

**RESILIENCE NARRATIVES AMID ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES
STORIED BY UNEMPLOYED YOUNG AMERICAN BLACK MEN**

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Abstract

The objective of this qualitative narrative inquiry dissertation was to gain an understanding of how unemployed young urban American Black men negotiate economic and educational inequalities from resilience perspectives. The investigation took place in a long-standing disadvantaged Black community in a small suburban city in New York. The three participants were unemployed urban American Black male descendants of slavery in the United States, aged 18 to 35, who possessed personal experiences adapting and coping within economic and educational inequalities. Data collection consisted of in-depth narrative interviews, field notes, and reflexive journaling. In Chapters V, VI, and VII, each participant is represented by a brief description, a restoried biographical narrative with richly textured stories of life events negotiating resilience, an orientation of the narrative's authorial voice or the predominant cultural discourse shaping and creating the perspective, and an analysis of two resilience negotiation experiences using Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework elements, which consider temporality (continuity), sociality (interaction), and space (situation). Chapter VIII discusses the five narrative threads that emerged from collective interpretation and synthesis: recognition of tension, resolve, ongoing mentorship, strengthening social identity, and optimism and gratitude. The narratives and threads were positioned within Payne's site of resilience theory for contextual observations. Study results recommend critical social analysis to aid in minimizing health disparities, entrepreneurial support, and helping unemployed young Black men become more resilient by encouraging self-awareness, establishing psychological and physical sites of resilience, and sustaining mentorship opportunities.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband and my children, who have been exceedingly patient and supportive along my academic journey. I send out love and appreciation to my ancestors, particularly my great-grandmother from the South, Nora Bradford, and my grandmother from the North, Hilde Britton, who both demonstrated and fostered the values of strength and perseverance within me. This dissertation honors all of those whose lives were cut short prematurely due to structural disadvantages, particularly my cousins Darryle, Derek, Christopher, and Shannon.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Racism has dramatically impacted the social hierarchy of United States society, influencing manifold inequalities in the circumstances surrounding wealth, education, and criminal justice system involvement. I as the researcher recognize that these structural disadvantages lead to unequal socioeconomic prospects and consider how unemployed young American Black men adapt to, cope with, and navigate society in the face of adversity; these abilities constitute resilience. Many Black people are stuck in intergenerational poverty, owning one-tenth the wealth of whites (Hanks et al., 2018), with much lower upward mobility than whites (Chetty et al., 2020). Poverty increases the obstacles while also diminishing the resources necessary to navigate those obstacles. Take education, for example: the U.S. Department of Education reported that in the fall of 2017, 45% of Black and Brown students attended high-poverty schools, compared to 8% of white children (Hussar et al., 2020). In addition, although there was a decreased overall high school dropout rate, Black 18- to 24-year-olds who were neither enrolled in school nor employed (22%) doubled that of whites (11%). The fact that American Black men born in 2001 have a 1-in-3 chance of being imprisoned at some point in their lifetime (Ghandnoosh, 2015) perhaps best exemplifies the devastating impact of blocked economic and educational opportunities mixing with criminal justice system policies.

During the formation of the United States, the invasion and seizure of lands occupied by America's indigenous people, subsequent expansion westward, and human domination through the institution of slavery gave rise to racism and inequality as dominant experiences particularly for Black Americans and Native Americans (Grandin, 2020). Racism is defined as prejudice, discrimination, or animosity directed toward typically marginalized racial or ethnic groups, built

on the assumption that race accounts for distinctions in human character or aptitude (American Heritage, 1993). Establishing racism and inequality as an acceptable paradigm was necessary to justify inhumane policies that allowed for wealth generation from race-based exploitation (Edmondson, 1976; Guess, 2006). After the abolition of slavery, structural conditions continued to impact Black people and other marginalized groups through federal housing and social policies, which disallowed the accumulation of wealth or property (i.e., sharecropping, convict leasing, legal discrimination; Schermerhorn, 2019). These discriminatory practices persisted post-World War II, when local officials administering veterans benefits blocked Black men from receiving unemployment compensation and low-cost mortgages. However, many Black veterans were able to take advantage of college-level tuition payments (Smithsonian Institution, n.d.).

Being blamed, stigmatized, and persecuted for one's circumstances are conditions of oppression (Hinson & Bradley, n.d.). Racism, oppression, inequality, and hostility are entwined and cause health disparities, unfair treatment, and hate crimes that, in turn, lead to fear, injury, and death; in addition, scapegoating distracts attention from structural problems (Bennett, 2021; Gee et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2021; Williams, 2018). Without meaningful control of wealth and power, structural disadvantages will continue to weigh on young Black men (Prilleltensky, 2008).

Studies on young Black men have shown that resilience is a process that develops in response to structural disadvantages (Gordon et al., 1994). Young Black male resilience necessitates rejecting traditional perspectives that suggest victims are responsible for their circumstances without acknowledging the coercive systems that block economic and educational opportunities and cause harm without accountability (Davis & Museus, 2019). For example, deficit narratives attribute failure to personal characteristics, claiming that in order to succeed

some groups of people just need to make better choices, develop self-discipline, and hone grit (Farkas & Vicknair, 1996; Quinn, 2020; Rogers et al., 2015). In contrast, newer perspectives recognize that these men are resilient; given their unique circumstances, they approach survival considering individual and structural conditions from cultural, intergenerational, and economic perspectives (Cross, 2021; DeGruy, 2005/2017; Mosley et al., 2021; Payne, 2011).

Although studies on young Black men have shown that resilience is a process that develops in response to structural disadvantages, scant research has explored the experience in this demographic. Narrative stories reveal the context and complexity of experience (Munhall, 2012). Understanding socioeconomic inequality experiences from resilience perspectives can enhance cultural competence; help address economic and educational social determinants of health; and inform resilience strategies that nurses can employ in schools, communities, prisons, and other practice environments. Therefore, I conducted this qualitative narrative inquiry to better understand how unemployed young Black men negotiate economic and educational inequality from resilience perspectives.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of how unemployed young urban American Black men negotiate economic and educational inequality from resilience perspectives. My interest was understanding experiences navigating the link between socioeconomic inequality and resilience. In other words, what feelings, perceptions, views, and choices emerge from adapting and coping amid experiences of economic and educational inequality? I proposed to accomplish this by collecting and composing field texts (i.e., narrative data) through probing interviews and demographic inventories with participants. Narrative inquiry was used to answer the following research question: How do unemployed young urban

American Black men negotiate economic and educational inequalities from resilience perspectives?

Phenomenon of Interest

Economic inequality conveys disadvantages experienced through complex contributing factors, which are insufficiently explained by measuring income alone. For example, the Brookings Institute used American Community Survey data from 2014 to investigate the multidimensional nature of poverty, including indicators such as low household income, limited education, no health insurance, residence in a poor area, and unemployment to measure disadvantage (Reeves et al., 2016). The study demonstrated that among those disadvantaged, most Blacks and Hispanics disadvantaged in one poverty indicator were also disadvantaged in another, while most whites and Asians were only disadvantaged in a single indicator. The Brookings Institute report did not examine a longitudinal measure of persistent disadvantage; however, studies of intergenerational poverty do consider this. Multiple studies have investigated intergenerational poverty using national income data sources across generations and found that African Americans experienced higher poverty rates, significantly less upward mobility, and high rates of downward mobility (Bloome, 2014; Chetty et al., 2020; Winship et al., 2021). Racism exacerbates economic inequality, thereby compounding the effects of employment and mortgage market discrimination, injustice, and criminal justice system involvement, as well as exclusion from social networks and institutions that are essential for economic mobility (Blankenship et al., 2018; Hanks et al., 2018; Quane et al., 2015).

Educational inequality refers to conditions that contribute to students with inadequate preparation to navigate their environment successfully. Unlike educational systems in Europe and Asia, where schools are funded centrally and equally, students' learning opportunities in the

United States vary tremendously based on their neighborhood and social status (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Education systems are not compensating for structural racism and economic disadvantage. Thus, low social status leads to weak education, isolated and segregated neighborhoods, fewer decently-paying jobs, and scarcer safety nets (Barnum, 2020; Hanauer, 2019; Kearney & Levine, 2016). Underperforming schools can also push students into the criminal justice system through oppressive conditions: institutional and interpersonal racism, lack of academic and social support, harsh and uneven disciplinary action, and school violence (Payne & Brown, 2017). These studies demonstrated how educational inequality is impacted by economic inequality.

My phenomenon of interest is negotiating economic and educational inequalities from resilience perspectives. Aburn et al.'s (2016) integrative review examined 100 articles and found no universal definition of resilience. Aburn et al. identified that researchers' definitions of resilience were guided by five key themes: rising above to overcome adversity, adaptation and adjustment, "ordinary magic," good mental health as a proxy for resilience, and the ability to bounce back. Because resilience definitions vary widely, I welcome Franklin's (1999) interpretation that resilience involves navigating the hassles of daily life to promote adaptation and coping.

These definitions illuminate the essential role resilience plays in the lives of the Black community, especially considering the frequency and intensity of discrimination that Black people report. Thompson (2002) administered a Daily Stress Inventory and the Experiences of Discrimination Questionnaire to 156 multiethnic participants and indicated that Black people reported a higher impact of discrimination than white people, but not other ethnic minorities. In a much larger study, Ayalon and Gum (2011), using 2006 data from the Health and Retirement

Study in adults over 50, found that Black older adults experienced the greatest number of discriminative events (45%), versus (30%) in the general population. Keyes's (2009) review of published research found that the Black community demonstrated mental resilience, despite increased disparities and discrimination. Although there is some evaluation of discriminatory experiences, there remains a lack of contextual investigation into how Black Americans experience the interaction between socioeconomic inequality and resilience.

Justification for the Study

Justification is central to narrative inquiry, answering why an individual should conduct the research and to whom the findings will be relevant (Clandinin et al., 2007). Clandinin et al. (2007) necessitated justification at three different levels. Social justification considers the more extensive structural conditions at play. Practical justification arises from how insightfulness may shift perspectives and advance understanding. Finally, personal justification situates oneself in the study. Each of these will be discussed below.

Social

Resilience considerations align with health disparity reduction and are central to the nursing profession. Access to care and improved technology alone will not reduce entrenched health disparities (Phelan & Link, 2005). Whitehead (1992) defined health disparities as avoidable, unnecessary, and unfair health differences that result from minimal lifestyle choices and stressful and unsafe living and working environments. There is often inadequate access to basic healthcare and a tendency for sick people to move down the social ladder because of income loss or other social consequences. These socioeconomic differences in health lead to avoidable illness, suffering, and premature death (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014).

Many Black Americans face wearisome disparity; multidimensional historical and present-day structural oppression results in a higher magnitude of disparity and exclusion from meaningful participation in society. The social, economic, and physical conditions that lead to health disparities are called social determinants of health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), social determinants of health are the forces, policies, and environments that shape the conditions of daily life and affect health outcomes. WHO recognized that across the globe, the lower one's socioeconomic status, the poorer one's health. The *Healthy People 2030* (2021) campaign grouped social determinants of health into five domains: economic stability, education, health care, neighborhood, and social context, and recognized their vital influence on health, well-being, and quality of life. Because nurses are care providers, advocates, researchers, and teachers, the social justification is to provide contextual lived experiences exploring social determinants of health and how they affect health outcomes in nurses' efforts to work toward the greater public good. Focusing on the contextual experiences helps move discussions from tallying inequities toward a deeper understanding and context for reimagining policy and action.

Practical

The practical justification for this work is to disrupt deficit thinking, shift perspectives, and advance understanding by redirecting the focus from personal success to the more extensive structural conditions that create inequality. The insight gained from understanding unemployed young Black male life experiences may offer new perspectives and approaches to recognize opportunities to diminish structural inequality. A better understanding of this phenomenon can also improve nurses' cultural competence and resilience-strengthening strategies in many areas, including community health, patient teaching, social justice, and educational and penal

environments. I hope that even the small amount of community contact involved with this study will facilitate future research with these or other young men from the same community.

Personal

In acknowledgment of my assumptions and personal investment in this proposal, I share the following. I am interested in young Black men's lived experiences and survival because their lives and well-being suffer in higher numbers and greater severity than other groups. I lost four Black male cousins prematurely. Some of them spoke of what Womack (2016) called a sense of foreshortened future. As descendants of the slave South, we had a mix of experiences living in a rural Black community in Mississippi and suburban Black communities in New York. My cousins' lives were cut short partly because poverty, violence, broken families, stress, and racism diminished their chances of successfully navigating society. Although I have mixed Black and white American ancestry, I identify as Black, even though my ethnicity is not visible due to my fair skin. My personal experiences of economic and educational disadvantage were impacted by family violence, an absentee father, poverty, hunger, frequent relocations, living in subsidized housing, social rejection, devaluation by high school administration, high school truancy, joining the military as a way out, and mandatory remedial uncredited college courses.

Specifying my interests and relating my background and my various roles and positions of power are integral to qualitative and social justice work. My social position as a healthcare professional and researcher can potentially be influential and intimidating to the participants in this study. My role as a trusted researcher requires self-awareness of the privilege and power dynamics that arise to foster authentic engagement in my interactions with the participants. As a nurse, my motives are to facilitate health and improve my ability to advocate for others. By extension, other nurses can apply these findings to their own practice. Maintaining participant

well-being will always be held in higher regard than this study. My goal was to complete a dissertation project that elevated community voices to address health disparities and empowered young Black men to engage in structural analyses of social problems.

Assumptions and Biases

I assumed that I would find unemployed community members interested in participating in this study, willing to express their personal stories of resilience related to socioeconomic conditions. I predicted that participants' storied life experiences would include poverty, limited employment opportunities, and premature expectations to be the man of the house. They would also name over-policing and surveillance, the threat of incarceration, and frequent curtailment of their behaviors due to others' perceptions influencing their decisions. Therapeutic benefit was not an intention of this study; however, narratives may allow for an opportunity to make sense of one's experiences, recognize incongruencies, or use imagination to move beyond boundaries and resolve discrepancies in identity or personal stories. My experiences may result in a tendency to recognize themes that support my worldview while overlooking others. I endeavored to remain open to all of the insights I could learn from these men's stories, not just the ones that confirm what I already believe.

Relevance to Nursing

Nurses support well-being, personal potential, and quality of life during interactions focused on self-care and healthy behavior change (Parse, 1992; Pender & Pender, 1986; Reed, 1991). Historically, nurses care and advocate for the disadvantaged when others will not (Attenborough et al., 2019; Henry Street Settlement, 2017; Selanders & Crane, 2012). Nurses' ability to engage in community advocacy and disparity reduction depends on understanding the relationship between resilience perspectives and the lack of economic stability and inadequate

access to education in disadvantaged population. The effects of inequality require nurses to purposefully incorporate those most alienated into the benefits of existing systems. Improved training and resources are needed for nurses to recognize these situations, assist people in navigating adversity, and support better societal outcomes. Because socioeconomic conditions impact health-related concerns, marginalized perspectives help develop more relevant and robust strategies to eliminate health disparities (Olshansky et al., 2005; Stauss et al., 2019). A bottom-up approach can establish meaning and direction from community voices. Incorporating unemployed young Black male perspectives of inequality may also foster pragmatic health-building strategies to benefit clinical and community-based nursing endeavors.

Use of Racial/Ethnic Descriptors

The application of labels was a repeated point of contemplation in research related to this phenomenon. The literature has demonstrated disagreement about using the term *Black* versus *African American* to describe the population of interest. I had an internal bias toward using Black as the primary descriptor of race and ethnicity because it is used in my family and community. The literature I read was split down the middle, using either one or the other. When referencing others' work, I attempted to retain their descriptor preferences. From an academic standpoint, Black is a racial descriptor and African American is a cultural descriptor, even though these terms are often used interchangeably. I chose to use Black because it represents the self-determination and self-identification exhibited in throwing aside the term *Negro* and embracing the term *Black* in the pursuit of liberation (Brown & Ellis, 1969; Ture & Hamilton, 1967/1992). Furthermore, when referring to racial and ethnic groups, I capitalize Black and not white because Black represents many people's shared sense of identity and belonging (Laws, 2020). White

people in the United States are often able to identify their forefathers and refer to more precise ethnicities.

Summary

This introduction demonstrated that unemployed young Black men are subjected to the shortfalls of society's shared beliefs, policies, and social structures that perpetuate conditions of poverty, disparity, and excessive entanglement in the criminal justice system. I utilized narrative inquiry, a qualitative approach to the research process, to generate particular experiences and meaningful content. As the content experts, participants were asked to share how they adapted and coped with economic and educational inequality experiences. This effort can raise awareness of the textured experiences associated with structural inequalities to improve resilience strategies and health disparity reduction.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study proposed using narrative inquiry to develop a deeper understanding of how unemployed young urban American Black men navigate economic and educational inequalities from resilience perspectives. With this purpose in mind, this chapter provides an evolution of the study, the historical context of economic and educational inequality in the United States, a literature review related to Black men negotiating economic and educational inequality experiences, and the theoretical rationale for the study. Conceptual definitions of constructs are also provided (see Appendix A).

Evolution of the Study

The process of identifying my research topic began with an interest in promoting well-being in young Black men. I looked at well-being research in the general population, where meaning and purpose were identified as essential attributes (Agenor et al., 2017; Kimiecik, 2011; Vittersø, 2016). Literature searches in the Black male population revealed too few results. Thus, I investigated well-being in Black Americans and the literature demonstrated an overall positive impact of meaning-making on well-being. Studies in Black Americans suggested that aspects of meaning development, like self-reflection, can strengthen self-awareness, identity development, and personal growth (Mosley et al., 2017; Neville & Cross, 2017; Smith & Hope, 2020).

These studies identified several themes. First, identity development appeared to be a precursor to meaning-making, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Smith & Hope, 2020; Storer et al., 2019). However, the baseline quality and degree of identity formation needed for meaning-making were unclear.

Second, even when a person experienced recurrent incidents leading to stress and mistrust, one's evolving self-perception and engagement in a life philosophy contributed to positive outcomes (McGee-Holloway, 2017; Mosley et al., 2017). Similarly, among greater perceptions of discrimination, self-reflection often resulted in personal growth (Earnshaw et al., 2016; Neville & Cross, 2017). However, Earnshaw et al. (2016) noted that among people living with HIV, HIV activists reported greater well-being and somewhat greater depressive symptoms than non-activists. Further, Neville and Cross (2017) explored racial awakening epiphanies and described one participant who, after encountering discrimination, experienced disappointment and despair without a subsequent transformation in consciousness.

Third, external stressors and mistrust were common (Alang, 2019; McGee-Holloway, 2017). In a national survey of 1,237 Black people, Alang (2019) described that unmet mental health needs resulted from experiencing both racial microaggressions in multiple institutions and mistrust of mental healthcare systems. Treatment-seeking was also hindered by structural, informational, and cost barriers. Alang recommended critical self-reflection of one's assumptions about racism at the personal level and racial equity analysis at the organizational level. Avoidance and other coping methods were purposefully adopted throughout the well-being literature in Black Americans to lessen the frequency and severity of challenging situations, but the degree to which this strategy was employed seemed underappreciated. There was a lack of guidance in the literature on methods to foster meaning-making and well-being among the multitude of stressors faced by Black Americans. Based on the literature, the decision to engage in self-reflection or meaning-making should be a personal choice due to its complicated association with distress. After contemplating the prevalence of distress and mistrust described in the well-being studies, I understood that I needed to focus on resilience rather than well-being.

In summary, well-being literature on Black Americans supported identity development and self-reflection, maintaining awareness that personal growth and sometimes distress can result. The mention of external stressors (i.e., discrimination) was a recurring theme. With these findings in mind, I designed a quantitative pilot study titled “Reflection and Resilience Influences That Support Survival in Young Black Men.” The study results which are being analyzed demonstrate the need for context, which is additional justification for the current research. Through these efforts, my understanding of the body of research and my topic of interest evolved. I better recognized the value of a theoretical framework that directly applies to the population under study; the limitations of quantitative research to provide meaningful, culturally relevant findings; and the need for the development of resilience within socioeconomic inequality.

Historical Context of Economic and Educational Inequality

Racial disparity was a cornerstone of European ascendancy in America. As a result of four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade, Black people were displaced from Africa into more than 50 different ethnic groups and nationalities. Hence, the African Diaspora’s distinct differences in culture, migration, and history affect personal circumstances, experiences, and opportunities (Cooper, 2016). In the United States, big business (i.e., banking, capitalism, stockholding, land speculation) thrived, revolving around extracting value through native inhabitant genocide and chattel slavery via theft of persons, property, and ideas (Grandin, 2020; Lockhart, 2019). In this paradigm, white entitlement and racism were advanced by exploiting people of color to forge national unity (Grandin, 2020). The Black American experience from the country’s inception until today has been and remains impacted by these tactics.

Post-slavery social policies (i.e., Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, sharecropping, convict leasing, separate but equal doctrine, vagrancy laws, and institutionalized racism) kept self-determination, participation in mainstream society, and prosperity beyond the grasp of the large majority of Black people, leaving them a vulnerable underclass of cheap labor (Alexander, 2018; Hinton et al., 2018). More recent evidence of oppression manifests in the criminal justice system veiled in tough-on-crime rhetoric. It is exemplified through New York State's Rockefeller drug laws of 1973, California's Three Strikes laws of 1994, racial profiling, and stop-and-frisk policies that disproportionately impact Black Americans (Hinton et al., 2018; Peters, 2013; Taibbi, 2013). United States history is linked to current, persistent social determinants of health, such as poverty, inadequate housing conditions, food insecurity, racism, and social exclusion (Braveman et al., 2011). Hinton et al. (2018) and Sule et al. (2017) argue that this multilayered and ingrained climate of oppression and its long-term consequences contribute to broken families, reduced employability, restricted access to housing and services, widened racial wealth gaps, health disparities, and premature death. Systemic oppression continues as exploitation and stripping of Black Americans' economic and social power (Jackson et al., 2016; Sule et al., 2017; Womack, 2016).

Background on Unemployed Young Urban Black Men

In conducting empowerment programs for inner-city adolescent males, Gilgoff (2007) recognized these young men faced constant threats. Many had already fallen victim to substance abuse, joined gangs, or been involved in the criminal justice system. Incarceration in state prisons occurs for Blacks at 5.1 times the rate of whites (Nellis, 2016). The literature has demonstrated that Blacks fare far worse than whites in confinement rates, frequency of incarceration, and sentencing length (National Research Council, 2014). Black men also have a

shorter life expectancy and a higher incarceration rate than other major groups in the United States (Arias & Xu, 2019; Carson, 2020).

Young Black men disproportionately find themselves in an existence that jeopardizes their ability to transcend circumstances and cultivate well-being. The disempowerment, marginalization, and health disparities they experience contribute to their limited opportunities, premature deaths, and profound adverse outcomes: homicide, suicide, incarceration, substance use, stress, trauma, and disease (Blankenship et al., 2018; Halloran, 2019; Womack, 2016). Lack of opportunity, including unemployment, results in a reality far from the mainstream. Survival may include turning toward a street-life orientation as a source of resilience (Payne, 2011) and is complicated by negative interactions with formal power structures in neighborhoods that are frequently over-surveilled and over-policed (Payne et al., 2017).

Structural oppression reinforces the lack of enrichment opportunities young Black men experience. Of the many enrichment opportunities that seem denied to young Black men given structural barriers, employment is a key area where efforts can have an immediate impact. Unemployment is defined as jobless people actively seeking and available for work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.), and it is a result and side-effect of economic and educational inequality. Employment and earning gaps between Black men and other men persist, with Black men incurring double the unemployment rates and earn, on average, half of what their white counterparts earn (Couch & Fairlie, 2010; Holzer, 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Low employment among Black men persists partly because of a substantial competitive disadvantage that is connected to a lack of early social supports like academic preparation, work experiences, career exposure, and mentorship (Harris, 2013; Jennings, 2014). Even if Black students attend college, Jones and Schmitt (2014) explained that *a college degree is no*

guarantee of success. In 2013, Black college graduates had an unemployment rate of 12.4%, double that of all college graduates (5.6%). Further, among Black-employed recent college graduates, 56% were underemployed.

Market factors contribute to racial disparity in unemployment, as evidenced by the fact that prime-aged Black men are the first to be fired during economic downturns (Couch & Fairlie, 2010). Holzer (2021) identified the ultimate causes of low-employment rates among Black men as discrimination and social isolation. Additional contributing factors included lower marriage rates, poorer health, higher incarceration, and child support obligations.

These examples show that many Black men face high unemployment rates due to unfavorable socioeconomic conditions from childhood to adulthood. Diminishing the effects of structural disadvantages on unemployed young urban Black men requires a more equitable distribution of educational resources, quality employment opportunities, and the exercise of impartial justice. To make some headway, society must share knowledge and power with unemployed young urban Black men while they build skills and confidence in their individual ability, as well as in their community's ability to mitigate societal stressors (Prilleltensky, 2008).

Literature Review

For the literature review, I sought sources related to negotiating economic and educational inequality in consideration of resilience in young Black men. A thorough literature search strategy was developed by varying search terms and consultation with a reference librarian. The keywords were as follows: (a) resilience or resiliency or resilient or empower or empowering or well-being or positive impact or positively impact or reward; (b) inequality or social inequality or inequity or disadvantage or divide or oppression or racism or discrimination or health disparities or trauma or narratives; (c) economy or economic or poverty or social

mobility or unemployed or unemployment or unemployable or jobless or job loss or education or dropout or opportunity or engagement; (d) Black or African American or African-American or people of color or drug sellers; and (e) men or males or man or male or drug sellers. Publication years were limited from 2010 to 2021 to assess more recent evidence and current trends.

Electronic searches were conducted using all available bibliographic databases on the EBSCOhost research platform, including CINAHL, APA PsycInfo, MEDLINE, ERIC, SocINDEX, and OpenDissertations. The date of the last data retrieval search was September 3, 2021. The database search retrieved 1,313 items. After the removal of duplicates, 634 items remained.

I scanned titles and abstracts for key terms and relevance. One additional source was identified from reference list searching. The search sought conference proceedings and other web-based gray literature, but none were identified. Exclusion criteria rejected 613 less relevant sources that were outside of the population age range (119); unable to be obtained (9); or had an unrelated (131), academic (119), female (101), sexuality (76), or medical health disparity (61) focus. Applying the search and exclusion criteria produced a sample of 22 full-text sources for review, of which there were 16 research articles, five expert opinions, and one campaign booklet. To establish the relevance of the sources, I evaluated and weighted them for study design level of evidence and grade of recommendation (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2013), based on feasibility, appropriateness, meaningfulness, and effectiveness.

Ultimately, the final literature sample consisted of 14 studies from psychology (4), Black American studies (2), criminal justice (2), education (2), public health (2), social work (1), and sociology (1) disciplines. This sample of one quantitative, two mixed methods, one systematic review, and 10 qualitative studies were independently appraised for overall methodological

quality, informative value, authenticity, and representativeness applying separate criteria for different research designs. Justification for inclusion required 14 out of 20 of Bowling's (2014) checklist of points for the quantitative study; a majority of criteria on the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018) and the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (n.d.) systematic review checklist; and 6 out of 10 criteria on Pearson's (2004) critical appraisal scale for qualitative studies. Five articles did not address Institutional Review Board (IRB) engagement. I contacted authors via email, and each reported receiving this approval (J. Fader, S. Godsay, B. Gordon, A. Henson, Y. Payne, personal communications, September 2021).

Selected literature was related to young Black men negotiating economic and educational inequality experiences with some type of attention paid to resilience. The articles examined the influence of poverty, racism, and other sociostructural stressors on young Black males aged 18 to 35, spotlighting high school educational experiences, the necessity for economic survival, and adaptive coping and resilience strategies. The sample showed the interconnectedness of the burdens experienced in low-income communities, particularly the interplay among educational and economic conditions.

High School Education

The social status of a surrounding community impacts the quality of elementary and secondary education students receive. Four studies investigated phenomenological narratives of young Black male experiences with schools that failed to invest in or adequately prepare them for success (Briggs, 2018; Gordon, 2012; Harden, 2014; Payne & Brown, 2010). The students, particularly those who identified with street culture, navigated racism, poverty, and violence in and out of school. Payne and Brown (2010) conducted participatory action research (PAR) with four street-life-oriented Black men implementing mixed methods to document how boys, aged

16 to 19, used a street-life orientation as a site of resilience in the school environments of Harlem, New York City, and Patterson, New Jersey. The authors described street-life orientation as an identity associated with street culture in low-income areas, including engaging in various illicit activities (i.e., gang involvement, interpersonal violence, drug selling) to survive harsh, impoverished living conditions. Surveys and interviews demonstrated that the boys intrinsically valued formal education. They were acutely aware that they did not receive the high-quality instruction necessary for socioeconomic upliftment, nor did their educational experiences address the true-life challenges facing them. The students' school experiences were laden with prejudice, low standards, harsh punishment, and humiliation. Behaviors associated with a street-life orientation, which schools viewed as problematic (i.e., antagonism, disengagement, truancy), reflected having to deal with a hostile school environment. The boys' efforts to adapt and survive also included violence and drug sales. The authors called for research grounded in phenomenological perspectives to produce interventions that reflect underlying cultural, economic, and academic considerations.

Similarly, Harden (2014) interviewed 11 Black males, aged 18 to 20, who were enrolled in a Chicago, Illinois, public school and involved in the juvenile court system about their experiences with violence and access to or rejection from mainstream institutions. Themes emerged indicating that family and neighborhood bonds were important in complex and contradicting ways, mainly because school engagement did not exceed the benefits of street life. Consistent with Payne and Brown's (2010) research, the participants reported feeling teachers mistrusted them, neglected to teach them, and singled them out for discipline. The students were keenly aware of insincere messages and desirous of relationships with trustworthy teachers and staff. Fighting occurred regularly because students brought street conflicts to school and vice

versa. Public institutions were hostile spaces where the students felt alienation, anger, and a need for protection, reinforced by security personnel. The authors recommended engaging culturally responsive teaching with creative programming, eliminating zero-tolerance policies, and developing community-centered interventions that provide opportunities for youth to be heard and access relationship building with mentors.

The two following samples of American suburban and Canadian urban young Black men confirmed the pervasive lack of trust and vulnerability experienced within educational systems. Gordon (2012) obtained educational life histories from three high school and one college student about growing up Black and male while attending predominantly white schools in the suburbs of a large mid-Atlantic metropolitan area. The narratives revealed that they were also seen as academically and socially problematic and told of institutional insensitivity to racial issues with little acknowledgment of racial tensions from elementary through high school. The young men reported lower expectations for performance, less recognition for achievement, and harsher discipline. Participants mentioned experiencing rejection, which sometimes led to underperformance. Although a specific cause is unclear, the insults often motivated them to higher achievement and finding other sources for resilience strengthening and validation external to the school, examples of post-traumatic growth.

Similar socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical proximity support the relevance of Canadian research findings. Briggs's (2018) research with 10 second-generation Caribbean Black males, aged 18 to 27, in Toronto, Canada, explored obstacles navigating the high school to labor market transition. Feelings of abandonment and neglect in the school environment, a leadership void of role models and guidance, and a lack of support vied with participants' positive dreams and aspirations. The conditions reported in all four of these studies resulted in

the participants' lack of confidence, confusion about educational and employment strategies, and disadvantages accessing and navigating opportunities during and after high school. The conditions also resulted in the criminalization of the students and contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Necessity of Economic Survival

After high school, the impact of inferior education, mixed with few local and legal employment options or opportunities for socioeconomic mobility, leaves young urban Black men in a dangerous environment and a precarious situation (Blankenship et al., 2018; Fader, 2019; Henson, 2020; Jennings, 2014). For example, Blankenship et al. (2018) explored racial differences in mass incarceration experiences on well-being by administering surveys to a community sample of men and women over 18 who were placed on probation or released from prison or jail for drug-related offenses from 2011-2014 in New Haven, Connecticut. In comparison to whites, Black respondents reported that criminal justice involvement had a larger impact on well-being (education, dropping out of school, leaving a job, leaving their longest job, and family estrangement due to incarceration). As might be expected, number of adult incarcerations ($b = -0.17$; 95% CI = $-0.35, -0.07$), number of surveillance types (indirect effect: $b = -0.12$; 95% CI = $-0.29, -0.03$), and juvenile incarceration ($b = -0.061$; Sobel's test $p = .012$) were significant mediators in the relationship among race, mass incarceration, and well-being. Without the means to support themselves and their families legitimately, young Black men considered the risks and rewards of illicit money-making activities.

Other recent research has investigated experiences of economic survival for young Black men with the burden of trauma, violence, and poverty. For example, Fader (2019) conducted interviews from 2009 to 2012 with 20 African American drug sellers, aged 18 to 33, in

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Even though they held negative views of drug sales and were aware of the risks, most participants started selling drugs as adolescents, earned minimal profits, and felt the need to engage in illegitimate income-generating strategies to make ends meet. Amid reduced adherence to the moral code of the street and the heightened gaze of the criminal justice system, participants regularly considered exit strategies and desired legal employment to minimize risk, but they were met with undependable access to the mainstream economy.

Recognizing the intersection of Blackness, maleness, and a criminal record, Henson (2020) conducted interviews focusing on the impact of policing practices and criminal justice involvement on fathering with 37 young Black men, aged 25 to 34, living in Southwest Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Fathers were conflicted about wanting to provide for their children but had limited opportunities to do so. Fathers wanted resources in their community like local, decent-paying, meaningful jobs; business loans; and education and training in line with a successful reentry environment. Participants in Fader's (2019) and Henson's (2020) research held mainstream values and wanted to be a part of the legitimate workforce but faced constant rejection and employer discrimination. Half of the men in both studies were unemployed, so providing by any means necessary became an act of resilience.

Considering untapped abilities and the need for economic opportunities, Jennings's (2014) systematic literature review investigated entrepreneurial education and microenterprise development programs related to health disparities among urban Black male youth. Historically implemented to relieve gender-based inequality suffered by women in developing countries, entrepreneurial initiatives can help address the poverty, unemployment, and adverse outcomes facing young Black men. The six eligible studies, published between 2003 and 2014, provided evidence that the participants benefited from increased autonomy, engagement, and risk

avoidance. Jennings highlighted that these programs were severely underutilized in the United States and should have a wider implementation, more available resources, and improved evaluation strategies.

Adaptive Coping Strategies for Resilience

Any consideration of resilience in young urban Black men must account for pertinent individual, community, and structural conditions (Bauer et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2010; Godsay & Brodsky, 2018; Mosley et al., 2017; Payne, 2016; Teti et al., 2012); otherwise, critiques and interventions will miss the mark. From a mental health perspective, Mosley et al. (2017) used an open-ended online survey to uncover contextual factors contributing to vigilance and cultural mistrust in 104 Black males, aged 18 to 64 ($M = 35$), which could potentially be misdiagnosed as paranoia. Participants' mistrust (particularly of White Americans, but not exclusively) came from lessons learned in close relationships, negative work and school experiences, and living in oppressive contexts. The authors recognized adaptive strategies used to cope with mistrust at the personal, relational, and systemic levels. Participants' coping strategies consisted of: (a) increasing awareness, invoking uplifting narratives, ignoring slights, and engaging in meaning-making for personal coping; (b) critically analyzing the actions of other people and protecting one's privacy for relational coping; and (c) understanding the pervasive nature of racism and overcompensating for stereotypes to cope with systemic oppression. Considering personal, relational, and systemic coping strategies helps compare resilience findings between studies using a holistic view of economic and educational inequality.

In a mixed-methods study, Bauer et al. (2020) elicited attitudes and beliefs linked to resilience, trauma-related risk behaviors, and receipt of mental health services among 55 African American males, aged 18 to 30, from community settings in Kansas City, Missouri. Trauma

exposure (i.e., substance use, retaliation, incarceration) significantly predicted risk for recurrent trauma ($b = .513, p < .01$); however, the relatively high resilience scores ($M = 6.9; SD = 1.7$; range 0-8) did not significantly moderate the relationship between trauma exposure and trauma-related risk behaviors or predict receipt of mental health services. In focus groups, the young men described maintaining resilience autonomously, coping through games, music, prayer, and substance use, as well as habituating to the hardship of traumatic experiences (desensitization). Congruent yet more meaningful descriptions of coping strategies were offered in the following study, in which Teti et al. (2012) explored resilience narratives in a community sample of 30 Black men, aged 18 to 44, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They were mostly low-income and mostly unemployed; a third of them were previously incarcerated. Pervasive sociostructural challenges were related to racial microaggressions, incarceration, unemployment, and the enduring stress of the streets. The men expressed resilience in the form of perseverance, being committed to learning and growing from hardship, creating a supportive environment, drawing support from religion or spirituality, and reflecting and refocusing to understand and address difficult situations.

The last three studies are exemplars of specific adaptive coping strategies utilizing clinical therapy, the content of a music album, and a social movement. These resilience efforts promote healing and liberation through action and activism. In the first study, Brown et al. (2010) treated a 19-year-old street-oriented Black male from an urban northeastern United States city in need of mental health services. The therapeutic team and group culture circle sessions used film clips and other tools prompting discussions about race, class, gender, and addiction to begin the client's framing of multiple identities and allegiances within his social and structural context. Eventually, the young man was encouraged to juxtapose the conflicts he experienced to

help make life-affirming and non-exploitive informed decisions with community support and accountability. In the next study, Payne (2016) analyzed music lyric content for evidence of coping and resilience. This phenomenological case study explored Young Jeezy's gangster rap album *The Recession* to elicit the culture and perspectives of street-identified Black men. The brash sentiment in the album reflected notions of resentment toward blocked economic and educational opportunities within the pervasive structural inequality experienced in low-income Black communities. The examination highlighted lyrical content that reflected resiliency from an economic survival standpoint with messages of personal upliftment, obligations to family and community, and catharsis through expressing anger and responses to sociopolitical injustice. Finally, Godsay and Brodsky (2018) examined resilience from a broader social movement backdrop. They interviewed 14 Black men, aged 18 to 29, in Baltimore, Maryland, to discuss ways the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement influenced their resilience and empowerment processes. While not all reports regarding the BLM movement were strictly positive, some participants reported it inspired racial awakening and emerging critical consciousness, reinforced racial pride, offered new resources, and opened new opportunities to enact policy change.

This literature review demonstrated connections between economic and educational inequality and adaptive coping; however, less was revealed about the context, meaning, and negotiation of resilience amid socioeconomic disadvantages in unemployed young urban Black men. Synthesized recommendations for future research from the included studies reinforces the existence of this gap:

- Acknowledge systemic racism and consider multilevel social conditions in race inequities (Bauer et al., 2020; Blankenship et al., 2018; Fader, 2019).

- Utilize strengths-based perspectives and expand definitions of resilience (Henson, 2020; Payne & Brown, 2010; Teti et al., 2012).
- Ground research efforts in subjective perspectives that consider risk and opportunity, including in-depth interviews and narrative analysis (Fader, 2019; Mosley et al., 2017; Payne & Brown, 2010; Teti et al., 2012).
- Investigate the relationships among life experiences, coping mechanisms, and outcomes (Mosley et al., 2017).
- Create effective strategies and policy-based solutions to support community-centered mentorship, education, and employment (Briggs, 2018; Harden, 2014; Jennings, 2014; Teti et al., 2012).

The absence of in-depth narratives and the recommendations to address this gap align with findings identified in the Evolution of the Study section in Chapter II. Those well-being studies of Black Americans supported identity development and self-reflection while recognizing historical and current sociopolitical contexts and developing an understanding of nuanced experiences (Alang, 2019; Neville & Cross, 2017; Smith & Hope, 2020). In the present study, I used a narrative inquiry approach to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of strengths-based resilience perspectives, consider economic and educational social determinants of health, promote self-reflection, and address the lack of nuanced narrative experiences.

Theoretical Rationale

This study considered resilience through a contextual lens on a particular population. The historical meaning of resilience had varied. Early resilience conceptualizations were formed from vulnerability and outcomes research with children and adolescents (Garmezy, 1971; Rutter, 1987; Werner et al., 1967). Then, external levels of protective factors were incorporated (Olsson

et al., 2003), and distinctions were made between resilience as an outcome versus a process (Bonanno, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000). The historical definitions failed to emphasize that populations are working amid varying structural conditions that influence opportunities and resources (Aburn et al., 2016; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). More recently, resilience theories are looking at micro- or macro-level ranges of adversity, outcomes, and mediating factors (van Breda, 2018). My view of resilience acknowledges the impact of socioeconomic structural conditions faced by many in the Black community and incorporates all of the themes mentioned in Aburn et al.'s (2016) integrative review, discussed above on page 5 (rising above to overcome adversity, adaptation and adjustment, "ordinary magic," good mental health as a proxy for resilience, and the ability to bounce back). This resilience conceptualization differs from the historical use of the term that is heavily weighted in self-reliance and not population-specific.

Payne's (2011) site of resilience theoretical model acknowledges the individual and structural conditions relevant to resilience in low-income, street-oriented Black men (Figure 1). The theory conceptualized resilience "around feeling well, satisfied, or accomplished" to enhance survivability (p. 429). I am inspired by resilience theorists Garmezy (1991), Luthar et al. (2000), and Ungar (2004), who recognized risk and protective factors as complex, contextual, and multileveled (Shean, 2015). However, I agree with Payne's argument that traditional conceptualizations of resilience heavily (a) orient with middle-class values, singular adverse events, or maladaptive life patterns (Bonanno, 2004; Masten & Tellegen, 2012); (b) lack temporal resilience patterns (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995); and (c) place the burden of achieving resilience on individuals without explicit consideration of structural disadvantages (Duckworth et al., 2007; Freitas & Downey, 1998). This variability may be attributed to the lack of definition

daily life, cumulating over one's life history, which enhances one's adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies" (p. 781).

In this model, street-life-oriented Black men look to the streets to foster resilience through essential sociocultural relationships. *Psychological sites of resilience* or one's identities are informed by sociocultural values and merge with *physical sites of resilience* or geographical places where men congregate to bond, cope, and become resilient at the personal, group, and community levels. Gender, ethnicity, key relationships, social injustice, historical patterns, environment, education, employment, poverty, crime, safety, and health contribute to many individual and structural conditions impacting lived experience and resilience sites. In addition, resisting poverty, preserving dignity and respect, and considering one's standing with self, family, and community represent "street love," the humanity of *the streets* (Payne & Hamdi, 2009). Although the present study is not limited to those with a street-life orientation, this starting point prioritizes perspectives from the more marginalized. Thus, this narrative inquiry proposal is positioned within sites of resilience theory, acknowledging that all young Black men are resilient, given their particular circumstances and recognizing the subjective personal and sociocultural conditions and the physical and structural conditions that influence social identity.

The above literature review search did not capture the following relevant study which applied the site of resilience theory. Payne (2008) organized a PAR team with four street-life-oriented Black men in Harlem, New York City, and Paterson, New Jersey. They collected 371 surveys and conducted two group interviews with Black men, aged 16 to 65, to examine attitudes about street life and educational and economic opportunity. Analyses revealed a majority experienced tension with teachers; nonetheless, the men expressed a strong desire to receive a quality education (74%). The men held increasingly negative attitudes toward economic and

educational opportunities across the lifespan (77%), viewing society's opportunity structure as unjust. Content analysis on the code of economic survival revealed three themes: commitment to family/community, personal motivation, and moral posture. All the men believed it was logical to engage in illicit activities as a method of survival while also agreeing that criminal actions harmed the community.

Summary

This literature review chapter began by considering the evolution of the study through an investigation of, first, well-being in the general population and, second, meaning development specific to Black Americans. I looked at the historical progression of economic and educational inequality in the United States, with persistent impacts on poverty, unemployment, and criminal justice system involvement. I offered additional research to develop the contextual background of challenges faced by unemployed young urban Black men. Then, I presented a systematic literature review related to young Black men negotiating economic and educational inequality and resilience. Finally, I provided the theoretical rationale for situating the study within the site of resilience theory.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

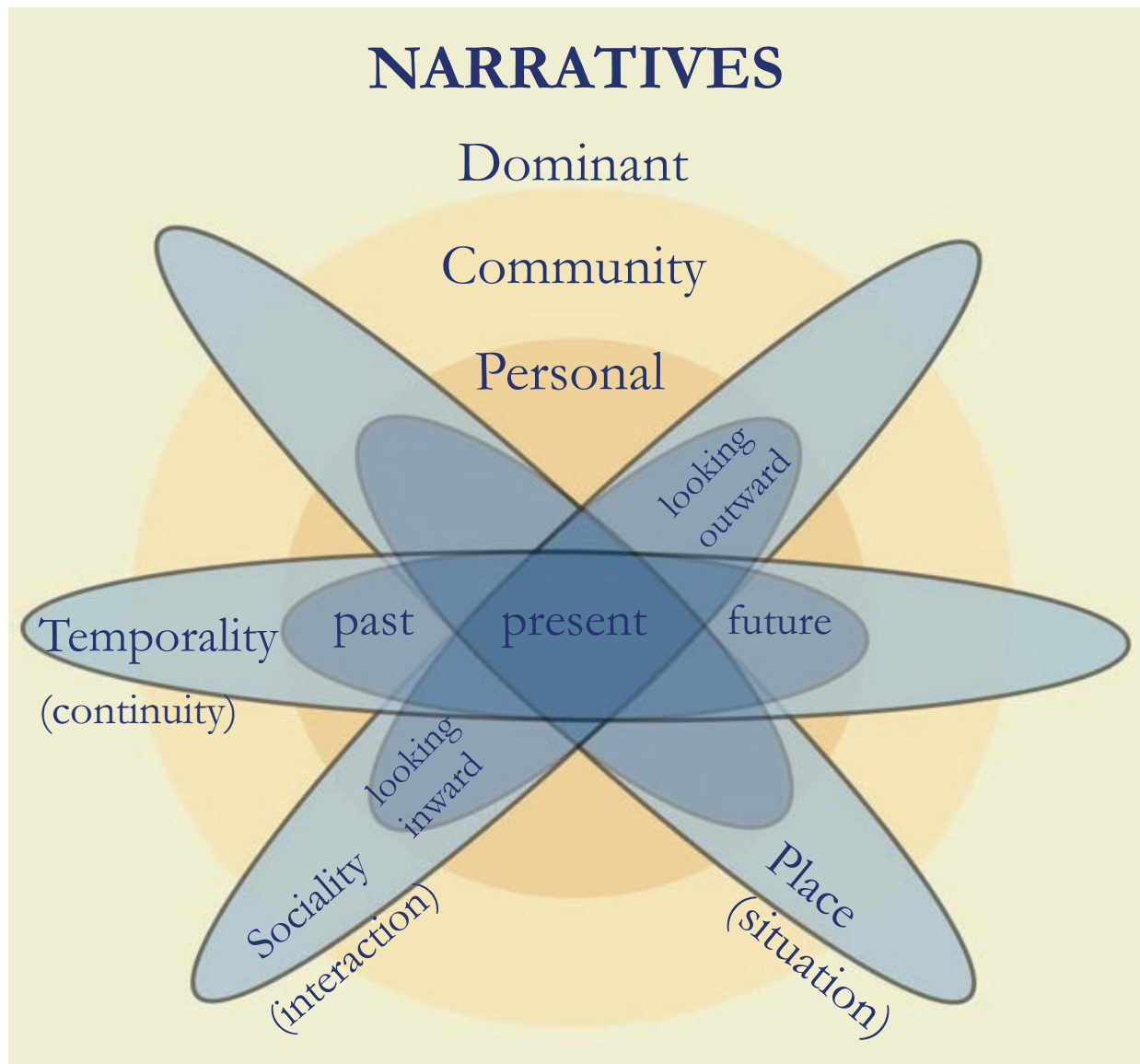
As a methodology, narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach that examines storied life experience using interviews as the primary data collection method and applying various analytic techniques. Narrative inquiry can discern meanings attributed to experience and how language represents one's social world; thus, it embodies personal and social identity (Munhall, 2012). The analysis of narratives from psychological perspectives looks at patterns beginning with the individual and moving outward using linguistic threads (Gee, 1991) and psychoanalytic (Schafer, 1980) models. Labov (1972) offered one example of a distinctly structured analysis for narrative inquiry. Themes were coded for a step-by-step reconfiguration of the storied narrative's structural elements. Alternately, consideration of the broader cultural impact on an individual's personal and social identity is at play in biographical (Denzin, 2001) and ethnographic (Bruner, 2004) approaches to narrative inquiry. Exploring experiences of navigating economic and educational inequality may similarly come from broad angles without common properties and requires consideration of structural and cultural impacts; therefore, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework best fits my purposes.

Methodological Considerations

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework comes from the education field and contemplates the phenomenon of personal experience from attending to a story's narrative view while recognizing larger contexts and relationships. With this framework, the stories told of life experience are immersed in temporality, sociality, and place considerations to systematically guide the how and why behind the research question and

Figure 2

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space Framework, Adapted from Kirkpatrick (2008)



method formation. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) offered the following explanation of narrative inquiry:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and

made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework considers a storied conception of experience. The focus must be balanced appropriately with attention paid to the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place:

- *Temporality* draws attention to the continuity of people and events within the past, present, and future. Examining oneself and life experiences has changing perspectives as we look backward and forward in time.
- *Sociality* focuses on personal and social interactions. Looking inward to personal conditions reveals feelings, desires, emotions, and moral reactions. Looking outward to other people and structural conditions reveals a context. The relationship between the inquirer and the participant also falls within sociality.
- *Place* refers to the physical and varying situations where inquiry and life experiences occur. These spatial consideration can take place within a person, context, or environment.

The three commonplaces guide the multidimensional process of imaginatively considering the narrative inquiry research puzzle, with the ever-changing dynamics of the participants, inquirer, and space.

The following four nursing studies used Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework as a methodology and in narrative analysis.

Barton (2006) investigated four people of aboriginal ancestry eliciting life stories and experiences informing diabetic stories in considerable detail. Six conversations and field notes

contributed to retelling numerous life stories for each participant, followed by interpretive, analytical writing. Additionally, Barton's narrative analysis developed collective personal, cultural, professional, and theoretical considerations and overarching analytical interpretations of cultural differentiation and the diabetes experience, existential understanding of aboriginal diabetes, and authentic mutual respect and caring acts. Narrowing the focus to only one area of interest for her dissertation research, Maley's (2019) examined five Associate Degree nursing students' stories about academic misconduct. A single open-ended interview, demographic inventory, field notes, and reflexive journaling were used as field texts. After a short background context for each participant, their stories were shared, followed by a reflection and analysis. Emergent themes from narrative analysis reflected the perception of rules unfulfilled, the fear of getting caught while feeling pressure to succeed at all costs, treating others as one wants to be treated, and cheating throughout the program even though one may only be cheating oneself.

With an innovative twist in the third example, Walji-Jivraj and Schwind (2017) considered the process of two nurses' experiences in creating art as a medium to derive meaning about their nursing practice. The participants were narratively interviewed twice, and between the meetings, they engaged in creative self-expression through metaphor selection, drawing, and reflective journaling. Field texts were constructed into temporally congruent individual stories and viewed specifically through Carper's patterns of knowing theoretical lens. Narrative threads emphasized the importance of person-centered care and the benefit of reflective practice. Lastly, using dual analysis methods, Feather et al. (2017) sought nine community members' experiences with a nurse-led service navigation support program designed to improve health and social outcomes in marginalized urban neighborhoods. Narrative semi-structured open-ended interviews, field notes, observations, and documents were used as field texts. A categorical

content analysis using NVivo software and narrative coding of commonplaces showed that participants valued therapeutic relationships, lowering barriers, and connectivity, despite aggravation with system-level fragmentation.

Two other studies used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) methodology but chose a different thematic framework for analysis. Benson's (2019) educational psychology dissertation explored the relationship of colorism on the Black Superwoman persona and its impact on professional identity development. Five Black women with higher-level degrees underwent a participant-driven photo-elicitation interview with photos of strong women they admired and a follow-up semi-structured probing interview. Structural narrative analysis with tables was used to restructure and compare two or three participants' cohesive responses and some thematic analysis. Overall, the inquiry found small instances of colorism without a notable impact on professional identity. Similarly, for an educational counseling dissertation, Jones (2014) conducted a one-time interview with six African Americans focusing on identity, perceptions of psychological problems, and mental health treatment. Field texts included an unstructured life-story interview guide, journaling, and self-reflective memos. Critical race narrative analysis was employed. Jones described the participants, then provided a literal description of a house with specific rooms where certain conversations are likely to happen, which unfolded along with participant responses. Analytic discussion noted that racial identity development influences psychological well-being, a lack of community or formal training in identifying or handling stress, and negative perceptions about seeking mental health. A table comparing participants' ideologies and counselor implications was thought-provoking.

Clandinin et al. (2007) recommended, and these examples demonstrate, that asking questions of meaning and significance presents an opportunity to position narrative inquiry

studies with respect to related phenomenological conceptualizations, research, experiential knowledge, and other forms of methodological inquiry. This study's research phenomenon naturally aligns with the historical/temporal, social, and physical components specific to a narrative inquiry puzzle. Therefore, I considered the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework in developing the research question and the method; this framework was also applied to the narrative analysis.

Study Design

The study follows a qualitative approach using a narrative inquiry research design to answer the research question: How do unemployed young urban American Black men negotiate economic and educational inequalities from resilience perspectives? This study was guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences negotiating interactions between resilience and economic and educational inequalities. Narrative inquiry recognizes an ever-changing, multidimensional context and facilitated discovering the participants' lived experiences.

As a method, Clandinin et al. (2007) suggested a narrative inquiry framework of eight design elements as criteria for guiding the formulation of a project, carrying out an inquiry by composing field texts from multiple vantage points, and building a scaffold for analysis and interpretation that emphasizes the three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) explained above. I employed the eight recommended design elements: (a) establishing personal, practical, and social justification of the inquiry's importance; (b) naming, thinking, listening, and telling within a narrative view of the phenomenon; (c) imagining the possibilities of how the phenomenon and participants fluidly exist in space and figuring out what kind of field texts need to be collected and composed to consider particular methods; (d) defining and balancing the

commonplaces while moving from field texts to research texts for analysis and interpretation; (e) positioning the study in relation to other research and experiential knowledge; (f) contemplating the uniqueness of conceptualizing, perspectives, and knowledge representation about the phenomenon that differs from other methods; (g) recognizing ethical considerations that extend from early imaginings to unfolding relationships, and through representation; and (h) considering the representative form and intent of the prospective research texts.

Payne's (2011) site of resilience theory was applied in conceptualizing and structuring this study and provided context for considering all eight design elements. Particularly, the fifth design element (e) is where the narratives are positioned in relationship to the site of resilience theory and other related research. I have developed the design, collection of field texts, and narrative analysis to develop an understanding of the young men's lived experiences considering the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework and site of resilience theory. A project budget and research timeframe based on a 12-month schedule was prepared (see Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively).

Landscape

A small suburban city in New York State was the primary setting for the study. The city has a long-standing disadvantaged Black community. It lies within the suburbs of New York City, with a population of less than 50,000 ethnically and racially diverse residents, described by the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) as almost half Hispanic or Latino, a quarter Black or African American, and the remainder white. The city has a vibrant art district with preserved historical assets, yet long-standing health disparities remain. A Health Equity Report from the New York State Department of Health (2017) that compared the city to the rest of the county, documented impacts on health disparities such as lower median income and higher rates of unemployment,

poverty, and uninsured. The leading causes of death, for 2011 to 2013, for Black people in the county were heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases, and unintentional injury. The [name] County Community Health Assessment & Improvement Plan ([name] County Department of Health, 2014-2017) found that African Americans in this city experienced double the premature death rate in comparison to the rest of the county, substantiating the evidence of compromised health. Despite increased efforts to address persistent health disparities, they remain the norm in this community, seriously impacting young Black men's health and well-being. The trajectory of chronic unemployment, poverty, and premature death may lie ahead for some of the city's unemployed young Black men.

Sample

The population under study is community-based unemployed young urban American Black men from the northeastern United States. The sampling frame is unemployed young Black men in a suburban city in New York, who experienced economic and educational inequality. I used referral and snowball sampling to intentionally select participants that are representative of the phenomenon.

Participants qualified to participate if they met these inclusion criteria: (a) urban Black male descendant of slavery in the United States, (b) aged 18 to 35, (c) unemployed, (d) resided in this particular city, and (e) possessed personal experiences of adapting and coping with economic and educational inequalities as demonstrated by their ability to provide an exemplary experience. The study was limited to descendants of the slave South because their sociocultural and intergenerational experiences differ from Black people who center their lineage in other geographic locations (i.e., Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Europe).

The sample size aimed to be two to five participants, considering similar study designs eliciting narratives in marginalized populations (Barton, 2006; Benson, 2019; Dewart et al., 2021; Schwind et al., 2016). Guetterman's (2015) analysis of qualitative sampling practices in education and health sciences revealed sample sizes in narrative inquiry research varying from 1 to 52. For this study, the narrative sample contained an adequate number of participants to obtain meaningful insight, confidence in results, and diverse perspectives (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Participant recruitment included the use of flyers (see Appendix D) with study phone number and email address for dissemination to local community organizations and businesses that had a history of serving the health needs and interests of young Black men in this city (i.e., NAACP, academic success initiatives, Human Relations Commission). Recruitment also used word of mouth in the same circles to identify and provide referrals or contact information for potentially eligible participants. When contact was made, an enrollment script (see Appendix E) and my explanation of the study were used to deliver study information, determine eligibility, and elicit a pseudonym for use throughout the study. After determining that participants were eligible, I sent an email (see Appendix F) with the Research Participation Information Sheet (see Appendix G) to participants. If they agreed to take part in the research, participants were asked to contact me at my university email address with a statement that they agree to participate and have the interview recorded.

Protection of Human Subjects

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects (2018) recognized that due to economic or educational disadvantage, in this case from race, ethnicity, and lack of employment, study participants may be vulnerable to coercion or

undue influence requiring additional considerations. Including this population in the study was essential because the study focused on social determinants of health. Eligible participants were provided with compensation after the 2-hour interview (\$45 eGift Card) and after any other follow-up meetings to cover reasonable transportation costs (a roundtrip three-mile taxi ride of \$20) to a private location and a meal (\$25). Compensation would have been provided once participants agreed to participate and started the interview process, even if they ended the interview early. Because the study was limited to interview procedures, there was low risk associated with participation. The Pace University IRB reviewed and approved this study, resulting in an exempt determination.

I obtained an email from participants indicating agreement to participate and willingness to have the interview recorded (see Appendix F). The intent was to avoid recording any personal identifying data during interviews. Discussions with participants used the pseudonyms they provided for themselves, and I reiterated the importance of altering names and other identifying data during the interview. Study data were handled as confidentially as possible. Only I and my committee members had access to study information. Future publishing or presenting of the results will not include individual names and other personally identifiable information. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised. Therefore, pseudonyms were used for all written documents and in transcription to minimize risks to confidentiality. Disclosure of mandatory reporting requirements, such as child and elder abuse, were explained. To maintain the integrity and confidentiality of participants' personal data, I will reserve the consent emails, audio recordings, and field texts in a locked filing cabinet and a password-protected computer until such time that they are destroyed, no more than 3 years after successful completion of the dissertation defense.

Data Collection

The interview design (see Appendix H) aimed for the researcher and participant to engage in two or three meetings (narrative interview, follow-up to review transcript, and a possible third meeting to review data analysis findings) on a CITI-approved remote video platform (i.e., HIPPA-protected Zoom) or via telephone. They were asked to select their pseudonyms during enrollment. Any note-taking or recordings were organized using these pseudonyms. For the first meeting, the 2-hour narrative interview consisted of conducting a narrative interview and completing a demographic inventory. The quantitative data obtained in the demographic inventory informed the qualitative findings and were based on population-specific surveys, national guidelines, and related research (see Appendix I). I explained that the interview design may be modified to meet the participants' needs and effectively accomplish the study, although no modifications were necessary. Field texts consisted of interviews, field notes, and reflexive journaling after each meeting with participants.

I conducted the in-depth narrative interviews along with demographic inventories that captured experiences and contexts. The flexible narrative interview protocol began with an opening question and prompts that provided the participants with an opportunity to share and make sense of their lived experiences (see Appendix J). I intended to create an atmosphere of trust and goodwill by being honest and responsive to the participants' needs. I aimed to remain neutral and not lead or be suggestive during the interview process. I stayed alert to changes in awareness and meaning in the interviewees and strove to make the interview process positive. I took detailed field notes during the interviews about the participants' interaction, tonal emphasis, and nonverbal communication. While clarity was sought as appropriate, I did not push the participants further than they were willing to go. Narrative interviews were transcribed using a

professional transcription service. All narrative interviews were reviewed in their entirety to verify the accuracy of the transcripts. Identifying data were removed from the transcripts and other field texts.

Data Analysis

At a minimum, researcher-driven interviews have been used as the method of narrative inquiry. However, the “principal interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author.... there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story” (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 71). Preliminary analysis involved immersion in the field texts, reading and re-reading, listening, and re-listening, considering multiple perspectives, and taking notes.

The first level of analysis was integrating and synthesizing the validated interviews and other field texts into chronological restoried narratives of participant experiences. This restoried narrative is considered an interim text. Text content was purposefully preserved to illuminate fresh perspectives, allowing the stories to speak for themselves. I retold the stories along temporal lines while retaining their words to illuminate context for how the young men have become the way they are and how personal and structural conditions have contributed to their inner stories. As the researcher, I was responsible for upholding the integrity of this project with clear intentions and obliged to describe my participants’ experiences as accurately as possible. Through objective observations and reflections, I employed thick description to describe the participants and interpret the results, remaining faithful to the participants’ complex perspectives while resolving social context inconsistencies (Munhall, 2012). Further, I intentionally sought out and reported evidence from the field texts that was contrary to my biases.

The iterative process of collecting and analyzing field texts continued to overlap. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiries are not carried out as a series of steps; instead, a negotiation occurs from the outset to project completion. The beginning steps and all those that follow inform how the study moves forward. I documented refinements and support for decisions and arguments throughout the process. Initial analyses revealed plotlines and other structural matters. With narrative analytic terms in mind, I began iteratively reviewing and comparing (i.e., events, tensions, and information gaps) the field texts.

The second level of analysis and interpretation of the validated interviews and other field texts considered:

1. orientation of authorial voice or the predominant cultural discourse shaping and creating the perspective;
2. expression of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework elements, which consider temporal (continuity), personal and social (interaction), and spatial (situation) aspects of experience; and
3. position within Payne's (2011) site of resilience theory for contextual observation of identity and structural conditions.

To draw out context and significance through a theoretical lens, I asked questions derived from the two theories that guided the investigation. The following are samples of questions I pondered while analyzing and interpreting texts, with theoretical derivation in brackets:

- What is the continuity and changing perspective of people and events existing within a past, a present, and a future? [temporality]
- What do personal and social interactions reveal about the experience? [sociality]

- What are the physical and varying situations where economic and educational inequality experiences occur? [place]
- What considerations were contemplated due to economic and educational circumstances? [resilience]
- Is there an overriding subjective experience, identity, or social context? [social identity]
- Are there sociocultural backgrounds or key relationships central to the experience? [relational coping]
- What are the physical and structural conditions at play in the experience? [structural conditions]

My responses to the questions of context and significance ultimately directed the transition from interim texts to the final research texts. After the participants' narratives were restoried, the analysis continued to alternate between the individual and collective interim texts to develop an understanding that resonated and captured their experiences and contexts. Narrative inquiry contains description, narrative, and argument in differing proportions, depending on the experiences being represented and the inquirer (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). Once I developed some familiarity with the participants and their experiences, I was better able to determine the best kind of final research texts to compose that represented this narrative inquiry puzzle. The final research texts contain participant descriptions and individual biographical narratives that include representative stories of life events negotiating resilience, and an interpretation and analysis of participants' experiences (Dewart et al., 2021; Maley, 2019).

During analysis, participant participation and interpretation promoted connection to the research process and validated emergent findings and conclusions (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). During the interview process, I asked two participants to review the final research texts for conclusive member checking. I requested that two participants check my findings and consider if they accurately reflected their experiences or whether I was missing the point or critical connections. One participant responded that he agreed with the results and the other participant did not respond.

Moving from Field Text to Research Text

Narrative inquiry utilizes field texts and research texts in data analysis for developing an understanding of lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Data analysis began with listening and re-listening, reading and re-reading the narrative field texts, and referring to field notes and reflexive journaling. During immersion in the data, I created a transcript analysis key and color-coded narrative passages along theoretical lines (see Table 1).

Table 1*Transcript Analysis Key*

Action	Topic	
Underlined	<u>Main experience with few financial resources and ineffective education where they adapted and coped for well-being and survival</u>	
Italicized	<i>Authorial voice</i>	
Gray	Excluded content given grey text highlight	
Site of Resilience Theory		
Structural conditions		
Brown	Social injustice (racism)	
Red	Safety, police, +street life	
Orange	Education high school, college	
Yellow	Employment, poverty	
Individual conditions		
Light green	Identity, choices	
Dark green	Culture/community, relationships/mentorship	
Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space Framework		
Blue	Temporality (continuity)	past, present, future
Indigo	Sociality (interaction)	looking inward vs. outward, +coping
Violet	Place (situation)	within person, context, environment

The primary research question was: How do unemployed young urban American Black men negotiate economic and educational inequalities from resilience perspectives? I foregrounded the research question during this phase to prioritize resilience considerations. The color-coded passages were rearranged, leading with the primary resilience negotiation experience followed by the largely chronological biographical restoried narrative. Varying excerpts of revealed stories were combined, and content was organized along plotlines. Particular attention was paid to retaining the near-complete interview of participants' actual words, meaning, and context. One exception was Human #1's narrative, where I excluded 23 pages of detailed stories about his childhood and work environments.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I sought to conduct the research in a manner that best told the participants' stories. I was responsible for recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent, conducting flexible and open-ended narrative interviews, presenting the interview transcripts to the participants for their review, and incorporating their feedback throughout the process. The resulting research texts are intended to honor the storied life experiences of the participants.

My role was that of a trusted researcher, not a friend or confidant; therefore, I required self-awareness of the privilege and power dynamics in interactions with participants. At all times, I made an effort to generate respect and transparency toward the participants through my demeanor and by providing detailed descriptions of the research process. I prioritized the safety and confidentiality of the participants through clear and honest communication about my intent and participation expectations for the study as well as diligently excluding identifying information. I aimed to develop a trusting rapport with the participants to foster potential future working relationships, given that I hope to conduct research in this community, particularly in Participatory Action Research (PAR), in which community members can be involved in the entire research process. Moreover, participants were encouraged to contact me with any additional considerations throughout the project.

Rigor of Data

Trustworthiness or systematic rigor in qualitative research involves reliability and validity and is engaged by aligning ontological, epistemological, paradigmatic arguments (Rose & Johnson, 2020). This study was formed within assumptions of philosophic idealism ontology, in which truth is interpreted and subjective. Idealism is a dynamic and evolving philosophical conception of the world (Munhall, 2012). On the most fundamental level, this perspective means

that each person's reality is sensed through subjective mental perception. This study is also congruent with the nursing epistemology of humanist and holistic means of knowing that include self-determination (Munhall, 2012). These broader assumptions align with the following paradigms and theories applied to this study:

- Critical theory is emphasized by historical situatedness and the selection of Payne's (2011) site of resilience theoretical framework.
- Constructivism is asserted through co-constructed realities as a catalyst for action sought through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space methodology.

Rose and Johnson (2020) advocated for establishing reliability as the sound application and implementation of methods. In this regard, I explicitly chose narrative inquiry to elicit experience, and I consistently applied the flexible narrative interview protocol during the interview process. Further, I verified the accuracy of each transcript and procedurally replicated the same steps during analysis. Additionally, the personal justification description of the views and experiences I brought to the research process represents *subjectivity*, while journaling to capture my reflections throughout the research process is *reflexivity*. Both help establish reliability within the applied paradigms because insights from my perspective can be added to other perspectives to understand the phenomenon better.

Validity is the accuracy of interpretations and deep understanding involved in research practices and was established through the following techniques (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Member checking occurred when I gave the restoried narratives and results to the participants, providing them with an opportunity to restrict the use of any data that breached their privacy and to ensure that the research reflected the truth of their experiences. Narrative inquiry necessitates

rich, thick description for a contextualized understanding of the nuanced phenomena. *Peer debriefing* ensures consistency in data interpretation and fit to philosophical perspectives. For this study, an expert in narrative inquiry and I conducted a collaborative debrief through analysis and restorying of one narrative interview; this was 33% of the data.

In narrative inquiry, distinguishing the authorial voice or world view that influenced the narrative is essential. This consists of considering the extent to which social perspectives influence participant experiences. The narrators in this study were both I and the participants. Data collection and analysis included continuous checking (Munhall, 2012) on three levels: representativeness and saturation of the data during interviews, recognition of authorial voice, and fit to the methodological frameworks during analysis. I repeatedly asked myself: What do I know, and how do I know it? I selected narrative analysis in part because of the impact that understanding others' experiences can impart.

Risks and Benefits

Although I made every effort to minimize physical and emotional burdens, confronting struggles can be challenging. Noone appeared overwhelmed during the interviews. I observed no hesitancy, silence, or extreme emotional response, and no participant wanted to stop or withdraw from project participation. If additional assistance was required, I offered referral to health services at the local health center. There was no direct benefit to participants, although sharing their experiences will hopefully benefit other young men. The Protection of Human Subjects section addressed participant compensation.

Summary

Through this narrative inquiry study, I sought to obtain narrative interviews and evaluative participation from unemployed young urban Black men. Clandinin and Connelly's

(2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework provided design, implementation, and analysis methodology. The research was also situated within Payne's (2011) site of resilience theory to consider perspectives of the impacts on resilience in this population.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Final Sample

My final sample was three young unemployed urban American Black male participants who met all the study criteria. The pseudonyms used were derived solely from the participants. The name of the city where the participants lived and select narrative details were made more ambiguous to protect the participants' privacy. The demographic inventory (Appendix I) was completed after the interviews, and a summary of the data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Summary

Interview Order	Pseudonym	Age	Education	Recent Work Experience	# of Arrests
1	Human #1	Mid-20s	Some college, no degree	Locksmith, Marketing entrepreneur	0
2	Alex	Early 30s	Bachelor's degree	Teacher, Entrepreneur	5
3	Joe	Late 20s	Some college, no degree	Professional fighter, Pool technician	5 or 6

The demographic inventory revealed all participants were in their 20s or 30s and single with a significant partner. Only one participant had a child. All the participants had some college experience, with one earning a bachelor's degree. Two learned trades through experience outside of school. They were all currently unemployed and looking for entrepreneurial opportunities or local employment. Only a single participant stated he always had enough money in the home for necessities. Two of the participants reported repeated interactions with police, but no long-term incarcerations. The participants all stated that they had never been to the emergency room due to

an act of violence. They rated their health from fair to excellent, but only one indicated having health insurance. Only one participant rated spirituality as important, and no one belonged to an ethnic organization.

Gathered Narratives

Participant recruitment and narrative interviews occurred during January and February 2022. All interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded with permission using the Voice Memos app on an iPad. To initiate the narrative interview, I began with the opening key question: Consider your experiences with few financial resources and ineffective education and tell me about a time you adapted and coped for your well-being and survival (see Appendix J). When participants were stuck in a thought or wandered from the interview question, I provided prompts and follow-up questions to gain clarification, insight, and context (see Appendix J). The participants provided narratives of resilience negotiation amid economic and educational inequalities. The interviews concluded when the participants had nothing further to add, and they lasted about 90 to 120 minutes. The demographic questions were piloted on a sample of 90 young American Black men in my pilot study titled “Reflection and Resilience Influences That Support Survival in Young Black Men.” The procedure method was unchanged during data collection from how it had been detailed previously. After the second and third interviews, I considered Leininger’s (1994, as cited in Munhall, 2012) arguments on qualitative evaluation criteria. Although there was no long-term engagement, I obtained meaning-in-context as participant experiences became understandable, and repeated circumstances from different interviews supported confirmability. A final sample of three was deemed suitable. A professional transcriber transcribed all interviews, and I reviewed and corrected each transcription against the

recording, removed identifying data, and returned the participants' transcripts to them to assure content validity. The reviewed and verified transcripts were now ready for analysis and restorying.

The participants are presented individually in Chapters V through VII, utilizing three final research texts. Each participant is given a short description derived from observations during our interactions integrated with field notes and reflexive journaling. Next, I present the restoried narrative of participants' specific experiences generated from the validated narrative interview transcripts. Then, I assess the orientation of authorial voice and analyze the two most relevant resilience negotiation stories using elements of three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework outlined at the beginning of Chapter III. I created a contextual diagram to visualize the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in certain cases. Chapter VIII presents findings as narrative threads and collective analysis with interpretation through site of resilience theory.

Chapter V

HUMAN #1

In this chapter, I briefly describe Human #1, present his restoried narrative, then discuss the narrative's authorial voice and provide an analysis of two resilience negotiation experiences. Human #1 was an aspiring entrepreneur in his mid-20s. He contacted me through a referral. He informed me that he would not normally participate in something like this, but he had a lot of respect for a mentor who suggested he participate. While speaking with me, he gave the impression of being calm, comfortable, and optimistic. My observations outside of the interview were that Human # 1 liked to engage in discourse but highly regarded his privacy.

Restoried Narrative: Negotiating Success

I guess to start off basic. I would say transitioning from a sports focus to a work lifestyle, like completely forget about sports. That was probably something more like difficult, especially at the time I was a little bit younger, being in high school necessarily, and then realizing basketball is probably not going to happen kind of thing, then going from, all right, what am I going to do since I'm not going to be playing sports? That was pretty difficult, and just a lot of mental, a mental (pause) how should I put it? Just a mental battle kind of thing,

This is probably like junior year going into senior, you know. For me personally, I'm from [this town] so when I was growing up, we were mainly a basketball-orientated town. You know, every other sport wasn't really the main focus. But then, as a—in a transition of coaching and staff and all this other stuff, then things weren't the same and the coach wasn't giving the—he wasn't giving the team the focus of basketball anymore. It's more of like morals and all this other stuff which I understand is valuable, but completely tossed out opportunities for a lot of the players at the time.

I mean, I was good till probably the actual season started 'cause (pause) you know, initially coming in, it was like (pause) you know, we really didn't know who was going to be the coach and we thought it was going to be one way, and the coach it did end up being—he kind of tried to like play it cool like that first summer before the first season started. Then at the end of the summer, that's when the kind of bomb dropped for us, like yo, none of this stuff is gonna be the same anymore. I'm going to have you guys (pause) I'm a—my job isn't to be—this was a quote: My job isn't to be a coach, it's to teach you how to be a man. Yeah, that was the whole, the whole thing. So, like I'm just like, okay (laughs), I didn't really know how to take it. I'm just like I knew this shit was going to be bad, and I'm just like let me just prepare for the worse and try to do my ends, you know.

Like me personally, I had colleges looking at me, and another one of my friends had colleges looking at him as well. Colleges come to the game and the coach would be—wouldn't play us, wouldn't do none of that, 'cause we didn't want to follow his program, like oh, join our team during the summer and train with us. We would then go, you know, me and someone else specifically chose to go somewhere else because we already had established a relationship and, you know, it was just a summer thing. It's not like during the important time of the season we were with another team. It was just for our own personal training, we trained separately from his idea and whatnot. So, he ended up being a little bit spiteful and taking away opportunities from both of us to be in a better position.

Also, so after that, you know, realizing that, you know, I already missed out on certain opportunities, it's late in the game, I'm already a senior, the year's almost over. I really honestly didn't know what I was going to do, going into my senior year and knowing that I already missed out on an opportunity, and I knew it was going to be hard for me 'cause I don't have financial

access to resources, coaches, teams, and—nor the guidance either, you know. It was mainly me, a group of my friends, you know, seventeen, sixteen, trying to navigate on our own ‘cause our parents didn’t have that just access and financial (pause), the financial opportunity to help us out. So that was probably a major point of like trying to overcome and adapt to the situation.

Luckily, I ended up having a teacher that, you know, she was also (laughs) it really changed my whole mind when I got into this class ‘cause the teacher was fighting with the school to teach financial literacy, and she had to get a petition, have a whole bunch of students sign and register for the class. [We] were the first people to have a class inside the high school at the time. And if she didn’t tell me, if I didn’t have that class, she would never—I would have never had the idea of trying to do like more business-savvy kind of things, and also just the whole—my whole thought process just changed, like I looked at everything differently and know that like—it made me realize a lot more opportunities, you know, outside of even college. It’s just (pause) and then after acquiring some of that knowledge, obviously that’s only in high school. I went to college temporarily for a little bit. I didn’t complete it but—because I wanted to focus on work, getting money, you know, giving my mom some money, household stuff and whatnot. So, it’s always (pause) there’s always a bump in the road, you know, when trying to figure shit out.

Being an athlete was kind of like (pause) how should I put it? It was more of a bad thing, ‘cause now it’s like the past generation did all this stuff and they got away with it, and now we’re going to take out all the past stuff on this new generation and we’re not going to care about basketball and the opportunities that come. We’re going to care about, you know, your morals and your decision making. And just ‘cause you’re a basketball player doesn’t mean you’re gonna get this, or just because you play a sport, you’re not gonna get this. It’s like you could be doing, you could have all the grades in the world, you know, be on top of the game, but they’ll

still like give you that niche, like yo, this isn't back in the day da-da-da, you're not just going to get away with this. But this is like, all right, we know it's not back in the day, like this whole shit has changed, but they're still like attacking us like we're those students, kind of thing. So, and that was maybe like, with the basketball situation, with that newer coach, he pretty much has said, Forget about everything that happened before, anything you were taught, anything—'cause I worked with the old coach and then, and the new coach, so I was there for the immediate change and like—and that was like, you know, I'm just like, okay, they're trying to send a message. It's not about college anymore, it's not about the grades anymore, it's not about basketball anymore. It's just the message kind of thing. But overall, it's just multiple changes happening, and then just having the, you know, just do the shit on the fly has been probably just the most difficult part.

Going from like the sports to like the business mentality, it was like, it was just frustrating overall just having to transition and realizing like, oh, I was taking like a real—it was a big leap to think like sports was the only way. Like, and the only reason why I changed my mind is because of that teacher that, that entrepreneurship teacher that brought that class in. The whole world of basketball was completely out the window. So that's when I'm like, all right, I know basketball isn't going to fucking work out, and I kind of just was like winging it. And she came to me and presented a paper, and I'm like, ehh. And she's like, we're really trying to do this. I'm like, all right, signed off on it, told a couple of my friends. They ended up doing the class too, and then it changed my whole life after that. Now that I'm older, I've always thought—thinking back to this, I used to sell candy in the back of my school bus like going to school and leaving school. And I'm like, okay, so I kind of always had like a thing for like entrepreneurial stuff, like just

trying to get the extra dollar. But I didn't really think about it and dive in till end of high school or whatever.

Yeah, at the end, it ended up working out, like once, once that our first year, like of us doing it, we were like just—it was a fun ass class, like just learning about it. She made us make like, make up our own businesses and everything like that, and crunch all the numbers and do all this other stuff, and like we'd watch all these videos about businesses, and then it was like, okay, so this shit is (pause) it's not as difficult as people want to make it seem, but it's like if you start as early focused on business as you do starting with basketball, you know, it's going to be a breeze once you're in the real world 'cause it's like, all right, I already have the foundation, I got all the knowledge. And, but for me, it was like, you know, it was kind of like just a leap of faith, like this is going to work, this is kind of what I want to do at the time 'cause basketball like just completely exploded in front of me. And then she's like, yeah, you know, you guys could all do this, but in our community, it's not a thing, and then she goes and tell us, like I'm going to start my own business as well and teach you guys, like I'm really going to do it. And she would tell us like, oh, I'm doing this, this, and that right now. And at the end of the year, you know, we did like another business presentation, like we were presenting it to a company to buy, and we all had to do like, you know, the Zoom meetings, dress up and all that stuff. But it was just, it's pretty, it was pretty dope. And the main trip that actually changed, that really like opened my eyes to it is she brought us to New York City, the Garment District, and we ran around with our groups and just bought random like gloves and all this other stuff, hats and shit like that. It was in the middle of the wintertime. And we would have to come up with our own prices like for the items. All right, we all, we know we bought this bulk of gloves for like five bucks for the pack, and we have to sell these for like two dollars or three dollars or some shit like that, and we can

double our money and da-da-da-da-da. So, we were like—she would literally open up the classroom. Like our day would end at like two forty-five or like our last class ends at two forty-five and the period started at like two o'clock. She's like, all right, the end of this period and for your lunch, come down to the classroom and we're going to have a little pop-up shop and try to sell your stuff to the students and the teachers. And they ended up coming through and buying stuff. It was like, okay, that was a good physical way for us to learn, like people actually do this. And then that's when I'm like, okay, I could definitely do this. That's when my head was like, yeah, this transition is happening. I just got to figure out what the hell I'm going to be selling kind of thing. So, I mean, it was tough (pause) thinking—I mean, it still is tough thinking, trying to stay on that path of trying, you know, do the shit and organize everything, and you still don't have like the guidance and the mentors or the financial backing and stuff like that.

Half the time in high school, people don't really care about education. Very few students actually care about what they're actually learning, probably because it doesn't—most of the time, it doesn't pertain to reality at the time. People in high school and middle school aren't—don't even know who they are yet. They have no self-identification and so always worry about the image and the next person and comparisons and (pause) and social media doesn't make it any easier for them to really dive in on the (pause) the individual side of it. So (pause) I feel like just a lack of—it's not even—just the type of knowledge that's being provided isn't really that much helpful when you get out into the real world.

I went to [community college]. I was at the campus. I paid out of pocket and everything like that 'cause none of my (laughs) family members went to college either, so none of them understood FAFSA and all that stuff. And then come to find out after like my first semester of trying to do it, my mom made too much money, but she was a single mom so like by their

standards, she made too much money for us to apply for FAFSA, but at the same time, you know, our overall condition of being a single mom, taking care of [a lot of] us. You know, it just didn't feel like she was at that financial point necessarily.

I mean, the main thing was like me personally, like I didn't have a car fresh out of high school, so luckily, I was blessed with like some good friends that gave me like reliable transportation. They, yo, work your schedule around my schedule and I'll bring you to school every day, like don't worry about it. And like two, three of my friends that are really like holding it down that way, so they helped me at least get the access to go and transport back and forth every day, they did it for like a year and a half, and then I finally ended up getting my license.

I knew I wanted to go into business, but (laughs) my second year, I think the third semester in college had this business class, and the teacher literally said to us, like, yo. You guys don't need this. He was like, you guys don't need this degree obviously. If you're going to be an entrepreneur and do like the business side of stuff, it's mainly just the information. Like I've worked for professional companies and now I'm a teacher now because I obviously want to give the information and stuff like that and give you guys a—I forgot this dude's name. He was pretty cool. Just give you guys the information and whatnot, and you know, you guys have to make the decisions like, you know, sacrifices, all that other stuff that comes with this, comes with doing the entrepreneurial stuff. Like there's a lot of, it's a lot of mental (pause) mental battles, you know, working with people. If you have like a partner and stuff like that. He was mainly talking about things like that, like how to navigate through the actual business, like not just, oh yeah, buy this item at ten dollars and you sell it at twenty-five, and you get a fifteen-dollar profit, and (pause) he was more like, you know, This is how you might want to approach people or a company and this, this, and that. But towards the middle of the semester, towards the end of the third semester,

he was like, Yeah, you guys like, you guys really want to do this shit, like college is, okay, it gives you the knowledge, it does give you certain experience, but the degree won't really get you (pause) to be a CEO. That's something you, you really have to work for, put the time into, and (pause) you know, make those good decisions and do a lot of research and whatnot. And at that point, I'm like, all right, my high school teacher said it, you said it. I'm just gonna get the fuck outta here and not waste my money.

Like (pause) so yeah, and at that point, I'm like, all right, I'm just not going to focus on college. I'm going to focus on trying to figure out a business plan that works or just negotiating, like affiliate marketing, working with other businesses and just making a little bit of money on top until I figure out my own thing and get a little bit more organized and I'm more prepared physically and mentally and financially for a bigger step kind of thing. So, at the end of the day, with all these decisions, my main focuses was my family and just the finances and time, 'cause I feel like, you know, time is probably the most valuable thing in the world necessarily. And a lot of time can be wasted just making bad decisions and being around the wrong people and all this other stuff.

Like when I officially decided like, all right, I'm gonna do like business and I left that, that last semester of college, I was just like, I'm not gonna party anymore (laughs), I'm not going out anymore. I just left my other girlfriend, my ex-girlfriend at that time, and I got my—you know, shit wasn't working out with us, it's not what I wanted. My whole lifestyle right now, I don't want—so I'm just not gonna go outside. (laughs) I'm gonna start a business, I'm gonna do something, and I told all my friends that too. Like, hey, like yo, I'm not gonna talk with you guys no more, I'm not coming outside. I don't want to hang out with nobody. Like you are still my dogs (laughs), if you guys want to come see me, sure. If I'm having something like come through.

Unfortunately, I'm super optimistic, so I really don't like try to think—I thought about the problems and like how things could go. It went a lot worse than what I thought it was gonna go, but I'm glad I went through it because it was just like I learned a lot about the people around me, real friends and all that kind of terminology and whatever the hell. 'Cause when I made that decision, it was like (pause) after that first year, like I've seen a lot of people. Yo, what's going on? Oh yeah, your stuff is cool, this, this, and that, what you're doing is cool. And then I lost mad friends, just instantly the whole bunch of friends just—I noticed, I wouldn't even say they were originally my friends. I just noticed certain things that they would focus on and it's like, okay, like I know why, now I'm realizing why you're really around me kind of thing. And then (pause) just also like I'm a giving person, so I was helping out a lot of people. (pause) Some people would consider me like the life of the party kind of thing. I wouldn't say I'm the life of the party because I don't dance. I'm kind of like, all right, let me just get my little weed, get a little cup, and I'm gonna sit back, just vibe, talk with my friends. I got more enjoyment out of seeing people, you know, turn up and have all that energy and all that stuff than me actually doing it 'cause I know I'm not that kind of person. So, you know, get the drinks for my friends or, you know, bring the weed for everyone to smoke, and it's like, Yeah, don't worry about it, like fuck it. And then after a while, it's just like, all right, now that I'm not doing that anymore, it's like people just stop hitting me up, stop talking to me. The conversations were a little bit—very like—not a little bit, it was very simple and like, okay, I know, I know what you, what you, what you want to do. You want me to go out with you so I can do this, and you got this girl with you, and you want to impress her, and you don't got it but I do! (laughs) So it's like, you know, all right, like, so after a while, I'm just like, yeah, I just don't wanna be around people like that and then, yeah, I just—my whole just lifestyle and the way I felt about things and just the way I am around

people just completely changed now. Like I was reserved before, but I feel like I'm like super reserved now. The only reason why (laughs), the only reason why I did this, honestly, is because [my mentor] was like, yo, you know, I have someone here that wants to do something real quick. You wanna do it? And he's like, I was like, I mean you're asking me, so fuck it, why not? I'll do it. So, I don't like having conversations. I don't like dealing with, you know, giving out a lot of personal information or just my thought process and decisions just around anybody. Like I'd rather just be quiet and then if it's around people I trust, that's when I usually like, all right, open up, or it's like (pause) sometimes I gotta give a little to get stuff out of, you know, people I'm trying to do business with and stuff like that. So, it's like I gotta be a little bit more personable and give them a little more access to me than I would just any random person walking around town kind of thing.

I would go to [my mentor's spot] like every other day. I mean, I still do now a little bit, but literally just go there and just ask [Mentor 1] a whole bunch of questions, you know, like, all right—originally it would be a whole bunch of business questions. Then he started giving me a little more knowledge, and then that's when the conversation started opening up. I knew, you know, years before he even got to where he's at now.... We were just doing something completely different, and then he started breaking down...[things, like this is how it works] and all this other stuff,- And then there is this one old dude. This is when I was still working at [the second job], matter of fact. This one older guy [Mentor 2], I actually gotta text him. He's like (pause) also I built a lot of relationships with older people, like nobody around my age. It's like forty, thirty-plus. Most of the time it's like sixty-year-olds. So (pause) this old dude [Mentor 2], he would just tell me like, Oh, like I know you're about this business stuff and all this stuff, but did you see this about [this town]? You know, he dropped a newspaper. I'd be like, Oh yeah. Read this, da-da-

da, he would circle it, he would do this every day, just drop off the newspaper and just, yo, this is what's happening in [this town]. Oh, did you hear about this? And we had a conversation and I asked him a lot of questions. Then I would just back and forth that with [Mentor 1] and him. Just [Mentor 1] would tell me a lot of information, I'll talk to [Mentor 2] about it. [Mentor 2] would tell me something, I'll talk to [Mentor 1] about it. And then a few people I went to high school with, literally only two people (laughs), actually got involved with politics now and, you know, I'm not really cool with one of them, but the other one... we kind of just had those politic conversations. And she was actually in school for it, so she would give me like, this law does this, and then, you know, Oh, [this town] is actually like that because the legislative and the city council and—what's it called?—county legislator, all this other stuff, it's like, oh, okay. So, this doesn't work, you know. I started seeing how the political wheel kind of works a little bit.

Like me just asking questions and then them replying. They're like, okay, then after a while, they just took the initiative to just keep giving me information. I'm like, you know, Thank you 'cause I'm—I would probably not figure this shit out anywhere else, or even have the thought to even look up some of this stuff on You Tube or Google just to get a little bit better informed. So yeah, once I kind of got the foundation of like politics and the front side of politics and the side a lot of people don't really talk about, which is mainly the relationships, that's when I'm like, okay, this is a whole 'nother business kind of thing. (laughs) A whole 'nother business and they're playing on a whole different board game, compared to everything else. So, and it affects everything else, so that's the other side to it, and that's when I'm like, okay, I see how certain things are,

So, I got a little bit more information just on business stuff and after that from there, I kind of just had my mind set on, you know, hustling (pause) in a legal way (laughs) necessarily

and trying to avoid like, you know, the bullshit, the street life, and— ‘cause it’s easy, it’s in front of you. Especially in a predominantly minority community, it’s like the door is always open for that kind of lifestyle. And I grew up in all that stuff and I’ve had my deal of situations but going from high school to now necessarily and still seeing people in my age group or older still in the same thing, it’s kind of like, all right, I knew I’m going on the right path.

But overall, you know, since leaving high school, it’s probably I’ve been just survival mode, you know, navigating in a space where I don’t have any like reliable source of communication, like besides like You Tube, certain people I follow on Instagram that provide information, but there’s no like direct source. Well, there was no direct source. Until I actually started speaking with [Mentor 1], I kind of got a little bit more information and just a different perspective, you know, him being a person that has also been going through the same experiences and probably worse back then compared to now, and thriving a little bit, you know, thriving to a certain extent. It’s like all right, it just reassures me like I’m trying to do the right thing. It’s just figuring out and being prepared as possible too (pause) so yeah, I think, I mean not only for me alone. Anybody else like just being a young adult and not having that information is like super important.

I don’t like switching jobs a lot, so fresh out of high school going into college or whatever, I was working at a store and then I had become an assistant manager over there, and then simultaneously I was (pause) you know, trying to make up funds for college and also like maintaining my household. So, I started being an assistant manager and then working overnight at [a second job] and going to school. I did that for about a year, and I was like burning myself down to the bone, so I had to like cut back a little bit. I ended up leaving [the first job] to [just work at the second]. But long story short, I stayed at the [second job] for another like five years

pretty much, working heavy. I loved the environment. I liked the job, I liked, you know, being of service to people, helping people out, and you know, [health] is a very important aspect of life that people also overlook, so I was happy to be a part of that. You know, it was something that messages that. But, you know, (pause) then the business side, the corporation side just, you know, doesn't help out when you're working in a place that represents a certain image, and all this other stuff, and I don't want to like bash the company and shit like that because I'm pretty sure I can get sued but (laughs). But pretty much what happened was COVID happened, and we had the slight shutdown and I'm thinking everything's—you know, obviously everything didn't open back up. We're all taking our time and precautions to be as safe as possible. And then when the [business] first opened up, it was obviously rough. They're all focused on sales, maintaining their customers, so on and so forth, you know. And also, like maintaining the safety, so—but there was just a lot of red flags. You know, obviously I don't want to put anybody's safety at risk. And I was the assistant manager at the time, so I knew like a lot more information than some of the other, some of the other employees, and it was just difficult trying to find that balance of management and then—or just work life and then just being honest and morals kind of thing. So, once they told me like, one, they're not going to quarantine the older employees, that's when I'm like, okay, I'm definitely quitting now. Like I don't want to live in the balance of, you know, I'm putting my job over my, you know, just human decency, respect, 'cause it's not even like they're asking them. This is what the company say they were going to do, and then it completely went out the window when the time came. So, it was rough 'cause I actually like, genuinely liked the job, but at the end of the day, just saying, all right, fuck it, you know, it did end up hurting me, but I had to, you know, end up finding a new way of how to make money, which was I just started helping out local businesses, throwing events, running places, talk to people and stuff like that.

I would just go around pretty much asking, What do you guys need help with? (laughs)

Or if I noticed that they don't have any social media or something like that, I'd be like, Oh, I notice you guys don't have any social media. Let me at least get you started or necessarily I have social media, so I'll like to promote your business, give it shout out, or if I can host a little event, have some of my friends come through, or people I just know I come across in my—just walking around and asking people, you know, they perform, they sing, they have bands. So, I just tell them, All right, I'm going to bring them through, they're going to come through and perform and, hopefully, bring you some attention. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, but at the end of the day, it was a I'm helping you out, you help me out kind of thing. So again, just having to transition from a consistent paycheck to no paycheck at all 'cause at the time, everyone, all the jobs either want you to be vaccinated or (pause) just the requirements to work there just weren't available at the time, so it was difficult, but you know, I managed, I'm still here. (laughs)

My main thing was, first, it was like family and finances just 'cause, you know, I wanted to pay my mom, give her some money, help out in the house and stuff like that, get groceries or, you know, just pay for my end of my living space. And then the other thing was I—with that job specifically, I was helping a lot of people. I was like—even though I was an assistant manager, I was like doing a lot of things outside of, you know, helping...[my coworkers]. The staff—the customers mainly, there were certain—there was a lot of issues with (pause) just transactions that the job was doing. It was a lot of like funny shit, honestly. (laughs) I could go on and on about the things that happened that—just the change from the way the job was before COVID to after, it's like, all right, and I'm big on numbers. Like once I took the entrepreneur class, every job I ever went to, I 'm always thinking, all right, how does this business make money? How does

it work? Get all the details and that's my way of kind of like coping with the bullshit of the actual job.

It's been tough. I mean just (pause) mainly like breaking old habits, trying to break old habits overnight, you know, kind of thing. Making better decisions. Family trauma, you know, having those kind of conversations and, or at least even trying to have those conversations 'cause it's difficult to have communication when there wasn't a lot of communication there to begin with kind of thing. Especially on just a mental health and, you know, it's one thing to talk with your family, oh, playing around and all that other stuff. And then letting, letting family in on some I'm really not handling things well, and so forth, and navigating through that. For me, my mentality is, you know, find a base job that can pay for the house stuff, basic car insurance, food, and whatnot, and then just reallocate those funds for, like the extra funds for trying to do a business or, you know, negotiate something that can make like passive income, which is something I learned about—it wasn't through school, unfortunately, except for that one teacher in the last year of high school. Besides that, I've mainly learned it from like just You Tube and taking courses or having those conversations with people of our culture necessarily.

Like for me personally, my (pause) my dad, he started his own business, and it wasn't with his funds, it was with my mom's funds, and he ended up messing that up. And then (pause) another problem like (pause) I feel like that we have in our community is more of a (pause) tend to give a little too much, like and not stand by this is our price, our standard, we're not budging blah-blah-blah. So, like to my father..., our people would go to his store and ask for discounts. Yo, can I get it for free? I'll pay you back this time, this time. You know, he's a mom-and-dad shop, so he's kind of like a little more lenient. And then he ends up going out of business and then passed away a few years later. So, it was just like, you know, if they would have treated it

like, you know, if our people would have treated him like they do C-Town and how the Hispanic culture treats C-Town, it would be completely different, you know. There would have been the financial stature there, it would have ended up helping our family a lot more, but our willingness to give—and he's not the only business that I know that has done that. The businesses I've worked with now have been telling me, oh, I'll do this for free or, you know, I'll give you this, you know, as incentives to get people in here. But it's like, no, we gotta charge, I'm going to charge something for this and I'm going to give you some money as well because, you know, you gotta make your ends back and that's going to end up hurting you. And the only reason why I'm like that now is 'cause I know my dad was a very giving person, so and even with my mom too, she was trying to start another business out here as well. And it was working out, but she took those funds and put it into my dad's thing—and then everything went left from there, so. I feel like that's another thing with our demographic, it's more of like (pause) we're more lenient compared to other cultures when it comes to business. And also, just the way that we do business, I feel like is more—what's it called? (pause) It's more quality business. Like we're going to have a standard, I'm going to respect your wants and needs as a person and a human being, and whatever you want to negotiate, we'll work out something from there. As for Caucasian and like Hispanics, it's more like, you're going to do the task at hand regardless of whatever is going on, and we're not going to budge kind of thing. Like this is what we want, and we don't want to go any other way about it kind of thing.

For me, I just try to be super transparent. Like I'm going to tell you exactly what I'm going through as well as what I need of you or what can you do like, or how can you help me out in order for me to help you. Like tell me exactly what's going on. And I'm going to like definitely try and work something out for you.

Most of the time I would go [seeking opportunities] by myself. And my partner was also of a darker complexion than me, so there's been times where if he was around, they're a little bit more hesitant or, you know, (laughs) not as open to conversation. But also—what was I going to say? When it comes to actually having the conversation, I have to think about like (pause) twenty other alternatives, you know, five other alternatives to try and get somewhat of my way. If like the first thing—sometimes I already know, all right, they're not going to want this, they're not going to want that. It can't be too Hip Hoppy, it can't be too R&B, it has to be a mix of everything. That's what usually works when it comes to the events. If it's not predominantly what they're usually interested in, I have to make it super broad, so it's not focused on, you know, a certain demographic kind of thing. So (pause) the words I'm using also just super important, like I try to, you know, use words that I don't use on a regular basis to try and like get my message across, you know, or show a little bit more intelligence, you know. I might talk a little bit more looser or curse—I usually curse a lot, so like, you know, dumb down the cursing. (pause) Also, just the way I like phrase certain things, and just I have to think, really go in depth of thinking of just having the conversation and the way I have to go about having the conversation. I mean, I always do any time I'm trying to do business or talk with an artist or, you know, pick someone's brain, depending on who they are, you know, how I have to really think about how I want to go about it. But specifically with other races, I have to really like put a lot of extra effort in just thinking about our conversation and their energy, how they can be as a person.

I feel like it depends on the conversation 'cause, you know, me approaching them and they own the building or they're renting out the building, it's like, all right, they have that sense of like power, entitlement, and you know, this is my spot at the end of the day so it's going to be my decision. So, I have to say certain things so I'm like not stepping on their toes. I'm sure they

had to do the same thing to probably cater to the politics and other businesses and stuff like that, but usually, usually with other races and their establishments, they already have a core, core foundation, a core following. Usually, their demographic mainly goes in there, so with someone outside of their demographic, it's like a little risky. You know, I'm risking a little bit, and usually I worry kind of like. So, they might have the same aspect of going about the conversation in a certain way, especially dealing with a different demographic, but probably it depends on their position, you know. If they're trying to do business with someone, you know, but if they're at the advantage or they're at a different level, they're probably a little bit more firm on what they want to do and what they want to get across kind of thing.

Most of the time, if it doesn't work out, it's usually meant to be or (pause) if—don't take the first no as the end all be all, because there is usually more, like another way to go about it. Or, you know, like I said with the conversation, like I kind of have to make alternate plans if I can't get that first plan to go across. Even though it's my major idea, I gotta shortcut it with something with baby steps that can finally lead me up to the original plan I had. So, I'm super optimistic, so if somebody usually tells me no, it's like, okay, like I'll wait a little bit, let me get a little—find a way to build some leverage, you know, do something somewhere else, and then come back to them and be like, all right, this is what I got going on. You know, I could bring this over here or I could do something similar, and that way—usually that's what ends up happening. I end up getting that leverage, it could be either an individual or, you know, building up ahead of time.

But if I can get the ear of the owner or like the store manager, like the highest position, it's like I can—it helps me out a little bit easier 'cause I feel like (pause) when I talk to, when you approach someone like one on one or just face to face, you know, that first impression is

probably the most important thing, so it's like, Hi, how are you doing? I try to articulate everything very well. And I'm kind of like a personable person. People say that about me, so it's just like usually I—you know, usually I end up getting their attention or at least just getting my foot in the door to have the conversation, and then I give them a little bit of it and usually, if they end up liking it, they bite. If not, you know, it doesn't work out, so (pause) and usually if that first conversation doesn't work, that's when I bring out the content and the people, and that's when they're like, yeah, okay, I'll work with you a little bit more. I feel like that's another thing to really highlight, like we don't need you to do all this stuff. We're trying to help you out. But the main focus—where my original thought was going, besides like the money being the focus of it, it's building leverage that just gets your foot in the door and hold that like first event or have that first transaction with them. And then just focus on trying to build a long-term relationship just trying to be super transparent and have like—stay in constant conversation with any person I either want, either like mentor-ish or like trying to have a business relationship with and just stay in constant conversation, hit them up like, Hey, I'm doing this, I got this going on. Oh, I see you have this extra business. You should just try to do this or like, you know, recommend ideas just so you're trying to help them out, and usually that's the best part, when you don't even think about like—not the best part but when you don't think about the money and just talk about the ideas and how you want to help out and build, it usually works out better in my favor 'cause then they're not thinking like, oh, he's just trying to steal the money or take the clientele. It's more about building and growth kind of thing.

I've taken things probably out of my life and relationships and dealing with people and put it into the business 'cause (pause) I feel like a lot, a big issue with especially like younger people, and now like there's no (pause) there's no like individualism, there's no like realizing

who you are and what you want to do (pause), how should I put it? Like people are lost, let's put it like that. And I've watched a lot of lost people, older generations, (pause) maybe learning from older generations mistakes 'cause I grew up with a lot of older people. I have older [family relations] and stuff, but I wasn't like hanging out with them. I was more like the basketball players or drug dealers, you know, stuff like that, watching how they're moving and trying to navigate through stuff 'cause I didn't really have any influence in the business world till later on. It's like, all right, when I was younger, I've seen you doing this exact same thing. I'm older, you know, [some] years down the line now, and I still see you in the same position, it's like all right, I know I'm making a—I know I'm doing the right thing 'cause I'm constantly either changing or evolving and other people, it's just like stagnant and then also just emotional reactions to certain situations. (pause) Just, you know, dealing with the feelings of being like overwhelmed and the pressure and all that stuff 'cause we all, we all deal with it. It's a matter of, you know, how to cope with it, realizing that this is what you're feeling, not just, you know, a lot of people just go straight for like I'm just depressed or anxious, but it's like, you know, where is all that coming from? You have to—people gotta navigate like, all right, I'm this way because of all this shit going on, and it takes a lot, sometimes it takes people a while to realize that. By just, you know it's just being super observant for me, like I've always been watching people and how they go about things and kind of just, you know, just learn from that and then just applying it to the business. Like all right, if I see a certain business owner with a certain demeanor, he might approach me a little bit aggressive or, oh, what's going on? Or oh, like what are you really trying to do, bro? Or like you know, (pause) it's like all right, I see that they're over here. Let me stay at this level, and if I just continue the conversation, they're slowly going to like calm down a little bit. Or sometimes like just matching their energy, if someone's super excited about an idea

going on, it's like, all right, you're passionate about it, I gotta be equally invested, you know, to get what you want going on, you know. And yeah, it's just watching the body language, demeanor, (pause) has been like watching regular, like people on the everyday basis who are really struggling go through that, and then going to a business owner who probably has come from the same past and stuff like that, the struggle and all that stuff, they hold their business, you know, like it's a new baby, like it's a newborn baby. They don't want no one messing with it. So yeah, that's probably the other thing, just understanding, by seeing a person, reading them, and then like, all right, I'm going to have to be this certain kind of way to get through this conversation (laughs), 'cause usually it's that first conversation where they're super guarded, walls are up, and then, you know, you just notch it down a little bit and have them open up a little bit too. But like I said before, you gotta give a little, so you gotta open up as well.

One part of it is like self-evaluation, you know, like people know that they're fucked up. It's not like, oh yeah, I'm just walking around, and I just so happened to get fucked up. It's like, no, I've kind of been fucked up for a while and just don't want to acknowledge it or (pause) whether it's with physical things, materialistic things, or just emotionally, you know. I'm gonna react to every situation with aggression, when it's not completely uncalled for kind of thing, or certain people are always on like a defensive mode. (pause) It's probably just (pause) you know, there's so many factors into it, I think it's more of like, it starts off with a self-evaluation, then it's also the ego check, and then like a pride check. So, you know, certain people just (pause) you know, a street dude, well, I've been struggling all my life. I had to get it however I could, da-da-da-da-da. Like you know, people, I grew up on this, da-da-da, and this is all I know kind of thing. But it's like half the time, opportunities probably did come their way, but in that moment of survival mode, you know, they completely ignored the opportunity that could have took them on

a completely different route. Or you know, they want to learn more, to open that door, but then again with the way the school system is set up, you know, comparing a trade school to a public school. A trade school sets you up for financial literacy, but as well as time management, the freedom with your time after you learn that trade skill. School's focus is more of, you know, school, college, than experience and learning the world kind of thing. And now it's probably a lot more different. You have access to the internet and people getting paid to post videos, and then also the videos that are being pushed that are paying people is probably not the on—like not the correct image of that personal individual or the culture as a whole, necessarily so. Then the people who view those videos that are being pushed are influenced and it just trickles down from there. So, yeah, I probably feel like it's more of like a—it has to start with the self-awareness, and then from there, you know, the person, the individual will grow. And I feel like they probably should teach more about self-awareness and culture, not even just for like Black people, but Hispanic people as well, and be transparent about the history 'cause obviously the history books, all the shit that I learned in that school is not the exact history that is being portrayed.

For example, [this town] itself—this is something I learned from [Mentor 2]. (laughs) He was telling me about how back in the day, [this town] had a predominant African American business structure in the town, and then redlining and the zoning stuff happened, and they ended up destroying most of the businesses. Like there was a big—burning down the buildings, all that type of stuff, and then the owners of the land never bought back their land. The African American owners ended up selling it to whoever else bought it, and now they lost out on the financial gain long term, their grandkids' money, all that other stuff. They could have been a completely different town if that situation didn't happen. (pause)

Or for example, just (pause) the awareness like for like our own cultural support amongst each other isn't even a thing. Like Hispanic culture does it regularly, opens up their own businesses, gets support from their people, send money to their family, bring them over here, get them a job. Now they have financial structure and income coming in. The person who brought them in is now moving up the position, probably not at the shop no more, still making money or opening a new one. And you know, it keeps going from there. Same thing with Caucasian, you know, they'll have the family deli, sell bagels or something like that, hire their son, you know, and then it just keeps going like that. But African Americans, it's like not really there—they don't have, they'll be the business, it'll be there for a little bit, but lack of support (pause) from our own, and then just, you know, there's always the stereotype of—I mean, granted, there's always stereotypes in other businesses as well, like expanding businesses, you know, they might say, I mean they only sell fucking beans and rice, you know. I'm just making some shit up. And then the White deli, they don't fucking put salt and pepper on their bagels when you want a bacon, egg, and cheese, so blah-da-blah-da-blah. And then with African American people, it's like, you know, they're late, the store is not open on time, they were rude. Even though those are like some regular things that happen with mom-and-dad shops or whatnot, for us it's taken in a worse way than maybe other demographics may get that leniency.

If anything, it would probably be like (pause) for our culture, very consistently like (pause) checking other (pause) our culture is very hard on ourselves, I'll put it like that. Like, you know, we disable ourselves by not communicating and only reacting. Like I feel like we've been super reactive to things but not proactive to a lot of situations. Even like with all the killings and all this other shit that goes on in the world that we all know is like fucked up, it's been going on like consistently, there's no like (pause) it's kind of like it happens and we react,

and then it's gone. Like there's no (pause) I don't even know how to put it. Like (pause) there's no proper way for us to like (pause) express ourselves without sounding like—I mean, there is, but we probably just don't it. Expressing ourselves without it being like an attack on other ethnicities or cultures.

[This is the end of Human #1's restored narrative.]

Individual Analysis

In this section, I talk about the authorial voice or predominant cultural perspective in Human #1's narrative and then analyze two resilience negotiation experiences. Human #1's personal philosophy was formed by self-evaluation, mentorship, and optimism. During high school, the coach's and school's authorial voice and worldview were imposed on him. In some ways, this stole Human #1's agency, or sense of control, influencing a critical life transition. Human #1 began to respond to his own authorial voice or cultural discourse; it was shaped using observation and critical thinking toward achieving goals, prioritizing family, and evaluating his circle of friends. Both of Human #1's parents influenced him with their business experiences. He told us his dominant standpoint: "I knew I wanted to go into business..." He created a professional identity that intentionally counter-balanced mainstream stereotypes of Black men and the Black community: "...if I see a certain business owner with a certain demeanor, he might approach me a little bit aggressive.... Let me stay at this level, and if I just continue the conversation, they're slowly going to like calm down a little bit." Human #1's decisions were frequently impacted by a sense of responsibility to support his family and his home, as he related, "...I wanted to focus on work, getting money, you know, giving my mom some money, household stuff and whatnot."

Sports to Business

Human #1's story of negotiating resilience is the experience of "Going from like the sports to like the business mentality, it was like, it was just frustrating overall just having to transition...." Elements of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework are used to investigate how Human #1 negotiated resilience in this transition. The element of place is represented by the difficult high school situation in which Human #1 realized that a future guided by basketball was doubtful, and he questioned what to do with himself in the void that followed. He explained, "...realizing basketball is probably not going to happen kind of thing, then going from, all right, what am I going to do since I'm not going to be playing sports?"

Socially, looking inward he observed, "I was taking like a real—it was a big leap to think like sports was the only way." Looking outward toward other interactions, he signed a petition for a teacher wanting to teach financial literacy. Human #1 took the class and said, "it was a fun ass class, like just learning about it." The class involved a trip to the garment district and a pop-up shop to sell items. His social interactions of signing the petition, taking the class, and fully participating in class activities aided in identifying new opportunities.

Temporally, being a basketball player dominated most of Human #1's high school identity. In this situation, he realized, "the whole world of basketball was completely out the window." His hopes were hampered, in part, by a change in coaching philosophy, and he was "kind of just was like winging it" while having a mental battle about what he was going to do after high school. In thinking about his future, he decided to "completely forget about sports" and pursue business instead; "If I didn't have that class...I would have never had the idea of trying to do like more business-savvy kind of things." Taking a critical look at his situation and

engaging in his environment was essentially negotiating his resilience; Human #1 noticed, “my whole thought process just changed, like I looked at everything differently.”

Making It Happen

Human #1’s second example of resilience negotiation occurred navigating community-based entrepreneurship, which is a progression of his main story. Again, I used the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework to analyze the narrative. The element of place is represented in the various community spaces that served as affiliate marketing opportunities. Human #1 said, “I had to, you know, end up finding a new way of how to make money, which was I just started helping out local businesses, throwing events, running places, talk to people, and stuff like that.”

Regarding sociality, Human #1 looked inward and acknowledged his contributions to interactions with friends at parties: “My whole lifestyle right now, I don’t want—so I’m just not gonna go outside. (laughs) I’m gonna start a business. I’m gonna do something.” Human #1 looked outward by upholding transparency and anticipating expectations of potential community business partners: “When it comes to actually having the conversation, I have to think about like (pause) twenty other alternatives...to try and get somewhat of my way.”

Temporality was exemplified in his nurturing of long-term mentoring relationships. Human #1 took advantage of real-time resources: “...every job I ever went to, I’m always thinking, all right, how does this business make money? How does it work? Get all the details...” Moreover, his perspective was future-oriented: “I’m super optimistic, so if somebody usually tells me no, it’s like, okay, like I’ll wait a little bit, let me get a little—find a way to build some leverage, you know, do something somewhere else, and then come back to them and be like, all right, this is what I got going on.”

Chapter VI

ALEX

This chapter starts with an introduction to Alex, followed by his restoried narrative, then an analysis of authorial voice and two resilience experiences. Alex's last formal employment was working as a teacher; now he was also an aspiring entrepreneur in his early 30s. He too contacted me through a referral. Vocally, he sounded excited to participate but was slow to respond to electronic communication. Alex was interested in my educational trajectory, willing to contribute to my educational learning, and interested in helping others in the process. His energy over the phone was confident, energetic, and interactive. Based on my observations, he was also thoughtful and purposeful in his activities.

Restoried Narrative: Negotiating Resilience

Honestly, I think of freshman year in high school. I had a change in teachers and my older teacher, she was a cool lady, but she was more—I want to say she was[n't] as professional as the teacher that came. The previous one was more personal. So, the new teacher that came, I guess she was setting her standard, her tone for the class, and she made it known that she was there to educate us and that for those who really wanted to learn, she was there for us. So, she had no problem letting us know like, for those who want to learn, you can come sit over here, and those who don't want to learn, you can sit over here, but just don't bother the kids that want to learn. And I don't know, I guess you could say, 'cause it just showed me that not everybody's going to take the time to really want to spend time on somebody and it has to be up to you to decide if that's what you want to do.

I didn't have any direction in life, really. Before that happened, I didn't really know what I wanted to do or get anything out. I guess I—yeah, I had no direction really. That's the best way

to put it 'cause from that moment, when she came, I started realizing what I really wanted to do: just be a leader, not really be a follower. I wanted to be an educator, and now I wanted to just be my own person, if that makes sense.

We had the option to do BOCES or you could have did something else, and I did the other option. It was like, it was basically like I did like an internship because I was going the teaching route, so I did an internship with different teachers. That was pretty cool 'cause I knew the (laughs) that's funny, now that I think about, it makes me happy. But I knew the people in the class, like it was my friends and stuff, so they took it kind of serious that I was being a teacher, so even though it's funny in how we operated, I took it serious because I was actually being a teacher and they knew that this was kind of what I wanted to do.

High school was cool, I would say for the most part, 'cause where I grew up was pretty diverse. It was actually more Black and Latino than it was white. White was really rare. So, we had teachers of, I would say we had more white teachers, but they were actually more cool, like they were understanding, compared to what I probably could have went through. So, I would say that I was a pretty loved kid 'cause I always talked to a lot of people. I was very social. I did what I needed to do when it came to schoolwork and my teachers, and I just liked, I just liked being friends with people, so.

I, I would say I was cool with my teachers to that level that they would give us the heads up, like the things that we're teaching you is not really what you need to learn for life. So, they told us that. Like my teachers, my teacher that came in ninth grade, she told us that in ninth grade (laughs), like the schoolwork that you're preparing for, yeah, we're teaching you how to be in school, but this is not going to teach you anything in life or what you really need. So, I knew that from really early and I guess I got blessed, now that I think about it.

[Some of my siblings] had more of a challenge in school with learning and staying focused and keeping themselves in the classroom, so they would have a hard time. [One sibling] especially would have more of a hard time being in class. I remember when I was a senior, they were in high school. So, I remember like I would be in class, and I was like, I was pretty well known in my high school by my teachers and the staff 'cause I was like the good kid or just popular. So, they knew who my siblings were. If my [sibling] was having a hard time in class, the staff would literally call me to come deal with them just to make sure that everything was all right and that everything was cool. Like the staff knew that we were siblings, that the teachers were all right with me just coming to make sure things were cool if they were having a hard time.

I wish high school would have showed us more options of like getting grants or better scholarships or more—better routes than going the debt route or signing away a piece of paper for debt later in life, because when I was in school—just because the, the, the pressure of having to succeed in school and getting a degree, like I could think of so many times my family had to do things just for me to be successful in school or to stay in school and have to pay—or had to pay a crazy amount of money or travel to different—so many different places and give away their vehicle to me to just be able to be in school. It's like I wish that high school or something would have told us—or gave us better options just to be secure, 'cause then, thinking about it now, like so much money went into my financial well-being when instead of that, I could have had other options, and then maybe I could have been in a better position now in life than having to do so much with myself now than before.

In hindsight now thinking about it, I wish, I wish they would have told us about credit, taxes, you know, things like that, owning a home, just the responsibility of managing money and finances, aside from the streets, would have been nice 'cause, you know, you can be an

entrepreneur, but what kind of entrepreneur do you want to be? I would get people from the community that are doing entrepreneurial pursuits, get them to come in periodically. Maybe if not once a month, like at least every quarter, get them to come in, talk to them, have little events, and just talk to people, let them know what's going on. Maybe even offer internships or scholarship opportunities. Yeah, and just have, yeah, have little events and just raise awareness 'cause people don't know if they're not aware, so the only way to give an opportunity is to create one.

But I think that I got a more quality life education [here] as compared to a school-wise education. Just socially how to interact with people about certain ways of the world. How, how Black people are treated in America, especially in the ways of the world.

Yeah, but yeah, it was cool 'cause like I mean, thinking of like the typical experiences that most Black males go through or most Black men in America go through, I could (pause) that I could say that I was kind of lucky, you know? I grew up somewhere else a little bit far from [this city]. [I came here], in fourth [grade]. Where I was originally from, if I went to high school there, I would have definitely got a better education than I did [here].

I saw sports, so basketball and football was huge. For me, it was a little different 'cause I grew up playing soccer, but then when I left my old town and then I moved to [this city], soccer wasn't really a thing. So, like the cool kids or the popular kids did basketball or they played in the streets, so that's what the real focus was. As far as like getting girls or wanting to be cool or getting any type of name for myself, it was like trying to pay attention to those. But at the same time, again, like I said, thinking back, I feel like I've been blessed because the people—even though that was the lure and I did it like the people around me, my family kept me in my books and my head in the school work so they made sure that I could get an education for myself and

put me on a different path than keeping my head in the street or trying to stay focused on what they're doing or what's popular with the drugs and stuff.

Growing up, [this neighborhood] was a little more hood than it is now. Like I would say it's probably gentrified, now it's gentrified and okay to deal with. Mmm, I like that it's quiet and it's still a little peachy and touristy, so it's not like as negative as it could have been, but I don't like that (pause) it doesn't really support a Black crowd as it should, like business wise. But like growing up, it was more street. It was transitioning from the last era of the street era to like a kind of little better era, so when I was growing up, it was like, there were still gangs, there was drugs going on. There was guns, but it wasn't too crazy. Knives were really a thing more so than anything, but it was just more so gangs and cliques and a lot of fighting. Thinking back on it, it was definitely unhealthy 'cause it was like a lot of, I guess you would say activity that was going on that shouldn't be going on for kids, for kids of our age at the time. So yeah, gangs. Yeah, a lot of smoking, sex. A little bit of guns.

I was raised in the household of my grandparents; they would always talk about back home and how it was for them and what life was like for them growing up. But so, I always had like a strong culture identifying as [Caribbean], and what it is to mean to be [Caribbean], even though I was raised American, as they would say. But on the flip side, it was a little bit of a culture shock. Like again, like I said, I had the teacher in high school that was a mentor to me, so it was a culture shock because I would hear one thing from my family about how life was growing up in [the Caribbean], in my house, and then I would go outside and be in the streets with my friends and life in America is something totally different. So, I had to learn how to process what life in America was like, and then the life in town in [the Caribbean] is not the same thing.

Depending on who I'm talking to, I'll say [I'm] Black or I'll say I'm [Caribbean] 'cause some people say, Okay, Black, but what kind of Black? And I'm like, All right, I'm [Caribbean], my family's from [the Caribbean]. So, to the Americans, I'm Black. To other people I'll say I'm [Caribbean] or [Caribbean] American. I just think of growing up with my mom's side of the family and how that life was.

I didn't grow up with [my father]. We had a very strained relationship. Like he probably lived ten, fifteen minutes away and then we could have stretches of not seeing or talking to each other for like months to years, and then randomly seeing each other. It would be good for like a week and then go back to the regular cycle.

So, when I was a kid, before the strain with my father happened, we did have a relationship. He grew up with his mom and dad, and he had a bunch of siblings, but his dad died when he was young from lung cancer, if I'm correct, so he only grew up with his mom. It was just his mom and his brothers and sisters. So, they took care of each other from a young age after their dad died. My father did the streets. He was more of a street guy, so I don't, I don't, I can't remember anything off—in my mind of him doing sports or being an athlete or being a businessman, but I just know that he was in the street, he played the street.

So, I can just think of situations where like my peers wanted to do one thing, and because of like my older sibling or my family and the things that they would talk to me about or our conversations we'd have at the house, like I would go outside and my friends would want to do something, and I wasn't really attracted to it or I didn't want to do it because I would think of what these conversations and my family told me or these things that they went through.

Yeah. Yeah. I'm thinking of situations where it's like out of town with a friend, and then I'm thinking of a couple situations that happened, and I don't want to get into some of the

specifics, but basically, I know how some of my friends' personalities are, and then we're out of town. So, it's obviously you're amongst strangers and you're with your friends, so you're going to move more with your friends. And I know the personality of some of my friends and the interactions with my friends always get into with strangers, and it's like I know how my friends' personality could be a little extreme or it could, they could be wrong in a sense, but it's like, dang I gotta go with my friend because this is who I came with, and I worry about his safety before anything. So, it was like we got, we kind of gotta do this. (laughs)

I've had moments where it's like—I could say it was like moments where there would be violent situations, and I had certain peers around, but then we'd come back home and then certain things happened with those same peers, and then it's just like, What? Do you view me as a friend or how do you view your relationship? And it's just like I, if that's the case, then I don't need to be around you, so I wouldn't really hang out with them as much. And I don't think there was a crazy drawback of it. I don't think that, but nah, yeah, I would just not hang out with them as much.

I grew up around here, so I know people. So yeah, I feel safe. [But it] depends on like where I'm at in the town and who I'm with, 'cause you just know—yeah, just who I'm with and where I'm at in the town and what's going on, 'cause, I know, I know certain crowds of people and how they are, so if I see them and their in the environment, it's like I kinda gotta be a little more on guard. Even though I don't think they're going to do something to me personally, it's just like you've gotta be aware 'cause you never know what could go down just 'cause how this one person is around, or another group is around.

I mean, I got—'cause when I was a kid, I got detained like at times, but then they let us go after that they didn't take us to the station or anything, I would say five times. Yeah, I got

detained in the car twice, I got detained on the street once, I got arrested twice. Well, I've got like arrested and then they brung me to the cell, then they let me go. Didn't really have the best experiences with [the police]. Even got lied on a couple times, so.

Yeah, there was a situation that—I don't want to get too much into details because then it kind of like is a little revealing, but yeah, there was a situation that went down, and I had the cops lie on me. They said I had a gun and, yeah, I didn't have a gun. And I know for a fact that the female officer knew I didn't have a gun. She just lied to say it, and it resulted in an assault on me in front of my own house, and my [family members]. Yeah, so they lied. Basically, they tried to lie and said I had a gun, so I can't talk about it. It was not good at all.

I had an older [sibling] that was in the streets. I kind of played the streets, but my [sibling], my peers kept me out of it more than my older [sibling] did. My younger [sibling] kind of followed my older [sibling]'s path and did the streets, but (pause) we kept [them] out of trouble as much as we could. My [other sibling] is like this—is like a city [person], kind of kept [to] the streets, but did all right [too]. I would probably say of all my siblings, they would say I'm the one who did the most well off.

My younger [sibling] and I are the only two in my family that graduated college. I think [college] was probably a little challenging 'cause [my sibling] was a kid that received assistance when in school, like 'cause, as I mentioned before, [they] had a time, a hard time focusing on classes or doing the schoolwork. So, now that [they were] in college, [they] didn't get that much assistance as [they were] supposed to. So, [they] had to find ways to operate within school and how to do schoolwork or get extra help from friends to help do [the] work or try to ask me [for tutoring].

What I learned while I was in college, 'cause I went to school down South, is that you kind of have to put yourself in debt to get an education, which was really weird, now that I think about it, 'cause my family didn't have that much money, so I had to take out personal student loan debts to put myself through school. And now that I think about it, if I didn't do that, I probably would have never got a college degree or graduated, and because of that, I had to take moments for myself to—'cause I was schooled down So—at school down South and, you know, technically, after eighteen, you're an adult. I was sitting in rooms with people signing papers that I really didn't know anything about just so that I could continue going to school and getting a college degree. And now that I think about it, it affected me later 'cause I was just a kid and we never learned anything about credit or really about banking when I was in high school or how that could affect our life or how we could use it for our life in better ways. So, with me older, I'm seeing how that affected me now 'cause no one taught me about credit, and now I'm paying back my student loans could really put me in a better position later in life for credit, or if I didn't sign certain papers to get these loans for school, that I could have actually got better scholarship opportunities or I could have got grant opportunities because my grades were good instead of me signing my life away in a certain way. Not to put it like that, but in a certain way, but I kind of got taken advantage of because I was a kid and I just signed without really thinking about it.

On one end, I thought of my family 'cause they really wanted me to go to school, they wanted me to get education, they wanted me to set that standard for myself. So, I was doing what I had to do. On the other hand, I'm like, I don't know, I was a kid, so it didn't really cross my mind as to what as far as like, okay, this is something that could really affect your life, but it's just like I think at the time, I was just like I just need to do what I gotta do. Like this is just it, just do it and don't really question it.

I had a very wide range of friends, some closer than others, I guess, growing up in life. And just thinking about it right now, I have one friend whose family say they always supported me and say they would help me out in situations. He was a little better off, well off than I. You know, he knew—his family knew my family didn't have it like that. But never have I once, not once can I think about that they asked me, helped me out in a way that they said they would help me out financially as far as school or not wanting me to be in debt or anything. Like I just really had to take that burden on my own.

I guess that I gotta really pay attention to who I say that I—or say—I guess I have to pay attention to who says they really have me versus than doing it, 'cause my family like really bent backwards to put me through school. Even when they didn't have any, they found ways to get it for me to make sure that I was good 'cause I—after I went to school—I went to two different colleges, one in my home state and one out of my home state. And when I lived out of my own state, it was a little harder for me 'cause I didn't live on campus, I always lived in an apartment. I had to get my own food. And my family, I didn't have, I didn't have the school's meal card, like how they have meal plans that you can put on a card, I didn't have that. So, my family would really do what they could to, you know, support the house, and then at the same time send me money to make sure that I had food or make sure that my rent was paid and that I was all right at school. But even as far as—I can remember one time that I didn't even live anywhere near my school. If I would say it was a drive, it was about a thirty- to forty-minute drive. Walking, that's probably like two hours. My family gave me the car for a whole year, and they needed it, I knew they needed it, but they just had that much faith in me of going to school and knew what I needed, knew what I needed to do that they bent over backwards. They gave me their car so that I could be all right. And that just—and that situation, it just showed me like, wow, like my family

is willing to do whatever it really took to put me to school and make sure I got an education and that I was all right.

I'm vulnerable 'cause I was put in a position that I didn't predict, or I wasn't expected. 'Cause you know, we always—education was always something that I put at the forefront, especially as a Black man, they telling us that we had to be something other than the streets, at least for me. So, when I'm hearing that I had to sign a loan that's going to give me five thousand dollars, ten thousand dollars in debt later down the line, it kind of makes me freeze, but it's like all right, right now in the moment, I need this money so that I could put myself through school because I have my family sacrificing, so in a sense I have to sacrifice too, and I can't just really be upset about it. I just have to find a way.

When I moved down South, I like experienced racism for the first time, so that kind of had like a different impact on me as far as how the school, and I really kind of stuck to myself and didn't really operate with people down South as I did in New York or do in New York. I was at a college party. My roommate at the time, he was older, so like I said, I didn't live on campuses at school, I lived in apartments when I moved down South. So, my roommate, the school put me with someone who was older, but he was getting married, and he had ties to a fraternity, so he would invite me out to this fraternity that he was cool with. I was cool with some of the people, but they ended up having a party where it was like a lot of alumni and current members there. I got into a misunderstanding with one of the few Black members that they had, and the white member took offense to it, and it turned into a whole episode, like a whole episode, literally a whole episode of this guy feeling entitled to say certain things, and then another guy saying some things. I found out they were brothers. And then with them being racist to me, I had basically the president of the fraternity telling me that he would have jumped me for the other

guy being racist to me, and I even told him the story. And he's like, nah bro, but still that's our brother, we would have had to roll out for him. And I'm like, oh yeah, rolled out for somebody who is racist, to somebody that y'all wanted to hang out with? Like come on, that don't make no sense. I thought [it] was outlandish and crazy at the time, so much so like it kinda it really did hurt me a little bit, and I wrote my mentor at the time. Like I said, I have my teacher, when she came in ninth grade, she influenced me, so I wrote her a letter of basically everything like—like that event was so powerful, like the night it happened, I had to write everything that happened, and I sent her a letter. I told a couple of my friends 'cause I had one friend back home that I would tell everything, and he and I would talk about it, but I don't remember off the top of my mind of him having to ever go through a situation like that or he himself going through something similar. You know, like she was probably the first and only person that knew about it at the time, besides my best friend.

And she asked if she could use it as a piece for her students at the time, and I told her yeah. Like it was interesting to see 'cause like the kids that she had, the younger generation, some of them knew me, and they read the letter and it just impacted them differently 'cause they didn't think that—'cause they knew me personally, they never knew that I would have went through that experience or that that was going on at the time down South. And it was just like an eye opener for myself, for her, and these people that read it.

The mindset with, my mindset with the South was different. It was, it was kind of crazy. Yeah, so, 'cause I freshly moved out there, I didn't really know people. I was like a so—I'm a social person, so kind of after that happened, since I didn't live—I lived in an apartment, and I just moved out there. So, like after that happened with my roommate and his friends, like I didn't really talk to people outside of class and stuff.

I would say it was a little tumultuous 'cause I didn't really have people I could confide with at the time, and then my roommate, he was never home 'cause, like I said, he was engaged, so he wasn't somebody that I could talk to. I had nobody that I lived with, I just lived by myself. So, I just like kind of drowned myself in schoolwork or video games. I became a little more antisocial or a little cold, in a sense, and I wasn't as open or receptive as I normally would be. And that kind of took a little toll on me how I interacted when I came back home or when I talked to people or how I viewed some of my relationships before. 'Cause like I grew up in New York and, like I said, I kind of was like kind of lucky where I grew up in the universe, so I never really experienced racism before. So then now, even though I understood it, like I would look at certain people or certain friends or certain situations differently, and I would kind of over-analyze and think like, Is there a deeper meaning behind this than what they're saying or what they're doing, or is it just straight up? Are they just giving me the straight-up of who they are right now?

It wasn't until maybe like a semester or two later where I really started to kind of open up to people 'cause again, I didn't live anywhere near school. And I used to, I used to have to walk to the grocery store to get my food and stuff. So, one of my friends that was in my class would see me walking to do my groceries. And when the grocery store was nowhere near where I lived, and she came to me in classes and talked to me about it, and she offered to take me to the next time I had to go get groceries. And then that's when I started like, like getting—I guess would start saying interacting with people really again, but that was like a year after the, the racist incident that I went through.

I thought of it like, times have changed, but when I was in high school, my teachers already kind of gave us the gist of how it really was, so I knew that America was still racist

already or I knew that it still existed. So just personally experiencing it was just basically a wake-up or a reminder like, hey, this is still out there. Don't sleep on it or don't forget about it.

[Now] I guess I'm a little more discerning 'cause I pay attention more so, like so say if I'm doing a business interaction or a job interaction, like not to say how it benefits me, but it's just what does this relationship consist of and how does it benefit each other? Like how does it benefit you and how does it benefit me? 'Cause I don't want to just put myself in a position where it's like it's seemingly good right now, but then I find out later down the line that at that moment, it was something other than it really meant to me.

Even now, that teacher that influenced me, I still have a connection with, so we have conversations. If I ever go through moments or situations or just need clarity for myself, she's somebody that I can just talk to and that just opened up the door. By having connections with other people, you know just having a mentor 'cause like (pause) I didn't grow up with my father, so I didn't have a role model or somebody to really look up to, just my [sibling]. But from my conscious remembrance of like looking up to it, I had a lot of female role models in my life, starting with my grandmother, my mother, my aunts. But like outside of that, educational wise, there was my teachers. I had a lot of women teachers who really took the time to craft my mind and put me on a good path.

The majority of people would like look at somebody of my skin color and think that we're supposed to be in prison or in gangs or, you know, something about the stereotypical Black man. But I really—like the people around me, my family, my teachers, they really did their best to keep me out of the streets, and I thank them for that 'cause it put me on that educational path of wanting to be a writer, wanting to be a teacher myself, just to be my own leader, open up my own businesses. So, with saying that, that's not something that you would think that's typical for a

Black man, so I figured I would get my life and then want to learn something that's outside the inequality. I would say that you could look at a Black man like me and think they can make it outside of sports, outside of being in a gang, outside of being a rapper, outside of being in the entertainment or music industry.

I've been employed since I was seventeen from summer jobs. When I was in school, I had work study jobs in college. I had summer jobs when I came out of college, home for the summers. After I graduated, I had a steady job. I mean my degree is in education, so I had teaching jobs, educational jobs, and those came my way, but like I did do those jobs, but then they weren't in the environments that would be a typical or traditional school, so I was in alternative school [environments]. I chose them basically based on benefits and pay, people that I knew there, how they felt about the job and just took it based on that. Later in life, I ended up going to a city school and that was more predominantly a Black and Hispanic environment, and it just felt more homey. Like it felt, it felt right, if that makes sense.

It wasn't until around pandemic time that that changed. It just seemed like the job, like upper management worried more about themselves versus really the workers, and then they're putting the workers in even crazier predicaments and threatening us with our jobs, and it's like how can you want a great and awesome work environment or a healthy work environment, and you don't really care about us as workers? Like we're telling you what's the problems and you're seeing the problems, and y'all aren't trying to change anything. It just didn't feel right. I was just seeing how my mood was, and like certain times where just certain interactions and thinking back on certain things, they just didn't feel like me. And then just at the moment of how the job was going and I'm feeling a little testy and get a little extra agitated or not taking time to certain responses from people. So, I just seriously did a breather. One time I was talking to one

of my friends about everything that was going on at work, and then that was more so an epiphany 'cause it was just like, wow, I'm saying I went through, I'm going through it, but then sitting down and me saying this to you about what I'm going through, like dang, that's an eye opener 'cause if I'm going through all this, then is it really worth it? Like is my mental health or my health really worth going through all these problems for money? Like no, not. I had to get myself out of there 'cause it was just like mental, it was draining mentally at some point, and I felt like it was (pause) I didn't—personally, I've never had a moment where I felt like I had mental health issues, but then when the pandemic happened and then the way that my work environment was, like I really felt like I was developing mental health issues with everything that was going on, so I just had to take a step back away from that job and get myself out of there. And I'm kind of glad that I did do that because I kept in touch with a lot of coworkers that still work there, and the things that they told me, I'm like, wow, I'm glad that I'm not there anymore because it just would have been horrible for me, just mentally it would have been horrible just to deal with that for a job that will replace me in a week. Right? Come on.

I mean, I feel better. (laughs) I feel better than I ever have with any other job. Like that I know that's probably like kind of the opposite of what you'[d expect], but honestly, ever since I quit my job, even though I didn't have a job, like and you know, I was kind of worried about money and stuff, I felt more right than being at work and slaving myself all day 'cause I always found a way. Regardless of me not physically having a job or what people technically considered having traditional money means, I still found a way and I still take care of myself, and I still get by and do what I need to do.

I was scared, I was definitely scared, but you know, we're raised in an environment our families like you have to work to get money, you have to work, work, work. You just gotta work,

you know? And it's like I get it, we have to have money to survive and money to do things. But it's just like how can we be effective in these environments and work on our space to make money if we're not even right for ourselves?

I started my own website. I'm a writer, I make beats, I'm all around creative, I can network people, you know? I dabble in the streets a little bit. So, there's different ways, there's—I have different avenues. Oh, I'll also invest, you know, I'm in the stock market, I'm in the crypto market, so like I have different options, money options, so I never tied myself to—like after I left my job, I made sure that I didn't have to kind of tie myself to having to worry about being under somebody else's authority when it comes to money, 'cause when you have your own money, then you're all right.

I didn't really know what it would take to be a business owner, about going about getting things, you know. We get money, thinking about it, we—it's easy for us to get money, it's easier for us to spend it. It's hard to save or we don't invest because that's not something that we thought of. So right now, I'm going to just entrepreneur, it's me and my—my lady and I, we have a business that we do, and one of my friends and I, we have a business that we do. And then seeing how it's a start-up, being a start-up entrepreneur and as Black man, versus have some white friends in the world and seeing how they're start-up entrepreneurs, I can see the differences in hardships. For example, I can say this as an example, and I don't mind using this. I had friends that started up a business a couple years ago, and when they did that, like their family invest—their family and a few of their friends and stuff like invested thousands of dollars into the business, made it real great from the jump. It was a great business, it was a great idea, but they ended up parting ways with it and the business broke up after like a year and a half, two years. Now my lady and I, we started our business and I have a lot of people that support me in

my corner. I would never doubt that. But I can think of these same people, friends, and I remember supporting them back in the day, and then like now, we're doing our business and it doesn't seem like some people are supportive or are as helpful as they would be. An example I could think of a friend, a friend, a family friend, when we started the business, she was willing to invest, and then, you know, as the business goes around, you need more things. And then I wholeheartedly approached her again, and then she came to me and said to me, If you have to come to me, then what do you have a business for? And then that kind of turned me away 'cause it's like if you said that you're going to help me, want to be a support, then do that. But if you're going to criticize me when I need help, then it's like what was the point of saying that you would support me from the jump?

It's (pause) it's been challenging. It's been fun 'cause it's been challenging. It's cool, it's been a learning experience all around 'cause we're doing a lot of the groundwork ourselves, so we have to go out and do like logistics, learn things, get inventory ourselves, talk to a whole bunch of different people and network. As compared to just some other business who could just pay somebody, they'll tell them they want, pay somebody, and then that person will go out and do everything themselves. Everything we have to do, we're doing from ground up, and it's cool. We get support, we do get help. I want to say that we work, doing it a hundred percent on our own 'cause when we do have our events, so we put shows together, we do get people that help us out, like our family helps us out really, really well, and it's great. But it's just a lot of legwork on our part and finances too, 'cause there's so much things that, even when you think that you're good, you're not really good 'cause you forgot something that you forgot to pay for. Something small that we forgot that is needed, and then you're running out, having to pay more money out

of your pocket to get things that we didn't think that we needed. And it's like, dang, we gotta pay more money.

But to be honest, me quitting my job when I did was probably the best thing that ever happened—one of the best things that ever happened in my life, besides graduating college and meeting my lady. Like that's probably one of the best things I ever did, 'cause within that time of, so from quitting my previous job to now, I opened two businesses, I hosted four events, I traveled to like seven different places. So, it's just like out of that negativity of me being in my last job's environment and then deciding I need to change something within myself, a lot of positive things came out of my life, and I did things that I never thought I would be doing before.

[However, the educational system] needs to change. It needs to, it needs to be honest and tell us the real truth about it, how the world is or how it operates. And then it needs to change so that it can truly benefit people in the way that they want to, 'cause now it's like a job. To me, thinking about it now, like in the past to now, and then looking at it now from the other side because, you know, you were a kid once, so you know how it is, and then you're an adult so you know how it is and how you have to do things, especially if you're a worker and probably, you know? But it's just if, if we really want to succeed, we have to tell people the truth, and then also have to make the change within our self to really show people how to succeed so we can succeed as a collective.

It's showing by example and then take their hand, because, like I said, I know people's personalities. Because I know a person's personality, if I want to help them with a job or a situation, you have to put them in an environment where you know they could thrive instead of failing. Tell [students] the truth and give them a choice, 'cause I liked my mentor when I was a kid. She kept it honest with us and she kept it real with us because then they'd give us the option

to choose what we wanted to do with our life, and she didn't say, You have to do this, you have to do this, and this is what it is. She'd give us the choice, and then we ourselves chose what we wanted to do. Now I feel like that impacted me crazy in life now because I just talk to people and then we find a common ground, and then I let them know, It's like you have the power to change it for yourself. Nobody stops you but you, so what's stopping you? (laughs)

I would tell [people] that they could make anything of themselves that they wish to be. Even though you're going through what you think right now is the best of life and that this is all there is to it, there's more to it if you just apply yourself 'cause all it takes is focus, all it takes is discipline, all it takes is the right attention, and all it takes is knowing what you for yourself really want and want to do for yourself. And that's all it takes, and there you go, that's it.

Start making a plan, have an idea and vision, have an angle. Think of the steps that you would need to take to get to that angle. Sometimes there are people and things that you may love and think that you need around. Sometimes you gotta cut that out. Sometimes if these people love you and you're focused on what you want in your life and then this is what you really want to do. If they say they love, how they really love you, they would help you stick to that path 'cause then, you know, all it takes is consistency and dedication for you to become something, if anything. Take—I would tell them, take sports, for example, you want to be a basketball player, you want to be a football player, you go to the gym, you work out, you put practice in, you put time, you dedicate your time. You make sure that you're the best at what you do in your craft so that when you go on the court and you have a game, that you can give your all and that you give your hundred percent, right? That's the same thing with a business, that's the same thing with learning a new craft or a new skill. You have to take the time, you got to dedicate, you got to practice. I'm not saying that you have to read, 'cause not everybody's a reader, not everybody

wants to pick up a book, but you have to give yourself the time to get the focus and the energy and the knowledge and the attention of what it takes to build something or to make a creation, to start a business, to create an image or to get a logo. Just to apply yourself really.

From my experience of the current college education, I think that it's going in the right direction 'cause it allows for a space of being open and wanting understanding for the self, and how even though these things in the past have an effect now and effect on the self, how do we come out of it with a better understanding to even, to change it even more?

[If you want to go to college] I would say, make sure that's what you really want to do for yourself. There's nothing wrong with it 'cause I think sometimes when you talk to people about a thing, they'll try to weigh you down or say that's not something that you should do or yada yada yada. But I would say just make sure that's what you want to do for yourself. See how that can help you with your life and how to get you further to the vision or the goal that you have, for what you want to do for yourself. And then, if you're gonna do that, make sure that you could have, you could get the steps so that it benefits you instead of hurts you in the long run. (pause) 'Cause, yes, it's, that's a real thing. And then you let them know about the, let them know about the knowledge and awareness of credit, debt, taxes, and equity, and financial management. I'm trying to figure out what I truly want to do with [my educational background], but I do have the option and the opportunity.

[This is the end of Alex's restoried narrative.]

Individual Analysis

In this section, I evaluate the authorial voice in Alex's narrative and analyze two of his experiences negotiating resilience. Alex discovered as a freshman in high school that he could either go with the flow and experience a life dictated by dominant social discourse or actively

shift his contribution and influence his life's trajectory. Regarding his pivotal moment of sudden understanding, he said, "Since that moment, it turned something in me." As Alex became more conscious, the authorial voice in his life changed. He made a significant step into conscious decision making and intentionally directing his future. Alex's narrative standpoint became his own positive Black male identity. Further, Alex also wanted to break stereotypes on a large scale. He recommended that others make the conscious decision to hold more positive, creative, and productive expectations of young Black men: "I would say that you could look at a Black man like me and think they can make it outside of sports, outside of being in a gang, outside of being a rapper, outside of being in the entertainment or music industry."

Choosing Where to Sit

Alex's main story of negotiating resilience occurred during that pivotal moment in ninth grade that changed his personal understanding. The narrative details are highlighted using the three elements, or commonplaces, of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework. Here, the place is a new teacher's classroom. She made a distinction concerning a classroom opportunity: "for those who want to learn, you can come sit over here, and those who don't want to learn, you can sit over here, but just don't bother the kids that want to learn."

In terms of sociality, Alex looked within at his desires: "I started realizing what I really wanted to do: just be a leader, not really be a follower. I wanted to be an educator, and now I wanted to just be my own person, if that makes sense." He took a step back and pondered others: "...not everybody's going to take the time to really want to spend time on somebody and it has to be up to you to decide if that's what you want to do."

Alex considered the past in terms of temporality: "Before that happened, I didn't really know what I wanted to do.... I had no direction really." This experience was an Aha moment,

when he understood it was up to him to decide what he would do. This was one of the major influences that

put me on that educational path of wanting to be a writer, wanting to be a teacher myself, just to be my own leader, open up my own businesses. So, with saying that, that's not something that you would think that's typical for a Black man, so I figured I would get my life and then want to learn something that's outside the inequality.

Racism in College

Alex also negotiated his resilience after being subjected to racism during a fraternity party in college down South. Place in this story is the situational awareness of being threatened in the context of racism.

I got into a misunderstanding with one of the few Black members that they had, and the white member took offense to it, and it turned into...literally a whole episode of this guy feeling entitled to say certain things, and then another guy saying some things. I found out they were brothers. And then with them being racist to me, I had basically the president of the fraternity telling me that he would have jumped me for the other guy being racist to me, and I even told him the story.

With respect to temporal considerations, Alex had never been exposed to racism before, at least not consciously. He said, "...personally experiencing [racism] was just basically a wake-up or a reminder like, hey, this is still out there. Don't sleep on it or don't forget about it." In the immediate aftermath, he reflected, "I didn't really talk to people outside of class and stuff. I would say it was a little tumultuous 'cause I didn't really have people I could confide with at the time..." Alex revealed that subsequently:

So then now, even though I understood it, like I would look at certain people or certain friends or certain situations differently, and I would kind of over-analyze and think like, Is there a deeper meaning behind this than what they're saying or what they're doing, or is it just straight up? Are they just giving me the straight-up of who they are right now?

In terms of sociality, Alex looked inward: "I thought [it] was outlandish and crazy at the time, so much so like it kinda it really did hurt me a little bit, and I wrote my mentor at the time."

He limited his interactions with others:

I became a little more antisocial or a little cold, in a sense, and I wasn't as open or receptive as I normally would be. And that kind of took a little toll on me how I interacted when I came back home or when I talked to people or how I viewed some of my relationships before.

This experience with racism caused Alex to withdraw for approximately a year, affecting his generally friendly and social nature.

Chapter VII

JOE

I begin with a short description of Joe, then move on to his restoried narrative. After that, I discuss authorial voice and analyze two resilience negotiation situations. Joe was a professional fighter in his late-20s. He contacted me through referral and was excited to participate, but it was challenging to coordinate the interview with him. While speaking with me, he gave the impression of being happy, inspiring, and forthright. During our interactions outside of the interview, my observations revealed that he is a spiritual person who strives to be productive.

Restoried Narrative: Negotiating Survival

Okay. Well, I want to start off by saying it all started when I was sixteen, when I got my first kid. I wasn't ready at the time and wasn't quite sure how it would affect me later on in the future. Oh man, that [my anger] was the heart of it. That was everything! Let me tell you something. That was ninety-five percent of everything. Because I didn't marry her at the age of sixteen, her family was like old-school Spanish, so because I didn't marry her, she said, You can either marry me or I make your life a living hell. All right, oh man, you gonna wanna hear this. All right. So, when she got pregnant, her friend told me. I didn't really believe it. I thought she was just like talking shit. So, I didn't think much of it. So, three weeks later down the line, she has a belly, so that's when I just started kind of freaking out. Not freaking out, Freaking Out, 'cause then that means I had to tell my dad, I had to tell my mom, the age of sixteen, Black kid, still in high school. It just was not it! Let me tell you, it was not it. So, in my head, I'm freaking the hell out, but her—she's like, Oh, my parents want to talk to you. So, I'm like, What kind of talk? She's like, Oh, they want to have dinner with you. Goddamnit. So, I go over there after school, I'm in the house eating dinner, and I'm at the very end of the table 'cause I don't trust

anybody, so I'm at the end of the table. And the dad is like, Well, you know, normally we don't (pause) we don't (pause) the women in our culture, when they get pregnant, the man usually marries the woman. And off the bat, I already knew what he was trying to get at, and mind you, at the dinner table was her mom, her uncle, her dad, her brother, sister, grandma, grandpa, which is everybody. Their [different culture]. So, it's a mob of them. So, I'm at the end of the table, and he finishes and he's like, So, are you going to marry my daughter? Man, I looked at him. I, I stood up from the dinner table, and I was just like, No, I'm not, I'm not doing this. I'm sixteen years old, I'm not about to marry your daughter. And then that's when I, I excused myself, and I was about to walk out, and before I walked out, she's like, Listen, you can either marry me or I make your life a living hell. I looked at her and I said, You can just make my life a living hell. Like here's what it is, I'm not marrying you. And from there, she's spent about four or five years, making my life just a miserable hell.

But once I got out of high school and graduated and started working, that's when I started realizing the finances starting depleting. You know, I couldn't make a proper check. I would pretty much have to work two jobs just to stay afloat and, you know, be on top of everything. That being said, the court also had issued my license to be suspended at the time, so driving, that was a major downfall for me because the majority of my money came from driving, deliveries, trucking, you know, stuff like that. And because of that, you know, it hurt me pretty bad. And I even pleaded with my baby moms, you know, if we could like somehow reduce the child support. But she wasn't having it. She told me, she said, "I don't care about the money that's coming out of child support. I only care about the money that's coming out of your pocket." So, since then, she's been making everything hard for me. Crazy hard.

Oh, well, well, during that time period, I was, I was fighting, professional fighting. I was doing that for about like thirteen or fourteen years. I had a bit of [an] anger problem. My brother noticed, so he took me in at the age of sixteen and, you know, ever since then, like all my anger, everything that [I] was ever angry about, you know, I would just take it out in the ring. I was doing between tournaments, seminars, cage fights, exhibitions, you name it, anything physical to just release that, and for fifteen years, you know, I had that, that, that, that emotion just lingering inside of me. A lot of the times, you know, sometimes that wouldn't even be enough, so I would be in practice from, I don't know, like four o'clock to eleven-thirty. I was a coach, I (pause) I had my own little kids' program called the Bullyproof Program, you know, to teach kids how to defend themselves, and not just be the kids' coaches, instruction coach, but be more towards like a life coach, you know what I mean? So, doing that, I didn't really have much (pause) I didn't have much because, I mean, I wasn't really working, so all I did was just train and, and try to scrape up some money, you know, here and there for myself, eating and everything. Luckily, I was still staying at home at the time so, you know, I had two parents who loved me to death and always made me, always had a home-cooked meal. You know, they knew that I was training, so they would make like a big old pot of rice for me, some chicken, you know, stuff like that, so I could get my weight up. And from there, it's all she wrote. (laughs) I didn't really have anything like extra lingering with me, if that's what you're asking. But after those five years, I smartened up to figure out the system, understood how things worked with certain things, and got a job on the books, and then got a job off the books. The job off the books makes more money than the job on the books. So, yeah, that's what I figured out.

I had gotten locked up a couple of times. That kind of messed up my finances. On top of owing child support too, that messed me up. So then, you know, I would have to—I would be in

arrears now. Mind you, she takes out two hundred, two hundred and forty dollars a week. On the average of a forty-hour paycheck, I make like, I don't know, eight hundred dollars. Taxes, they take out a good two and change, and she takes out a good two-forty, and then I'm pretty much left with two hundred dollars pretty much. So, you know, I was at a, I was at a dark place, you know? Luckily, I had the support of my family and my peers and stuff like that, and I was able to pick myself back up. But doing so along that journey was very, very tough. Yeah, I was limited. I was, it was so bad to the point to where I couldn't even, I couldn't even buy an Arizona, and an Arizona is a dollar. That's how I knew how bad it was. So, I (pause) I started doing some illegal things. Started doing check frauds, scams, whatever it is I could do to at least have money in my pocket, so that way I'm able to cover my expenses. It wasn't, it wasn't, (pause) I didn't do it for, oh, to buy extra stuff. No, I did it, I did all that illegal stuff just so I could pay my bills, just so I could eat, just so, you know, I could be all right. I was doing that for like a good four or five years. Wasn't proud of it at all, but you know, you gotta do what you gotta do.

I had a lot of (pause) I had a crew that I was doing this with. They actually brought me in. I was online on [website] looking for jobs or whatever, and I saw their ad, and so I decided to respond to that ad. And (pause) and (pause) um (pause) they brought me along, told me what it is that they do. At first, they weren't really trying to, but the guy was trying to scam me, and I pretty much just exposed him for what he was doing, and I told him, Listen, you know, I got this back and forth going on. You know, I want in, can you teach me? (pause) All right, so, about like four or five times a week, I would get an email. In that email, I would have to sort out the checks and, you know, just doing that and just having that on my email account itself just pretty much exposed me to, to the feds and, you know, that stuff's weighing down, and in the back of your head, it's just like, well, when the hell is the big bust gonna come? You know what I mean? So, I

was scared. Very anxious. Very aware of my surroundings. I was scared out of my mind. I was so scared to the point where like I thought that, you know, any, any day, somebody can just come knocking at the door, some government official come knocking at the door, and if they brought that profile up, and just my email itself, it was just enough to do like all four seasons in prison.

Now this guy lived in [a different state], so everything that we did was remotely and everything we communicated was through a fake number, so I was doing it on the phone, on the phone, and you know, seeing all the money that I was giving this guy and he was dishing it out to everybody else, I just noticed that I wasn't, I wasn't getting paid as equal as everybody, and I was doing the most work. And at one point, I got cheated out of money and so, you know, an eye for an eye, leaves everybody's blind. So, what did I do? I cheated him for his money, and then initial threats were going back and forth, and that just, that just ended it all. So, I definitely stopped. Anxiety and fear caused me to stop. And I went ahead and looked for an opportunity, another way, 'cause I just didn't like that. So, on top of that too, I was also ruining family households and stuff like that and freezing bank accounts. It was bad, it was a mess.

I made a huge family within the fight community. Those people, that's my fight family. That (pause) that they were able to see more strength in me than I thought I had. You know, sometimes I would limit myself, but having them behind me, just pushing me, egging me on, hyping me up, telling me to go further. You know, they pushed a lot of barriers, broke through a lot of doors, mentally and physically.

I started smoking when I started fighting because I was taking a lot of like physical damage, and so, the smoking and all that stuff helped my body like relax and ease my muscles, whatever. You know, they would like spazz out, or if I had like a pinched nerve or muscle spasms, or what was it? I have, okay, so I have a fractured wrist, I have two, two bruised ribs, my rib

cage is bruised. Shoulder got displaced. My ankle got popped out of socket. What else? What else? What else? What else? What else? Oh, my right knuckle is damaged. I got excited when I won a match. I jumped up and I punched the ground, so my knuckles got pushed in. I never went to physical therapy for that, but I'm all right. What else? (pause) Oh, bruised chest plate and my left one, my left chest plate is bruised up. I can't put too much pressure on that thing. Yeah, but smoking, I don't feel it. (laughs) It's kind of hard to believe, but yeah, I smoke a lot.

To be honest with you, I didn't, I didn't do really much of anything except for fighting. Like after I was going through a lot of stuff, I, I used professional fighting as a security blanket. I was in the gym pretty much every damn day, whether it's promoting, fighting, coaching, judging the fights, you name it, I was a part of that. And I stopped for a while after my mother died. That just took a lot out of me. I, I was, I was, I was messed up. I didn't want to fight. I was depressed, I didn't even want to work, I wasn't working, totally just stopped that. I just stopped everything pretty much. Like I was—you could consider like I was withering away, and a buddy of mine a real awesome partner was just bugging me every day, blowing up my phone, texting me, calling me. Just like, Bro, you gotta get out, dude, you gotta train this guy, you gotta do something. You know, you can't just lay in the house all the time. So, thanks to them, thanks to him, he pulled me out. [I realized] that it doesn't matter if you're Black, White, (laughs) tall, short, dumb, or smart. At least, at least, at least having them on my side, I felt like I was on top of the world.

Honestly, (pause) it's, I think it's—I wouldn't want to say it like that. I don't want to say that, it would sound inhumane. (pause) I think (pause) I think if I wasn't so angry at the time, when I was younger, I think I probably would have made better choices. (pause) Well, I like to think [of] things like this. If I never, if I had never got introduced to this, honestly, (pause) I think

I would probably be in jail 'cause I would still have the same anger (pause) use it incorrectly, you know? So, like I would still have that, that messed-up mentality that the whole world owes me something.

Well, even though everybody kind of separated, physically, but nobody stopped communicating with one another. So (pause) I guess just being around, being around each one for all those years, we developed this little brotherly system to where we know we gotta do check-ups, whether it's random, whether it's text or call, to say, "What's happening? Are you all right? Still training?" You know, that kind of thing, so I guess, so it's like (pause), it's always going to be tight like that. I would call it brotherhood.

I was adopted as a baby. Yeah, I don't know nothing about my [birth] father. I just know a lot about, nope, I'm not even gonna say I know a lot about my [birth] mother, I just know a little bit. I have a biological sister. My birth mother is from, from [nearby city], the whole family's out there from [nearby city] ironically. Her, her name was [name], and she wasn't really a good person. I mean, I don't want to say she, she looks, she, she had to survive. (pause) That's—she had to survive, she had to do what she had to do. I'm not mad at her because, you know, I'm still here, thank God. But I do think about what my life would become if I had, you know, if she had like, you know, kept me. That life would have been bad, so I'm very thankful for her on that. (pause) Yeah. Have I ever seen her? Nah. Do I care? Nah. The thing is, is that when some—when you throw away garbage, do you go back in that garbage and take that garbage out? (pause) Yeah. Yeah, so that being said, to me I wasn't valuable enough for her, so I don't, I could care less, you know what I mean?

I wonder whether her intention was for her to leave me behind for, you know, a greater family, but nah. The way the nurse described it, pretty much she popped me out and just dipped.

(laughs) Just upped and just dipped. Same thing with my sister [other biological sibling]. Like she, you know, how to explain it? I want to say it was like a forty-five caliber gun with fucking two bullets in it. Shoot it, boom. Cock it back, shoot another one, boom. Just that simple. So, you know, she popped us out like that and just left us. So nah, I don't—am I angry about it? Nah. No, not at all.

No, it's just me. Believe it or not, my mom didn't even want a boy. They called her, told her what happened, and they took me in as a foster for a bit. Not even for a bit. Honestly, it was no more than a month, or I think it was less than a month. Yeah, I think it was less than a month. They were like, Listen, we want to be his parents, and they did the paperwork, they went through the courses that they had to go through just to get approved for it. Like they did a lot. (long pause) They did a lot.

You'd think my own blood that created me just threw me out, and then people that weren't my blood picked me up and raised me as their own. So yeah. (long pause) Hmm. I will say that.... Just because they're your blood doesn't mean they're your family. (pause) I like that one. Yeah. No, look, no, just the way my birth mother gave me up, and that's my blood, you know what I mean?

[In my neighborhood], well, it's not what you think it was. It was everybody was a community, everybody knew everybody. The neighbors knew everybody, the neighbors knew all the kids. I grew up playing stickball, I grew up playing cops and robbers, I grew up playing wall ball. I was at cops and robbers, tag. Like I grew up the classic way, you know, like, you know, once the streetlights come on, get your ass in the house type of thing, and if I wasn't in the house by the time that streetlight came on, and let's say I was how like (pause) I don't know, a block away from the house, I could hear my mom calling from a mile away. You hear that hollering,

Get your ass in the house! And if I, if I didn't hear her, then the neighbors that saw me would be like, Oh, your mother's calling you. Get your ass home type of thing. Like I grew up to where they say, you know the phrase (pause) Told from the grapevine, you heard that? Yeah, well, that's, that's pretty much the way I grew up, like the old school, classic like, like if (pause) okay. Let's say I get in trouble down the street, and my neighbor saw it or whatever. And my mom doesn't know about it. I get into the house. I'll still get my ass beat 'cause my mom heard it through my neighbor. That's through the grapevine kind of thing.

So, it was a very, it was a tight, strong community. I knew everybody. We had, oh man, we had about like fifteen kids. It, it was fun. Growing up was fun. And we had a lot of positive people. I will say this, though. I did have, I did have something happen to me when I was younger. It would change a lot of, a lot of kids, but it didn't affect me as, as it should have. So anyway, I (pause) we had a deli down the street, and (pause) you know, being a kid or whatever, I—long story short. I don't know why it's hard for me to say this story, but long story short, I was molested as a kid by [someone at the deli] or whatever, and (pause) yeah, that was a pretty big, big thing that happened in the community, pretty much everybody wanted to kill this guy. Pretty much they ran the store out of business, they ran them out of the store. This is like pretty much after the whole court thing and shit, but yeah.

Now, it was a single incident. I guess as a kid going through that, you know, it was (pause) it was weird, and it was very uncomfortable, and it wasn't—the uncomfortable part wasn't (pause) wasn't him touching me like that. The uncomfortable part was to me telling my father and through the grapevines, my [siblings to] hear about it, and Oh, Shit! So that's what I was fearful, like even though I got violated, I was still fearful for this guy's life, you know what I'm saying? So, (pause) you know, my dad, we were on our way to [store] that same day, we

were on our way to [store], and he just noticed that I just wasn't right. And so, we got in the car, and he's like, You know, you all right? What's going on? And I told him, and like, yo, like my dad, my dad wanted to kill him. Like he, we was on our way home and he wanted to get the double barrel and just blow his shit off. But like my mom talked him out of it. Like he, he was, he was, he was on a mission and thank God, my mom talked him out of it. And like you know, let's just do this legally, let's not get out of character, you know, and have other problems dragging along with it. So, he did everything through the legal system, and that same day, my other [family relation] (pause) I pretty much waited for him—to go all the way down. He lives down South. I waited for him to drive all the way [down] and then I told him, because if I had told him right then and there as he was leaving, oh my God! He would have killed him, he would have done it with his bare hands, that's, that's, that would have been manslaughter right there. Like I said, like I was very (pause) afraid (laughs) of this guy's life, though he, you know, violated me.

I had a pretty good education. I'm not even going to say pretty good. I had a damn good education. The fact that I was in private school...before I went to an actual school, I would say, I would say it's pretty good. I mean, I graduated with a three-point-eight, three-point-eight GPA. So, I mean, and I'm not an idiot, but I'm not the smartest person in the world. (laughs) But I didn't have any problems in school, put it that way. All my homework was done, I read books, I played the clarinet. Shit, I played the drums, I played violin, I played the viola. Like I grew up in a really good home. (pause) And yeah, you know, I was raised in that Black household, I got my ass beat a couple of times. That was very educational. But every day, my mom would have me read out loud for forty-five minutes. She'd have a timer. She'd put the timer on the stove, and I would read out loud for forty-five minutes, and once that time was up, wherever I'm at, I paused, and then the next day I'd go back to it and read again, every day for forty-five minutes.

The content was like Lord of the Rings, like fantasy stuff. Some would be like autobiographies. Oh, she had me read a lot of like Black historic books, Malcolm X. Oh man, had me read that. Who was the other one? Harriet Tubman. A lot of it had to do with like slavery and stuff like that because she wanted me to be educated in that field. And detective books. Oh, my favorite, my favorite were actually the Hardy Boys and the Goosebumps. Those were my two favorite series, I loved reading that. But like all the other stuff, like as a kid, like reading the Malcolm X book as a kid, like you know, like it's not, it's not (pause) how should I say it? It's not, it's not fairytale like, you know what I mean? But I read it anyway. So, I would say I grew up with a good education. I had a pretty good support system with my teachers. My teachers personally knew my mom, my mom, the principals personally knew my mom, and I was also pen-pals with the superintendent of the school. So, Doctor, Doctor [name], yeah. A pretty good one. We would have in like the English class, whatever, he would have like a chart, and in that chart, it was based on how many books you read. Mind you, I was maybe the third Black kid in class, so to my mom, that was like, Well, you gotta pull past everybody, you know what I mean? Being the Black male, the only Black male. So, my mom's like, You gotta blow past everybody. So, my mom was just, Well, you gotta read this, you gotta read that. How many books is that? How many books did you read on the chart? Five. Oh, we need more. So, my mom was a very go-hard tough woman when it came to fucking education, I will say that. She did not play.

So anyway, long story short, I had my [family relation]—living with us, like when I was younger. He moved in in our house, for like a couple of years or whatever, he was living in the basement. And he was from [nearby city]. Mind you, I was a sweet kid. I was the sweetest as they could come, a good old [smaller town] kid. Like I didn't know nothing about the streets. I didn't—had none of that. I didn't even know who the hell—this was when Fifty Cent was

popping. And so, he comes through, I went downstairs (pause) one time! One time, and we're sitting there freaking writing rap music, and I'm sitting there like using curse words that I never used before and like (laughs), it was just a huge door for me, like it was like a whole 'nother world, and yeah, I guess you could say I was fascinated. I mean, what kid wouldn't, honestly?

I guess I was about like seven, six, whatever. And just hanging out. He was an amazing artist, like not just a Hip Hop artist, but like drawing-wise too. I also picked up my drawing skills from him. He was drawing like animated characters, like real good drawing. Like drawing is another big thing in my family, and I just, just so happened to pick it up. (laughs) And yeah, having him there exposed me a lot. Like I said, he's from [nearby city], so like, you know, seeing—he brought in the lingo, he brought in, he brought in the music, and then like he would have his [family relation] come through and that was even more exposure. And then, and then he had me out with him walking around and playing basketball, street ball, whatever, and like just him being there for those years, I was pretty much like a sponge, you know what I mean? Like he was just this huge tidal wave just rushing to the sponge, and I just absorbed everything. (laughs) Whether it was good or bad, I just, I absorbed it. And I guess that's what kind of molded me into (pause) becoming that person, I guess. But like he, he never smoked weed or anything like that, so he didn't expose me to that. That was my [family relation].

Once I started fighting in high school, I wanted to be a professional fighter. Like everybody wanted to be like a doctor or like, you know, some type of physician or, you know, something like that, but I, I just wanted to be a fighter. Like fighting is like a big thing in my family, within like the males and stuff like that, because they have a military background and all that crap. I was the only one that didn't go into the military, but being exposed to that background just always pushed me in that direction, you know. I was (pause) I was always good

with my hands, whether it was fighting, wrestling, you know, whatever, whatever, you name it. I was really good at that, and so my [sibling] saw that I had talent, and so did not let that talent go to waste. Oh yeah, I got a big tournament coming up [soon].

When I got out of high school, I went to [community college] and, because my [family relation] was a trainer, and so he wanted me to have that background, so I went to school to be a [health-related major]. And it didn't really work out. I did it for like about a year and a half, almost two years. A year and a half. I remember like those desks that I was sitting in in lecture class, and I was, I would fall asleep. I was knocked out. In that twenty-five minutes, I was just knocked.

Oh! (laughs) Well, shit. I (pause) well, normally, I smoke before I go to class, so I smoked, obviously I was high, knocked out. Woke up, I'm looking around, like my boy wakes me up, he's like, Yo, dude, like pay attention to the professor. Saw the professor how, you know, just (pause) I don't know how to explain it. Like he was just boring, like he didn't make it fun, you know? Like I wasn't—he didn't make it seem like, oh, well, this is exactly what we have to learn and this is why, and because of this, this will help you in the future with this knowledge. It was never that. It was just like, it was just, it was the type of person that just drags a story, and it just has no meaning and it's not going anywhere. I'm just like, Oh bro, like this is, this is cool and all but like half the stuff he's saying is just, he's just talking out of his ass, like he's not really explaining so it's like how the mechanics work and shit like that. And so, me being a person, I need to be, I need to be excited. You know, if I'm going to do something, make it exciting. Like make it fun, you know? Make it so that I'm not doing work, but I'm having fun. Like I want to, I want to do work, but I want to have fun doing work, you know what I mean? Like I don't want to be bored and do something 'cause then I'm not going to want to do it, I'm not going to be

interested at all. So, I was pretty quiet about it. (pause) I heard it for about maybe five minutes till I like literally looked at my boy. So, I was like honestly, you know, I said this is for the birds. I gripped my hand, broke the pencil, and I was like, Bro, I can't do this anymore. I'm out. He's like, Bro, you can't just leave during the middle of the class. I'm like, Why not? He said, Well, 'cause the professor's talking. You gotta walk past the professor. I was like, Yo, bro, I'd rather just make money and fight, do my own thing, and make it on my own. So, I looked over at him, I was like, Listen, watch me just walk past the professor. So, I got up, the class looked at me, got my things together, stood up. The professor looks at me while he's still talking. [He] didn't even bother to announce that I was leaving. I just got up and left and just never, never looked back. I put my music in my ears, and, and right then I walked out that door.

Okay, well, besides that, I, [for work] I was a (laughs) I was a spray foam technician. I'm a pool technician. I mean, I worked at a lot of places between like [lists popular businesses]. I'm also a [paint] technician. What else? Delivered a lot of food. I did trucking. I moved, I worked with moving companies. I did [shipping]. (pause) I had my own little side business where I was selling cars, so basically, I was buying cars, adding after-market parts, and flipping them, so I was making a lot of money off of that. But yeah, ever since I stopped doing that illegal thing, I've just been trying to do things that's not illegal like that.

I try not to get an attitude [with the police]. It depends on what kind of cop it is. I know how to (pause) I know how to talk to cops. You know, I know how to not sound irritated or, or, you know, or leave all the aggression behind. I'm pretty good with that. But sometimes when you show that you're trying to make something into something, make something into nothing, then that just means you're a perfect cop, and I can't abide that, and that would probably be my, one of my downfalls. You know, I was taught always, you know, use your head before you use your

hands. So, I, I do that. It's been good, it's been good. [I was arrested] maybe about like, like maybe five, six times. Nothing crazy. I have, but I have no felonies, you know? So, that's an awesome thing. I keep my record clean; I will say that.

I (laughs) all right. (laughs) All right. Possession, possession of marijuana, receiving stolen goods. I had another charge selling to an undercover cop. I had another charge fugitive from out of state. Fugitive running out of the state. (pause) A couple weed charges when weed was illegal. Yeah, the majority of times, it was weed. That's the only time I got locked up. But the fugitive one, that, that one was big because when I got locked up down [South]. I was held up in there and (pause) for the possession of marijuana and receiving stolen goods. So, what happened was they found those blank checks, so let's go back to the checks, or whatever, the bag that I had, that I was carrying pretty much had all the blank checks. This was about like five years after the lying, I was done with the whole thing, and the cops went through my bag, saw that, and tried to make it into a federal case, but all the checks came out as, you know, as voided, so that was good. But I still got charged with receiving the stolen goods. They claimed it was stolen property, and I got, I got charged for, for the marijuana. It was lower than a point-five, but they charged me for twenty-four ounces or less. Yeah, that was all crazy. My bail just to get out, because they weren't trying to get me out, my bail was about forty, forty-seven hundred dollars. So, anyway, long story short, after I got that whole thing squared away, about two, two and a half years later after that whole situation, they never took me out of the computer, and I never knew that. So, two years I was driving around with, with a warrant, so I got pulled over. I guess I had a loud exhaust, the cop said, and because of that, he ran, he ran if I had any warrants. That came up that I was a runaway fugitive, and boy oh boy, that was a big thing. I had my dog in the car with me, so I got locked up and my dog got sent to the pen, so that was pretty bad. But

emotionally, I was pretty all right during the whole situation. I was really like high off the edibles, five hundred milligrams. I just ate like two bags of those things, so like I didn't think I was ever going to get pulled over, so during that time I was just really high, and they brought me in, and it was like, Well, we may have to indict you and (laughs) hearing that word, I'm just like, So, you're gonna send me back [down South]? They're like, Yeah. So, it was so funny. I said, So, do I get my phone call? They said, Oh, who are you gonna call? It's like I can call my dad, so my dad could come down here and show you guys the proof that I paid for everything. The thing was that they, they didn't want me to call my dad. They wanted me to call somebody, somebody else to come pick up my car. So, I was like, you know, I have to call my dad because my dad is the only person that can drive my car 'cause it's stick shift. They're like, Oh well, we can't have your dad here. I'm like, Why? They wouldn't give me a valid answer, so I already knew what the whole ordeal was. Black man, got a warrant, ran the way up from fourteen different states. So, it's a pretty big deal for this cop, so he's not trying to jeopardize, I guess, this ticket or whatever. So, they brought me in. I saw the judge about like two-thirty in the morning. The judge comes in and he's like, Well, they have you on the report because I'm a fugitive. So, like, Well, we can give you two choices, he said. He said, Either we could reopen up the case out here in New York and you deal with it here. Or we send you back [down South]. Now, I've been there trying to speak, and I'm like, Well, hold on, hold on, can I just say something? And my lawyer cut me off, he's like, Oh no, we don't, we don't want to, you don't want to jeopardize yourself, you know. This is being recorded. And so, you know, I flat out (pause) I freaked out. So, I was like, Listen, like honestly, I don't care. I'm not a criminal by any means. Like I have all the proof. And so, once I said proof, my lawyer turns around and says, So, you tell me you paid for all this? I was like, Yeah. So, I asked to speak to my lawyer private next to the phone in the room. Officers

weren't trying to let me use the phone at all. So, instead, I said, You know, how about you call my father, and you talk to him? He called my father. My father said, Listen, I could fax it all to you. Matter of fact, I'll bring it to you right now. So, he sent my [sibling], my [sibling] came all—came to the bureau, dropped it off at three-thirty in the morning, all my paperwork, and then from there, I was smooth. Smooth! I knew everything would be all right. So, they brought me in the cell, whatever. I slept maybe about like till eleven o'clock. Guard comes through, picks me up, brings me over to speak to the lawyers, and I was pretty much Facetiming with like twenty different screens, Facetiming all these people, I don't even know who they were. I only knew my lawyer. And so, they pretty much like, You know, you're, you're free to go. It was a mistake in the system, and I cut them off. So, I'm like, So do I get an apology or does something happen or what? They're like, Oh no, we just, you know, just go about your merry day pretty much. And that was it, that was when I was locked up in [nearby] County.

When (pause) ummm, ah, yeah, that's right. When I got locked up in Queens, man, I was scared as shit only for the simple fact that, you know, once you get locked up in like the city area, the first thing in your head is Riker's Island, you know? And when I was in there, that was, that was when I was selling, I sold to that undercover cop at a freaking concert or whatever. I thought it was smart to go out with a whole pound of weed that I dealt, so I went out there with about four thousand dollars in my pocket, just straight cash. That did not look right at all when I got caught. So pretty much, all I could hear from the cops and from the D.A., it's Riker's this, Riker's that. All I kept asking was, Am I going to Riker's? Am I going to Riker's? Am I going to Riker's? The D.A. came in and was like, You might be, you might be going to Riker's, and that's when I freaked out. That's when I freaked out 'cause I was like, what—I'm in no position, any shape or form, to go to Riker's. I'm not good over here. So, I was freaking out for like a good, an

hour and a half until, until I got my paperwork. And the only, the only reason you would ever go to Riker's is if you got a felony. So, the D.A. kept telling me, Well, we don't know if you're being charged with a felony or misdemeanor. It depends. And she just kept, she kept pushing that it was going to be a felony, it's going to be felony, it's going to be a felony. Thought it was all gone. My life was just out the window, poof, smoke, until I got the paperwork, and I saw where it said M for misdemeanor, and that was the biggest sense of relief e-ver! It taught me how to move, move differently. You know, they say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. So, you know, I'm still here, and I don't make the same mistakes twice. So, I will say I've definitely smartened up. It's kind of sad I had to learn it the hard way, but I learned and I'm still here, and I can speak on it, so.

[My] relationship with my child, it's, it's, it's up and down, honestly. When I was fighting, I would always include my kid, like I would have him come in, everybody knew him. He would come into the little octagon cage or whatever to learn some moves here and there, you know. We was hanging out, it was cool, you know? At first, as I was getting older, you know, the younger I was, I was scared, but the older I got, I saw it as like, you know, this is a cool thing. Like why not? Like I got a little me running around, he wants to explore the world, learn things, so you know, sitting there teaching him things, what to do, what not to do, yeah, and just, you know, just—I just had so much to say and just wanted to do that, you know, I got overexcited. Overexcited at the fact that I could teach a young mind, a young me to do what I do, but do it better, you know what I mean? So, like I was, I was always proud of that, that little thing.

And the relationship with the baby moms and me, it's not, it's not good, you know, because it seems like every time when I try to, try to establish like a good relationship with my son, it was always like, Oh, he's having too much fun. It was at a point to where I even bought

him a phone, I bought him a—what was it? An iPhone eight or whatever, whatever, you know? It's a phone. So, I hooked it up and all that, I was like, Hey, listen, just to let your mom know that you got a phone so now you can communicate with me. So, about two or three days later, I'm trying to call my son, she's like, Oh, he didn't like the phone. He wants the new iPhone. I'm like, Does he want the new iPhone or do you want the new iPhone? She's like, Oh no, he wants the new iPhone. He doesn't want the old stuff. I'm just like, You know, like it's just a phone. He's only like eleven years old, you know? I just want something to communicate with him back and forth, but she wasn't having that. And I think was it two days later, she's like, Oh, he lost the phone. So, I already knew off the bat what that was, and I was able to talk to my son about it, and he was like, Oh, well, yeah, she took the phone, da-da-da, she didn't like it. So, and ever since that moment, that was like during Christmas, and ever since that moment, things have just been rocky. She just doesn't want to have any type of communication with me. I, I would try to contact her, and first thing out of her mouth is, Oh, [son name]'s trying to do this. How are you going to pay for it? I'm like, What do you mean how am I going to pay for it? You get about twenty, twenty-eight a check in child support. That's about like what, it's like a couple thousand, it's about like ten, ten grand a year pretty much you get. Ten grand a year! And you're telling me with that Ten K, like that's not enough? She's like, Oh no, that's not enough, I need more. And you know, I talked to a lot of my friends with kids and stuff like that, and they tell me that's the kind of money that you pay for two kids, you know? So, you know, it's just—I want to say it is what it is, but it really isn't. Yeah, I, I was going back and forth with the court system. Didn't really have a good relationship with the judge at all. She had a better relationship with the judge than I did. I was pretty much looked at as a piece of shit. But yeah, I mean, it is what it is. But the one thing I can say is that my son's, my son will always be financially good. Always. So, that's

something I never have to worry about at all. But as far as his social skills, like it's, it's a little bad. Like he's, he's turning into a little juvenile, and it seems like every time when he's going through problems or something like that, that's when, that's when I get called, you know what I mean? It's like, Oh, you gotta figure it out, or I'm gonna drop him off to you, or Forget what you're doing, he's going to stay with you for two weeks, or whatever. So, then it's just like, Yo, like you can't be doing that, you know what I mean? Like, I have, I have stuff going on too, you know? So, yeah, a little tough. A little tough.

I had a couple of experiences [with racism]. I'm going to tell you; I'm going to tell you a nice experience. I think it's nice. So, we're all in the gym training together. This new kid comes in, this white boy, skinny white boy, and whatever. I hadn't been to the gym in a while, so you know, I don't really know all the new faces, so everybody's introducing me, whatever, you know, everybody shakes hands, talk a little bit. Then we started class. So, my usual partner, he's with somebody else, so I'm partnering up with this new kid, and you know, we get into it. And after the, you know, after the certain technique was learned, now we're just going over simulations, and I guess he thought he was tough or something, so he goes, Oh yeah, I got this nigger right here. Yo! Everybody, everybody and grandma broke their necks and looked at me. I just put my hands up and was like, Oh, you know it's fine, it's fine. It's just words. Nothing crazy. And he kept throwing the word around four or five times, and you know, when I'm in (pause) that mode, I'm a different type of animal, you know? Because in my head, it's no holds barred. The only person here that's like, you know, could pretty much stop me would be the gym, and I don't think the gym would. That's what I thought. And (laughs) he said it to me the fifth time, so I just proceeded to beat the shit out of him, and I didn't think much of it, you know. You come to the gym obviously, you signed a waiver, so pretty much to me, that's like, it's like a big ticket to

really mess you up. So, I went to town on this kid. You know, everybody saw that I wasn't playing around, so the whole gym started to come at me. And I don't like being touched when I'm in that mode, so you know, a lot of people got hit, so it took a lot to restrain me. And then it took a lot to like calm me down and talk to me in this that and the fourth. But anyway, long story short, this kid has a disability or whatever, so you know, they're like just, just be mindful of that, but at the same time, you know, autism or not, he can't just go around throwing that word around and just think that, you know, someone's not going to react on that, especially if you're sitting there calling that to them and just saying the full-fledged thing, like just saying nigger, like yo, the way he said it was just like, like you definitely heard that from your parents or something, just the same style of the way they said it and think it's all right for you to say it to me. So, I take that as a big offense, and I just beat the shit out of him. Shrugged my shoulders, I didn't really care. He came back to the gym. Believe it or not, him and I are actually really good friends. He's a cool dude. (laughs)

[Another time,] (pause) Oh, okay, me and my girl, we were upstate in [small city], and my girl and I, I mean let me say that properly. We were upstate in [small city], and yo, mind you, we, we liked to go hiking and stuff like that. It's her family's thing to like go hiking, and so like, all right, we went hiking on this like mountain thing. I tell you that from the bottom of that mountain to the very, very top part of that mountain, there was no Black person in sight. Like I, I tried my damn hardest to just look for a half-breed, just somebody light-skinned. No-body! And we got up to about almost to the top part of the mountain, and that's when I was like, Listen, I gotta use the bathroom. I, I didn't feel comfortable going outside, even though we're outside in nature, stuff like that, I just did not feel comfortable. So, what did I do? I had to walk from pretty much the top of the mountain all the way down to the bottom of the mountain to use the

bathroom stall. In doing that, yo, like when I tell you just walking around, like just heads just—necks were breaking, and they were just looking at me as if like, you know, I, I don't belong here like at all. When I say that I didn't belong, it was very well, well known that I wasn't, that I clearly didn't belong there. I had my headphones in my ear, and what I like to do is just—I didn't play any music, I just wanted to hear, you know, the background noise, and all I could just hear was just kids pointing and just asking their parents like why am I here? And like I heard one guy say, You shouldn't be here type of thing, and I'm just like, you know, me being the person that I am, and you know, then the physique that I had, I knew off the bat that everybody's just going to talk and point and all this other stuff, but I knew that nobody was ever going to touch me. So, having that in the back of my, in the back of my mind, you know, made me feel at ease because (pause) you know, nobody—I didn't take anybody as a threat pretty much. So, me reminding myself who I am and what I'm capable of made me feel a lot better walking around nonchalant 'cause I was—before I was walking around scared with a stick up my ass. You know, like I was almost scared to step on a rock the wrong way, you know? But just that little reminder to myself as to who I am really made a big difference.

Oh yeah, yeah, here's another one. So, same place, [small city upstate], So, my girl and I—actually, my girl is white, so we're walking around the town and, mind you, before—I didn't even say anything. My girl is the one that said something first. So, we were holding hands and walked around, and we come across this old, old group of ladies, and like they see me come around the corner, they, their conversation just stopped. Like everything was on pause. And the first thing that they looked at, they did not look us in the eyes. Basically, they looked at us holding hands, and they were just disgusted, like I knew that they were disgusted, and my girl

even said something. I was like, You know what? We don't have to, we don't have to escalate things or anything like that. (pause) So that was, that was, that was that.

Sometimes I would, I would feel anxious. (laughs) Anxious because the person I am now, it's like, well, you got a problem with it. I know you're, I know you could talk on it, I know you could throw your opinions and all that other stuff, but all that stuff at the end of the day is just words and they don't hold no value to me, you know. Unless somebody physically does harm to me, then that's just another, that's another situation. That's what I have to tell myself a lot of the times, like a lot, you know. I always gotta remind myself as to who I am and what I can do, you know, because if I don't, then I fall into this, this, this illusion that, you know, I have to, I have to watch myself, I have to watch where I step, I have to watch what I do, I have to watch what I say, you know what I mean? I shouldn't have to do that. So, yeah, all it takes is just a little reminder.

Oh, I remember back in the day when I was (pause) when I was at camp, I was at like this sports camp thing. I would go like every year or whatever. So, one summer, we're playing like roller hockey or whatever. It is a small kid—you know, it always seems to be the smallest person that just does the most. But anyway, this small little white boy—I don't know, I don't know why I found it funny, but like I kept pestering him, so this is my fault. I kept pestering him. I don't know what I was saying to him, but I just, you know, I kept pushing this kid and just pushing him and pushing him and pushing him. And so finally, mind you, there's a bunch of Black counselors around me. Mind you, so he's just like, he goes, You, you, and, and—the counselors knew what was about to come out of his mouth. I had no idea. He just goes, You, you fucking nigger! And I'm just, I look at him, the counselors looked at him, they surrounded him, took him away, and pretty much it's just like, you know, you can't go ahead and say that. Then, I had a mob of counselors rush up on me, it was like, [name] are you all right? You know, and me nonchalant

because in my head, it's just words, you know what I'm saying? Like I get that that word has a meaning like six hundred years ago dated, but like to me, words don't, words can't hurt me, you know what I mean? I was never one to be hurt by words, but actions is one thing. I mean, it's another thing, and I get being, being taught that, you know, I just have like a different outlook on things. You know, a lot of things don't bother much, I don't know. (long pause) I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but (pause)

I realized in life that a lot of people (long pause) uh (pause) a lot of people can't be trusted. I've learned to keep a small circle. I've learned to not go outside my circle. (pause) uh (pause) And I learned that (pause) family isn't always by blood. (pause) [People should know] that a human being backed into a corner is very dangerous. (pause) Meaning there's only but so much you can push somebody until, until they just freak the hell out and pretty much goes berserk. If you don't have a good support system, then somebody like me that didn't have a good support system—well, I did have a good support system, but if I didn't have a good support system, I'd still be in jail and we would not have this conversation. So, I guess, don't be impulsive, think twice before you react. Yeah, actually, think twice before you react. (laughs) There's nothing wrong with having a helping hand. (pause) [And] don't let your pride get the best of you. (long pause)

Umm (pause) this was fun. I (pause) so (pause) um I'm glad I was able to say a lot of things that I wouldn't normally flat out say to anybody else. (pause) Got a lot of things off my chest, I will say that. Just talking about it.

[This is the end of Joe's restored narrative.]

Individual Analysis

Here, I look at Joe's narrative's authorial voice and examine two resilience negotiating situations. In Joe's narrative, the authorial voice or standpoint is from a Black man raised in Black American culture. He said, "I was raised in that Black household; I got my ass beat a couple of times. That was very educational." He considered cultural stereotypes and rejected them by explaining that his neighborhood was "Well, it's not what you think it was. It was everybody was a community, everybody knew everybody." Two instances demonstrated that he was intimately connected and influenced by his family's historical interests: "Like fighting is like a big thing in my family, within like the males and stuff like that, because they have a military background and all that crap. I was the only one that didn't go into the military.... I was always good with my hands, whether it was fighting, wrestling, you know, whatever, whatever, you name it" and "Like drawing is another big thing in my family, and I just, just so happened to pick it up." The dominant standpoint of Joe's story was his personal investment in fighting and how it has sustained his life. His narrative was filled with examples of his understanding of the influence of community. One can see how much he values community in his respect toward his parents' role in his life, the description of his neighborhood growing up, and his involvement in the fight community.

Anger

Joe's central story of negotiating resilience took place in a multifactorial sequential situation where he faced the consequences of having a kid at a young age and transitioning to adulthood. "I want to start off by saying it all started when I was sixteen, when I got my first kid." As previously mentioned, there are three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework. The landscape of Joe's story,

referred to as *place*, occurred within him as a person while he dealt with the tensions of having a kid, holding on to ongoing anger, and trying to cope.

With theoretical consideration for the temporality commonplace, the story began when Joe found out he was going to have a kid and was experiencing tension with the mom; “...because I didn’t marry her, she said, You can either marry me or I make your life a living hell.” The circumstances contributed to his ongoing anger:

...like all my anger, everything that [I] was, ever angry about, you know, I would just take it out in the ring. I was doing between tournaments, seminars, cage fights, exhibitions, you name it, anything physical to just release that, and for fifteen years, you know, I had that, that, that, that emotion just lingering inside of me.

As the years progressed, Joe recognized the importance of fighting: “I used professional fighting as a security blanket. I was in the gym pretty much every damn day, whether it’s promoting, fighting, coaching, judging the fights, you name it, I was a part of that.” He also battled with trying to make enough money to support himself: “But once I got out of high school and graduated and started working, that’s when I started realizing the finances starting depleting” and “I started doing some illegal things. Started doing check frauds, scams, whatever it is I could do to at least have money in my pocket, so that way I’m able to cover my expenses.” In time, Joe acknowledged that anxiety and fear contributed to ending his involvement with illegal activities. He has continued fighting into the future: “Oh yeah, I got a big tournament coming up [soon].”

From the sociality commonplace, when Joe looked inward, he reflected on what could have been his future:

If I never, if I had never got introduced to [fighting], honestly, (pause) I think I would probably be in jail ‘cause I would still have the same anger (pause) use it incorrectly, you know? So, like I would still have that, that messed-up mentality that the whole world owes me something.

Joe began making the best of his relationship with his son:

At first, as I was getting older, you know, the younger I was, I was scared, but the older I got, I saw it as like, you know, this is a cool thing. Like why not? Like I got a little me running around, he wants to explore the world, learn things, so you know, sitting there teaching him things, what to do, what not to do, yeah, and just, you know, just—I just had so much to say and just wanted to do that, you know, I got overexcited.

When Joe looked outward, “I had the support of my family and my peers and stuff like that, and I was able to pick myself back up. But doing so along that journey was very, very tough.” He was grateful for the long-established fight community brotherhood he is a part of:

Well, even though everybody kind of separated, physically, but nobody stopped communicating with one another. So (pause) I guess just being around, being around each one for all those years, we developed this little brotherly system to where we know we gotta do check-ups, whether it’s random, whether it’s text or call, to say, “What’s happening? Are you all right? Still training?” You know that kind of thing, so I guess, so it’s like (pause), it’s always going to be tight like that. I would call it brotherhood.

Racism While Hiking

Joe offered a different story of negotiating resilience when he experienced racism. Place, in this story, was the environmental context: “...we went hiking on this like mountain thing. I tell you that from the bottom of that mountain to the very, very top part of that mountain, there was no Black person in sight. Like I, I tried my damn hardest to just look for a half-breed, just somebody light-skinned. No-body!” He walked down the hiking trail in upstate New York alone to use the bathroom. From a commonplace sociality, he looked outward:

Yo, like when I tell you just walking around, like just heads just—necks were breaking, and they were just looking at me as if like, you know, I, I don’t belong here like at all. When I say that I didn’t belong, it was very well, well known that I wasn’t, that I clearly didn’t belong there. I had my headphones in my ear, and what I like to do is just—I didn’t play any music, I just wanted to hear, you know, the background noise, and all I could just hear was just kids pointing and just asking their parents like why am I here? And like I heard one guy say, You shouldn’t be here type of thing...

Then, he looked inward:

Me being the person that I am, and you know, then the physique that I had, I knew off the bat that everybody’s just going to talk and point and all this other stuff, but I knew that

nobody was ever going to touch me. So, having that in the back of my, in the back of my mind, you know, made me feel at ease because (pause) you know, nobody—I didn't take anybody as a threat pretty much.

From a commonplace of temporality, Joe considered the past: "...before I was walking around scared with a stick up my ass. You know, like I was almost scared to step on a rock the wrong way, you know?" In the present moment, he takes measures: "So, me reminding myself who I am and what I'm capable of made me feel a lot better walking around nonchalant..." Several other times in Joe's larger narrative, he employed this tactic of self-assessment and self-awareness.

Chapter VIII

COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses the study results while presenting an argument through an interpretation of the collective sample. The results are presented as narrative threads, also called overarching categories and core emerging themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moszczynski, 2013; Ntinda, 2019). I assert that the stories of negotiating resilience which the participants and I are telling together, because they are influenced by my inquiry, resonated with five narrative threads: recognition of tension, resolve, ongoing mentorship, strengthening social identity, and optimism and gratitude. Tables of participant quotations provide support for each narrative thread.

I also make the case that the narrative threads and this research into the subject of negotiating resilience within educational and economic inequalities are positioned within particular areas of the site of resilience theory. As discussed in Chapter II, Payne's (2011) site of resilience theory considers resilience among street life-oriented Black men. In this theory, individual conditions (identity, culture, relationships, mentorship) contribute to psychological sites of resilience, while structural conditions (education, poverty, employment options, safety) contribute to physical sites of resilience; thus, the psychological and physical sites of resilience overlap and influence the person's social identity. The theory added to this investigation by providing a structure for considering the breadth of the findings.

Narrative Threads

Thread #1 Recognition of Tension

The first thread was the recognition of tension associated with stories of negotiating resilience. Tension refers to mental or emotional strain or discomfort. The identified experiences

included distinct undesirable feelings, internal conflicts, and uncomfortable situations that were associated with insight; the thread of recognizing discomfort was strongly supported by specific quotes from all three men, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Thread #1: Recognition of Tension

Thread #1: Recognition of Tension	
Quotes	Pseudonym
Realizing basketball is probably not going to happen kind of thing, then going from, all right, what am I going to do since I'm not going to be playing sports? That was pretty difficult, and just a lot of mental, a mental (pause) how should I put it? Just a mental battle kind of thing.	Human #1
Like I don't want to live in the balance of, you know, I'm putting my job over my, you know, just human decency, respect.	Human #1
I didn't have any direction in life, really. Before that happened, I didn't really know what I wanted to do or get anything out. I guess I—yeah, I had no direction really. That's the best way to put it 'cause from that moment, when she came, I started realizing what I really wanted to do: just be a leader, not really be a follower. I wanted to be an educator, and now I wanted to just be my own person, if that makes sense.	Alex
And I'm like, oh yeah, rolled out for somebody who is racist, to somebody that y'all wanted to hang out with? Like come on, that don't make no sense. I thought [it] was outlandish and crazy at the time, so much so like it kinda it really did hurt me a little bit, and I wrote my mentor at the time.	Alex
I've never had a moment where I felt like I had mental health issues, but then when the pandemic happened and then the way that my work environment was, like I really felt like I was developing mental health issues with everything that was going on, so I just had to take a step back away from that job and get myself out of there.	Alex
I was so scared to the point where like I thought that, you know, any, any day, somebody can just come knocking at the door, some government official come knocking at the door, and if they brought that profile up, and just my email itself, it was just enough to do like all four seasons in prison. So, I definitely stopped. Anxiety and fear caused me to stop. And I went ahead and looked for an opportunity, another way, 'cause I just didn't like that.	Joe
I was at a dark place, you know? Luckily, I had the support of my family and my peers and stuff like that, and I was able to pick myself back up. But doing so along that journey was very, very tough.	Joe

The examples in Table 3 show that the tensions were due to combinations of individual and structural conditions. For example, high school was a time of developing self-awareness and making important decisions about the future. It is well known that impoverished communities often have poorer education quality, and the narratives showed more contextual evidence of these interconnected impacts.

Human #1's narrative revealed educational experiences with no advocate to petition the continuation of middle school accelerated art classes. In high school, he encountered (a) the coach intentionally benching him when a college scout came to the game to watch him play; (b) no follow-up on his application to BOCES; (c) inadequate career guidance; (d) exposure to cameras and locked doors, (e) scandals with teachers getting arrested and quitting; and (f) the general student body expressing apathy toward learning. After high school, Human #1 lacked formal sources of information as well as transportation (had to rely on friends) and financial support for college. There were also limited entrepreneurial resources in the community and historic exploitation of Black-owned businesses.

Quotes in Table 3 refer to Human #1's uncertainty and Alex's lack of life direction experienced in high school. Alex said he felt he would have received a better education in a different school system. Interestingly, Joe attended a nearby high school and thought he had a great education. Nevertheless, both Human #1 and Joe dropped out of community college during their second year. Human #1 explained that his professor said, "The degree won't really get you (pause) to be a CEO. That's something you, you really have to work for, put the time into, and (pause) you know, make those good decisions and do a lot of research and whatnot." Human #1's response was, "At that point, I'm like, all right, my high school teacher said it, you said it. I'm just gonna get the fuck outta here and not waste my money." Joe felt the college professor

was boring and he reasoned, “I’d rather just make money and fight, do my own thing, and make it on my own.” Following high school, the participants spent a significant amount of time examining their priorities and determining how to achieve their objectives.

Intergenerational impacts on educational experiences can be revealed in considering parental education. In the demographic inventory, the participants reported that all of their mothers graduated high school, and one had some college education but no degree. However, only one of their fathers was known to have completed high school; of the other two, one dropped out and the other was unknown.

Employment issues and economic opportunities are also structural conditions. Both Human #1 and Alex left their last formal employment in two different sectors due to COVID-19-related mental stressors and management’s failure to address staff concerns effectively. When Joe experienced unmeetable economic demands that were not satisfied through legal employment, he engaged in illegal activities.

Considering that Cheng and Robinson (2013) reported underutilization of mental health services in the Black community, the participants’ awareness and revelations about impacts on their mental health were reassuring. Each took drastic steps to remove the offending threat. For example, Human #1 mentioned his mental battle trying to figure out what he would do when basketball no longer seemed an option. Alex felt compelled to leave his last job after experiencing mental health concerns for the first time. Joe was angry because of relationship pressures (individual condition) and financial demands (structural condition), and he relied on his established support systems to get him through tough times.

Thread #2 Resolve

The second thread was the participants' resolve to consider their situation and adjust.

Table 4 illustrates soul-searching, immersion, self-isolation, and decision-making examples.

Table 4

Thread #2: Resolve

Thread #2: Resolve	
Quotes	Pseudonym
Like when I officially decided like, all right, I'm gonna do like business and I left that, that last semester of college, I was just like, I'm not gonna party anymore (laughs), I'm not going out anymore. I just left my other girlfriend, my ex-girlfriend at that time, and I got my—you know, shit wasn't working out with us, it's not what I wanted. My whole lifestyle right now, I don't want—so I'm just not gonna go outside. (laughs) I'm gonna start a business, I'm gonna do something, and I told all my friends that too. Like, hey, like yo, I'm not gonna talk with you guys no more, I'm not coming outside. I don't want to hang out with nobody. Like you are still my dogs (laughs), if you guys want to come see me, sure.	Human #1
So, like after that [racist event] happened with my roommate and his friends, like I didn't really talk to people outside of class and stuff. I would say it, I would say it was a little tumultuous 'cause I didn't really have people I could confide with at the time, and then my roommate, he was never home 'cause, like I said, he was engaged, so he wasn't somebody that I could talk to. I had nobody that I lived with, I just lived by myself. So, I just like kind of drowned myself in schoolwork or video games.	Alex
Sometimes there are people and things that you may love and think that you need around. Sometimes you gotta cut that out. Sometimes if these people love you and you're focused on what you want in your life and then this is what you really want to do. If they say they love, how they really love you, they would help you stick to that path 'cause then, you know, all it takes is consistency and dedication for you to become something,	Alex
I had a bit of [an] anger problem. My brother noticed, so he took me in at the age of sixteen and, you know, ever since then, like all my anger, everything that [I] was, ever angry about, you know, I would just take it out in the ring. I was doing between tournaments, seminars, cage fights, exhibitions, you name it, anything physical to just release that, and for fifteen years, you know, I had that, that, that, that emotion just lingering inside of me.	Joe

Human #1 hit a threshold where he did not want his whole lifestyle, so he made drastic changes to his relationships and socializing and committed to a greater focus on business. While Human #1 used self-imposed isolation for personal growth, Alex used it for self-protection because he felt he had no one to talk to about it. He also recognized that there are times when he must cut people out of his life to stick to his goals. By contrast, Joe resolved to immerse himself in the gym and fight community for his mental health and survival.

The participants coped, set boundaries, addressed conflicts, and changed their angle. Sometimes resolve included ending friendships and even isolating oneself for self-protection. With their resolve, participants looked inward and actively established or replenished their psychological and physical sites of resilience.

Thread #3 Ongoing Mentorship

The third thread highlighted the importance of mentorship in the participants' lives. Mentorship provided support and opened up new possibilities; as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Thread #3: Ongoing Mentorship

Thread #3: Ongoing Mentorship	
Quotes	Pseudonym
I would go to [my mentor's spot] like every other day. I mean, I still do now a little bit, but literally just go there and just ask [Mentor 1] a whole bunch of questions, you know, like, all right—originally it would be a whole bunch of business questions. Then he started giving me a little more knowledge, and then that's when the conversation started opening up.	Human #1
Even now, that teacher that influenced me, I still have a connection with, so we have conversations. If I ever go through moments or situations or just need clarity for myself, she's somebody that I can just talk to and that just opened up the door.	Alex
And I made a huge family within the fight community. Those people, that's my fight family. That (pause) that they were able to see more strength in me than I thought I had. You know, sometimes I would limit myself, but having them behind me, just pushing me, egging me on, hyping me up, telling me to go further. You know, they pushed a lot of barriers, broke through a lot of doors, mentally and physically.	Joe

All three participants highly valued mentorship ties. At least two community members acted as mentors to Human #1. Alex's opening experience in the narrative was inspired by a new teacher who became a lasting mentor, while Joe had a group of people within his fight community who contributed to a mentorship space. These effective mentorship examples were also long-term relationships. Mentorship is considered an individual condition that falls under relational coping within site of resilience theory, adding value to psychological sites of resilience. Mentoring aided these participants in being more aware of many facets of resilience.

Thread #4 Strengthening Social Identity

Outward execution helped the participants strengthen their social identities. Developing and increasing their skillsets strengthened their social identities and provided them with various tools to deal with challenges. Table 6 displays supporting quotes.

Table 6

Thread #4: Strengthening Social Identity

Thread #4: Strengthening Social Identity	
Quotes	Pseudonym
I just started helping out local businesses, throwing events, running places, talk to people and stuff like that.	Human #1
I started my own website. I'm a writer, I make beats, I'm all around creative, I can network people, you know? I dabble in the streets a little bit.	Alex
I was a coach, I (pause) I had my own little kids' program, you know, to teach kids how to defend themselves, and not just be the kids' coaches, instruction coach, but be more towards like a life coach...	Joe

Aside from their stated psychosocial and cultural identity as Black men, the participants had other identities. Human #1 was strengthening his identity in business and affiliate marketing. Alex was strengthening his identity as an entrepreneur and considering what to do with his teaching expertise. Joe's central identity was a professional fighter; aside from his many odd jobs, he also invested time coaching a little kid's program. As the participants experienced clarity

in their psychological and physical sites of resilience, this resulting space allowed for new possibilities and strengthened their social identities.

All the participants spoke of exposure to street-life. Human #1 was trying to hustle legally and avoid street-life. He explained, “‘Cause it’s easy, it’s in front of you...it’s like the door is always open for that kind of lifestyle. And I grew up in all that stuff, and I’ve had my deal of situations.” To this end, Human #1 took advantage of legal opportunities in the community (i.e., mentorship, potential business relationships).

For Alex, there were safety concerns in his neighborhood: “I guess you would say activity that was going on that shouldn’t be going on for kids, for kids of our age at the time. So yeah, gangs. Yeah, a lot of smoking, sex. A little bit of guns.” He suffered numerous police encounters:

I got detained in the [police] car twice, I got detained on the street once, I got arrested twice...and I had the cops lie on me. They said I had a gun and, yeah, I didn’t have a gun. And I know for a fact that the female officer knew I didn’t have a gun. She just lied to say it, and it resulted in an assault on me in front of my own house, and my [family].”

Alex reported participating in some elements of street-life but felt his family made substantial efforts to ensure that he experienced a different future.

Although not in his physical neighborhood, one of Joe’s relatives exposed him as a youth to elements of street-life, as he said:

...having him there exposed me a lot.... he brought in the lingo, he brought in, he brought in the music,...he had me out with him walking around and playing basketball, street ball, whatever, and like just him being there for those years, I was pretty much like a sponge...and I just absorbed everything.... And I guess that’s what kind of molded me into (pause) becoming that person, I guess.

Joe was the only participant whose current self-image held notions of street-life orientation; he also revealed more extensive participation in illegal activities (check fraud, scams, selling weed when it was illegal) and involvement with the criminal justice system. Joe reported, “[I was

arrested] maybe about like, like maybe five, six times. Nothing crazy. I have, but I have no felonies, you know? So, that's an awesome thing. I keep my record clean; I will say that."

Thread #5 Optimism and Gratitude

These participants' perspective of optimism and gratitude aided their resilience to various impacts. The belief that things can be better, along with self-confidence, smoothed a path to securing resilience. Table 7 specifies with substantiating quotes.

Table 7

Thread #5: Optimism and Gratitude

Thread #5: Optimism and Gratitude	
Quotes	Pseudonym
I'm super optimistic, so if somebody usually tells me no, it's like, okay, like I'll wait a little bit, let me get a little—find a way to build some leverage, you know, do something somewhere else, and then come back to them and be like, all right, this is what I got going on.	Human #1
I would say that you could look at a Black man like me and think they can make it outside of sports, outside of being in a gang, outside of being a rapper, outside of being in the entertainment or music industry.	Alex
So, it's just like out of that negativity of me being in my last job's environment and then deciding I need to change something within myself, a lot of positive things came out of my life, and I did things that I never thought I would be doing before.	Alex
...she had to do what she had to do. I'm not mad at [my birth mother] because, you know, I'm still here, thank God. But I do think about what my life would become if I had, you know, if she had like, you know, kept me. That life would have been bad, so I'm very thankful for her on that.	Joe

In the quotes, Human #1 takes a negative answer as motivation to strengthen his case and try again. Alex's calls for others to rise above stereotypes exemplified his desire to make a positive difference in the world. He also acknowledged the negativity that drove him to change career course, but he saw the entrepreneurial challenges he has set for himself as beneficial,

inspiring, and rewarding. Finally, Joe considered what his life might have become if he had not been adopted, and he is thankful for his birth mother's decision. These are all constructive and positive reactions to potentially distressing situations. Optimism and gratitude emerge from a person's value system; this is covered by phenomenology in site of resilience theory. This perspective also lends itself to a growth mindset, as evidenced by the critical thinking displayed in each scenario through exploration, consideration of options, and assessment of results.

In summary, the collective narratives shed light on the issues these young Black men weighed as they negotiated resilience. The five narrative threads were overarching categories found in each personal narrative and they appeared in specific areas of site of resilience theory. I contend that the thread of recognition of tension occurred within experiences of individual and structural conditions. Resolve sought to develop or restore their psychological or physical sites of resilience to address internal and external conflicts. Ongoing mentorship, the third thread, was housed within relational coping and individual conditions and also provided value to the overall resilience negotiation process. The area where psychological and physical sites of resilience overlapped was ripe for new possibilities and social identity strengthening. The final thread was optimism and gratitude, which are phenomenological values that support survival. Depending on the participant's context, the development of any of these threads was resilience strengthening.

Chapter IX

DISCUSSION

I used narrative inquiry to investigate how young urban American Black men negotiate resilience when they have experienced education and economic inequalities. This study began with an accounting of challenges facing many young American Black men that stem from the historical mistreatment of marginalized populations. I was mainly concerned with poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity, and increased engagement with the criminal justice system. This unique set of circumstances contributes to the poorer health outcomes seen in this population.

I conducted narrative interviews with three unemployed young Black men. Analysis of their stories of resilience negotiation resulted in five narrative threads: recognition of tension, resolve, ongoing mentorship, strengthening social identity, and optimism and gratitude. This study's contribution to the literature was to view contextual narratives through a narrative inquiry and the site of resilience theory lens while also identifying narrative threads in resilience negotiation that resonated with these participants.

This chapter begins by comparing the study results to my initial thoughts and what is known in the literature. Then, I develop lessons learned and implications for policy, practice, education, and research. I end with a discussion of the study limitations and final conclusions.

Results Compared to Initial Thoughts

In reflecting on my earlier view of resilience, I found that the narrative threads of this investigation corresponded with my original thoughts. My initial thoughts on resilience were aligned with key resilience definition themes, as identified in Aburn et al.'s (2016) integrative review (adaptation and adjustment, the ability to bounce back, rising above to overcome

adversity “ordinary magic,” and good mental health as a proxy for resilience) and Franklin’s (1999) characterization of resilience as the capacity to negotiate life challenges in ways that foster coping and adaptation. I see parallels because recognizing tension is an early step in adaptation, resolve can improve the ability to bounce back, ongoing mentorship aids rising above to overcome adversity, strengthening social identity can occur in everyday routine endeavors, and optimism and gratitude are strategies of working toward good mental health.

In reviewing my assumptions and biases from Chapter I, I noticed that all the participants’ storied experiences revealed financial concerns at some point, and two mentioned having jobs that did not meet their financial demands. No one felt pressured to be the “man of the house.” Both Alex and Joe described periods of excessive police contact, but no one mentioned surveillance. The participants were well aware of the threat of incarceration. Lastly, due to other people’s perceptions, Human #1 said he regulated and altered his behavior in business interactions. Joe also said he knew how to communicate with the police, implying that he understood how to appear non-confrontational.

This study focused on unemployed young men to capture lower-socioeconomic status experiences and more experiences considering educational and economic impacts. Even with a degree in a field Alex enjoyed, he found the working conditions intolerable. So, what are these men doing about their unemployment? They are strengthening their social identities. They want work in more ethical and supportive environments. They are diversifying their skillsets, employing their creativity, and pursuing community-based entrepreneurial avenues on their own. They are finding their own way and working hard at paving their own path of resilience.

Results Related to Literature

Like Payne and Brown's (2010) findings with 16- to 19-year-old boys who used street-life orientation as a site of resilience in inner-city school environments, these three participants navigated poverty and violence at some point in their lives. These participants could also tell when they were not receiving high-quality instruction. Similarly, these participants explained how educational experiences did not adequately prepare them for the real-life challenges they would confront (i.e., need for entrepreneurial skills, understanding ways to finance education, effectively navigating parental demands). In Payne's (2008) investigation of street life attitudes of Black men through surveys and group interviews, the majority of men reported experiencing tension with teachers. In contrast, two participants in this study described positive transitional experiences with teachers who had long-term positive effects: Alex in ninth grade and Human #1 in twelfth grade. Although Alex and Joe said they got along well with teachers, Human #1 believed his coach targeted him and a friend for punishment; as he said, "...they're still like attacking us like we're those [past generation] students...." The coach seemed to view the basketball team players as needing instruction in ethics and values, which corresponded with Gordon's (2012) description of a commonplace conceptualization of Black male students as academically and socially problematic. It is worth noting that none of the participants mentioned racism in high school, and all acknowledged a diverse student body.

Consistent with Harden's (2014) interviews with Black male students involved with the criminal justice system, all participants in this study were desirous of quality mentorship in high school and beyond. Human #1 felt forsaken from high school guidance counseling, just as the participants did in Briggs' (2018) study of second-generation Caribbean men who were navigating the high school-to-labor market transition and felt a strong sense of abandonment in

educational environments. The educational life stories of Black males growing up in predominantly white schools in Gordon's (2012) study also described difficulties accessing and navigating opportunities during and after high school.

Jennings's (2014) examination of the scarcity of entrepreneurial education and microenterprise development initiatives for Black male youth was spot-on. The young men in this sample were interested in learning about entrepreneurship and financial literacy and appreciative of the associated autonomy. Human #1 was fortunate enough to take one of these courses during his senior year. Overall, the men were primarily self-educated on these topics, and two wished they had had greater community entrepreneurial resources and high school exposure to professional entrepreneurs. Consistent with Fader's (2019) interviews with drug sellers and Payne's (2008) findings on street life attitudes, Joe elaborated on the necessity of engaging in illicit activities to survive, even though he acknowledged the harm done. His moral posture eventually caused him to stop.

Mosley et al.'s (2017) research into personal, relational, and systemic coping strategies connected to vigilance and mistrust is bolstered by the contextual examples mentioned in this sample. Human #1's drive to succeed in community business ventures resulted in personal lifestyle changes, such as separation from unproductive social circles. He described using relational coping to develop community relationships by overcompensating for preconceptions generated from systemic oppression, even though he expressed mistrust of working with white Americans. Alex's undergraduate encounter with racism left him feeling hurt and distrustful, leading to self-isolation as an adaptive coping method. Joe's immersion in fight culture was his personal and relational coping strategy. The men consistently mentioned how work environments (legal and illegal) directly impacted their mental health, particularly concerning stress. Moreover,

the participants agreed that increasing awareness and critically analyzing other people's actions were methods for navigating resilience.

The participants also noted social pressure, aggression, and illegal economic opportunities, which Teti et al. (2012) referred to as “the lasting stress of the streets.” This sample, like that of Teti et al., displayed resilience by persevering and continuing to grow despite adversity, forming their own support networks, and refocusing to overcome challenges. Like Payne's (2008) content analysis on the code of economic survival, all participants demonstrated a commitment to family and community, a moral stance, and motivation to succeed on their own terms. On the other hand, only Joe mentioned the importance of spirituality when completing the demographic inventory. Despite Alex's and Joe's repeated and unfair confrontations with police, none of the participants had a history of incarceration lasting more than a weekend in jail. There was wide variation in experiences of racism and police exposure.

The PAR study by Smith and Hope (2020) among tenth graders aimed to promote meaning development through critical social analysis. However, the level of requisite identity development for meaning making was unclear. Even though the students identified racism and related anxiety, they believed in meritocracy and had difficulty grasping systemic oppression. Human #1 lent support to this conundrum when he said,

...dealing with the feelings of being like overwhelmed and the pressure and all that stuff 'cause we all, we all deal with it. It's a matter of, you know, how to cope with it, realizing that this is what you're feeling, not just, you know, a lot of people just go straight for like I'm just depressed or anxious, but it's like, you know, where is all that coming from? You have to—people gotta navigate like, all right, I'm this way because of all this shit going on, and it takes a lot, sometimes it takes people a while to realize that.

Critical social analysis was required to realize how structural conditions influence opportunities and choices. Eliciting feedback on how or when this could happen was outside the scope of these interviews.

Lessons Learned

I realized that finding young Black male volunteers who were willing to participate turned out to be far more complicated than I anticipated. I went to neighborhood businesses, walked the streets, and contacted Black community organizations. I met a lot of unemployed young Black males who were friendly and social, but they were unwilling to do an interview. The two latter interviews came about because of word-of-mouth referrals after I interviewed the first participant.

It was a privilege to have access to biographical narratives. The fact that I was granted access to information and knowledge that is not widely shared was at times accompanied by a sense of intimacy. This exposure elevated my awareness that these young men belonged to a defined group and needed extra precautions to protect their privacy.

During one interview, I thought that a participant held a particular viewpoint. However, after double-checking the transcript, I realized he said the exact opposite. This example illustrates how easy interviewers may misinterpret meaning in conversation. Two participants also asked me what I thought about what they just said, causing me to summarize my take-aways. The participants were expecting genuine interaction and ensuring that they were being heard.

Human #1's pseudonym was unusual, and I have since pondered its underlying meaning. Is he claiming his humanity? Is this a play on anonymity? Or was there a different meaning altogether? The focus at the time was to embark on an interview, so I did not ask for the meaning or pursue it any further. In reflection, I wished to understand what the pseudonym represented. In retrospect, I would have incorporated an opportunity into the study design to gain more insight from the participants on an as-needed basis.

Recommendations

Policy

In response to their unemployment, the young men in this study were working toward predominantly entrepreneurial, nontraditional, community-based sources of income. These results point to the need for formal national and community-based entrepreneurial education programs for young Black men. Mentorship is known for significantly impacting success in diverse student populations (Hurd et al., 2012). The participants wanted quality mentorship opportunities; greater support for mentorship in high school and postsecondary education is a potentially powerful intervention for students from lower-resourced communities. COVID-19-related institutional and private business practices had a significant effect on the health of two of these participants, and clear policies with consistent enforcement would alleviate the mental strain on staff. Higher-quality local jobs can also provide legal income-earning opportunities, possibly eliminating the need, as one participant felt, to engage in illicit activities for survival.

Practice

The participants wanted to know how to best navigate transitions after high school. Accurate information on finances, entrepreneurship, and opportunities was in high demand among the participants. One participant said he had no interest in nursing. However, there are many opportunities in healthcare outside of traditional nursing jobs. Nurses can bring students and community members into practice settings to expose them to various professions, role models, and different aspects of healthcare. Nurses in communities, schools, and prisons should facilitate resilience strategies that foster self-awareness and recognize tensions, establish sites of psychological and physical resilience, sustain mentorship, strengthen social identity, and foster positive and growth-oriented mindsets.

Education

After high school, the participants wished they had received better instruction on navigating the real world. They were looking for advice on managing finances, investment, college loans, grants, scholarships, and building relationships. Not only should education and professional trajectory mentorship be well underway in high school, but participants desired improved access to mentors and exposure to entrepreneurs, as well as community-based entrepreneurial education.

Research

Participants were aware of tensions in their environment, which prompted resilience negotiation. This finding highlighted the importance of further research on awareness of internal and external tensions, and the role of cognitive dissonance, or mental discomfort caused by two or more conflicting ideas or behaviors, in resilience. To support reducing structural disadvantages, research is needed on how to help young men recognize to what degree structural conditions affect their opportunities through critical social analysis and critical consciousness, and how and when this should be promoted. Two participants indicated that work-related mental strain changed their employment trajectory; thus, additional study is warranted on how mental health concerns influence decision making. More research on what relationship-building actions are advantageous for young Black male entrepreneurs is also needed. PAR would be beneficial in gaining access to this hard-to-reach population.

Limitations

Limitations to this research included using an opening question in the narrative interview, and missing content that would have been shared otherwise. For a successful narrative inquiry, I established trust with and respect for the participants. Specifically, we needed the confidence that

we had each other's best interest in mind and the ability to complete the study; a lack of this would have been a significant limitation. There were inevitable power imbalances because of each of our varying skillsets and given that I was directing the flow of the process. Further, as a woman interviewing men, I may not have obtained the rich responses a male researcher could potentially receive. If participants did not have internet or telephone access, physical study design limitations would have resulted in their exclusion from the study because of COVID-19 risks and related New York State guidelines. This was a limitation because perspectives from those without phone or internet access (i.e., the most impoverished) may differ from those who have this access.

Generalizability was not sought in this study because qualitative findings cannot be extrapolated outside of the sample. Instead, transferability can be considered to see if results can be applied in a similar situation (Munhall, 2012). A limitation was the small sample size, which prevented more diverse viewpoints from being included. Because all participants had at least some college education, this sample had more exposure to society and was presumably more educated than some of their peers. These participants' ability to navigate society may not be typical of their peers.

Conclusion

Three unemployed young urban American Black men participated in interviews that formulated the narratives and gave contextualized examples of resilience negotiation within educational and economic inequalities. I used the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework to investigate selected stories. These young men negotiated their resilience by recognizing tension, employing resolve, identifying and sustaining ongoing mentorship, strengthening social identity, and displaying optimism and gratitude. The five narrative threads

emerged from collective consideration of the narratives. These threads were positioned within particular areas of the site of resilience theory. Participants used a wide variety of strategies and skills to negotiate resilience depending on the situation, including self-isolation and quitting stressful work environments. According to the results, negotiating resilience was associated with poverty, racism, safety concerns, and extensive involvement with the criminal justice system.

For unemployed young urban American Black men, these results indicated that personal and institutional critical social analysis will aid efforts to minimize health disparities. Entrepreneurial education, exposure, and support can contribute to reducing structural inequality. Public policy objectives should support higher-quality local jobs and consistent enforcement of COVID-19-related business practices. As nurses, we can help people become more resilient by encouraging self-awareness, establishing psychological and physical sites of resilience, and sustaining mentorship opportunities.

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Appendix A

Key Terms

Term	Conceptual Definition
Black Americans	Those who self-identify as belonging to the Black race or a Black ethnic group and reside in the US, including African Americans, Africans, Caribbean Americans, multiracial, and multiethnic people, irrespective of skin pigmentation
Economic Inequality	Disadvantages through complex contributing factors representative of poverty, unemployment, low household income, residing in a resource poor environment, few safety-nets, and lacking resources such as health insurance
Educational Inequality	Conditions that contribute to students exiting schools with inadequate preparation to successfully navigate their environment, often stems from low resourced and underperforming schools with oppressive conditions
Narrative Inquiry	A way of thinking about experience as story and a storied view of phenomenon (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006)
Resilience	“The individual’s effective management of the hassles of daily life, cumulating over one’s life history, which enhances one’s adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies” (Franklin, 1999, p. 781)
Restory	The taking of a life experience as lived and told by a participant, collaboratively developing the experience through inquiry with the participant, and then retelling the experience.
Young	Young refers to 18 to 35 years of age, closely aligning with young adulthood or the period between the age of maturity and middle age

Appendix B

Budget

540	Remuneration for up to 5 unemployed young Black male participants \$45 after interview and \$45 after follow-up \$90/participant = \$450 Two participants to review final research texts \$45 x 2 = \$90
1,043	Qualitative analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription service \$200/transcript * 5 interviews = \$1,000 • Digital voice recorder for interview \$43
175	Other costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment flyers \$50 • Travel to post recruitment flyers \$125
750	Academic editor \$50/hour for 15 hours = \$750
2,508	Total Expenses

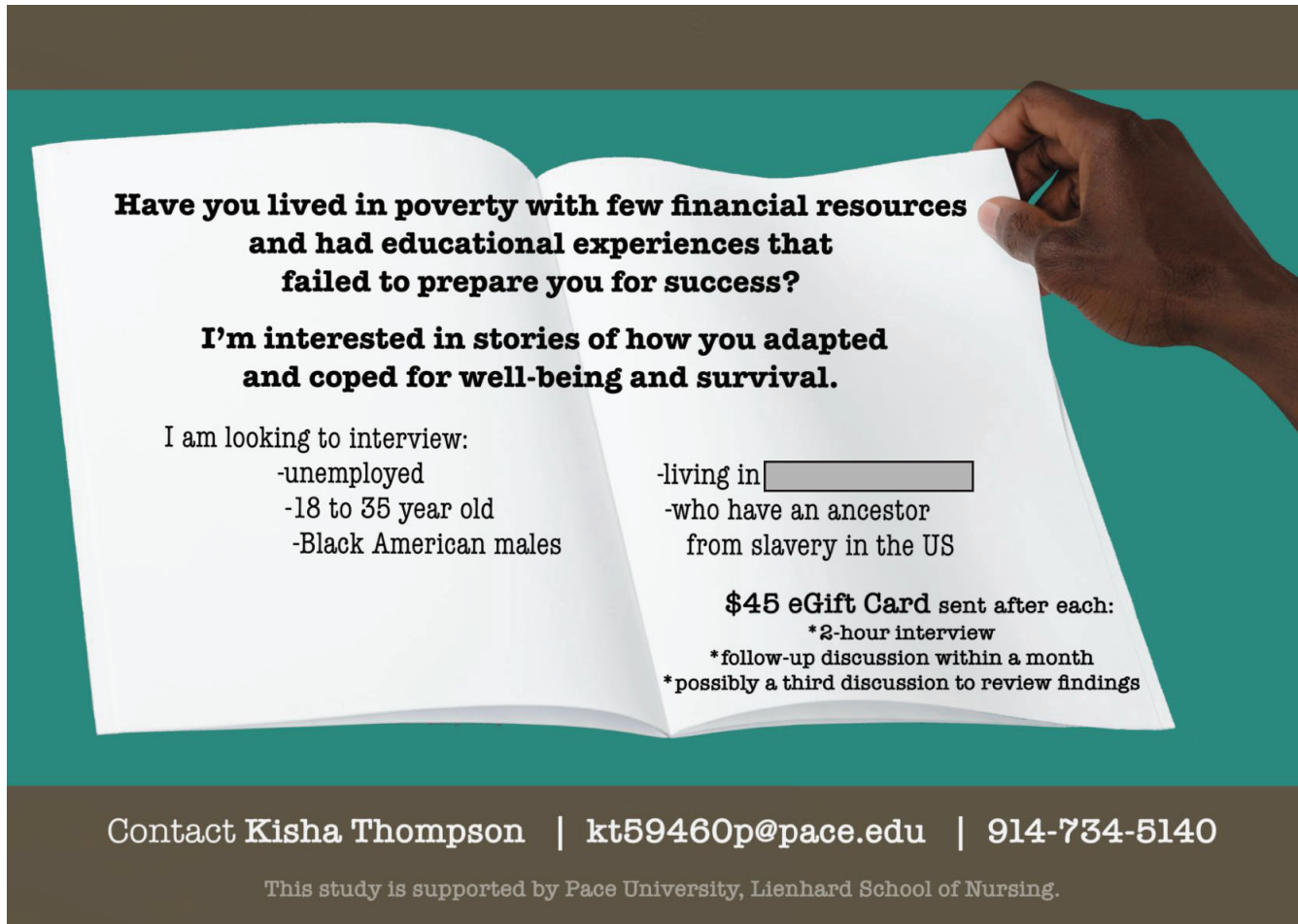
Appendix C

Research Timeframe on 12-Month Schedule

ACTIVITY	DISSERTATION YEAR 2021 - 2022											
	Sep Oct Nov			Dec Jan Feb			Mar Apr May			Jun Jul Aug		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Draft of all chapters to Chair												
Apply for Gould scholarship												
Finalized proposal to committee												
Defend dissertation proposal												
Apply for IRB approval												
Recruit participants												
Conduct interviews, follow-up												
Write-up description and experience of process (Chap 4 & Chap 5)												
Dissertation manuscript review												
Defend dissertation with PPT Final Dissertation Approval form												
Submit bound/digital copy of dissertation												

Appendix D

Recruitment Flyer



**Have you lived in poverty with few financial resources
and had educational experiences that
failed to prepare you for success?**

**I'm interested in stories of how you adapted
and coped for well-being and survival.**

I am looking to interview:

- unemployed
- 18 to 35 year old
- Black American males
- living in
- who have an ancestor
from slavery in the US

\$45 eGift Card sent after each:

- *2-hour interview
- *follow-up discussion within a month
- *possibly a third discussion to review findings

Contact Kisha Thompson | kt59460p@pace.edu | 914-734-5140

This study is supported by Pace University, Lienhard School of Nursing.

Appendix E

Enrollment Script

SCRIPT

1. Hi, this is Kisha. I am a graduate student doing a study. If you grew up with or lived in poverty with few financial resources and experienced ineffective education, I'm interested in understanding how you adapted and coped for your well-being and survival.
2. To see if you meet the requirements to participate, I will ask you a few questions.
 - (1) What is your race and ethnicity? (Black)
 - (2) What is your gender? (Male)
 - (3) Did any of your ancestors come from slavery in the United States? (Yes, American)
 - (3) How old are you? (18-35)
 - (4) Are you currently working? If so, do you get paid? (No, unemployed)
 - (5) Do you live in [this city]? (Yes)
 - (6) Have you lived in poverty with few financial resources and had educational experiences that failed to prepare you for success?
 - (7) If so, how have you adapted and coped for your well-being and survival?
Please give me a brief example. (Do they demonstrate understanding?)
3. You meet the requirements; I will now talk to you about the study.
(Otherwise: Unfortunately, you do NOT meet the requirements, so I cannot include you in the study but thank you for your interest. Have a good day.)
4. I will not use your name in any of the work that is done based on our interview. Although I may speak to you with your name during the interview, the person who transfers the recorded interview will leave out your name. We must choose an alternate, fake name to use so that there is no way you will be identified by name. What alternate name should we use to refer to your experiences?
5. Do you have an email address that you are willing to share, knowing that I will delete the email address once the study is over?
6. Participation requires engaging in a 2-hour interview. During the last 15 minutes of the interview, you will be asked to answer demographic questions, which are expected to take less than 10 minutes to answer. Interviews, observations, and story-telling will be used to gain a deep understanding of how you adapted and coped for your well-being and survival to manage experiences of limited resources and ineffective education.

In other words, I want to find out what feelings, perceptions, views, choices and remembered stories come to mind when you think about how you have adapted and coped to manage poverty or limited resources and educational experiences that failed to prepare you for success?

7. Participation includes agreeing to have your interview recorded. If you are interested in participating, I will email a Research Participation Information Sheet to you for your review. I ask that you review it and send me a return email stating that you would like to participate and agree to have the interview recorded. We will arrange a time to have the interview over the internet on Zoom. If you do not have access to Zoom, we can arrange a telephone interview with

a voice recording. A typed-up version of our interview will be returned to you to confirm what you wanted to say. At a later date, I may ask you to confirm the results of my study to be sure they reflect your experience.

8. To thank you for participating in this study, you will be sent a \$45 eGift Card for participating in an interview. Within a month, you will be asked to participate in a follow-up discussion to validate the interview transcript; For this, you will receive another \$45 eGift Card. Two people will also be asked to participate in a third discussion within three months of the initial interview to review my final research texts and see if they accurately reflect their personal experiences; if you participate a third time, you will again receive a \$45 eGift Card. All discussions will be 2-hours or less and all eGift Cards will be ordered within the following 24-hours. eGift Cards will be sent if you agree to participate and have begun the interview or discussion, even if it ends early.
9. There are no health-related benefits to participation in this study. Any potential risks or discomforts from study participation are expected to be minimal. Some of the discussions may make you uncomfortable or upset. You are free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to or stop participating at any time.
10. To be a part of this study, you must agree to participate and be recorded.
11. You are free to stop participating in the study at any time without penalty and you will still receive an eGift Card for that part of the study.
12. What questions do you have for me about the study and your participation? **[LISTEN AND RESPOND]**
13. If you have questions in the future, please get in touch with me. I am grateful for your interest in this study, and I hope that this research will have a positive impact in the future. I will be in touch with you through email. Take care.

Note: The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level readability score for this script is 8.

Enrollment Data Collection

	Participant Pseudonym	Email address	Race & Ethnicity & Gender	Descendent of slavery in the United States	Age	Unemployed	Place of residence	Experiences of negotiating resilience within inequality	Eligible Y or N
1									
2									
Etc.									

Appendix F

Email to Participants

Dear Participant,

You are eligible to participate in the study titled *Resilience Narratives Amid Economic and Educational Inequalities Storied by Unemployed Young American Black Men*.

Please read the attached Research Participation Information Sheet. If you agree to take part in this research, please email me at kt59460p@pace.edu to schedule the interview and include a statement that you agree to participate and have the interview recorded.

Thank you for your interest in this study. If you have any questions, please email me at kt59460p@pace.edu.

Take care,

Kisha Thompson, RN
Graduate Student
Lienhard School of Nursing
Pace University
kt59460p@pace.edu
914-734-5140

Appendix G

Research Participation Information Sheet

Pace University, New York

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

Resilience Narratives Amid Economic and Educational Inequalities
Storied by Unemployed Young American Black Men

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation is completely voluntary.

My name is Kisha Thompson. I am a graduate student in the Lienhard School of Nursing at Pace University, working with my faculty advisor, Professor Keville Frederickson. I want to invite you to participate in my research study, which concerns understanding how you have adapted and coped for your well-being and survival to manage experiences of limited resources and ineffective education.

If you agree to participate in my research, I will ask you to engage in a two-hour a narrative interview. The interview will seek your personal experiences of having to adapt and cope to manage poverty or limited resources and educational experiences that failed to prepare you for success. During the last 15 minutes of the interview, you will be asked to answer demographic questions, which are expected to take less than 10 minutes to answer. The interview will take place over Zoom and will be recorded. If you do not have access to the Zoom internet platform, we can arrange a telephone interview with a voice recording.

Some of the research questions may make you uncomfortable or upset. You may choose not to answer any questions and may stop at any time. You can find resources to support your mental health and wellbeing at the local community clinic in [this city], New York:

[Local clinic contact information]

Only members of my study team will know your name and email address. We will store your records in ways we think are secure. Paper files will be kept in locked filing cabinets. Electronic files will be stored in computer systems with password protection and encryption. However, we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.

You will be sent a \$45 eGift Card for participating in an interview. Within a month, you will be asked to participate in a follow-up discussion to validate the interview transcript; For this, you will receive another \$45 eGift Card. Two people will also be asked to participate in a third discussion within three months of the initial interview to review my final research texts and see if they accurately reflect their personal experiences; if you participate a third time, you will again receive a \$45 eGift Card. All discussions will be 2-hours or less and all eGift Cards will be ordered within the following 24-hours. eGift Cards will be sent if you agree to participate and have begun the interview or discussion, even if it ends early.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at (914) 734-5140 or kt59460p@pace.edu. If you agree to participate in the research, please **email me at kt59460p@pace.edu to schedule the interview with a statement that you agree to participate and have the interview recorded.**

Appendix H

Interview Design

	Session Topic	Agenda (2 hr)	Justification
Session 1	<u>Interview</u> : Resilience perspectives within experiences of economic and educational inequality	Flexible narrative interview to address topic Complete demographic inventory	Provides narrative experiences related to the research question
Session 2	Follow-up	Review transcript Discuss accuracy, any necessary changes Validate content Two participants will be asked to participate in Session 3	Provides participant an opportunity to modify and validate interview transcript
Session 3	Final member checking: Two participants only	Review final research texts	Validates true representation of findings

Appendix I

Demographic Inventory

1. Enter your age. (please specify)
2. Enter the alternate, fake name that you would like to represent you. (please specify)
3. What is your gender? (please specify)
4. Would you describe yourself as transgender?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. How do you describe your ethnicity?
 - a. Hispanic, or Latino
 - b. Not Hispanic, or Latino
6. Please write out what ETHNIC GROUP you personally identify with (i.e., African-American, Jamaican, Ghanaian, Puerto Rican, Dominican, etc.)? (please specify)
7. Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:
 - a. Black or African American
 - b. White
 - c. Asian
 - d. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
8. Where were you born?
 - a. United States
 - b. Caribbean
 - c. South America
 - d. Africa
 - e. Europe
 - f. Other (please specify)
9. What is your current ZIP code? (5-digits, please specify)

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

10. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
 - a. Less than a high school diploma
 - i. What is the last grade you completed? (please specify)
 - b. High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
 - c. Some college, no degree
 - d. Associate's degree (2-year)
 - e. Bachelor's degree (4-year)
 - f. Master's degree
 - g. Doctoral degree
 - h. Professional degree (JD, MD)
11. Do you have any trade experience?
 - a. Yes
 - i. What kind? (please specify)
 - b. No

12. What educational degree does your mother hold? (please specify)
13. What educational degree does your father hold? (please specify)

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

14. Which statement best describes your current employment status?
 - a. Working full-time (35 hours or more per week)
 - i. What type of employment do you have? (please specify)
 - b. Working part-time or less (34 hours or less per week)
 - i. What type of employment do you have? (please specify)
 - c. Unemployed and looking for work
 - d. Unemployed and not looking for work
 - e. Student
 - f. Other (please specify)

FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

15. What is your current marital status? Select all that apply.
 - a. Single without a significant partner
 - b. Single with a significant partner
 - c. Legally married
 - d. Living together (cohabitation)
 - e. Common law marriage
 - f. Married but separated
 - g. Widowed
16. Have you ever been divorced before?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
17. Do you currently have any children?
 - a. Yes
 - i. If so, how many? (please specify)
 - ii. If so, do they live with you?
 1. Yes
 - a. How many of your children live with you? (please specify)
 2. No
 - b. No

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

18. Have you ever been arrested before?
 - a. Yes
 - i. Total number of arrests in your life? (please specify)
 - b. No
19. Have you ever been incarcerated before?
 - a. Yes
 - i. Total number of incarcerations in your life? (please specify)
 1. What was the length of your last incarceration? (please specify)
 2. What was the release date of your last incarceration? (please specify)

- ii. Primary hustle prior to last incarceration? (please specify)
 - iii. Charges(s) that led to last incarceration? (please specify)
 - iv. Are you currently on parole?
 - 1. Yes
 - a. For how long? (please specify)
 - 2. No
- 20. Gang involvement prior to incarceration?
 - a. Yes
 - i. What was the name of the gang? (please specify)
 - b. No
- 21. Are you currently on probation?
 - a. Yes
 - i. For how long? (please specify)
 - b. No

RESIDENTIAL INFORMATION

- 22. How would you describe your current living quarters?
 - a. Low-income apartment complex
 - b. Mid-income apartment complex
 - c. Multi-family home
 - d. Condominium
 - e. Private home
 - f. Shelter
 - g. Car
 - h. Abandoned building
 - i. Other (please specify)
- 23. How many people live in the space you are currently living in? (please specify)
- 24. What is their relationship to you? (please specify, i.e., brother, mother, son, girlfriend, acquaintance, etc.)

HEALTH

- 25. In general, would say your health is: (please select one)
 - a. Excellent
 - b. Very Good
 - c. Good
 - d. Fair
 - e. Poor
- 26. Do you have health insurance?
 - a. Yes
 - i. What kind?
 - b. No
- 27. Do you have Medicaid?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

28. Do you have any chronic or serious health issues?
- a. Yes
 - i. If so, what kind? (please specify)
 - b. No
29. Have you ever been to the emergency room due to an act of violence?
- a. Yes
 - i. If so, for what reason(s) did you have to go to the emergency room? (please specify)
 - b. No

INCOME

30. In the past 3 months, have you had enough money in your household for food, rent, or utilities?
- a. Always
 - b. Very Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never
 - f. Prefer not to say
31. Information about income is very important to understand. Would you please give your best guess? Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income (previous year) before taxes.
- a. Less than \$15,000
 - b. \$15,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. \$100,000 or more

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

32. Select any religious preference that applies to you (choose all that apply).
- a. None
 - b. Christian
 - c. Muslim
 - d. Jewish
 - e. Hindu
 - f. Buddhist
 - g. Tribal and indigenous religions
 - h. Other (please specify)
 - i. Prefer not to say
33. How important is religion to you?
- a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Of little importance
 - d. Not important

34. Do you belong to ethnic organizations?
- a. Yes
 - i. How many? (please specify)
 - ii. Please list them. (please specify)
 - b. No

Note.

Questions 2 and 9	Created to ascertain a pseudonym and zip code of residence
Questions 3 and 4	Include nonbinary and transgender considerations from Rosenberg (2017)
Questions 5 and 7	Adheres to national guidance for race and ethnicity (National Institutes of Health, 2001)
Question 8	The same birthplace question in open-ended format was asked in Godsay (2018)
Question 10	Includes educational content from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019); I added options f. g. and h.
Question 30	Relates to having enough money in household (Wilson, 2014; Tucker-Seeley Research Lab, n.d.)
Question 31	Reflects income brackets from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2014)
Questions 32, 33, and 34	The relevance of this content arose from Cross (2021)
For the remainder of the questions, permission was granted for use by Dr. Yasser Payne and the questions were validated in community surveys of Black males in Wilmington, DE (personal communication, July 12, 2021).	

Appendix J

Flexible Narrative Interview Protocol

Negotiating Economic and Educational Inequality

Key Question:

1. Consider your experiences with few financial resources and ineffective education and tell me about a time you adapted and coped for your well-being and survival.

Follow Up:

1. What kind of feelings, doubts, and reactions occurred during this experience (sociality)?
2. What was revealed about other people (sociality)?
3. What was revealed about relationships (sociality)?
4. What was revealed about the situation (place)?
5. What was revealed about the environment (place)?
6. How was this experience connected to other experiences within the past and present (temporality)?
7. How is this experience connected to experiences that may occur in the future (temporality)?
8. Were you changed by this experience?
9. Has this experience influenced your life?
10. What can those interested in reducing inequality learn from your story?
11. What can those interested in promoting well-being and survival learn from your story?
12. What other experiences have you had adapting and coping with few financial resources and ineffective education?

This line of questioning and prompting will be repeated for each shared experience.

Additional Probing Questions:

If participants have difficulty talking about personal experiences, the following additional probing questions will be asked to provide context related to personal experiences, help keep the participant engaged in the interview, and redirect the interview back to personal experiences.

Education

1. What grade did you reach in school?
2. What is the educational status of your siblings, children, and parents?
3. What were your experiences in school or with the educational system?
4. What kinds of positive or negative experiences did you have?
5. Did you find educational experiences valuable or enjoyable?
6. How did your teachers treat you in school?
7. Did your teachers respect you?
8. Do you feel prepared for college?
9. Have you ever taken college courses?
10. What was your experience with college?

Employment

1. Have you ever been employed?
2. Tell me about your employment history?
3. What kinds of jobs have you had?
4. How long were you employed?
5. What is the employment status of your siblings, children, and parents?
6. What are employment opportunities like for you?
7. How have you hustled to make money?
8. Have you been to jail or prison?
9. What is it like in general for someone returning home from prison?

Community and Home Life

1. Describe your neighborhood.
2. What do you like or dislike about your neighborhood?
3. How do you feel about your neighborhood?
4. Do you have a good relationship with your neighborhood?
5. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?
6. Where do you feel most safe or most unsafe in your neighborhood?
7. How would you describe your home life?
8. Is there enough food in your home?
9. How do you and your family or friends bond with one another?
10. Where do you gather and socialize (i.e., private homes, recreation center, gym, bar, club)?

Family

1. Do you have children? If so, how many, and how old are they? Do they live with you?
2. How do you feel about raising your children in [this city]?
3. How would you describe the family you grew up in?
4. What did your parents do for a living?

Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

We are now at the end of the interview. Thank you for your time!

[Confirm email address for compensation and remind participants of how I can be contacted.]

Note. Questions within the Education, Employment, Community and Home Life, and Family sections were validated in Black males in the Wilmington Street Participatory Action Research Project and adapted and used with permission from Dr. Yasser Payne (personal communication, September 13, 2021). The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level readability score for this interview script is 5.9.

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