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# A portrait of one woman's resilience in navigating her multiple worlds' challenges within community, family, school, and individual/peer experiences

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**A portrait of one woman's resilience in navigating her multiple worlds' challenges  
within community, family, school, and individual/peer experiences**

by

**Linda M. Abbott**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Ames, Iowa

2014

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**DEDICATION**

In

memory

of my grandma Winnie,

who was there for me in so many ways

during my childhood, adolescence, and well into my adulthood.

Her unconditional love, patience, understanding, and support

carried me through countless challenges,

especially when I was sure I couldn't take the next steps.

She taught me about the power of prayer and perseverance.

She encouraged me to continue my education.

Grandma's unwavering belief in me contributed immensely to my own sense of self.

For the privilege of having her in my life as a role model,

I am and will always be eternally grateful.

May she rest in peace.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Why is this an Important Study?.....	6
Background of the Study .....	7
Research Questions .....	12
Literature Overview .....	13
Overview of Methodology .....	16
Definition of Terms .....	16
Resilience .....	21
Risk and Vulnerability .....	22
Summary .....	25
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	29
Dynamics That Facilitate or Impede Educational Processes and Outcomes .....	29
Community factors.....	35
Family factors.....	37
School factors.....	43
Peer/Individual factors .....	48
Resilience .....	52
The Educational Realm and Students' Multiple Worlds .....	57
What Can Leaders/Educators Do to Create Conditions That Directly or Indirectly Influence Positive Outcomes? .....	60
Theoretical Framework .....	64
Summary.....	67
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....	69
Case Study as a Research Design .....	69
Researcher Positionality.....	74
Data Collection .....	79
Data Analysis .....	82
Rigor and Theoretical Saturation.....	84
Summary .....	87
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS.....	89
First Impressions and Observations .....	89
Deeper Conversations.....	90
Beginning our journey together .....	92

The World of Family.....	97
The World of Community.....	101
Ethnicity.....	104
Religion.....	105
Sexual assault.....	108
The World of Peer/Individual.....	110
The World of School.....	119
Multiple Worlds Resiliency Model and Jackie.....	127
Summary.....	131
<b>CHAPTER 5. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED AND WHAT SHOULD WE</b>	
<b>CONTINUE TO PURSUE?.....</b>	
Discussion.....	132
Theoretical Implications Played out In Jackie’s Life.....	135
The World of Community.....	136
The World of Family.....	137
The World of School.....	139
The World of Peer/Individual.....	141
Social Competence.....	142
Problem Solving.....	142
Autonomy.....	143
Sense of purpose.....	143
Resilience Not a Stage.....	144
Summary.....	145
Practical Implications for “At-Promise” Students.....	147
Recommendations for Future Research.....	154
<b>APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM.....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>159</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 2.1. Students' Multiple Worlds model .....	66
Figure 4.1. Jackie's life mapped against this Multiple Worlds Resiliency model....	129

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This research emanated from a recurring question in my professional career. I was always fascinated with the phenomena that some students seemed to overcome the barriers in their lives and become successful readers, and puzzled by students who appeared to have all the necessary supports and yet continued to struggle academically.

My work on this dissertation study has not been without challenges. I wish to acknowledge the recommendations of my committee approving the proposal: Drs. Mike Book, Katherine RichardsonBruna, Daniel Liou, Melanie Brooks, and my major professor, Dr. Jeffrey Brooks. Departing Iowa State University just prior to this dissertation research, but highly influential in my work leading up to this, Dr. Ryan Evely-Gildersleeve was a mentor and major professor in my capstone project that provided a backdrop to this work. I am also appreciative of the support of the committee responsible for assisting in the completion and my defense of this dissertation: Drs. Katherine RichardsonBruna, Jan Westerman-Beatty, Debra VanGorp, Daniel Robinson, and Joanne Marshall, Major Professor, who guided me through the final stages of this work.

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study examined the interaction of personal and environmental factors that influenced the experiences of a student in the K-12 educational setting. The purpose of this study was to examine one person's life to determine how educators, schools systems and programs might better serve students at risk. In order to attend to this objective, it was important to examine the existing literature on the role of resilience as it relates to overcoming the challenges of community, family, school and peer/individual influences in the student K-12 experiences. Much of the available research has investigated specific factors but not as much has been presented on how we, as individuals, make sense of our experiences. Similarly, research is emerging with respect to how students transition between the various cultural settings in which they live and work. In order to understand resilience comprehensively, we must take into account risk and resilience as well as how borders are created that limit access for children and adolescents. Resiliency models and Students' Multiple Worlds Model were frameworks from which to examine risk and resilience and how these played into the overall perception of one woman's life experiences and her worldview. This narrative case study examined her experiences related to community, family, school and individual/peer factors and what role her resilience played in navigating her school experience.

Recommendations to school practitioners include consideration of the interactivity of resilience and multiple worlds influence. Further, understanding the ways resilience is developed and the ways in which a student's multiple "worlds" informs her perceptions can provide insight for educators as they design school environments to enhance student experiences and outcomes.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*The odds are against him, the odds have always been against him, and he knows it, he has never believed it.*” (Werner & Smith, 1989, p. 1)

Morning after morning, middle-school students go about their daily routines, getting themselves ready for school. Some have breakfast with their families at home and some get themselves ready for school and eat breakfast in the school cafeteria; still others, for various reasons, have no breakfast. Every day, each brings his or her individual set of challenges and experiences.

Jackie had her own unique circumstances. As a junior-high-school student, Jackie encountered many experiences that almost anyone would agree were adversities and, more often than not, presented obstacles to positive outcomes. These will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4. Arguably, the most horrific of these experiences for Jackie occurred during the summer of her fourth-grade year. A friend invited Jackie to go along with her family on a trip. The product of a working class family, growing up in the 1960s to mid1970s, and having little opportunity to take family vacations, Jackie was elated at the thought of a trip! Jackie’s friend had an older stepbrother and the three children were under the care of her friend’s parents. Jackie recalled that they had gone to the Ozarks and, on the way home, they stopped somewhere along the Mississippi River for an overnight stay. They had spent the day by the Mississippi where they learned that a girl had drowned in the river near the area where they were that day. Although she didn’t know the girl, she left with her friend’s family thinking how tragic and terrible this drowning was. Jackie recalled that they slept in the back of a station wagon at a roadside park. Falling asleep that night, this thought

haunted her, but her memories about this trip were about to become more personal. Sometime during the night, Jackie woke up feeling as though she was suffocating. As she became more awake and aware of her surroundings, she began to realize that this high school-aged boy was on top of her, forcing his penis into her mouth. She recalled feeling suffocated and, soon after that, she passed out leaving no memory of what occurred in the car after that horrific experience.

After arriving home, her mother noticed a change in Jackie's breathing and asked her about it. At that time, Jackie wasn't able to talk about it or tell her mother what had happened. By the time she thought she might have been able to share this with her parents, the other family had begun accusing Jackie of stealing this girl's bike. Jackie didn't know anything about the bike, and had no idea why this accusation was directed at her, but did not fully understand how wrong the accusation of stealing was. She realized that her reputation had been tarnished by something she didn't do, and her credibility was likely destroyed. How would her parents, or anyone, believe that she had been sexually molested if she broke that news now?

After that experience, Jackie was diagnosed with chronic asthma and has lived each day with complications resulting from this stress-induced onset of asthma. These many years later, Jackie admitted that she has never shared that situation with her parents, nor has she seen a therapist as an adult. She has not been able to reconcile these feelings to her satisfaction.

Jackie's lived experiences have colored her world-view. She described the internal struggle, and the barriers between herself and the forces beyond her control. Through the re-creation of her life (in Chapter 4), Jackie explored how she navigated the challenges, the

questions, and the uncertainties of childhood and adolescence. It was with these experiences and a myriad of others that she would continue her education in a public school. What would the future hold for her? How would these experiences influence her academically, socially, and emotionally? Would some of these experiences play a larger role in her matriculation or personal development than others? Despite these hardships, would she be resilient?

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of resilience in overcoming the challenges of community, family, school, and peer/individual elements relative to student K-12 experiences. Ultimately, this research was intended to reveal the supports and to inform educators about the role these professionals might play in helping students overcome the obstacles and become resilient. Until this point, most of the available research has investigated factors but not as much has been presented on how individuals make sense of their experiences. In order to understand resilience, one must take into account the relationship between risk and resilience. Individual theories with their unique sets of assumptions provide insight into social phenomena. The Students' Multiple Worlds Model (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998) provides a framework from which to examine risk and resilience, and how these might play into the overall perception of life experiences and individual world-views. Understanding that each of us has experiences in various domains of life, we learn how to cross borders between these various "worlds." Individuals transitioning between family, school and peer groups are influenced by their experiences in each of these domains, and these experiences inform their future experiences between and among the other domains.

Wright (2013) posited that a student's home environment may collide with his school's culture and expectations. What is necessary in the community to keep himself safe

may often be perceived in the educator's realm as anti-social or deviant behavior (Wright, 2013). Conflict may occur internally and externally; consequently, Piaget's theory was applied in this research to explain how young children organize their thinking and make sense of their environment. In order to attend to this purpose, I carried out an in-depth study of the lived experiences of one woman and how her resilience played a role in overcoming or not overcoming the obstacles in her life. In an effort to conceptualize resilience, the descriptions she provided of her life and her reflections of schooling have contributed to the body of research on protective factors and, more importantly, their influences on outcomes. The research process was enhanced by the added advantage I had from already being acquainted with this individual. I had developed a good rapport with her, and a relationship of trust had already been established.

This narrative study examined this woman's experiences relating to community, family, school and individual/peer factors, and what role resilience played in navigating her school experience. The study further informs research on how navigational skills play a role in successful or unsuccessful transitions among the multiple contexts in which one lives. This woman's retrospective account described life experiences that shaped her identity and her self-perception. As Liou, Antrope-González, and Cooper (2009) pointed out, "...one's identity is fluid and transformative over time" (p. 535). The authors emphasized the importance of this identity in resilience. In keeping with this premise, the themes that emerged in the ways the participant described herself over the course of her K-12 experience exemplified how her interpretations of life and of herself transformed as she matured. In this transformation from child to adult, she has displayed resilience in meeting traumatic events by overcoming the challenges inherent in community, school, family and peer/individual

events. Today, she is gainfully employed and economically independent of others and society in general.

As a requirement of No Child Left Behind, states are to establish indicators of student success, and annually report progress with these indicators (Bosworth, 2005; Iowa Department of Education, 2012). In Iowa, these indicators include proficiency on the Iowa Assessments at grades 4, 8, and 11, attendance rates for K-8, and graduation rates for high school in addition to district-determined measures (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). Studies reveal that academic performance often declines and behavioral problems often increase in adolescents, posing questions about which phenomenon might precede the other and what relationships exist (Hill & Chao, 2009). Boykin and Noguera (2011) described students with problematic behavior in the classroom, specifically challenges with attention and off task behaviors, as well as “low academic skills and low social competence” as being identified as high risk (p. 72). As an educator working in a team environment with other educational professionals, I have witnessed students struggling academically and behaviorally. Behavior issues often preceded the challenges they faced in learning the skills they need, and educators also surmised that the inappropriate behavior followed from the frustration they felt over the challenges they faced (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). As educators, we work toward helping each student learn what he/she will need to know and be able to do in order to realize a productive fulfilling life in the adult world (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). High levels of emotional support in the classroom were found to decrease the achievement gap between low risk and high-risk students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

What is it that does make a difference in schools to promote resilience, and what can educators and schools do systemically to ensure the success of those who are most

vulnerable? Proactive approaches strive to mediate the risks before they happen in the life of a child or adolescent (Beaulieu et al., 2001; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992). Preventing or at least buffering risk factors may be possible when we can identify what situations pose risks and what we can do to promote healthy responses to stressful incidents (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). Providing supports when those risks have already occurred may well influence development of resilience in at risk children. In order to be proactive, it is important to understand what those risks might be, and what can be done to lessen their influence or to bolster the child to meet those challenges and rise above them. Resilience, as defined in the research, is the ability to navigate the challenges in one's life and influence how future challenges are met (Henderson, 2013; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Rhodes & Brown, 1991). In this study one woman's resilience along with her multiple worlds experience enabled her to navigate the dynamics that facilitated and impeded her educational outcome. In addition, the educators in her life influenced her educational experience, and it was through this lens that the phenomenon of resilience was examined.

### **Why is this an Important Study?**

Education has been recognized as having a significant influence on one's future (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). Dorn (1996) spoke of education as "the ticket to a successful life" (p. 2). Those with limited education in today's society encounter marginalization professionally and socially (Esch, et al., 2011; Lewis & Sugai, 1999, Yonke, 2001). Deschamps (1992) added that limited education negatively impacts society specifically naming "lack of skilled workers in the labor force's high unemployment rates and increased welfare dependency and other demands on social services" (p. 26).

Literacy in any curricular area requires reading skills. "Failure to provide effective

reading instruction that nurtures students' identities as readers" generally manifests itself in later years as academic failure (Tatum, 2009, p. 1). Yonke (2001) examined the effects of failing freshman English as part of the dropout phenomenon. English/Language Arts is the curricular domain encompassing reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing in the Common Core Standards and the Iowa Core (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). It has been generally accepted that reading is the key to all other academic pursuits (Schmoker, 2011). In addition, the National Reading Panel (2000) has found that the earlier a student acquires the necessary skills for reading, the better equipped the child is to handle more rigorous academic tasks. In support, Schmoker (2011) offered "[w]ide abundant reading is the surest route out of poverty and the limitations that impose themselves on the less literate" (p. 95). This was further supported by Hirsch (2010) when he concluded that: "literacy is 'the most important single goal of schooling'—a reliable predictor of general competence and life chances" (as cited in Schmoker, 2011, p. 94). Examining one woman's resilience is an important study revealing how resilience can influence future life experiences.

### **Background of the Study**

The phenomenon of underperforming students has been under national scrutiny in recent decades (Beaulieu, et al., 2001). Is it a problem of skill or will? Educators acknowledge that there are students for whom intellectual aptitude challenges their academic ability (McPartland & Slavin, 1990). The U.S. Department of Education under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) provided for the "appropriate accommodations and alternate assessments where necessary and as indicated in their respective individualized education programs (IEPs)" (IDEA—Reauthorized Statute, 2004, 612(a)(16)(A)). Yet there remains a segment of the student population that is unsuccessful. These students fail to



demonstrate competency in one or more core areas needed to graduate. However, this failure is not because they do not possess the intellectual capacity. It is easy to dismiss this failure as lack of motivation. Maybe there is a third component beyond skill and will. Or could there be a mutual component to each of these which influences how a student matriculates?

Demographic factors have historically been the target in explanations of student failure (Dorn, 1996; McPartland, & Slavin, 1990; Rhodes & Brown, 1991). Dropout data has been traditionally correlated with low socioeconomic status, single parent families, minority status, alcohol/drug abuse in the home, and other pathological situations. Werner & Smith (1992, 1989) studied these factors extensively. At risk policies emerging in the 1960s promulgated the belief that one or more of these less desirable situations are predictors of academic success (McLaren, 2007). This movement initiated various government-sponsored programs to “remediate” unsuccessful students through pullout programs, many of which are still in practice today (Dorn, 1996). The deficit model, as described by McLaren (2007), blames failure on “an individual trait or series of traits (e.g., lack of motivation or low self-concept)” (p. 234). While it is generally accepted that risk factors may contribute to difficulties students experience in their education, a paradigm shift forces one to reject the notion that it is a predictor (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Benard, 2004).

Instead of continuing to accept a deficit model, more recent research has focused on those factors that enable student success (Krovetz, 2008). A resiliency model rejects the notion that demographic factors account for the unsuccessful academic performance of students (Benard, 2004; Henderson, & Milstein, 2003). It proposes that by focusing on the strengths each student possesses, by building the student’s capacity, any and all of these factors might well be overcome and that a life course could be altered (Henderson, 2013;

Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Krovetz, 2008; Werner & Smith, 1992, 1989). Internal or personal strengths identified by Benard (2004) fall into four categories: social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose.

Henderson and Milstein (2003) revealed certain characteristics inherent in resilient children and adults: willingness to give of oneself in service to others, life skills (i.e., problem-solving, assertiveness, impulse control, good decision making), sociability, good sense of humor, internal locus of control, autonomy, positive view of his/her future, flexibility, sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence. These specific traits are described as protective factors or buffering agents (Benard, 1991; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Werner & Smith, 1992, 1989). Additionally, research has found that both internal and external or environmental factors working together enhance resilience (Benard, 2004, Bosworth, 2005, Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Environmental factors include those relating to community, family and school (Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Krovetz, 2008). Community factors are those opportunities presented by the presence of laws and expectations held within the community, protection from substance abuse, poverty, and community organization (Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Krovetz, 2008). Family influences mirror community factors: expectations and attitudes regarding substance abuse, parental guidance and consistency in responsible behavior, low levels of conflict, and high levels of family bonding (Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Krovetz, 2008). Student attitudes toward school and experiences in school such as success with academic and behavioral expectations and high degrees of commitment were associated with resiliency (Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Krovetz, 2008). To the degree that these factors occur, resilience can develop.

Benard (2004) emphasized that humans are innately motivated to meet basic human needs and the developmental process is aligned to acquire desired needs identified by Maslow.

When young people experience home, school, and community environments rich in caring relationships, high expectations and opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution, their developmental needs are met. In turn, having these needs met naturally promotes the individual resilience strengths of social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and sense of purpose and bright future. These individual strengths result in young people's improved social health, and academic outcomes and protect them from involvement in health-risk behaviors, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse; teen pregnancy; and violence. (Benard, 2004, p. 107)

Phelan, Davidson and Yu (1998) emphasized the importance of the various environments students experience and how each plays a role in their perceptions as they navigate between and among their "worlds." Positive experiences in one or more domains supports resilience-building in other areas (Benard, 2004).

Until recently, most research on resiliency focused on children and adolescents. Benard (2004) defined resilience a "universal capacity" to overcome obstacles inherent in "highly stressed families or resource deprived communities" (p. 7). According to Henderson and Milstein (2003) "an understanding of how adults exposed to both personal and work-related stress bounce back is just emerging" (p. 5). They added that the process of resiliency in adults seems to parallel the process in children and adolescents. A resiliency model first proposed by Richardson et al. (1990) was described by Henderson and Milstein (2003) as "...when an individual experiences adversity, he or she also—ideally—experiences individual and environmental characteristics, protective factors, that buffer that adversity" (p. 5). In whatever way an episode affects an individual's life or outlook on life, reintegration is the next step—moving forward either positively or negatively. If enough "protection" exists,

little disruption or interference with a positive outcome is caused in the person's life and may even contribute to increased resilience while bolstering the individual's coping mechanisms for the future (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Rhodes & Brown, 1991). If the buffering agents are not at work, and disruption occurs, the individual experiences psychological damage that contributes to deterioration of the process of reintegration.

Another resiliency model proposed by Masten and Powell (2003) took an "ecological approach," establishing life (organic) factors at the center with other influences increasingly distal to the individual that are represented as concentric circles ever-widening as the factors compound. Moving away from a central focus on the individual's internal capacity for self-righting tendencies, this model accepts and emphasizes the contribution of the family, social networks and institutions as well as the wider society's influence on each of us. Also addressing resilience, the Students' Multiple Worlds Model acknowledges the influences of the various contexts in which children and adolescents must navigate as they transition from one world or context to another (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). In this framework, adolescents are not described as "at-risk" but rather "youths." They are not categorized or classified according to outcome, but adolescents are given voice to share their experiences in order to examine the layers of experience and how the interaction between and among their worlds—family, school, peers and self—nestled in the "larger socioeconomic community" influences how they perceive the world and function in the different settings (p. 8). Using Students' Multiple Worlds Model along with the Resiliency Model will enhance our understanding of how one experiences life situations. Multiple Worlds model addresses the overlap and border crossings, while the Resiliency Model emphasizes the perception and the internalizations that occur within the individual as they experience life.

Much of the literature on risk is based on information from individuals who dropped out of school or were incarcerated. Generally, these people were selected for study due to their life conditions at the time of the study. Researchers investigated their life experiences and it appeared that the risk factors were identified by frequency of occurrence in large numbers of those studied. Further, it appeared that those specific factors occurring in young people's lives have been the identifiers for a child being labeled "at-risk." They became predictors for what might result. However, what these students eventually become may have more to do with the supports they have in their lives as they matriculate. The current literature seems to be somewhat in conflict on which plays a stronger role, risk or resiliency. It is my intent to examine the disagreement in the literature between the deficit model and the resiliency model with an emphasis on the influence transitions within youths' individual settings and ultimately contribute to the literature in a way that is more optimistic about how risk factors may actually play out in a person's life, thus providing educators information about how they can assist.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions became the basis for the research and guided the focus for this study. Throughout the review of the literature, the interviews and the data analysis, these questions were used to extract themes and delineate, as much as possible, the various influences that help one identify resilience:

1. How do life experiences influence resilience and the way one woman matriculates through K-12 schooling?

2. How does resilience play a role in her life? Specifically, how do community, family, school, individual/peer influences play a role in resilience and how has she navigated the border crossings between her multiple worlds?

### **Literature Overview**

Historically, research on outcomes of those who have experienced traumatic and stressful lives have followed a medical model of pathology and contributed to the problem by tracking anti-social and problematic behaviors with little optimism offered (Deschamps, 1992; McLaren, 2007; Yonke, 2001). Kaplan et al. (1997) cited poor academic performance, as evidenced by grades and subsequently influencing self-esteem, as the most often identified reason for dropping out of school. The high school dropout phenomenon has been accepted in the literature as evidence of an inability to rise above challenges in one's life in order to achieve success (Deschamps, 1992; Yonke, 2001). Social ills such as unemployment, poverty, juvenile delinquency and mental health problems were associated with the literature on high school dropouts in beginning in the 1960s (Yonke, 2001). McLaren (2007) discussed the "myth of democratic schooling" in terms of equality (p. 238). Buried for a time in the 1960s but pervasive in the 1970s for the next several decades, McLaren (2007) challenged the notion of education being the great equalizer, since it rewards those who are more able and justifies the outcomes of the "less able" as lack of intelligence, initiative, or perseverance. Governmental policies such as Title I funding supporting high poverty schools, IDEA providing special education for low-functioning students, and dropout prevention programs initiated over time focused on their specific factors placing a student at-risk and suggesting that a particular issue was the cause of the dropout's plight (Dorn, 1996; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Kaplan et al., 1997). While these factors were found to be

influential in isolation, they may not have been enough. Prevention strategies were narrow, focusing on a specific cause, and did not take into account the interaction of a variety of factors that influenced the adolescent's decision to drop out of school (Kaplan et al., 1997). At the same time, conclusions about relationships between demographic data and the dropout problem were drawn which suggested influences relating to family status, poverty and race (Frey, 2005; Yonke, 2001). Dropout prevention programs have emerged focusing on specific populations such as teen mothers, poor attenders or those with low self-esteem over the past 50 years, but school policies have effected relatively little change (Yonke, 2001). Dropout data continues to support the deficit model, blaming conditions relating to the students' personal attributes, family make-up or socio-economic status or the community/cultural/minority status from which the students come (Yonke, 2001).

The resiliency model (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992) is a shift from the pathological approach (Henderson & Milstein, 2003), also called the deficit model (Gadsden et al., 2009; Payne, 2008), toward a less critical paradigm investigating the internal and external strengths at work that mitigate the effects of environmental, physical and mental obstacles. The Students' Multiple Worlds Model further supports a feeling of optimism in a broader sense as it examines the lives of “*all* youths—not only those typically identified as ‘at-risk’; not only those representative of one cultural, ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic group; and not only those who are considered to be ‘in trouble’ academically” (Phelan, et al. 1998, p. 2). Research on resiliency has positively influenced the literature by providing evidence that hope and promise exists in spite of the challenges, given the right mitigating conditions. Henderson and Milstein (2003) proposed this as “[t]he Wellness Model [which] focuses on the emergence of competence,

empowerment, and self-efficacy” (p. 3). Benard (1991) retraced the development of the resiliency research emerging in the 1960s and 1970s creating a paradigm shift from a pathology model to the resiliency model. From a strength-based approach, sociologists could then have a different lens through which to view behaviors and outcomes. Henderson and Milstein (2003) noted that research on resiliency “offers hope based on scientific evidence that many, if not most, of those who experience stress trauma, and ‘risks’ in their lives can bounce back” under the right conditions (p. 2). Resilience research differs from the risk research (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) in that a resilience perspective challenges educators to focus more on strengths instead of deficits (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Studies from a deficit model focus on the negative circumstances that influence negative outcomes such as divorce, poverty, substance abuse, and poor mental health. Resilience research has revealed that more children of stressful situations appear to emerge successfully than those who do not (Rhodes & Brown, 1992; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). With this information, we can be more optimistic about the outcomes for children in these settings.

In order to understand how this has been realized in a personal sense I have engaged in rich dialogue with one woman whose life experiences have posed potential barriers to find out how she navigated these challenges. Her experiences will illuminate how she has met and overcome the obstacles in her life, what influences or experiences empowered her and how she developed resilience. Ultimately, this would provide us information about how we, as educators, might design buffering environments for students in our schools. Phelan et al. (1998) proposed that the ease or challenges inherent in boundary crossings and the ways in which an individual navigates within and among her various “worlds” influences future



experiences. Educators might use this information to support students in these border crossings and assist in resilience-building efforts.

### **Overview of Methodology**

Attending to this research, single subject case study was selected in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of one woman and how her resilience played a role in overcoming or not overcoming the obstacles in her life. Mirriam (2002) noted that a specific case can provide much information and that the narrative description of a single case can offer a reader vicarious experiences. Within the context of qualitative research methodology, case study immerses the researcher into the participant's story in an effort to accurately represent current or historical information. Just as in a drawing, a painting or a written narrative, setting and background are vital components of the completed work. The primary method for acquiring this background is interview and examination of personal documents or artifacts.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined for this study:

**At-Risk:** Students who are at risk generally possess one or more factors that predispose them to negative outcomes in their life chances, either behaviorally, academically, or both. The Iowa Department of Education uses the following definition of "at-risk":

"At-risk student" means any identified student who needs additional support and who is not meeting or not expected to meet the established goals of the educational program (academic, personal/social, career/vocational). At-risk students include but are not limited to students in the following groups: homeless children and youth, dropouts, returning dropouts, and potential dropouts. Iowa Administrative Code 281 12.2 (256)

Following the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* the construct of risk quickly entered into educational discourse and at that time, according to O'Connor, Hill, and Robinson (2009), was quickly associated with minority status (i.e., race/ethnicity). McDermott et al., (2009) acknowledged that while “race and class are two of the most pressing facts in American society” we should not be so eager to disregard the other environmental factors inherent in human interaction (p. 102).

**Dropout:** Definitions of dropout generally share the notion that leaving school early, prior to completion of necessary coursework and graduation is synonymous with dropping out of school. Esch, et al. (2011) acknowledged the complexities inherent in the different definitions of dropping out of school based on the policies adopted by individual states and school districts. Deschamps (1992) found a lack of uniformity among definitions. Esch and associates (2011) shared the challenges in the research as they provided examples of studies from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), EURO-STAT, and the Ministry for Education attempting to compare national dropout rates. Problematic in comparing data from these two agencies is the age at which they determined early leaving, ranging from adolescence up to age 24. In this study, the focus was on statistics from the Ministry of Education where the criterion was secondary school dropout, and considered “risk factors that may impede educational engagement and vocational decisions” (Esch et al., 2011, p. 2). Deschamps (1992) noted that variations exist within the United States. Although the definitions vary, “most define dropout as a student who leaves school before graduation and does not transfer to another school” (p. 9). The Iowa Department of Education defined dropouts as “resident pupils who have been enrolled in a public or nonpublic school in any of

grades seven through twelve who withdrew from school for a reason other than transfer to another school or school district” and potential dropouts as:

...resident pupils who are enrolled in a public or nonpublic school who demonstrate poor school adjustment as indicated by two or more of the following:

- a. High rate of absenteeism, truancy, or frequent tardiness.
- b. Limited or no extracurricular participation or lack of identification with school, including but not limited to, expressed feelings of not belonging.
- c. Poor grades, including but not limited to, failing in one or more school subjects or grade levels.
- d. Low achievement scores in reading or mathematics which reflect achievement at least two years or more below grade level. (Iowa Administrative Code 281 12.2 [257.39])

Establishing the ways in which children and adolescents make healthy adjustments in life has been a widely studied and published topic in recent decades (Benard, 2004; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Henderson & Milstein, 2003, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). Protective factors, as defined in the literature, are those circumstances or supports that enhance the likelihood that positive outcomes will occur or that mitigate the effects of an individual’s susceptibility resulting in a negative outcome. From another perspective, positive outcomes have been referred to in the juvenile justice literature as “indicators of protective factors, competence or strengths” (Peters & Myrick, 2011, p. 33). Schwartz (n.d.) described these as “academic competence, personal contentment, interpersonal skills, social involvement and staying out of trouble” (p. 253). Rhodes and Brown (1991) discussed protective processes as “reduction of the impact of risk, reduction of negative chain reactions, the development and enhancement of self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and the creation of opportunities” (p. 85). Rutter (as cited in Rhodes & Brown, 1991, p. 86) asserted that “successful interactions with risk situations may in fact lead to resilience from these situations” which begs the question, if some risk is good, how much is too much? It appears there may be a fine line between risk

factors with resilience-promoting characteristics encouraging positive outcomes and, on the flip side, detrimental influences with negative outcomes.

**Resilience:** Definitions of resilience vary, but generally, resilience refers to an individual's capacity to successfully adapt when faced with significant obstacles, stressors, or trauma. Werner & Smith (1992) introduced protective factors (buffering agents that mitigate the influences of negative experiences) and resilience as the "positive counterparts" (p. 5) to vulnerability and risk, both defined for this research. Resilience, according to Werner and Smith (1992) and Krovetz (2008), must be examined in the presence of risk or vulnerability. Protective factors such as "...[a]n easy temperament, the ability to plan, achievement up to grade level in primary school, responsible chores in childhood and adolescence, and successful graduation from high school," were identified by Werner and Smith (1992, p. 13) as personal attributes predisposing one to positive outcomes. External factors include educated, supportive and confident caregivers, nurturing home and school environments holding high expectations, and close-knit communities (e.g., neighborhoods, churches, schools) fostering a sense of responsibility (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Krovetz, 2008; Lippman & Schmitz, 2013; Werner & Smith, 1989).

Unger (2011) posited that resilience is "...best understood not as an individual's capacity to withstand adversity, but instead as the capacity of individuals to access the resources they need to sustain well-being" (p. 1,743). Although examining the influence of a social agency, such as a community or a school, on resilience may seem to detract from the resourcefulness of the individual, it seems important to consider how accessible the necessary supports are. Child Trends recognized the role of the individual in terms of his or her "behaviors, attitudes and competencies" (Lippman & Schmitz, 2013). In order to mitigate

risk of adverse situations, these individuals are buffered by good physical health, adequate sleep and exercise. Positive coping mechanisms for managing stress, an internal locus of control, good senses of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-regulation, and the ability to intellectually process information and problem solve were also found to be essential to resilience (Lippman & Schmitz, 2013).

Although resilience and resiliency are sometimes used interchangeably, Krovetz (2008) was specific about the subtle differences between the two terms. Paraphrasing Luthar (2000), Krovetz (2008) noted they are differentiated in the literature by explaining that resilience "...is the dynamic process of competency despite adversity and resiliency [which] is a specific personality trait" (p. 11). This is still somewhat confusing since both are nouns, terms for a construct: resilience—a process, and resiliency—a personality trait. The current study was conducted to determine resilience—the process one undergoes in order to overcome adversity and the conditions that are important in facilitating resilience. At the same time, it appears that resiliency as a personality trait is important to this process. I have made every attempt to stay true to Krovetz's (2008) definitions of these two constructs in this dissertation research. Resiliency, as a personality trait, may only be acquired through persistence and those supporting factors that are conditions for resilience. This leads to discussions of risk factors.

**Risk:** According to Henderson and Milstein (2003), much of the risk research examines the lives of those who are already involved in anti-social behaviors, such as failure in school, substance abuse or criminal behavior. Although this list is not exhaustive, these behaviors draw researchers' attention to the risk-takers' deficits and studies have been undertaken to examine the precursors to these conditions (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Bosworth & Walz (2005) noted that risk factors also influence other negative consequences, such as an individual's decision to drop out of school, engage in risky sexual behaviors that may result in teen pregnancy, or delinquency. This approach painted a much bleaker picture than the resilience research (Benard, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992). McDermott et al. (2009) asserted that race and class are among the most influential of risk factors in the United States. Hermann et al. (2011) emphasized other risks such as “deficient parenting, poverty, homelessness, traumatic events, natural disasters, violence, war, and physical illness” (p. 259).

**Vulnerability:** Werner and Smith (1992) referred to the vulnerable as those “...exposed to poverty, biological risks, and family instability, and reared by parents with little education or serious mental health problems” (p. 3). They noted that not all of those who are vulnerable experienced negative outcomes, whereas most of those considered at risk did not. Thus, the titles of their published works, *Vulnerable but Invincible* and *Overcoming the Odds*, in 1989 and 1992, respectively. Mervlyn Kitashima is one of the children in Werner and Smith's longitudinal study. Based on Werner and Smith's (1989, 1992) findings, Kitashima emphasized that the term “at-risk” should be replaced with “at-promise” (Kitashima, speech given at School Administrators of Iowa Conference, 2008).

### Resilience

Getting at the heart of resilience is not an easy task. Likewise, risk and vulnerability are challenging concepts. I have chosen to provide further context for each of these here in order to set the stage for conceptual understanding, but will be developed more in chapter 2.

Felner (as cited in Rhodes & Brown, 1991) described attempts to define resilience as blurry and nebulous when comparing this term to similar constructs as protective factors and

the opposing constructs of vulnerability and risk. It is generally accepted in the literature that resilience is defined as the capacity to rise above the challenges in one's life (Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Krovetz, 2008; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). Bosworth and Walz (2005) introduced a discussion of resiliency by relating it to the subject of physical science when describing "substances that have the ability to return to their original form after being bent, compressed or stretched" and used this term to those individuals who are able to "bounce back from adversity or grow stronger in the face of adversity" (p. 1). Bosworth and Walz (2005) cited studies by Werner and Smith (1982), and Rutter, Maughan, Martimore, and Ouston (1975) who "...used the term resiliency to describe these [vulnerable] children's capacity to overcome adversity" (p. 1). Werner and Smith (1989) discussed resilience as "...their capacity to cope effectively with the internal stresses of their vulnerabilities . . . and external stresses" (p. 4).

### **Risk and Vulnerability**

In this study, risk is defined as the inability to develop coping strategies for meeting new challenges and rise above adversities in life experiences. Stress, generally associated with risk in promoting less than desirable outcomes, was described by Sloan (2012) as "a physical, mental, and emotional response to life's changes and demands" adding that while some stress can be motivational, long term or intense stress can be harmful (p. 1). Stressors are adverse events that provoke stress, and these stressors predispose us to mental and or physical illness, and may influence decisions and life altering circumstances (Rhodes & Brown, 1991). When stressors become intense or combine, these circumstances place an individual at risk of vulnerability to unhealthy life courses or choices (Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992).

Risk has been associated with early onset of sexual activity and with teen pregnancy. Rhodes and Brown (1991) offered this definition of risk: "...a cluster of factors that have been empirically determined to be associated with the initiation of unprotected sexual intercourse and/or teen pregnancy" (p. 80). Bosworth and Walz (2005) defined risk as "...personal, familial, or environmental characteristics that predispose a person to a negative developmental outcome" (p. 3). Hull, Zachar, and Hibbert (2009) cited living in a single parent household and low socioeconomic status or poverty as factors associated with susceptibility to risk. Dropping out of high school has been frequently cited as a manifestation of risk (Dorn, 1996; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Hill & Chao, 2009). While this list is not exhaustive, several of these phenomena also played a part in my subject's life.

Hill and Chao (2009) revealed that a decline in achievement in school, behavior and academic, as well as a decline in engagement with school is common in adolescence, particularly at the middle school level. Over the years, statistical analysis has revealed the influence of under achievement in schools on graduation rates (Yonke, 2001). Equally important, Yonke (2001) added that examination of the root causes of lower achievement is essential to potential solutions. The focus of this research challenged the notion that these situations are fixed, and may indeed be altered by the internal characteristics and external influences of the child's environment. In support, Phelan et al. (1998) examined the school experiences of 55 youths, and subsequently presented case studies of seven of these, providing concrete examples of how levels of congruence among the sociocultural aspects of children's setting and their transitional strategies influence outcomes.

The term "at-risk" may be construed to have various meanings (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). While this label can and does have some negative connotations, it is a generally



accepted term in the literature and in governmental agencies for students who are in danger of academic failure. Kaplan et al. (2001) noted poor academic performance as a highly cited indicator of being at risk for dropping out. A student's academic failure can be evidenced by an inability to graduate on time (with his/her classmates) because of a lack of credits, or the student may be viewed as a potential dropout (Yonke, 2001). However, Gleason and Dynarski (2002) posited that the risk factors generally used to identify students for dropout preventions programs have not been strong predictors.

Researchers have long examined this phenomenon but, arguably, the most comprehensive study of risk and resilience spanned 40 years and involved over 650 participants (Yonke, 2001). In their longitudinal study, Werner and Smith (1989, 1992) followed a group of children through adulthood in their Kauai Study and wrote extensively about these children's experiences. They described the children as a "vulnerable" population "...exposed to poverty, biological risks, family instability, and reared by parents with little education or serious mental health problems" (Werner & Smith, 1989, p.3).

Over time, different factors have been suggested as causes of students becoming at risk of academic failure. Vulnerability, according to Bosworth and Walz (2005), is defined as being susceptible to risk. It lies at the opposing end of the spectrum from resilience (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). Risk factors relating to personal traits of the individual or characteristics of the environment (e.g., family, school, community) may influence negative outcomes thus rendering them vulnerable or susceptible to adversity (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). Rhodes and Brown (1991) posited that, when we can more accurately determine which factors influence a child's psychological development that place them at risk, we will be in a better position to improve their outcomes. Risk factors enhance the likelihood that a

person will be negatively impacted by adverse conditions (Beaulieu et al., 2001; Bosworth & Walz, 2005). This phenomenon was further dissected to examine the protective factors, such as supportive and nurturing environments, that mediated adversity and enhanced the possibility of developmental success (Bosworth & Walz, 2005).

Gleason and Dynarski (2002) identified family demographics, academic and behavioral successes, personal characteristics including psychological stability and stability, and strength of the school or neighborhood as risk factors. Werner and Smith (1989, 1992) labeled these mitigating influences “self-righting tendencies” and examined the ways in which protective factors buffered against the risk factors resulting in becoming developmentally successful adults. But what are these factors and what promotes them? Are they internal, external or a combination? How does transitioning between and among the student’s worlds influence how she constructs reality? Before we can delve into discussion about the influences it is important to understand specifically what they are and from where they originate. Thus, this study on resilience provides an in-depth view of how one woman’s resilience influenced her in meeting community, family, school and peer/individual challenges.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of resilience in overcoming the challenges of community, family, school and peer/individual elements relative to student K-12 experiences. Two research questions were posed: (1) How do life experiences influence resilience and the way one matriculates through K-12 schooling? (2) How does resilience play a role in her life? How did her experience in one “world” conflict with or mitigate adversity? When considering these questions, an introduction to the available

literature revealed a plethora of resources. It was necessary to gain a general understanding of the domains that current researchers cite as categories of influence and to begin to narrow the focus so as to determine which of the social entities might be related to K-12 educational experiences. The Students' Multiple Worlds Model (Phelan, et al. 1998) was proposed as a framework from which to examine the influence a youth's various contexts assist in her construction of reality. Additionally, Piaget's child developmental theories, specifically those related to how children make sense of the world, were briefly mentioned and are developed more fully in Chapter 2.

A brief description of case study as a methodology was described in this chapter. Single subject case study is a narrative approach for conducting research and presenting the details of one's life experiences in an effort to recreate experiences in the individual's life. In this research, case study was intended to illustrate how life events influenced the individual's perspective on life and may have shaped resilience traits. This research was intended to examine the life experiences that influence educational outcomes and determine what situations can mediate the effects of adversity. When we are able to identify those buffers, educators can build structures for reducing the influences of stress in the lives of our young people and, ultimately, help them rise above the challenges they encounter.

Given that there are terms specific to educational and sociological realms, definitions of at-risk, resilience and vulnerability were provided along with a brief description of how these constructs are supported in the literature. These definitions clarify how the selected terms were applied in this research. In addition, they enable future researchers to make connections and draw conclusions between two or more studies with greater ease.

In the next chapter, the dynamics that facilitate or impede educational processes and outcomes will be explored. Resilience will be delineated and Students' Multiple Worlds Model will be expanded and modified to explain the relationships that exist within a child's or adolescent's several "worlds" and how these may influence vulnerability, risk, and resilience. Accordingly, theories advanced by Piaget will be explored. Ultimately, this study was intended to provide information about how educational leaders can influence positive outcomes; therefore both positive and negative practices occurring in educational settings are also explored. My theoretical framework guiding the research is also presented.

Chapter 3 will discuss case study as a research design and methodology for studying and presenting life experience for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of how one individual interprets specific incidents in her life. Additionally, data collection and analysis for this study will be described along with how rigor and theoretical saturation were established.

In Chapter 4, I will present the findings from my fieldwork. In order to attend to the purpose of this study and examine this woman's lived experiences, it was important to delve deeply into the specific events and her reactions to these situations. My interviews with her, and my extraction of themes and member checking, ensured my understanding and enabled me to describe her life.

This study culminates in Chapter 5, where conclusions and implications are presented to gain new perspective on how the various components of life *may* interact to help an individual come to a worldview and how this influences how the individual chooses to respond to subsequent life events. The chapter concludes with suggestions for educators to structure educational systems and school faculty to enhance the K-12 experiences for

students to positively influence them socially, emotionally and academically in order to promote resilience.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence resilience might have played in overcoming the challenges of community, family, school and peer/individual elements relative to a student's K-12 experiences. In doing so, it was important to examine the supports and barriers that contributed to the participant's successes and challenges in her educational career and post-secondary pursuits. Beginning a discourse about educational processes and outcomes related to resilience is a large undertaking. To gain a better understanding of these factors that facilitate educational processes and outcomes and those that pose challenges, it was necessary to review the literature. An examination of the research was conducted in this area and provided a framework from which to begin as well as a broader context of the perspectives on school success and contributing factors of success and failure. While it may appear relatively easy to determine from the research which factors may predispose someone to risk or promote resiliency, it is difficult to separate the influences on these outcomes in one's life. One way that people may tackle such a research endeavor is by gathering qualitative data, and through personal reflection and interviews, recreate the settings and environmental phenomena as well as the internal mechanisms that are constantly at work in developing one's perspective. Data must be collected that reveals the way in which the human experience and thought processes interact to develop understanding.

### **Dynamics That Facilitate or Impede Educational Processes and Outcomes**

Halquist and Musanti (2010) addressed "critical incidents" and the contribution these offer in qualitative research. They defined critical incidents as "...not 'things' that exist independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery like gold nuggets or desert islands,

but like all data, critical incidents are created. Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation” (Halquist & Musanti, 2010, p. 450). It would be unthinkable to intentionally deprive an individual of basic human needs, such as food, shelter, love, belonging, etc., in order to study their outcomes. Ethically, we can study the effects of these factors when they have already occurred. We can conduct an historical account of the subject’s experience, and examine what bearing risks and supports have on an individual’s current situation (Werner & Smith, 1992). We know that these experiences are somewhat unique to the individual and, at the same time, we are able to categorize some basic components of life into smaller units which may help us to understand how each of these domains influence current behavior. We know that these outcomes are affected by internal and external factors, and it is critical that these be examined (Werner & Smith). These critical incidents collectively frame the experiences and shape the interpretations of an individual as he/she reflects and forms perceptions and develops a worldview. The “interpretation of a significant event...,” as Halquist and Musanti (2010) proposed, “...makes it critical” (p. 451).

Rhodes and Brown (1991) defined the constructs of resilience and invulnerability in children, and described these children as “...those who, because of stressful life events, are at risk of developing later psychological dysfunctions, but do not” (p. 1). The authors added that many children who face adversity and emerge from dysfunctional home lives or situations do not go on themselves to become dysfunctional adults. Instead, they rise above the challenges due to factors facilitating healthy adjustments (Rhodes & Brown, 1991). The factors that mitigate adversity become processes that enable children and adolescents to develop into resilient adults. Cameron, Lau and Tapanya (2009) explained these resilient

processes as “the capacities of individuals to thrive in the face of significant adversity” (p. 305).

From a resiliency perspective, Benard (1991) revealed that protective factors are also categorized by individual personality attributes or dispositions, family characteristics, and environmental influences (i.e., peers, school, and community)” (p. 6). Research by Herrmann et al. (2011) supported these findings. Krovetz (2008) and Bosworth and Walz (2005) identified four domains relative to resilience or vulnerability: (a) community factors, (b) family factors, (c) school factors, and (d) individual/peer factors. Findings of research by Cameron, Lau, and Tapanya (2009) on resilience revealed three domains of influence: (a) individual factors, (b) family factors, and (c) community factors. Rhodes and Brown (1991) noted: “...variables related to coping and resiliency include family characteristics and properties of the surrounding community, as well as personality characteristics or dispositions in the child” (p. 69). Phelan, Davidson & Yu (2002) identified these same conceptual realms and defined them in terms of the settings or worlds among which youth must navigate and proposed that how children and adolescents move from one setting to another and adapt to the norms and expectations of the different arenas is equally important. While the settings are general categories, subheadings for each have further defined the ways in which each of these sets of factors influences resilience. Bosworth and Walz (2005) cited the research of Hawkins, Catalano and Miller (1992) more specifically and clarified each of the domains:

- Community factors—laws and norms favorable toward risk-taking behaviors, availability of the substance of abuse, extreme economic deprivation, neighborhood disorganization
- Family factors—family behavior and attitudes regarding alcohol and drugs, poor and inconsistent family management practices, family conflict, low bonding to family



- School factors—early and persistent problem behavior, academic failure, low degree of commitment to school
- Individual/peer factors—peer rejection in elementary grades, association with drug-using peers, alienation and rebelliousness, attitudes favorable to drug use, early onset of drug use. (Bosworth & Walz, 2005, p. 4)

According to Krovetz (2008), “Werner and Smith (1992) wrote that the resilient child is one ‘who loves well, works well, plays well, and expects well’ ” (p. 7). Benard (1991) shared this definition, but added that it is vague. She further explained the resilient child in terms of possessing the attributes of: (1) social competence, (2) problem solving skills, and (3) autonomy. Social competence is evidenced in being flexible, responsive, having a good sense of humor, successful in communication, empathetic and caring. Problem-solving skills include the ability to think in abstract terms, being reflective and flexible in cognitive ways in addition to adapting learning to new situations. Autonomy refers to having a good sense of self, feeling that one is in control of his own destiny, and a feeling of self-efficacy and empowerment.

As mentioned previously, the community, family and school contributions are an integral part of the child’s well-being. Within each of those domains are common external components: a caring environment, positive expectations and participation. It is necessary to uncover each to understand the components. Cameron, Lau, and Tapanya (2009) studied the dynamics in families that are perceived to contribute to the child’s psychological strength. Their “day in the life” (DITL) studies involved interviews about and video recordings of child-rearing and family practices that potentially influence the resilience of children as they grow. The researchers also included other primary source materials, personal observations documented in field notes, and then searched for common themes. The authors drew from family experiences across seven countries: Thailand, Canada, Italy, United Kingdom, Peru,

Turkey and the United States, in order to understand “the roots of early childhood well being in diverse contexts” (p. 306). Findings revealed the common denominator for each of these children was a “significant family migration to a new location where they [did] not readily speak the local language or dialect on arrival” (p. 306). While language was an initial barrier, their teachers and others who worked with them noted their successful transition due to well-developed survival skills. Cameron et al. (2009) posited that the resilient children had adults in their lives who cared for them, and they had high degrees of self-regulation. These children reflected on their experiences, learning from them and adapting them to new situations. They had positive attitudes, well-developed senses of humor, and relied on these characteristics, in addition to contributing responsibly to the family, to ensure that their needs were met (Cameron et al., 2009).

Krovetz (2008) described the caring environment as one in which the child has at least one adult who “cares deeply” for the child and has concerns for his/her welfare. That person provides security through food, shelter and stability, making the child feel valued and important. This is true whether considering the child’s immediate family, the community, or the school. In each of these areas, the more caring support that is provided, the greater the likelihood that the child would develop the self-righting tendencies that Werner and Smith (1989) found crucial (Cameron et al., 2009; Kim & Esquivel, 2011). Children who enjoyed support with clearly communicated high expectations were less susceptible to vulnerability. When these expectations came from the family, the community and the school, greater positive outcomes were achieved. Once again, family, school and community played an active role in the responsibility and involvement each accepted on the child’s behalf as a

model for the child to become involved and take responsibility (Cameron et al., 2009; Krovetz, 2008).

When considering the protective factors that resilient children possess, Krovetz (2008) cited four attributes from Bernard's (1991, 1993, 1995) works: (a) social competence, (b) problem-solving skills, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose and future. Each of these internal traits positively impacted the self-efficacy skills needed to enhance coping mechanisms in times of difficulty or challenge. When adversity presented itself, it was the combination and intensity of the protective factors, whether internal or external, that determined the impact. When this support was not readily available, the breakdown of supports tended to result in negative outcomes for the child. This breakdown, or lack of supports in one or more of the external domains, was highly correlated with the child/adolescent engaging in risky or anti-social behaviors unless the child possessed the internal qualities to overcome those challenges. "Based on longitudinal studies, researchers have found that for every child coming from an at-risk background who later needs intervention, there is a higher percentage of children who come from the same background who become healthy, competent adults" (Krovetz, 2008, p. 7). These findings suggest that the personality traits that Werner and Smith (1989) identified as critical to resilience may have been more important than the external factors.

The overarching conditions that have the capacity to evoke negative outcomes, such as those Werner and Smith (1989) cited from Garmezy's (1974) research, are: "(1) genetic predisposition, (2) pathological disorganization within the near environment (the family), or (3) within the molar (sociocultural) environment of the child, and (4) deprivation within the prenatal or neonatal periods" (Werner & Smith, 1989, p. 4). These conditions often manifest

in children with behavior disorders. For the purposes of the current research, the factors reviewed in the literature have been narrowed to four domains: (a) community, (b) family, (3) school, and (4) peer/individual.

### **Community factors**

Cameron et al. (2009) identified the importance of having positive supportive relationships within the community, the perceived connection to family and community cultural beliefs and practices, and a meaningful role in the community as influences in well-being. Unger (2011) posited that "...most individuals are only as successful as their communities as a whole and that this success" is highly dependent upon the resources of the community (p. 1,742). The resources were further identified as the social supports the individual had with others and the available social systems in the community such as Department of Human Services and educational and health care systems.

Human capital, defined by Unger (2011) as the ability to work, having one's health and a strong knowledge base, is a strong predictor of success for communities, families and individuals. Citing a number of researchers, including Elder and associates (1974, 1984, 1985, 1986), Werner and Smith (1992) explained that children from "economically deprived homes sought more advice and companionship among persons outside the immediate family circle, for example teachers and friends, than did children unaffected by economic misfortune" (p. 6). Unger (2011) posited that resilience is as much a function of the individual's ability to access needed resources as it is a characteristic the individual possesses in order to overcome adversity. He explained that the resilience of an individual is "the result of how well his or her community provides much needed resources when risk factors are present" (p. 1,743).

In a study of the economically disadvantaged conducted by Werner and Smith (1972), findings revealed that attributes such as intelligence (in males) and physical attractiveness (in females) were identified as buffers. Easy temperaments for both males and females and positive mother-child relationships were also considered buffers. In another study, Werner and Smith (1992) cited military service as a positive influence for males: “Service in the military enable these youths to acquire scholastic and occupational skills they would not have had otherwise” (p. 7). After marrying, later in life these men were found to be more self-sufficient, and they reported more stable marriages than nonveterans. Elder (1986) also found that the occupational achievements of military veterans were generally better than could have been predicted (as cited in Werner & Smith, 1992).

The Cambridge-Somerville Project identified childhood variables contributing to delinquency and adult criminological behaviors: paternal aggressiveness and maternal permissiveness. As a buffer, Werner and Smith (1992) explained, the “father’s esteem for the mother, mothers’ self-confidence and education, and maternal affection seemed to insulate a boy against criminogenic stresses” (p. 9). In addition, they noted that the mother’s self-confidence complemented by consistent discipline was a significant factor in overriding the absence of the father or his lack of affection. On the other side, the effects of the mother’s lack of affection and her permissiveness could be mitigated by the father’s respect for the mother (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Lewis and Sugai (1999) identified families and communities failing to provide appropriate modeling of social skills as the major contributors to anti-social behaviors in youth. Communities were defined as those peer groups and other social networks (i.e., neighborhood, cultural groups) in which the youth came in contact. As students witnessed

more prosocial behaviors in their early years, they were less likely to engage in anti-social interactions with others. Lewis and Sugai (1999) found that 82% of crimes were committed by school dropouts. They added that over half of all crimes in the U.S. are committed by 5-7% of youth ages 10 to 20. In order to positively influence these children and adolescents, specific programs must be in place in our schools. “If antisocial behavior is not changed by the end of grade 3, it should be treated as a chronic condition much like diabetes” (Lewis & Sugai, 1999, p. 1). Management of this condition can be accomplished through carefully implemented interventions and supports.

### **Family factors**

Family factors have been studied and reported in the literature as influential in individual outcomes. Schlomer, Ellis, and Garber (2010) shared research supporting that “adolescents growing up in acrimonious family contexts, marked by high levels of parent-child conflict, have more behavioral adjustment problems (internal and external), more difficulties in school, and generally feel more distressed than their peers from more harmonious families” (p. 287). They added that this discord frequently resulted in divorce of parents, increasing the likelihood that children would encounter multiple parental figures during their adolescent years, which may negatively influence or effectively complicate family relationships.

Research by Cameron et al. (2009) cited “access to material resources” including financial, medical, educational and employment opportunities in addition to food, clothing and shelter as contributing to resilience (p. 308). Again, positive supportive relationships with others had a significant influence on wellbeing. Tension occurred when these relationships were strained by environmental factors or connections with individuals who

were vulnerable themselves. Social capital defined by Unger (2011) as “networks, groups and trust” emerged as influential in resilience (p. 1,743).

According to a meta-analysis of research on children from divorced families reported by Werner and Smith (1992), “some psychological effects of divorce can be long lasting” (p. 11). Also evidenced in work by Wallerstein (1985) and Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989), Werner and Smith (1992) explained that most women in the study cited the divorce of parents as major contributions impacting their choices regarding marriage partners, decisions about when/if to marry, and familial connections and networks. In their mid-twenties, the women studied “described themselves as having emerged stronger as a consequence of the parental breakup” and that this experience had “thrust them earlier into positions of responsibility (taking care of the household and younger siblings), and they had benefited from the opportunity and developed a greater sense of independence and maturity than their peers from intact families” (p. 12). Further studies conducted by Rutter and associates revealed the impact of a “supportive spouse (as reflected in a harmonious marriage characterized by a warm, confiding relationship)” as opposed to those with little or no marital support where an “increase in the rate of poor psychosocial functioning and poor parenting” was evident (cited in Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 11).

Another important factor in resilience to divorce is the type of parental interaction. Adolescents who coped effectively with hostility between parents “employ a distancing through cognitive understanding” (Rhodes & Brown, 1991, p. 16). They possessed the ability to reason and to take the parents’ viewpoints, developing an understanding of why one parent reacted in the way he/she did. A certain level of maturation, however, was required before this could occur. Resilient children tended to cite a peer group, sibling(s), and/or custodial

parent who were supportive in their development. This might include academic or emotional support in times of stress or extreme crisis. In contrast, “vulnerable children make less use of their families for support and rely more heavily on fewer friends who are more likely to have separated parents” (Rhodes & Brown, p. 18).

Racial differences revealed disparities in reasons for single parent families in white and black families. According to Rhodes and Brown (1991), “while divorce is the primary cause of single parenthood among white families, out-of-wedlock parenthood is the modal cause among black families” (p. 25). The authors added, “because blacks are significantly less likely to remarry following divorce, some black children will remain in single-parent families longer than their white counterparts” which may impact their adjustment (Rhodes & Brown, p. 25). Viewing the experiences of black children in single-parent families from a pathological frame of reference has been problematic in not recognizing the strengths that may result from this lifestyle compared to the challenges posed by two-parent families with other factors imposing barriers. Rhodes and Brown acknowledged that it is important to recognize these assumptions and caution is advised in generalizing from one ethnicity to another.

Positive family nurturing practices were highly correlated in children and adolescents found to have a better sense of wellbeing (Cameron et al., 2009). Conversely, without a caring adult in the child’s life or less nurturing, those adults had a greater the likelihood of a lower sense of self-worth. Early experiences of security were found to be important to later development of feelings about oneself.

Childhood maltreatment was studied by Kelley, Thornberry, and Smith (1997), and reported by the Office of Justice Programs, U. S. Department of Justice. Unfortunately, there



are many forms of maltreatment. In this study, the researchers noted that seven “subtypes” of maltreatment were included in this study: “physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, lack of supervision, emotional maltreatment, educational maltreatment, and moral-legal maltreatment” (Kelley et al., 1997, p. 3). Although there are several types of maltreatment, the researchers did not disaggregate data according to the specific type of maltreatment and also noted that the children frequently experienced combinations of maltreatment, making it difficult to separate the outcomes (Kelley et al.). Kelley and associates determined that recent research provides some indications that the overall experience of maltreatment, rather than the specific subtype, is what has the greatest impact on adolescent outcomes. For instance, in Widom’s (1996) study of a larger sample of 1,575 court cases of child maltreatment, the experience of neglect appeared to be as damaging as physical abuse (Kelly et al., 1997). Child victims of neglect were almost as likely as physically abused victims to be arrested for violent crimes as teenagers and young adults. Both neglect and abuse victims were more likely to be arrested for and involved in violent crimes than members of the matched non-maltreated control group (p. 3). Lewis and Sugai (1999) supported the contribution of caregiving influences citing work by the Oregon Social Learning Center where researchers established that a strong link existed “between inconsistent and harsh behavior management practices at home and later school- and community-related antisocial behavior by children and youth” (p. 2).

Chemical dependency by adult caregivers is also related to the outcomes of children in these environments. A 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that

...8.3 million children live with at least one parent who abused or was dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year. This includes 13.9 percent of children aged 2 years or younger, 13.6 percent of children aged 3 to 5 years, 12.0 percent of children aged 6 to 11 years, and 9.9 percent of youths

aged 12 to 17 years. These children are at increased risk for abuse or neglect, as well as physical, academic, social, and emotional problems. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.)

The report published by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in 2009 found that, when caretakers engaged in substance abuse and dependency, there was a significant “negative impact on the physical and emotional well-being of children” (n.p.) resulting in the child’s needs, whether physical or emotional, being secondary to the adult’s chemical dependency. The influence of prenatal exposure to alcohol and drug use were revealed. It is well established in the literature that substance abuse has profound effects on physical, emotional, and cognitive functions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.). Birth defects resulting from substance abuse by the mother may affect the central nervous system and major organs causing permanent damage. These can include deficiencies in growth, malformations in limbs or other features (i.e., eyes, nose) and internal organs, as well as limited IQ and brain development resulting in mild to severe mental retardation. Similar birth defects result from prenatal exposure to drugs, such as “premature birth, low birth weight, decreased head circumference, or miscarriage,” difficulties with brain function and touch hypersensitivities in newborns (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.).

Prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol continues to impact the development of young children and adolescents. This may manifest itself in behavior problems, attention deficits, irritability, attachment disorders, depression, social isolation, challenges picking up on social cues and using appropriate social skills, accepting responsibility, and developing feelings of inadequacy. As infants, the effects of drugs and alcohol inhibit their responses to caregivers that contributed to bonding processes important in parent-child relationships. Conversely,

chemically-dependent caregivers may react negatively to the child resulting in abuse or neglect. Even in foster care or adoptive situations, these children face and pose challenges. As a non-biological or non-chemically-dependent caregiver, children exposed to substance abuse either prenatally or postnatally often experienced social, developmental and academic problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.). They may not react in the way a typical peer reacts; they were more likely to experience behavior problems, psychiatric disorders and depression or anxiety (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.). When these problems arise, changes in foster care settings often occurred exacerbating the child's feeling of inadequacy or failure (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.). The DHHS (2009) report explained that, when chemically-dependent caregivers remained in that role, the stability of the family was also compromised. During periods of drug or alcohol use, lack of supervision frequently resulted in risky behavior by the child or, at the very least, his/her basic needs not being met. As the child grew, he/she became increasingly aware that the parent was incapable of caring for the family or for him/herself personally. The DHHS report described a process called parentification. This phenomenon was described as a role reversal in which the child felt responsible for assuming the caretaker duty, and was made to feel as though he/she was responsible for the parent(s)'s plight, particularly if/when authorities became involved. In addition, the social stigma of having a family member, especially a caretaker, who suffered from chemical dependency could be a burden on the child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.). Explaining unusual behaviors, living conditions, unemployment, etc. may be too challenging or embarrassing, so the child isolated himself from peers or did not want friends at his home (U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, 2009, n.p.). This was supported in Phelan et al. (1998) as a potential barrier to transitioning successfully from one world to another.

The term “psychopathology” refers to the study of mental disorders, and the mental health of the parent or parents impacts the family dynamics as evidenced by Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gunn (2010). In their study of “fragile families”, they examined commonalities and differences in children living in single parent households and dual parent (co-habiting/non-married) households. Noting that the stability of the adult relationships was generally less in co-habiting couples as opposed to married couples, the stress levels tended to be increased. The increase of stress was associated with mental health complications, often resulting in behavior problems in children. They reported that depressive disorders “interfere with [an adult’s] ability to display good parenting skills” (Waldfogel et al., p. 5). They continued to describe relationships between family instability and behavior, where the children in unstable families “display more externalizing, attention, and social problems, and again find that these effects are mediated, at least in part, by mothers’ problematic mental health and harsh parenting” (Waldfogel et al., p. 12). Again, Phelan and associates (1998) cited family instability as a border creating obstacle to transitions.

### **School factors**

As the various factors have been explained, it is understandable that children facing seriously adverse conditions may also present with challenges in their academic achievement. Research on manifestations of maltreatment showed that children’s achievement “is significantly lower than that of youth who do not have a history of childhood maltreatment. Poor grades are evident among 33% of the maltreated group, compared with 23% in the

group who were not maltreated” (Kelley et al., 1997, p. 10). Results from the Rochester study showed that “students performing poorly in middle school are considered at increased risk for continued academic failure in high school, low aspirations, premature school dropout, and reduced education and economic opportunities” (Kelley et al., p. 10). Encouraging reports in Yonke’s (2001) research supported that resiliency is a very real construct as evidenced in “[s]tudents who begin high school with low or failing grades and low commitment or attachment to school, exhibit resilience when they persist in school, improve their academic performance, and graduate on time” (p. 2). Yonke found that “[t]he strongest link between a specific characteristic and student resiliency is the sense of efficacy evident” in the students studied (p. 106). According to Yonke, students reported that they “recovered because they made the decision to do so” (p. 106). They expressed the belief that they could change their situations if they chose to, that they possessed the ability to control their own lives, and that “they could overcome failure if they chose to, or if they worked hard enough” (Yonke, p. 106). In her conclusion, Yonke also added that students recognized the influence of positive relationships with school staff. Realizing the importance of the school factors in combination with the personal traits of the students has been shown to promote resiliency (Yonke, 2001).

Dorn (1996) studied the evolution of the social construction of high school dropouts and concluded, “education can serve as an instrument of intergenerational security and a buffer against downward mobility” (p. 27). Following the rise of adolescent attendance in high schools after World War II, more and more students became formally educated and, in turn, their children were more likely to attend and graduate from high school than students whose parents did not attend or graduate from high school. Dorn continued to explain that graduates were more likely to become homeowners and this gave them the advantage of

building equity against which they could borrow in difficult economic times. Heads of households who rented rather than owned homes did not have this luxury or protection when times were difficult (Dorn).

Student perception of school and the experiences of the educational setting contributed greatly to the decision to drop out of school. Gleason and Dynarski (2002) studied risk factors that were efficient in predicting whether a student would drop out of school. They found five categories established in literature from education, sociology and economics circles associated with dropping out of school: “demographic characteristics and family background, past school performance, personal/psychological characteristics, adult responsibilities and school or neighborhood characteristics” (p. 26). Further, “High absenteeism and being overage by 2 or more years were more efficient than other single risk factors” (p. 34), but Gleason and Dynarski advised caution about using either of these factors in isolation.

Combined with other factors, the influence of age appeared stronger, and the more factors involved, the more likely a student was to drop out (Frey, 2005; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). It is well established in the literature that grade retention or being overage, including delayed kindergarten entry, for grade level was cited as a powerful predictor of dropping out (Frey, 2005; Bennett, 1990; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Deschamps (1992) found that being retained once increased a student’s risk of dropping out by 40-50% and a second retention increased the probability to 90%. Even transitional programs that are frequently implemented in early elementary grades as a method of giving the student an extra year to mature are more likely to result in premature school leaving.

Anti-social or inappropriate behavior has been revealed to correlate with poor school

performance (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). It has been debated whether the challenges of the academic work precipitated the inappropriate behavior or the behavior interfered with the learning to a point where skills are missed and performance decreases. A student's failure to succeed behaviorally and academically influences one's decision to drop out of school.

Lewis and Sugai cited research suggesting that school practices such as "punitive disciplinary strategies, lack of clarity about rules, expectations, and consequences, lack of staff support, and failure to consider and accommodate individual differences" contributed to higher instances of anti-social behaviors (p. 2). When appropriate practices, those teaching and encouraging pro-social behavior, were in place, the likelihood of positively impacting the adolescent behavior increased. The authors cautioned that, without evidence-based intervention and prevention programs which teach and reinforce expected and appropriate beginning in elementary school and continuing through adolescence, the probability of changing serious behavior challenges diminished with each year. These challenges were exacerbated by "limited or inappropriate parent supervision," and "set up children and youth for school failure, dropping out of school and incarceration" (Lewis & Sugai, p. 2).

Kaplan et al. (2001) studied relationships between academic failure and dropping out of school. Beyond the surface, these researchers examined the underlying associations that may lead to academic failure. They found that, in addition to situations in which some students experienced failure in their academic performance, there were other influences that may have been related to their academic challenges. Kaplan et al. identified "self-rejection in a school context, absenteeism and truancy, and deviant school behavior" (p. 332). They postulated that individuals tend to associate with others who are like-minded or with whom they believe they have something in common. Students who drop out often have friends who

are not regular attenders. They may feel as though school does not have anything to offer them, or that they have no connections to school. If their friends are not at school, they often don't feel a need to attend (Rhodes & Brown, 1991).

Connections to school are often compromised by inappropriate behaviors resulting in attitudes about school as being punitive, unsupportive and uncaring places. (Lewis & Sugai, 1992). Students often cite teachers as being uninterested and disengaged with them academically (Kaplan, et al., 2001; Phelan, et al., 1998). Poor academic achievement was found to be a highly correlated school factor in dropping out (Deschamps, 1992; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Kaplan et al., 1997; Moore, 2010). Using observable characteristics as measures of predicting future success can be problematic as Gleason and Dynarski (2002) cautioned. Family and community dynamics are not static. A student's perception can alter his actions or reactions to outside stimuli, and "unobserved psychological factors may be important determinant of whether individuals drop out" (Gleason & Dynarski, p. 38).

Supportive school environments have been found to be a buffer against challenging home situations when the right conditions exist. "More than any institution except the family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency in today's youth and tomorrows adults" (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). It appeared that the school was a stabilizing force in the child's life amid the disruption a changing home situation might cause (Krovetz, 2008). Connections with school faculty seemed to have a positive influence on maintaining healthy adjustments and facilitated more positive outcomes (Rhodes & Brown, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992). When schools provided support groups, children were better adjusted. Children who had quality relationships with staff members or had a mentor performed better than those who had not established those supportive ties (Rhodes & Brown,



1991). As was noted previously, teen mothers experience unique challenges, and these can be mitigated by supportive school environments. Varlas (2011) found that, particularly for pregnant teens, accommodations such as “special desks, bathroom breaks, elevator use, and food” demonstrate to a teen mother that the school is interested in her success (p. 1). Many schools do not assign homework to students who are absent during pregnancy, thus putting them at risk of coming back six to eight weeks behind their peers. In addition, schools need to keep students in challenging curriculum demonstrating to them that they believe in their abilities (Varlas, 2011).

### **Individual/Peer factors**

When comparing and contrasting his life with “the other Wes Moore” with the same name, Wes Moore (2010), prefaced his writing with the following statement: “This book is meant to show how, for those of us who live in the most precarious of places in this country, our destinies can be determined by a single stumble down the wrong path, or a tentative step down the right one” (p. xiv). Moore explained that our lives are colored by choices we make, our level of accountability for our own actions, and the ways in which we respond to adversity. His book chronicles two lives, his own and the life of another Wes Moore, close in age, who grew up just a few blocks away with similar life experiences. Moore compared his critical incidents with those of his counterpart in this biography/autobiography, and analyzed the events that enabled him to have overcome the obstacles juxtaposed with the “other” Wes Moore whose life choices landed him in prison.

A positive identity, characterized by a sense of purpose and high personal aspirations, influenced outcomes for individuals in studies by Cameron et al. (2009). Self-efficacy arose

in feeling equipped to care for oneself, and strong beliefs and values as well as a sense of being able to contribute in a positive way for the greater good. Tensions in these areas impacted self-perception and generally influenced negative outcomes. Moore (2010) speculated, “early losses condition you to believe that short-term plans are always smarter” (p. 157). Cameron et al., 2009 found two predictors of resilience in children: good self-regulating skills and adults who cared deeply for them. “Understated in such resilience research is the critical role children and youths themselves play in reflecting upon their experiences and adapting” to their experiences (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 309). Unger (2011) reminded us that “universal access to education delays the age at which young women have their first child” (p. 1743).

A growing body of empirical research has drawn correlations between spirituality/religiosity and resilience. Werner and Smith (1984, 1996) identified these as resilience factors. Other researchers, including Crawford et al. (2006), Van Dyke and Elias (2007), and Pargament (1997) supported the contribution of religion and spirituality to resilience (Kim & Esquivel, 2011). It is believed that, in life situations where adversity poses challenges, having a sense of purpose in life is influential in overcoming those challenges. Kim and Esquivel (2011) noted that “the resilience literature identifies spirituality as one of the core characteristics of resilience in adolescents, because spiritual values serve to maintain an optimistic outlook on life and even help one find meaning in adverse situations” (p. 757). Werner and Smith (1992) revealed “[n]early half of the resilient women and one out of five among the resilient men relied on faith and prayer as an important source of support in times of difficulty” (p. 71), adding that this faith was not necessarily confined to a particular religious sect. In relational studies, positive associations existed between a sense of purpose

and pro-social behaviors. There was evidence that a sense of purpose in life is negatively associated with behavior problems and negative outcomes such as substance abuse and depression. Inverse relationships between spirituality and depression were found in research by Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001), as cited by Kim and Esquivel (2011).

Individual/peer factors impacting decisions to drop out of school include “pregnancy, getting married, low self-esteem, feeling a lack of control in their lives, and low occupational aspirations” (Deschamps, 1992, p. 24). As was suggested previously, teen pregnancy diminished the probability that a female will stay in school and graduate with peers. Deschamps (1982) revealed that 80% of “females who become pregnant in high school drop out” and that it “is the most common reason that females leave school” (p. 25). In an article published in ASCD’s Education Update entitled Fighting the Female Dropout Phenomenon, Vargas (Dec. 2011) found that 30% of girls become pregnant before they reach age 20, and that “almost half of female dropouts said becoming a parent was factor in dropping out” (p. 1). Moore (2010) reported that, in “Baltimore in 1991, 11.7 percent of girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen had given birth” (p. 100). Feeling penalized for their pregnancies, teen mothers cited “lack of transportation and child care, extended absences and other scheduling conflicts, juggling school work and parenting responsibilities, and discrimination from school faculty” posed barriers to their educational success (Vargas, 2011, p. 1).

Bennett (1990) reaffirmed challenges posed by teen mothers needing childcare, and noted that school children with children are less likely to drop out of school when daycare is possible while they attend. These women often had a renewed interest in doing well in school. They were preparing themselves now to support their babies; but, at the same time, they felt disconnected from school and perceived that no one at the school cared about them.

This is not to imply that teen mothers are not resilient. Having supportive options available to them could be a determining factor in how quickly they are able to experience positive outcomes (Vargas, 2011; Bennett, 1990).

It is difficult to establish the actual single causes for students leaving school. Research is conflicted on exact characteristics, but the general consensus seems to be “it depends.” For example, the compounded influence of the experiences a student has was more predictable than a single cause. Thus, someone coming from a low-income single parent family, with a history of behavior problems and having been retained in at least one grade had a greater likelihood of dropping out than someone with any one of these factors (Deschamps, 1992).

As Phelan et al. (1998) stated, “[W]e know a great deal about the manner in which peer groups, families, teachers and schools independently affect educational outcomes. However, we know relatively little about how aspects of these worlds combine in the day-to-day lives of adolescents” and how this influences their involvement with school and their perceptions of life (p. 3). It is important to understand how the interactions of these different domains support or hinder positive outcomes. Protective factors and risks are inherent in each of these worlds. The individual experiences buffers and challenges in the context of family, school, peer and self and, at the same time, these are encapsulated within the larger context of the socioeconomic community. How one transitions and understands norms and values is largely influenced by the range and types of experiences she encounters. Cultural knowledge is constructed from the experiences one has. Phelan et al. (1998) emphasized that even within a social context the individuals bring unique backgrounds and may experience the same situation in many different ways. Some youths may seem to transition easily from one setting

to another while other youths require more assistance to understand the nuances of other social settings. The ease of transition is manifested in resilience. (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998). By way of example, consider a child arriving at school with the expectations of attending in class, interacting respectfully with peers and adults, and acquiring the knowledge and skills from each lessons' objectives. On her mind this morning may be the fight she witnessed between her parents, the physical and mental anguish she may be experiencing from a recent sexual encounter or assault, the responsibility of getting herself to school because no one is at home, a caretaker who may be present yet not able to assist her in preparing for school, lack of adequate food or nutrition the evening before, or any other of a myriad of possibilities. What are the ways in which school environments assist students, or even gain knowledge about the experiences children and youths bring? It is imperative that we, as educators, attend to the needs and concerns that our students have. First, we must develop an understanding of their family dynamics, their peer group and the larger socio-economic communities in which they navigate, and then we can begin to aid in their border crossing to ease these transitions. Students' Multiple Worlds Model proposed by Phelan et al. (1998) provides a framework for understanding the interaction of these domains.

### **Resilience**

The research on resilience is extensive. Delving into the literature revealed the various disciplines from which resilience has been approached. Defining resilience can be challenging because operational definitions have differed (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Herrmann et al., 2011). This may be due in large part to the range of perspectives from which the resilience researchers have come: psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and even more recently from physio-medical disciplines and the neurosciences (Henderson & Milstein,

2003; Herrmann et al., 2011). Conceptualizations of this construct among the various disciplines have complicated the discussions in that disparity exists between the perspective of resilience as a type of personality trait versus a dynamic process (Herrmann et al., 2011). For the purposes of the current research, resilience refers to the ability to adapt positively to otherwise negative or adverse circumstances (Benard, 1991; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Herrmann et al., 2011; Krovetz, 2008; Rhodes & Brown, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992).

Determining the factors that tend to promote what researchers call “healthy adjustment” in spite of adversity, is an area that has been researched through extensive, in-depth and longitudinal studies of general populations (Benard, 1991; Krovetz, 2008; Rhodes & Brown, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). Other research on adjudicated individuals overcoming delinquent or illegal behaviors has revealed how positive outcomes can occur in spite of perceived negative influences (Rhodes & Brown, 1991).

“Resilience is a characteristic that varies from person to person and can grow or decline over time” according to Henderson and Milstein (2003, p. 8). It is a product of children’s, adolescents’ and adults’ coping mechanisms, as suggested by Werner and Smith (1989), and the influence of their environment. Research is not clear exactly how these coping patterns are influenced by each situation or by their personalities, but this is an area that warrants further study. When researchers and educators understand the interrelationship between specific incidents and how individuals “critique” or interpret these events, educators may have greater insight into how both internal (personality traits) and external (environmental influences) factors work together to develop resilient tendencies.

Studies of coping patterns inherent in the Kauai Study have provided insight through the stories told by the vulnerable yet resilient individuals themselves. In doing so, Werner and Smith (1989) introduced “a model that shows the interrelationship between risk factors and stressful life events that increased vulnerability on the one hand, and protective factors within the child and the caregiving environment that increased stress resistance, on the other” (p. 7). Acknowledging that resilience is relative to the internal strengths one possesses and the protective factors that exist within the child’s family, community, school and peer group, the dynamic interaction among these elements collectively promote positive outcomes (Benard, 1991, Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). How one person may respond to a specific experience could differ dramatically from the way in which another may respond in the same set of circumstances is influenced by the coping patterns and the support systems in place for an individual (Krovetz, 2008). Werner (1992) noted, “at each developmental stage, there is a shifting balance between the stressful life events that heighten children’s vulnerability and the protective factors that enhance their resilience” (p. 13). Thus, it is important to consider how different stages of maturation influenced the interpretation of these events and from where they perceived their supports came.

In reviewing the Kauai Study participants, Werner (1989) identified various themes from the case studies. Werner noted that, among the different themes that emerged, the greatest disparity was discovered in goals that these individuals had set for themselves. For the resilient men and women, the highest priority was on career or success in their jobs, but for the vulnerable population this was the lowest priority. Resilient adults considered that their greatest support came from within themselves, and identified their own competence and determination as a key factor in dealing with challenging situations. Conversely, peers with

coping problems in adolescents relied heavily on friends and members of their family in times of stress (Werner, 1992).

Rhodes and Brown (1991) found that childhood experiences can have profound effects on adult functioning, and children and adolescents with strong effective coping patterns continue those into adulthood. They also emphasized the influence of environmental factors in helping youths develop those resilient traits. As they pointed out, some children do thrive, even under the most adverse conditions. While their focus has been primarily on positive outcomes from a population in the juvenile justice system, this is an interesting body of research. Although the “number of types of resilient childhood populations that have undergone investigation is limited” it sheds light on how they have overcome the odds (p. 3). For this study, I determined that it would be useful to look at situations in which children/adolescents were theoretically predisposed to succumbing to failure but who did not rather than study those who did and speculate why. In this way, we can proceed proactively with supports and interventions to beat the odds.

Rhodes and Brown (1991) noted “resilient adolescents have better verbal communication skills than those who succumb to stress” (p. 70). Families with healthy communication patterns also tended to promote better coping skills even under circumstances categorized as high risk. Some socially inappropriate behaviors are also described as acting out behaviors (i.e., argumentation, defiance), such as what Dugan (as cited in Rhodes & Brown, 1991, p. 70) called an “indicator of hope and potential for success in the face of adversity.”

According to Yonke (2001), a study of resilience reveals processes for how vulnerable individuals have overcome the barriers in their lives, and offers insight to how



intervention efforts can be designed in order to help others develop resilience. It is imperative that we examine what works and implement educational practices that promote resiliency traits. Caution should be exercised, warned McLaren (2007), about defining too narrowly what success, particularly academic success, looks like. Schools should function as agents of democracy “dedicated to forms of self- and social empowerment” (McLaren, p. 252).

The Bush Administration legislated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with its mandatory practices and sanctions. The leap taken was that education alone could change the social ills. McLaren (2007) criticized NCLB as almost exclusively addressing capitalism at the expense of societal equitability and social justice. Attempts to reduce oppression have been largely unattended. McLaren further dissected modern day oppression as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence, and acknowledged that, while this has become less overt than in colonial times, oppression is certainly just as prevalent. More regulation of academic standards and development of the Common Core curriculum does not change the social structure or reduce the immediate barriers which exist in our young children and adolescent’s environment (McLaren). McLaren (2007) suggested that raising academic expectations through a more rigorous curriculum without addressing the social structure may be difficult. Expecting higher achievement without attending to the challenging social aspects inherent in the areas community, family, school and peer/individual factors mirror conflict theory, which will be addressed in the next section. A description of emancipatory curricula is provided and discussed in a later section on how school leaders can facilitate educational empowerment.

A longitudinal study was conducted from 1997-2001 by the Search Institute that involved a total sample of over 4,800 adolescents. The purpose was to identify what “positive

experiences, opportunities, relationships, and personal qualities” seem to have the most influence on adolescents’ lives and the choices they make (Roehlkepartain, Benson, & Sesma, 2003, p. 9). The California Department of Education has endorsed the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets as a measure of resilience or as an indicator of working toward more resilient tendencies. A meta-analysis of the research on resilience categorized assets as either internal or external, which can be nurtured by families and schools. These have been selected as qualities that promote healthy developmental outcomes. While the Search Institute identified 40 specific assets, the resilience research found three basic “principles that protect student from risk and help them succeed: caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for participation and contribution” (California Department of Education, 2011, p. 1). Again, it is important to note the ways in which the student’s experience in her multiple “worlds” influences perception. This is a focus of the next section.

### **The Educational Realm and Students’ Multiple Worlds**

The social construct of schooling presents a unique context for the ways in which education plays a role in either mediating or exacerbating the chasms between the “haves” and the “have nots” (Bennett, 1990). Schools must be prepared to ease the transitions between students’ home “worlds” and the school “world.” The ways in which an adolescent navigates in her home environment and the values and beliefs of her family may differ dramatically from the values and beliefs of her peer group and, yet again, from the values and expectations of the school. McLaren (2007) extended research regarding the potential of schools to level the playing field. At the same time, he acknowledged, the reality of educational institutions to inadvertently establish barriers in the educational process for some students. Bennett (1990) emphasized that “turf wars” often occur when “student and adult

participants articulate [interact] with school differently because the interests which link them to school differ so much” (p. 245). American children are educated, “ostensibly to add to their store of cultural capital. However, in the exchange of cultural capital, working class children find that their stock is undervalued” because schools “embody the values and ideals—the cultural capital—of the middle and upper class” (Bennett, p. 17). They are often regarded as less intelligent and placed in programs and classes to “remediate” them. (Bennett). When the culture of the school or of education does not keep up with changes in the social culture of the students the likelihood increases that students will view school as irrelevant, resulting in conflict (Bennett).

Recognizing that conflict within families and between family and other social agencies such as school, family relationships have also been studied to understand outcomes. Schlomer, Ellis, and Garber (2010) acknowledged the existing research on parent-child relationships and noted associations between “various indicators of child functioning” including academic achievement, risk of pregnancy and substance use/abuse (p. 287). Scholmer et al. (2010) revealed the dynamics unique to parent-child relationships and the power struggle between siblings with the same parents, acknowledging that the more siblings, the greater the conflict because of the divergent “fitness interests” and the degree to which each family member is related to the other. The implication is that conflict will arise over the amount of investments each child is allocated in multi-sibling families. Schlomer et al. (2010) explained that, while mathematics and genetics support the closer ties one child has with his/her parents that the same child has with any one of his/her siblings, there is a basic need for what the authors’ term “parental investment.” The struggle for parental investment can result in one sibling monopolizing the parent’s attention (investment) and one

or a group of siblings receiving less than an equal share of the investment. According to the theory, parental disruption occurs when influences on investment occur in unwillingness or inability to “invest time, energy and resources in their children” (Schlomer et al., p. 289). It follows that the perception the child has of her value or position in the family might influence her transition in other settings.

Examining how an individual conceptualizes the world around him would not be complete without an understanding of how children organize their thinking (Brainerd, 1996). Under Piaget’s constructivist premise that “much of learning originates from inside the child,” it is important to study the nature of how knowledge is acquired by observing children in their natural settings and asking them to explain their thinking (Kamii & Ewing, 1996, p. 260). Through his extensive research, Piaget supported the theory that “children actively construct their knowledge and understanding” (Santrock, 2001, p. 49). The cognitive processes rely on schema—“a concept or framework that exists in an individual’s mind to organize and interpret information” (Santrock, 2001, p. 49). Schema is used and adapted by two processes: assimilation and accommodation (Block, 1982; Moshman, et al., 1987; Santrock, 2001). Piaget defined *assimilation* as new knowledge being incorporated into existing knowledge and *accommodation* as the cognitive adjustment to the new information (Santrock, 2001; Moshman et al., 1987). According to Piaget’s constructivist theories, as children and adolescents continue to construct new knowledge disequilibrium occurs when the child’s thinking challenges schema. In this state, the child experiences an “imbalance or inconsistency in his/her knowledge” (Moshman et al., 1978). Eventual “construction of better-organized and better-adapted new schema resolves disequilibrium and “restores

equilibrium” (Moshman, et al., 1987). Thus, cognitive processes are inherent in the transitions one makes from one world to another.

### **What Can Leaders/Educators Do to Create Conditions That Directly or Indirectly Influence Positive Transitions and Outcomes?**

McLaren (2007) emphasized that educators must create climates that promote opportunities for growth. Challenging schools and teachers to rethink current pedagogy and, instead of furthering the conventions of “legitimate[ed] shared assumptions,” we should establish classrooms that excavate deeply entrenched beliefs of society (McLaren, p. 254). Policy makers and educators must redesign curricula to engage students and enhance learning for all students (McLaren). We must also consider how the many worlds an individual transitions among influences her perception, and that the socioeconomic context is the broader world in which each of us lives and navigates (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).

Even though closing the opportunity gap among low income and minority students has become a national focus and strides have been made, disparity still exists and must be addressed (Allen, 2012). Furthermore, citing the research of Boyken and Noguera, Allen (2012) identified areas that have been found to contribute positively to achievement: increasing student engagement, strengthening student self-efficacy, goal setting and self-improvement, building a positive classroom, helping children prioritize mental effort, and knowing/making positive connections with every child. It is with this lens that an examination of the conditions should be conducted in order to promote a culture of learning and growing within our young children and adolescents. Ongoing professional development is a vehicle for educators to open doors of understanding to the influence of the various domains from which our students come. We must acknowledge the importance of their

experiences in how they transition from the outside-of-school settings to the school or classroom environment (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).

What can school and educators do to promote resilience? What protective factors have been found to enhance positive outcomes for students at risk? The California Department of Education (2011) has published recommendations for schools in relation to promoting resilience in students. The report stressed the importance of having high expectations for every student and ensuring that supports are in place to build and sustain that culture of excellence. High expectations included both academic expectations and behavioral expectations. (California Department of Education). Learning and practicing social and behavioral norms are essential to acquiring positive outcomes. The report shared that “schools that foster high expectations, caring, and meaningful participation also have lower rates of problem behaviors (such as dropping out, alcohol and other drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and delinquency) than other schools do” (California Department of Education, 2011, p. 2).

Tatum (2009) emphasized the importance of high quality instruction. Inadequately prepared and inexperienced teachers can place students at risk in schools that have other supports in place outside of school (Tatum, 2009, n.p). Schools with high quality instruction and whose staff communicated high expectations, believed in student success, and fostered caring relationships with students were found to have students who had greater aspirations, more positive outlooks on life, and higher levels of self-efficacy (Benard, 1991; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Krovetz, 2008;). Bennett (1990) cited McLaren’s work with a critical pedagogy advocating that schools “promote empowerment of subordinated and marginalized groups within society” (p. 174). The structure and

organization of these schools was essential. Instruction was focused on learning styles of the students, based on a guaranteed and viable curriculum, created “ongoing opportunities for self-reflection, critical inquiry, problem-solving, and dialogue” (California Department of Education, 2011, p. 2). Beaulieu, Israel, Hartless, and Dyk (2001) revealed that, in the work force, problem-solving skills, a quality education and expertise in technology are also associated with securing “decent jobs with generous and growing compensation” (p. 121). It was found that a lack of these skills resulted in declining wages and/or an inability to secure steady employment. Self-discipline was revealed to be a key asset in positive outcomes. This was found to be more important than IQ, and lack of self-discipline resulted in “students falling short of their intellectual potential” (California Department of Education, 2011, p. 2).

Categories with a research base for preventing dropping out of school were an emphasis in McPartland and Slavin’s (1990) work. The components identified were: “student success in school, positive student/adult relationships, relevance of school, and outside interferences” (p. 26). Ensuring student success came in the form of interventions, remedial classes, supplemental instruction and credit recovery. Establishing caring relationships between staff and students through mentoring, looping practices, and advisor/advisee programs were identified as successful in reducing drop out rates. Courses that make transparent the real-world application have a greater likelihood of attracting and retaining students. College credit options, dual enrollment and/or Post Secondary Educational Opportunity (PSEO) course offerings at the high school level retain more students. Finally, mitigating the effects of outside interferences (such as home environments that are neglectful or abusive, gang membership, substance abuse) through partnerships with outside agencies have been effective (McPartland & Slavin, 1990).

Arguing that raising the level of educational performance is not solely the responsibility of the school, Beaulieu and associates (2001) directed the home and the community to become equal partners in this endeavor to raise the academic level of our nation's students. Found in families, schools and communities, social capital is a vehicle for enriching networks and opportunities available to an individual. The higher the social capital and the more diverse opportunities that are available, the greater the benefit to students, and ultimately to our schools and communities. Phelan et al. (1998) emphasized the importance of embracing the diversity among the students in our schools and the families in our communities and using these as building blocks to enhance cultural opportunities and to enrich lives.

McLaren (2007) took a similar pedagogical stance and emphasized a focus on student experience which, he stated, "is intimately related to identity formation" and as educators we must "learn how to understand, affirm and analyze such experience" (p. 241). He insisted we must make learning meaningful to students, which is not a new concept. However, the avenue to achieving learning is to give voice to the students and allow them to analyze and critique in order to assimilate and move toward a new equilibrium. As an educational system, we present an authoritative discourse delivering content we believe students need to know and from the perspective that aligns with white middle-class ideology. In doing so, we unwittingly dismiss the perspectives and experiences of students whose experience is not that of white middle-class as erroneous, irrelevant, or without merit. If our goal truly is to engage students, then we must do so through a system that does not devalue their experiences. We must instead encourage them to "tell their stories," as McLaren urged, and help them become critical of all viewpoints. It is a shift from tradition, the teacher voice "reflect[ing] the values,



ideologies, and structuring principles that teachers use to understand and mediate the histories, cultures, and subjectivities of their students” to the student voice which encourages the interaction of experiences and perceptions in order to minimize oppression and enable individuals to see the virtues in another’s perspective (p. 245). In this way, a movement toward a more social democracy can develop. In a socialist democracy, schools encourage self-empowerment and social empowerment. McLaren asserted that it is imperative that we redirect our aims of education toward more social responsibility. “While it is probably true that schools cannot *remake* society, they must find better ways of making themselves vital places for all students—places where students can be empowered to gain a sense of control over their destinies rather than feel trapped by their class position” (McLaren, p. 176). Educators must understand how critical their role is to providing opportunities for all students. Through studies of individuals and their struggles and accomplishments we might create environments where all students thrive.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For my research, understanding how the separate worlds of an individual’s life were inter-related, as in the Students’ Multiple Worlds Model, was the guiding premise or set of assumptions in which the research was grounded. In order to demonstrate this model, I reconstructed the Students’ Multiple Worlds model from Phelan, Davidson and Yu (1998), which shows how the interaction of the various factors in a person’s life influence his/her perceptions and play a role in how the person responds in different situations. In Figure 2.1, I introduce the relationship of multiple worlds and resilience-building influences by incorporating the ways in which incidents may be interpreted by an individual, based on

experiences in each of these domains. The Multiple Worlds Resiliency model emphasizes that transition experiences between and among each context influences how one perceives her world and, in turn, how the individual consciously or unconsciously responds in subsequent contexts. Phelan et al. define “worlds” as the cultural aspects of a specific group. While these include “visible aspects and artifacts of a particular group (i.e., food, clothing, housing, implements, and so forth), it also refers to people’s values and beliefs, expectations, actions and interactions, as well as the meanings people construct about what is appropriate, inappropriate, normative, and aberrant” (Phelan et al., 1998, p. 7).

The Students’ Multiple Worlds Model (Phelan, et al. 1998) addresses domains similar to the resiliency model described by Henderson and Milstein (2003) which depicts how one responds to adversity due to the protective factors already in place. The existing research on resiliency identifies the protective factors, or supports, that exist in each of the various domains, community, school, family and peer/individual, and act as a buffer to challenges that an individual meets in his or her life. The supports or buffers mitigated the influence of the challenges a person encounters and assists in building strength or problem solving skills to meet or overcome these challenges (Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). According to Henderson and Milstein (2003) “[w]ith enough ‘protection,’ the individual adapts to that adversity without experiencing a significant disruption in his or her life” (p. 5). As an example, protection or support may be the influence of one adult who cares deeply for this child (Benard, 1991; Rhodes & Brown, 1991). Resilience is increased through the development of coping strategies and emotional strength. However, if the individual lacks adequate buffering factors, stressors or challenges may negatively influence how he or she rebounds (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Stressors may come in the form of divorce or family

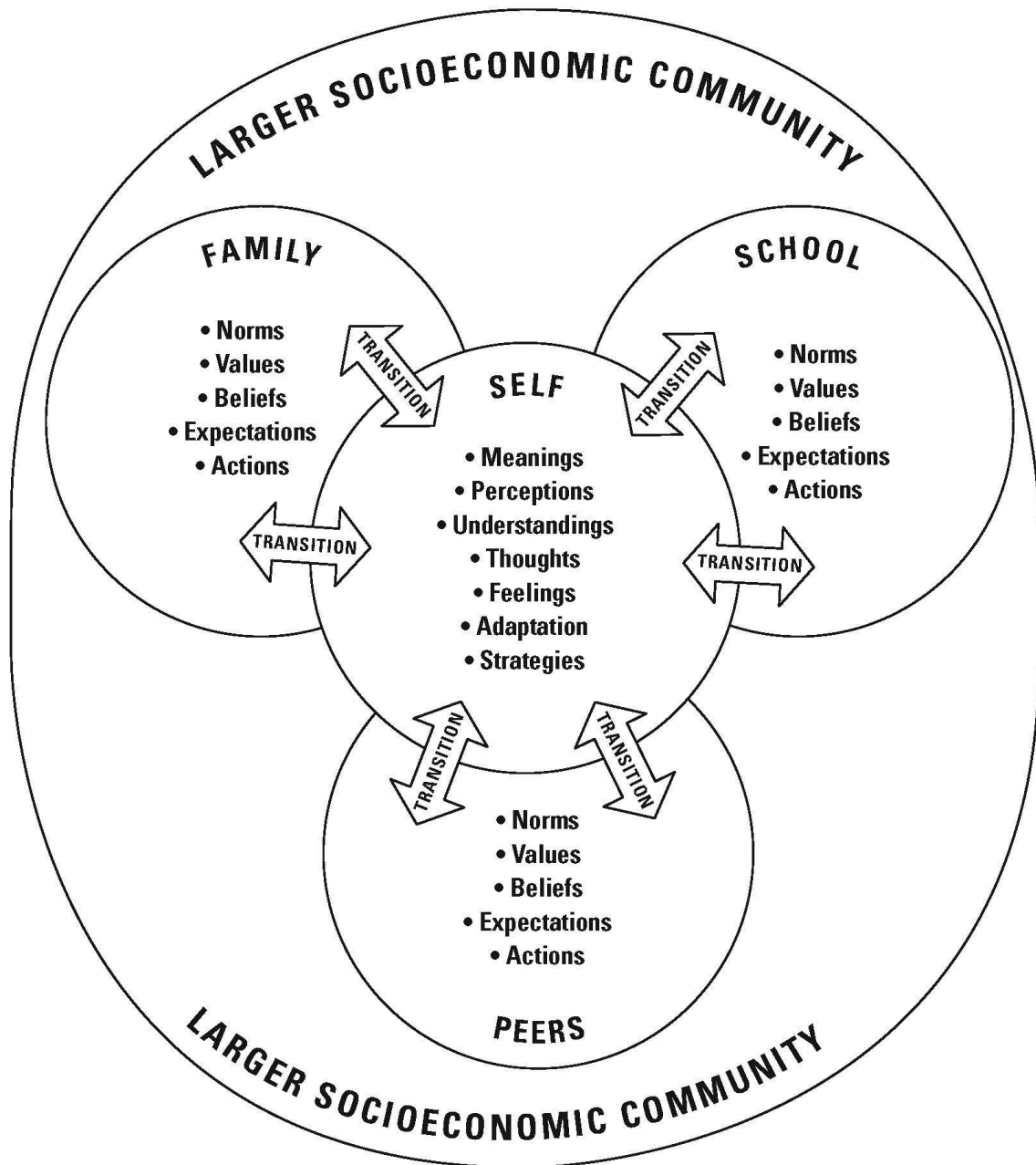


Figure 2.1. Multiple Worlds Resiliency model. (Adapted from Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998))

separation, financial difficulty, family discord, declining health or death of a family member

significant in the child's life, academic or social difficulties (Rhodes & Brown, 1991).

While the Resiliency Model from Henderson and Milstein (2003) addresses how adversity may be approached, it does not adequately account for the holistic view of the interaction between and among the various factors at work for us and within us as we encounter critical incidents. Therefore, I have adapted the Students' Multiple Worlds Model to include components of the Resiliency Model in order to include the ways in which experiences inherent in one woman's life have played a role in her resilience. In the Resiliency Model interactions may be influenced by different ways each particular domain provides support in positive life experiences or exacerbates negative situations. Using both The Resiliency Model and The Students' Multiple Worlds Model provide greater conceptual understanding of resiliency and how it develops. Through my research I have revealed how one woman navigated the various challenges in her childhood and adolescence and, through these experiences, developed a resilience that has supported her as an adult. Information gleaned from this woman's experience may provide insight to educators as to the critical incidents that today's students may encounter and the variety of sources that influence children. Additionally, my research will offer suggestions for school administrators and teachers for enhancing supports to all students, but particularly for those students at risk of academic failure.

### **Summary**

This chapter identified the four major influences found in the literature that are associated with the development of resilience (Benard, 1991; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). While there is some variation from one researcher to another regarding the specific factors that may promote or inhibit resilience, the literature categorizes

these characteristics into the four larger concepts: community, family, school and individual/peer.

I have introduced the Students' Multiple Worlds model and adapted it to include the ways in which resilience may be constructed based on a resiliency model offered by Henderson and Milstein (2003). I believe that by taking into account the contexts in which students interact as well as the levels of support they encounter in each arena this may offer insight into another avenue for developing resilience. The adapted model not only discusses the influence of the four domains (community, family, school and individual/peer) but also takes into account the challenges that often occur between two or more of these domains and the borders that may be constructed through the incongruencies that may exist. This conflict may also pose new challenges as one must consider the importance of the various factors in his or her life. Realizing that she must co-exist in various contexts such as within the community, as part of a family, or with peers in school or work, there may be new obstacles that ultimately influence one's resilience. In the following chapter, I introduce case study as a research methodology and design from which to understand further how resilience is acquired.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### Case Study as a Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences in one woman's life in order to better understand how resilience played out in her early childhood and adolescence. A qualitative approach to research gains inside information to the experience and in doing so the observer must become part of the study. Studying phenomena "in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" is the goal of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The researcher in a qualitative study has been termed by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) a "bricoleur, as a maker of quilts or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages" (p. 4). As a researcher, this approach challenged me to delve deeply into the personal experiences the participant brought to the dialogue and to look for patterns, themes, and connections. Taking these "quilt blocks" I needed to weave them together to create a whole, give voice to the participant's lived experiences, and fashion new learning from what had been shared.

The actor is constantly seeking understanding about his or her life and, at the same time, being influenced by internal and external forces informs this methodology. Case study was the method I chose for authentic exploration of the myriad of experiences—traumatic events as well as incidental events—that can and do occur in one's lifetime. As continually evolving beings, we are always searching for meaning. It is through this search and our need to make sense of all that is around us that life is dynamic and ever-changing. Bennett (1990) wrote about the "reflexive, reciprocal nature of human behavior as people 'work at' constructing reality around them" (p. 173). Recalling that making sense of the world, rather than conflict is the goal, these events enter our lives, many times without warning, and

influence us in ways difficult to understand, even in retrospect. Whether positive or negative, critical incidents influence how we perceive the world or ourselves in different ways (Bennett). Often the distance that time provides us and genuine reflection helps us see a clearer picture than is possible at the time. We can often go back in our mind's eye and recall the filters or the possible supports that either mediated risk or left us vulnerable with more clarity that we had at the time. We might now be able to more accurately identify the resilience factors inherent in community, family, school and individual/peer characteristics (as depicted in Figure 2.1) interacting with the critical incidents that brought us to where we are. For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to see things from the perspective of the participant in the study.

Bloom (1998) advocated for a better understanding of lived experiences through narratives exposing the “complexities, confusions, and indeterminacies of lived reality” (p. 67). Although there are various types of narratives, Bloom suggested that, whatever the approach, it is imperative that the writing should convey the nature of the experience with the range of human emotions and portrayed in a manner in which it can be visualized. In dealing with life's realities, one must deal with power and control (Bloom). Case study is one method of conveying that lived reality.

McLeod (2008) described case studies as “in-depth investigations of a single person, group, event or community” (p. 1) Originating in clinical medicine, this method involves observation of or gather historical information in an effort to reconstruct a case history of an individual or group. Allowing rich detailed investigations, the case study provides a method of exploration and representation in qualitative as well as quantitative research. In this approach, case study allows the researcher to place the person or group in context, socially

and culturally. In this qualitative work, the decision about the topic of study was purposeful—the intent to explore knowledge that might significantly influence educational practice and improve the outcomes for our students (Mirriam, 2002). Through my work on resilience, audiences might recognize more similarities than differences, more strengths than weaknesses, and develop more admiration for those around them. Yin (1994) proposed that case study is an appropriate methodology “when the research goal is to describe the incidence or prevalence of a phenomenon or when it is to be predictive about certain outcomes” (p. 6). Further, case study can be used effectively to answer “how” and “why” questions. (Yin, 1994).

Qualitative case study involves the outsider immersing herself or himself into the life and culture of the individual or group being studied with the purpose of extracting the soul or essence of that life and world-view. As the researcher, I developed a rapport with Jackie, and gained access to her experiences through my interviews and her reflections and willingness to share these memories.

As I was in the beginning stages of this study, I began research on the topic of resilience. As noted in Chapter 1, resilience has long been a fascination of mine, beginning with my experience as a classroom teacher. In a conversation, I discovered purely by accident that the connections that Jackie had in her adolescence mirrored the findings I had been reading about in the literature that influenced individuals’ K-12 school perceptions. I became immediately intrigued by some stories she told of her teenage years, and I quickly pursued the idea of this study with a single participant, focusing on her life story in an effort to understand how resilience played a role in her school experiences. We embarked on what would become an intimate dialogue about her memories of childhood and adolescence. As



we talked, I (audio) recorded our conversations, transcribed this dialogue and studied this data for themes. Throughout the process, I reflected on her messages, developed new questions for her, invited her reactions to my writing, and eventually transformed her recollections into a portrait of her life.

Maxwell (1996) noted that in qualitative research information gained and decisions about participants are made by a strategy called purposeful sampling, meaning “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 70). In this case, my purpose was to understand how certain protective factors influenced Jackie and her resilience played a role in overcoming the challenges of community, family, school, and individual/peer factors. Information from Jackie about how these buffers mitigated challenges in her K-12 school experiences could be explored through a study of this woman’s memories, reflections and personal interpretations of her life’s events. Additionally, Maxwell explained that the researcher is not only collecting information on the person, but also on the “settings, events, and processes” inherent in the individual’s interpretation and perseverance (p. 69). Through open-ended questions designed specifically for the interviews, our conversations and member-checking, it was my challenge to interpret the experiences of this individual for the influences her personal experiences exerted on her perceptions of life and how this personal sense-making was played out in her current life situation. The interpretation of these various circumstances and the ways in which she responded to challenges and opportunities have illuminated for her the perception of life she holds.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described the importance of the researcher’s personal experiences in researching and representing another’s experience. Similarly,

Miriam (2002) described the perspective of the reader as essential to meaning-making. “Case researchers, like others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationship—and fail to pass along others. They know that the reader, too, will add and subtract, invent and shape—reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it . . . more likely to be personally useful” (p. 179). Viewing the individual as an entity being influenced by various factors in his or her life is analogous to a young tree being acted upon by forces of nature, wind, rain, temperature and sunlight. The sapling has its roots in the soil and this is where its life begins. The nutrients in the soil coupled with the moisture received and the moderating effects of the temperature and adequate sunlight determine the stability with which the tree will grow. Over time and across seasons, the tree is exposed to harsh situations that impact the tree’s growth. When rings of a tree are examined, scientists tell us we can determine what the year was like in terms of moisture. No two trees are alike in how they respond to changes, but the scars on the bark and the unusual figurations give us insight as to the positive and negative forces at work.

Likewise, school leaders see how life events often challenge students. Educators have observed the interactions of academic programming, peer/adult relationships at school and having some [however] limited information about family situations, these factors have an influence on student achievement and social development. It is important to acknowledge that, unlike the young tree, a human being has the ability to choose how he/she will accept or reject challenges, conform to conflict or redesign perceptions and ways of knowing. To the extent that supports or buffers exist in the child’s life, he or she may be able to overcome adversity, drawing from previous experiences and enhancing opportunities for developing resilience to achieve positive outcomes. School leaders can use this information to structure

educational settings that are conducive to positive experiences, and which ultimately mitigate the influences of negative experiences. With an understanding of how an individual faces challenges and the supports used to address adversity, educators might be better able to understand how children and adolescents respond to situations in order to pursue positive outcomes.

Throughout this research process, I made every attempt to represent my participant's life experiences in its most real form. Using her words, her descriptions and her memories, I transcribed her life into the written word, giving her voice. It was imperative that an understanding of my theoretical perspective included the experiences and background which imprinted how I make sense of the world along with the theory and research that has been published on this phenomenon called resilience. Making transparent the researcher's perspective is essential to qualitative research, both for the purpose of acknowledging bias and so that others may interpret for themselves how this research may be used in other contexts.

### **Researcher Positionality**

When preparing to conduct this study, I immersed myself in the research surrounding resilience and the influences and characteristics of resilience. I also invested time in reflecting upon my own personal experiences with and in relation to resilience. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis called this "personal context: the researcher's perch and perspective" (p.66). They argued that it is important to first reflect on how the researcher's experiences will impact the work and to clarify personal assumptions and expectations. They added that clarifying this for the reader alerts the audience about the researcher's "personal journey" and demonstrates how the "physical journey" in the research may resonate with the actors in

portraiture and eventually with the audience (p. 67). I hold a flavor of portraiture in this work. Recognizing the importance of personal experiences in interpretation, I have provided a snapshot of my own life experiences that have influenced my world view and my research.

As a youth, having lost my mother at age five to an inoperable brain tumor in the early 1960s and experiencing my father's remarriage two years later, my closest ties were with my paternal grandparents, who lived just a mile down the road from where we lived in rural southern Iowa. My full biological brother (two years younger than I) and three half-brothers (ten, twelve and fourteen years younger) eventually completed the family. My relationship with my father was very rocky, and I recall few happy moments with him that might otherwise have colored the relationship I had then or have today. I say this only to be transparent about my life and how it influences my work here, not to evoke any emotion from the reader. A personal tension was manifested in childhood and adolescence, as each stage of my life seemed to be in two different worlds, my cultural knowledge related to the setting in which I operated. I always felt valued and loved in the presence of my grandparents and my brothers, my aunt and uncle and cousins but, when my father was present, this love was smothered by the concern that I needed to be on constant alert. His behavior was unpredictable, and his moods were difficult to interpret. As a result, it was not until I became an adult and moved out of my childhood home, that I was finally able to put into perspective what I thought others experienced compared to my own experiences. My recollections of childhood and adolescence once I became an adult continued to become important as I raised my own children.

Although many years have passed, as I reflect on my own transitions between and among "worlds," it seems that I carefully segregated the different domains. I believe my

teachers and my school knew very little about my home life. To my knowledge, my parents rarely communicated with school except through report cards and parent-teacher conferences. I was careful not to share with teachers or even peers about my strained relationship with my father. I believe my closet friends had their own interpretations of my paternal relationship from their own observations either after school musical performances or on the occasion that they spent the night at my house. I carefully guarded conversation with my grandparents, too. They would have observed many situations of strained relationships, and it was only as an adult that my grandma confided, “I wish I could have helped you more.” As we talked then, about some situations of physical aggression, she was upset at the thought that she suspected as much but did not see it, and admitted that “people just didn’t get involved then.” I knew what was expected of me at school and it was easy to comply. At home, I thought the expectations were clear, but there were times when I felt I was reprimanded for things beyond my control or and other times I didn’t even know why I was punished. My father was always in charge of punishment, and it was only later that I began to understand that these experiences might have been influenced by some mental health challenges my father experienced.

Ensuring that I could end the cycle of physical and emotional abuse and creating a healthy parent child relationship with my own children were foremost in my mind as an adult. As I conversed with Jackie in this research, I was mindful of the similarities and differences in our experiences, especially in light of the fact that she and I are the same age. I found myself frequently mentally mapping my experiences against hers, and I would often generate new questions to understand how her interpretations might differ from mine.

At school, I was more at ease and developed very close friendships. My high school

graduating class numbered 38 and, almost as many years later, we still keep in contact and look forward to class reunions. I excelled in school, not necessarily because I had an exceptionally high IQ, but because I feared the repercussions of my father should my report card have anything lower than a B, or should he get a call from school about inappropriate behavior. I do not recall ever having a teacher redirect me on anything, nor was I ever called to the principal's office. My school district had less than a 1% minority rate throughout my K-12 years. I believe there were very few, if any, families of wealth. Most of us were probably middle class, while others were at poverty level or what today is classified as low SES. I considered myself part of the middle class, likely because I didn't really realize the differences that may have been between my family's situation and those of my friends. Jackie related some of these same experiences—few minority students in her school, most families living at or slightly above the low income level, and the ability to achieve academically and opportunities to participate in school activities.

I suspect that, had public policies such as those making students eligible for free/reduced lunch been in place, my parents might have qualified. My grandparents owned considerable amounts of land, and my father farmed this land with my grandfather. My father rented a farm with a house where I grew up, but he never owned his own home. He continued farming for a few years after my grandfather passed away, then divorced my step-mother and moved to Arizona when I was about 28 years old. I have shared this information about my background in order to establish how my experiences may have influenced my work with Jackie as well as in interpreting her experiences. It was important that I was cognizant of situations where I might need to consciously remove my emotion from Jackie's descriptions. Unlike my experience, Jackie's parents have continued to stay married. While her family

experienced the death of a child prior to her birth, she has not personally experienced the death of any member of her immediate family, or of separation or divorce of her parents.

In spite of the challenging relationship with my father, my outlook on life was always optimistic. For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be an educator. I played school as a child and tried diligently to get the farm cats to be my students. They were only marginally cooperative in this role. My father tried vehemently to discourage me from my career goal, although it was an expectation that I go to college. He tried, without success, to push me toward optometry as a profession. His view was that this was a clean, professional environment that, in his mind, garnered admiration and prestige. As I entered junior college pursuing a degree in elementary education, he verbally disowned me for reasons I could now attribute to his own personal struggles. Jackie described her relationship with her father as one of respect. She commented on many occasions that she valued her father's attention and advice, and his belief in her influenced her belief in herself.

I was married for 29 years and faced many challenges but, despite the broken relationship (and subsequent divorce) between my husband and me, I loved life, my husband, our children, and the family we had made together. Our extended family was extremely supportive. I loved my job and enjoyed the people with whom I worked. I have acquired degrees in school administration, and am pleased to have been given opportunities in various districts to serve as a teacher and as an administrator. I believe that I have been successful, and I acknowledge that the experiences and personal challenges in my life have left an impression on me and have influenced my perception of the world. When I recall the myriad of memories I have of my life, now well over fifty years' worth of them, I think in somewhat of a matter-of-fact fashion that, although these experiences really are unique to me, each of

us has similar kinds of episodes in life that both challenge our mental and physical strength and those that excite and invigorate an individual to move forward. In my professional life, I have witnessed the challenges some students face in their school experiences. While I could never really know about the adversity outside of the school day, I have observed the struggles many students faced in learning. It was my privilege to celebrate with them each time they mastered a skill. Likewise, when they faced adversity at school, it was my charge to determine how I might become a support and provide the necessary scaffolding to assist them in overcoming these challenges. It is with the influence of my family and friends, as a child and as an adult, and my work and professional experiences that I have approached this work in resilience, and because of this background the intensity with which I approach this work has moved me forward.

### **Data Collection**

This study examined the life experiences of one woman and how her resilience played a role in overcoming or not overcoming the obstacles in her life. To attend to this purpose, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (see Appendix A) in order to facilitate greater flexibility in gaining information and an understand of how her experience in one “world” may have influenced her experiences in another.

Several years ago, I had worked with a group of teachers who were interested in what influenced that particular district’s at-risk students. Together we generated some survey questions to gather information from this group of students. We were able to garner information at that time that assisted us in making some adjustments in their programming and how they were mentored by faculty.



When preparing for this research on resilience, I developed similar questions and added new ones as I immersed myself in the literature on risk and resilience, making every attempt to design questions to evoke my participant's emotions that might prompt more recall of details or buried memories. These questions also encouraged a more natural conversation and enabled Jackie to take her reflections and her dialogue where she wanted. I was not only able to capture her words but also her mannerisms as she described her childhood and adolescent memories. In addition, I sought clarification through email when I had questions about her responses in our face-to-face conversations. Through this process, I believe I gained a more in-depth view, vicariously living her experiences as much as possible.

Following the requirements to conduct research involving human study, and with approval from Iowa State University's Instructional Review Board (IRB), my initial conversations with Jackie involved clarifying for Jackie how this information would be used and shared. I explained that the purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of her experiences and what she perceived were the barriers and buffers that influenced the outcomes of the challenges she encountered. I discussed with her that my primary means for the research would be personal interviews and the subsequent stories and memories she was willing to share. In addition, any specific artifacts that she might choose to share would provide me another perspective and a deeper understanding. Explaining that our interview sessions would be audio/video recorded enabling me to concentrate on the content, rather than focusing so much on note-taking, would facilitate a more natural conversation. This recording was transcribed through *Dragon Dictate*, a speech recognition software designed for this purpose. I also described the anonymity she was assured. In the narrative, her identity

would be preserved and, within one year after the culmination of this research study, all notes and audio/video recordings would be destroyed. In describing the usefulness of this research, it was my intention that her account would provide another view into how one's perception and resilience interacts with educational practices to more positively enhance life chances. With this explanation, Jackie agreed to sign the consent form (Appendix A) and our work together proceeded.

I met with the participant over a period of ten hours and, during that time I developed a feeling about her home, family, and her interests and life goals. I was able to gain an insider's view into her world as I we conversed. I believe our acquaintance prior to this work contributed to her comfort level, particularly early in the process. We spoke about passions and drives, and childhood/adolescent experiences. We conversed about the culture of her family, and her childhood friends and her neighborhood. We explored how her family and religious affiliation aligned with and deviated from her peers and her neighborhood/community. We examined the influences of school and teachers and educational opportunities and challenges and in doing so looked for ways in which her perceptions might be influenced by the separate "worlds" she encountered.

During our meetings, I was able to listen and reflect, and ask her to clarify or elaborate on many aspects of her life. All of these conversations were recorded using my laptop or iPad and the software that ultimately translated the spoken word to text. These words were translated verbatim to preserve the natural dialogue and the authentic experiences portrayed. I outlined questions and topic areas in advance in an effort to attend to the influences inherent in her childhood and adolescence that have acted as buffers to challenges she experiences or seemed to exacerbate negative outcomes. In preparation for this, I focused

on topic areas of early childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Within each of these categories, I asked Jackie to relate experiences that she recalled in her home, her neighborhood or at school. She would often speak of empowerment. On those occasions, I asked, “What did empowerment mean to you at that time?” Frequently, she would speak about her father’s influence and I encouraged her to elaborate on how she perceived his influence at that time, and how she views it as an adult.

It was important to have questions prepared; however, as Maxwell (1996) cautioned, “prestructuring of methods leads to a lack of flexibility to respond to emergent insights and creates methodological blindness in making sense of the data” (p. 63). Accordingly, while I was prepared, I did not allow my preparation to dictate the discourse nor get in the way of the memories she shared. By coming to each meeting with questions, it enabled me to be prepared and to maintain a focus on the specific factors from the literature that I wished to make more transparent, but I did not use these questions as a road map to a particular destination. It was more important for this research that I allow Jackie to expose the experiences she felt comfortable with at the time. Later, I revisited these with Jackie to gain more insight. This was done during our interviews as well as via email correspondence. For example, when I was drafting chapter four findings, I emailed Jackie for clarification about the destination or the purpose for the trip she took with this friend and the friend’s family. She emailed that she was unsure of the destination now, but thought it may have been the Ozarks.

### **Data Analysis**

The model of resilience presented in this study is heavily influenced by the psychological theories of learning and personality development and the work of Jean Piaget

in the mid to late 20th century. Block (1982) acknowledged the pervasive imprint Piaget made on our present understanding of cognitive and personality development. He described Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation in child development. Assimilation is the process of taking in new information. Often, we must adapt this information to align with our current knowledge. Accommodation is the process of changing previous knowledge or ideas in our learning. The relationship of assimilation and accommodation, Block (1982) wrote, are "two sides of the same coin" as he explained that one cannot occur without the other (p. 282). Accommodation implies some adaptation in the process of assimilation and eventual equilibrium. The ease of transition is influenced by how the participant interacts with the new experience, draws from previous experience and the extent to which borders have been created (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998). As Figure 2.1 depicts, the ways in which an individual successfully transitions between and among her "worlds" is critical to resilience. At the same time, the buffers that exist within those domains offer support to the individual as she navigates the challenges in the course of childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The Multiple Worlds Resiliency Model (Figure 2.1) was used to analyze the data derived from the interviews with the participant. Jackie's stories about her life and interactions with her family and peers, both at home and at school, were part of the portrait of her life. These events were influenced by incidents involving people and situations in her environment, such as the community in which she lived, the personalities and practices of the school faculty, and her own previous experiences and resilient characteristics that informed her perception of the world. In my analysis, I have tried to explore the ways in which her world view has been informed by the various domains identified previously: community,

family, school and individual peer relationships. This woman's resilience has been shaped by the lived experiences she has revealed.

### **Rigor and Theoretical Saturation**

As I conversed, reflected, wrote and continued to reflect, it was important to conduct member-checking practices for accuracy in interpretation of the experiences I was representing. As I listened to Jackie describe her experiences I often asked specific questions for my own clarification. Frequently, in transcribing our conversations, I would be curious about something she said and I would email her to elaborate or clarify. After I had written about her life experiences and included my interpretations, I asked her to read this copy and to provide reactions to or further explanation on anything she wanted me to consider. The member-checking process was an essential component of the product.

Maintaining the rapport in order to continue to gain the real essence of the life experience was central to the process and product. In an effort to stay true to the experiences it was important to transcribe the dialogue exactly as it was shared. To do this, I used audio/video recording through my laptop and transcribed the dialogue with software designed for that purpose. Observation of body language also provided insight into areas and raised further questions and/or topics in addition to what had been covered. As Jackie spoke, I also made written notes of her facial expressions, laughter and body positioning that might later assist in interpreting her feelings and recollections.

As the process unfolded, I was continually listening and reflecting on previous conversations and interviews, my own notes, and the retrospective views she offered. An important part of the qualitative process, theoretical saturation occurred in our conversations when I asked additional questions and the same themes emerged. For example, as I inquired

about her memories of school, and probed further on subsequent occasions, she frequently referred to the same experiences with two elementary teachers, resulting in essentially the same information, and often ending with “that’s about all I remember about that.” Member checking, asking for clarification, was especially important in establishing rigor and integrity in the work. This was accomplished in two ways: face-to-face conversation and via email. When I was uncertain that I had understood her memories either at the time of the initial conversation or after transcribing the audio recording, I would either ask her another question about that or I would email her to clarify for me. I also provided her with my writing as I prepared the findings presented in Chapter 4 and asked her to respond to what she read. In the interviews, she would quickly respond to my clarifying questions. When I emailed her, it would often be several days or weeks before I would receive a response. Regardless of how long it would take, I wanted to recreate her experiences as authentically as possible, and inviting her reflection on my representation of her life was one way to accomplish it. This process provided multiple opportunities for her to respond or to correct my misconceptions. Without validation from the participant, and because the interviews and the identity of the participant are confidential, the work may otherwise be little more than one person’s (the researcher’s) opinion. Within one year of the interview completion, the notes and recordings were destroyed in an effort to protect the participant.

To address the issues of rigor, scientific research (particularly research of a quantitative nature, but even traditional qualitative research) would have us describe in detail the elements of validity and reliability in gathering data. From a qualitative perspective, the sterile constructs of validity and reliability are replaced with the charge of being accurate and convincing in data collection and presentation, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis

(1997). The goal is to convey the lived experiences and the interpretations of the individual or group under study. Through my intense focus on asking the probing questions intended to elicit feelings and perceptions, and following up with clarification questions and member-checking, I was able to delve more deeply into Jackie's life and gain insight into how she interpreted the incidents and transformed them into critical incidents.

Investigating how she has made sense of the role of resilience in her life, along with the ways community, family, school and individual/peer influences have played a role in her resilience was a portion of this study. Additionally, it became apparent how she views resilience as a factor in the way she experienced school. While she did not use the term resilience in our conversations, Jackie's spoke about the people and events in her life that either positively or negatively influenced her thinking. I was eventually able to share with Jackie the model of resiliency developed through this study. In Chapter 5, I will unveil this model of resilience as it has played out in Jackie's life. As I explained my mental model of resilience as a blend of the Students' Multiple Worlds model with the Resiliency model, we talked about her critical incidents and where they fit. Jackie encouraged me to emphasize the importance of life as it unfolds, presenting new challenges. Often there were conflicts between Jackie's experiences at home and in her community that seemed directly opposed to the expectations of school settings. This is congruent with the Students' Multiple Worlds model and I began to place more emphasis on the Students' Multiple Worlds model as I invited critique from my university colleagues. Chapter 4 begins the critical process of peeling back the layers of Jackie's life, examining the influence of the various domains as Jackie navigated her public school experience. Culminating in this case study of her life and

her experiences, the final manuscript details how these were played out either positively or negatively, and how she responded resulting in development of resilient characteristics.

### **Summary**

This chapter has addressed case study as a research design and methodology for recreating and presenting Jackie's life experiences. This methodology was accomplished through extensive interviews conducted with a single participant in order to gain the deepest understanding of how various experiences and the responses to these experiences influence how one makes sense of the world.

Data collection, through interview and discussion about shared artifacts of this person's life, recorded for later transcription, reflection and subsequent writing, was enhanced through member-checking techniques for accuracy and to best capture an accurate in-depth view. With each interview, greater rapport and trust was established and more personal incidents were revealed. Data analysis was ongoing to determine whether discussion continued to prompt more topics or experiences that might reveal new information about critical incidents or perceptions about the incidents. Rigor was embedded in the continued word-for-word transcription and member-checking and in the subsequent authentic and convincing re-presentation of her processes for making sense in her world. Theoretical saturation was achieved when conversations failed to uncover new information or provide new insight into perceptions. All of these memories, dialogue and stories were woven into the tapestry that would become the portrait of Jackie's lived experiences.

The next chapter will reveal the lived experiences in this woman's life and how she has come to make sense of the world. Jackie has also described the ways in which resilience



has played a role in her navigating the K-12 school experiences and ultimately in her adult life.

The final chapter provides a discussion of the findings of this study, the conclusions drawn, and the implications this research has for K-12 educators and school leaders. It was my intent that this study would be useful in leading to policy and practices that enable all students to develop resilient traits and overcome the barriers and challenges which continue to plague society. Ultimately, we may soon be able to mitigate the influences of these challenges and reduce the barriers.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present Jackie's life and the influences of the four domains that research has revealed to influence resilience: community, family, school, and individual/peer. I further acknowledge the influence of Jackie's multiple worlds or the cultural knowledge she possesses and how, at times, barriers were created between the arenas among which she transistioned. Before delving into each of these, I begin by setting the stage for my relationship and interactions with Jackie.

### First Impressions and Observations

Jackie's hair, generally pulled back away from her face, revealed a smile whenever I walked into the room. This small-framed woman, with short wavy hair and warm brown eyes, met children every day. She knew them all by name, and conversed freely with them about the books they were reading, what topics interested them, and anything else they cared to share with her about their lives. For many years she worked in the library. Her organizational skills made her perfect for this position. Throughout the day, she read stories to each group of students who entered, and provided them time to select and check out books before they returned to their classrooms. The library was arranged to accommodate the different elementary ages and the reading levels of the children in the building. She developed her skills in using the technology available, and was willing to assist other staff when they asked about how to connect the cables, operate the hardware, or troubleshoot problems. I recall when we purchased the first document camera for the building. Although I had seen these cameras used in presentations I had attended, I was not familiar with installing the software on our existing computers in the library. Jackie eagerly offered to help me get it

installed. She asked two of her library helpers, our resident techies (two fifth graders), who worked with her to get the document camera working. Later that afternoon, she informed me that we were “ready to roll.” Jackie made herself available and offered library services to all our staff, but her character was more reserved, and she did not push assistance or her knowledge onto others. She shared with me that rather than push herself on others she usually waited for them to approach her with issues, questions or concerns they had. She added that she would like to help but preferred the teachers would let her know how she could assist them in their classrooms with materials for their students.

When I first met her, Jackie was in her late 40s, single and the mother of several grown children. I did not know the details of her family but, over time, I came to a deeper understanding of her life as a child, an adolescent, and a young adult. Her warm demeanor was suggestive of a peacefulness that existed within. At first, this was somewhat of a paradox. There seemed to be a sadness or some trace of struggle pervasive in her life. It was through my conversations with her that I came to realize how life experiences greatly influence the way we view the world and the ways in which we interact. Jackie continues to live and work in the town in which we both lived at one time. I have taken the liberty of using pseudonyms for the purpose of protecting her anonymity.

### **Deeper Conversations**

One day several years ago, Jackie talked with me about needing to attend a funeral. When I asked her about that, she explained that she was planning to attend the funeral of a friend from high school. “Had she been ill for long?” I inquired. “*No, actually her husband killed her and then killed himself.*” She went on to say, “*We all went to school together. I knew them both.*” Immediately feeling a sense of concern for her, I pressed her for more

information; at the same time, I was afraid that I might be overstepping boundaries. Much to my surprise, she didn't seem protective of the details. As I listened, and even though she was offering, I somehow felt that I was intruding in her life. In my mind, I wondered whether she thought I was just being nosy or if it was out of genuine concern that I had asked. Honestly, I think my mind went to the place it often has in my educational career—what experiences has this person had that has brought her to this moment? She spoke as I often did in my mind about my own experiences, in a tone of acceptance that this is what life is about. I listened intently and instantly felt sorry for Jackie at her loss, but also sadness for what I could only imagine was a very difficult life growing up in a neighborhood she only briefly described on this day. I was in the process of beginning this project, and listening to Jackie made me think that there was so much she could help me with, and hopefully at the same time, I could offer her something in return: the opportunity to give her a voice, a venue for sharing her life. Ultimately, I hoped to use this information to convey to the educational community something we might not fully understand. With a greater understanding of this phenomenon, maybe we could better design school climates and programming to mitigate the challenges many of our students face every day.

On the spot, I told Jackie about my dissertation topic, and asked her whether she might consider sharing her life stories with me. At the time, I was unsure as to whether this would be a single study or if she might be one of several I would interview. Although I didn't expect an answer from her right away, she quickly said, *"I'd be happy to help!"* The weeks following were filled with hope and anticipation of beginning the work. I applied for and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. I explained that my participant had already been selected so upon this approval I was able to

begin. Challenges in my own life posed obstacles to me in beginning the work when I had hoped. I was eventually able to go back to Jackie and formally ask her again, “Are you still interested in helping me with this work?” She quickly responded in the affirmative, and we set up a meeting date and time.

### **Beginning the Journey together**

Our first meeting was on a sunny September evening in the small town of Lake City (pseudonym) where we both lived. The local coffee shop, Coffee Haus, gave us a place to get together. I arrived a few minutes early, bought a can of Pepsi and sat down with my paperwork, my iPad and the backup digital voice recorder. I had planned to use the built in software on my iPad for recording and transcribing, but lacked the confidence that it would transcribe both our voices. True to my concern, it quickly became apparent that I needed the recorder. There was too much background noise and the iPad was not accurately transcribing even my words as close as I was to the hardware. I was certain it would never capture both of our voices and transcribe accurately. Jackie arrived soon after and we exchanged pleasantries. We talked about the beginning of the school year, and did a little catching up since we hadn’t seen each other in a couple of years. As conversation moved to our purpose for this meeting, I explained what I hoped to accomplish through this work, described the process for her, and gained her formal consent as a participant. She had a few questions for me, and I explained the legalities of conducting human research. She seemed satisfied knowing that she could choose what she was willing to talk about, how deeply she would delve into her experiences, and that she was in control of the information that would go to print. She spoke about how many students in our schools come from environments that are very challenging and, in many cases, negatively influencing their academic achievement.

While there were few people in the Coffee Haus that evening, a motor fan from the refrigerated water cooler and the pop machine interfered a bit with my recording. When the fans didn't run, I had concerns that the waiters might overhear our conversation and compromise Jackie's comfort level in sharing the details of her life. Thinking that the coffee shop was not the most conducive to these interviews, I offered my house for our future meetings, and Jackie quickly agreed. I asked her if she would be willing to drive the several miles from the center of town where I understood that she lived to my home. She said that she would, and I gave her directions. We discussed the days of the week that worked best.

I soon found out that Jackie was very involved in her church. Between attending services and her volunteer work each week, her available time was somewhat limited, but we soon determined that Thursday evenings would work for both of us. She told me about her work with prisoners who were living in transitional situations and how she assists them in learning to live on their own, without drugs or alcohol, and helps them develop the skills to become functional in society. Immediately, I wondered how this volunteer work came about and I thought about how strong she must be to take on this kind of work. Jackie explained that through her local church she had been introduced to this program and had been a part of it for several years. She described how these people, who I surmised through her conversation were mostly men when she frequently used the pronouns "he" or "him", did not possess the skills necessary to stay clean and sober "on the outside" (of prison) without support. They need to learn how to grocery shop for healthy lifestyles, how to cook, how to clean and do laundry. They need to learn how to live in a different world, one without the mind-distorting effects of drugs or alcohol. It often involved accompanying them to court-ordered meetings and speaking on their behalf about their progress.

About an hour later we said our goodbyes, and I looked forward to meeting with Jackie the following Thursday evening. As I drove home, I had many questions about how Jackie became involved with this prison population and was eager to hear Jackie describe the experiences in her life that brought her to this point, and made her the person she is. I admired her willingness to volunteer herself to these former prisoners, and thought about her commitment to her church. I spent several hours during the next few days transcribing our conversation and trying to identify with Jackie. I thought about how passionately she described her volunteer work, and admired her for this dedication to help others marginalized in society—primarily due to their own life choices or how they were influenced by their life experiences.

I awaited our next meeting with great anticipation and many new questions. Jackie arrived exactly on time, and I invited her to sit down. She chose the couch and sat at one end, while I walked around the coffee table and settled at the other end. I had set up my recording device there, along with my list of questions. Tonight, we were discussing her early childhood, mostly because it seemed logical to start at the beginning and take these topics somewhat sequentially. I told Jackie that I would ask the questions and allow her to take the dialogue anywhere she wanted it to go. I told her I wanted it to be conversational, and that I would try to let her do most of the talking. We both laughed together at this, and she adjusted herself more comfortably.

I began with my questions about her childhood and what her first memories were. She paused a moment and then told me that she recalled being very young, sitting on the floor of her home with her mother and grandmother on the couch nearby. She laughed when she said her grandma commented, “*She has fat little arms.*” Jackie didn’t know how old she was, but

she thought she must have been young enough that neither her mom nor her grandma thought she was old enough to care about that comment. Today, as she sat with me, she was anything but “fat”. I don’t know if she’s ever had a weight problem, but now at age 54 she still has the physique of a teenager. Most women would be envious of the way she has maintained her youthful figure.

Appearing comfortable in her own skin in a one-on-one situation, Jackie said, “*I felt content with myself, all the time.*” In adult groups, I have observed Jackie to be rather reserved. Dressed in jeans and a casual shirt in most of our sessions, she sat with her legs crossed on the couch recounting events in her life and reflecting on how these incidents influenced the way she viewed life and the intentional changes she made to adapt to new situations. Soft-spoken, she began by describing her family and how, as a young child her parents and older sisters helped shape her interpretation of life. I first asked Jackie to describe what she recalled of her early childhood. “*I talked incessantly,*” she told me. “*I always had lots of questions.*”

Jackie hesitated a bit when I asked her to tell me about her hometown. She described her memories of growing up in a poverty-stricken suburb of the Rosemont metropolitan area, a large city of about 200,000, in a mid-western state. Ashland was Jackie’s hometown, adjacent to the northwestern corner of Rosemont. Frequently referring to her roots in “the neighborhood” depicted both nostalgia for a somewhat simpler life juxtaposed with the relief that these many years later she has escaped. She spoke often about how much she enjoyed time with her father as a child and her experiences in the outdoors fishing along the river, contrasted with her feelings now as she infrequently goes back to “*the neighborhood*” and sees the needs that remain.



During our conversation, Jackie's eyes were generally fixed on me, signaling to me her sincerity in recalling the memories and her reflections, at some point, had been reconciled with real-life events. At times, as is natural, her gaze diverted to other areas of the room. This may have been due to the delicate nature of some of the critical incidents she divulged in our dialogue.

We met four times over the course of a month to six weeks, and each interview session left me with curiosity about what other events she might reveal when I least expected it. Months later, I met with her again after I was heavily involved in the writing process. This was to provide deeper insight into her experiences and to ensure that I was describing these experiences accurately. Following these sessions I was both energized and exhausted. The intensity of many of the topics that emerged often came to me out of nowhere, but for Jackie they seemed as if they were everyday occurrences. There was an aura of mild reservation in Jackie's tone about the way things were. She appeared to have accepted the events in her life almost as if everyone experiences the same kinds of things. Maybe many do. She expressed that she has developed strength and independence through her experiences. In order to flesh out how the literature on resilience has played out in Jackie's life, I have attempted as much as possible to separate the various domains and categorize her experiences in to these themes beginning with family and following with community, school and individual/peer factors. My choice for discussing family first, was that as I listened to Jackie speak, I developed a better understanding of her as a person in these parts of our conversations. I believe I learned more about who Jackie is as she described her family, and it is important to insert this here to provide the reader a clearer picture of this woman and her experiences as a young child.

### **The World of Family**

Raised in a family of seven children, Jackie had three older sisters, a brother who died in infancy before she was born and two younger brothers. Being just enough younger than her two sisters, and more of a tomboy, she could easily see the differences in her preferences and interests and those of her sisters. As a young child she enjoyed the outdoors and spending time with her father. Her fondness for the outdoors contributed to her appearance, skinned knees and bruises from the activities in which she engaged. Walking in the woods, exploring the riverbank, fishing with her father and his friends are memories that she revealed having a profound influence in her early years. This experience also contributed to some emotional exile from her sisters who did not share in her enthusiasm for the rugged lifestyle nor the toll it took on her physical appearance. Jackie described her sisters as being very vocal as to what, specifically, they objected. *“Look at your legs, they’re full of cuts and bruises. You’re not going with us.”* And, laughing, she added, *“Your hair’s a mess!”* She explained, *“they tended to not want me near them because I didn’t look like what the girls wanted when they wanted to attract boys so I was shunned.”* In keeping with this, and to the best of my recollection, I have yet to see Jackie in a dress. For work, she was always dressed nicely; clean, tailored attire, but not flashy or trendy. She later commented, *“I dressed modest.”* Her wavy hair was always neat and tidy, and she wore little or no make-up.

Acknowledging that she was unconcerned about her sisters’ opinions, she looked forward to the frequent fishing expeditions on the Rosemont River with her dad and his friends during the summer months. The river is not insignificant in its effects on the local geography. At times, flooding cost the city and its residents’ homes and businesses, and

renovation of the levees was done several times. For Jackie, the river was a source of freedom and adventure.

Fishing overnight on the river was exciting for Jackie, and she eagerly helped her dad prepare for these excursions. She explained that they would pack their “*ditty poles*,” made of pliable branches and at the end of the string a hook and whatever the bait of choice for the bullheads and other fish found in the river. Sometimes they took their own bait, and often they would seine the river for bait that would attract larger fish. Jackie’s father fished with several friends whose goal was always to catch enough to eat, and enough to take home and freeze for the winter. She remembered that there would usually be a full bucket of fish.

Jackie described that eight people lived together in their modest home of three bedrooms. She explained, “*I shared a queen bed with three sisters . . . and the two brothers shared a bedroom.*” Pets were always a part of her childhood. Cats and dogs generally lived outside at their house, though one cat lived indoors. Jackie recalled the fire that broke out totally destroying their home during her fourth grade year:

*Two days before Christmas, we had relatives over. Um, there was a lot of snow outside, and so things, back then we had pilot lights on the dryer and we had clothes on the dryer and something caught on fire on the dryer. We thought we’d gotten it out, the house was real smoky but everybody was airing it out and then, while we were kind of recovering from putting it out, it started up again. And then we had to leave the house. And all six kids were still at home, and, um, we had a Christmas tree up, and all that, and I think my grandma, my mom’s mom was there and a couple of aunts and maybe their kids, and uh, so we all went outside and got outside. We got our main cat, but we didn’t get the kittens and the house was a total loss. So, here was six kids and nowhere to go, so they split us kids up and put us in different places until they, my dad could rebuild the house. She explained that he “gutted the house inside after the fire and rebuilt all the inside” after heating the two-by-four frame up with a heater to open the pores in the wood to get the smoke smell out.*

Without insurance on the house or their possessions, it took about a year to rebuild. Jackie remembered living with an aunt and uncle until the new home was ready. When they moved back in, Jackie and her sisters had bunk beds and she shared the top bunk with her oldest sister:

*Candy was the toughest of all the girls and made a chalk line down the middle of the sheet and told me before I fell asleep the first night that I better not cross that line. That night she pushed me off the bed because she said I crossed the line (even though I was asleep). I remember dreaming that I was falling and found out it was for real!*

Jackie described that her parents used work to cope with difficulties. They experienced challenging economic conditions and stressful family life. Her mother worked in the home while Jackie was growing up. Volunteering to help with the local PTO at Jackie's school, might have been more rewarding if her mother hadn't felt that she didn't fit in. When Jackie was older, her mother described her feelings of "not fitting in" socially with the other mothers who also helped at PTO. Later, she took a job on the line at a local farm implement plant. She also worked for a time at a similar job at V Engineering. Her father learned the heating and air conditioning trade early in life to help support his own mother when he was younger, and this would eventually support his new and growing family. Jackie summed up her father's adolescent experiences:

*He was raised when times were harder and I think his mom, she was an alcoholic and so she really had a rough time. She went through a lot of husbands. And one time when my dad was about in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, she moved across town and didn't tell him. So he would have to be on his own. She took all the rest of the kids, even the older sister, but she left him because he was a boy and he could probably make it. He didn't have any food. He said she would put on a pot of beans in the morning, navy beans, and they would be there all day until they were gone and then she'd make another pot. And that's what they lived on.*

Jackie would often ask to have navy beans for meals at home because she liked them at school and her father would not allow it. It was also important to him to have butter at their house because, as a child, they didn't have that luxury.

Jackie often mentioned that her parents wanted better for their children than they had. They held expectations for their children.

*We weren't allowed to swear and we weren't allowed to take God's name in vain. I got one spanking growing up and that was for using God's name in vain. An, um, they didn't really spank, per se, but my dad had a temper and you'd run, 'cause he would like put his fist through a door and if you were on the other side you knew better than to push it. Except one of my sisters, she pushed it a lot. But not me (laughing)! Um, so they were mostly, that would have been for disrespect. You would have been afraid if you were disrespectful to them. You could say anything. I could talk to my parents, well, my dad, about most anything. But my mom was very reserved and it was hard to talk to her about things that were, you know. She just threw a book at us when we had periods. We didn't even get to talk about it. It's just fend for yourself. I know I learned about things more off the street than I did at home.*

This last statement foreshadowed events in Jackie's life she revealed to me later:

Jackie identified her father as having a significant influence on her life. Having high expectations meant being a good person, helping others, being respectful and earning one's own way in life. Girls were expected to live at home until they married, and it was accepted that they would get married. *"You get married before you leave the house. That was pretty much standard. That was normal for the day."* I asked Jackie, "So they [parents] didn't ever expect that you would live on your own as a single woman? Even if you didn't get married until you were 23 you would still continue to live at home?" She responded, *"Nobody ever did that, but yeah, that's what you would do. My older sister was not married when I got married, which was unusual in a family, and she stayed at home."*

Jackie described her family having experienced many challenges including a sibling of Jackie's dying in infancy prior to her birth, a Christmas Day fire that destroyed her

family's home in addition to the typical interactions between older and younger siblings. She portrayed her father as having a strong value system, serving as the head of household, and holding expectations for his children that they could become anything they wanted. He expected that his daughters would marry before they moved out of the house. Growing up under a female head of household, her father started working as a teenager to help support his mother, eventually learning a trade to support his own family. He took Jackie on fishing trips that contributed to her love of the outdoors. Jackie's mother worked outside the home and Jackie described her mother as feeling that she didn't fit in socially. Jackie's mother was more reserved and uncomfortable with some conversations, particularly about the changes for the adolescent female. Her parents expected respect and taught their children to respect others. Taking God's name in vain was a severe infraction.

### **The World of Community**

While it may seem logical to examine the ways in which Jackie's individual characteristics played a role in her resilience, I request indulgence from the reader. I believe the significance of events from Jackie's community have had a profound influence on how Jackie viewed the world and, by her admission, *"determined who I was to become."*

Jackie spoke about her life in Ashland. Having buffering agents in the community has been found to enhance resilience. For Jackie, these buffers were having relatives as neighbors. She learned about survival from other children in the neighborhood, particularly one set of cousins. These cousins were instrumental in Jackie realizing that she could overcome anything. Jackie described them as bullying her, one of them holding her head underwater in their backyard pool and letting her up only long enough to get a *"gulp of air"*

and ask “*Do you give up yet?*” When she didn’t back down, they finally let her up and she learned about determination.

Neighbors included many relatives. A set of aunts and uncles lived on each side of her family, and her grandparents lived nearby. “*We visited my grandma, but it was my great-grandma. It was my mom’s grandma. We visited her every Sunday. We all got in the car and we went to do that.*”

Jackie described her life as similar in challenges to those of her neighbors. She noted that having extended family was common in the neighborhood. They [relatives and neighbors] were close-knit and cared for each other. This became crucial for Jackie on one particular evening. As a young child her parents had been out for the evening. When they returned home, “*My dad got a gun and shot it in the house towards my mom. I thought he shot her ‘cause she fainted.*” She explained that her aunt came over from next door and took her to their house. This incident, as Jackie recalled, was only briefly discussed at that time, and not at any other point in the years since.

Families in the neighborhood were much like Jackie’s in many ways. Most of them had several children. Jackie described her childhood family of seven children as being common, and that within that neighborhood, most families has lost at least one child. Illness and disease was not uncommon. “*We had a brother that died in between the two oldest so they were less than a year apart, each of those three,*” Jackie shared. I inquired, “Was he stillborn?” “No,” Jackie replied, “*he died about three months old . . . of pneumonia . . . that was real hard on my parents. They were real young. Well, not real, about 18, and it’s young today.*” Even though her parents had lost this child before she was born, they felt fortunate

*You know they had other people in the neighborhood. I would say every family’d lost at least one child. So, it didn’t seem abnormal. You know, we felt*

*pretty blessed. Two houses down a family had a dwarf child and one of the ones right next to them had one of their kids get polio. So there's so many things that could happen. At the time it didn't seem as traumatic. I mean it was devastating, but there are, it was, you weren't the only one. So, I think community probably helped. Community ends up being a bigger deal than you realize when you're growing up. You realize what effect it has."*

In those years, many of those homes did not have running water. "Being modern," according to Jackie was equated with having amenities most of us today take for granted. She spoke of her parents' efforts to have indoor plumbing. She recalled that her older sisters remembered when they used an outhouse and how diligently her parents worked to get indoor plumbing, considering this becoming modern. She observed that having running water didn't seem to be as important to others in her neighborhood as it was to her parents. Her mother, she described was always very "fad-oriented." Her parents worked to gain the things they wanted or needed, but her mother especially seemed focused on whatever was in vogue at the time. Jackie saw this played out in having two Saint Bernard dogs at one time, as something her mother wanted that was rather faddish. Jackie laughed as she told that her mother knew of people who were breeding dogs and decided that this was what she wanted to do as well. However, it wasn't as productive a business venture for her mother because "they didn't like each other so it didn't work out for her!"

Many residents of Ashland also often did not have enough to eat. Jackie's family always had a big garden. Each summer the garden was intended to meet the family's needs for the year and to harvest enough to share with others. She recalled how her parents frequently provided food to other kids in the neighborhood:

*They would bring a plate of sandwiches out, you know, then other neighbor kids would come by and eat some so they'd have something. And everyone knew, you know, that's what we would do. What you had you definitely shared and they did raise us with just that ethic. You worked in the garden and then you shared it. That was just the way it was.*



*This was their way of contributing and helping others.*

**Ethnicity.** Of Swedish and Welsh decent, Jackie explained her interactions with friends and neighbors sharing similar economic challenges, but not the same heritage. A melting pot of primarily Italians and Germans, this neighborhood was the backdrop for the many questions that occupied Jackie musings:

*When I grew up it was mostly Yugoslavian or German, a lot of Italians. I don't even know all the kids. Russian, I suppose. Not really any Mexicans and not really any Blacks. I mean, really, I never thought people were really prejudiced. I thought people talked like they were prejudiced, 'cause my dad would say, you know, words that everybody else said, but I knew [the words] were prejudic[ial], but he never treated anyone like he was prejudiced [against them]. It wasn't until I moved to Rosemont and was a lot older that I heard people say things like that, which I had always heard it, but I realized they believed it.*

Explaining how Jackie viewed the intermingling of cultures:

*The Italian family, they didn't really like me as well, the dads, they didn't like that I was rebellious, is what they would have called it, because I felt empowered. Their daughters made the boy's bed every morning. Their daughters, um, did all the women things and the boys did the outdoor chores. I didn't really think that was right, so, and I was vocal. You know they would never say, you know we don't want Jackie around, but they would pinch your cheek, like really hard when they saw you, and you knew they didn't really appreciate your sharing that influence on their daughters. So I know there was little classes of "ethnicity" but not big, and nobody really treated anyone with prejudice whether you were poor or had more or whatever. They just accepted you, really.*

This intermingling of cultures presented Jackie with questions about gender roles. She did not describe any particular responsibilities she or her sisters had in their home that contrasted with those of her brothers. This revelation for Jackie demonstrated how she viewed her home experience as different from her female neighbors from different ethnic groups.

**Religion.** Further influencing the interactions in this neighborhood was the intermingling of Catholics and Protestant beliefs and traditions: *“I thought about traditions and the differences between the nationalities and people’s houses and how they raised their kids.”* I pressed her for these reflections, “Do you think there were things from their heritage, their background, that you picked up on, and maybe adopted for yourselves or maybe your family did as a result of the intermingling or the relationships that you developed?” Jackie replied:

*I don’t think they did. I think it made us accepting of differences, but I don’t think we embraced really anything that they did. Religion was a bigger deal then. Catholics weren’t as friendly about, you know, being Protestant, so you know we didn’t relate on that level, but you respected their choices and everybody respected each other. So, I think that came of having, being close to different nationalities, but you didn’t do what they didn’t. And I rejected most of what they did because it seemed very, um, well, it was more tradition that I was, card to have (laughing).*

She described the Catholic faith as being laden with rituals and traditions. For Jackie, it wasn’t so much adopting the beliefs or the traditions of another group for herself, but learning a tolerance and developing respect for those who were different in some way. She related, *“one of my girlfriends, one of my close friends, she was Catholic, and we’d have to come up with something to confess for her on the Saturday or whenever it was.”* Jackie admitted that this event engaged her in thinking about rituals and traditions in other religions. She acknowledged that this was more tradition that she cared to have herself. In recent years she has affiliated herself with the Baptist Church and attends services and Bible studies several times each week in addition to her time devoted to special church projects, such as assisting former prisoners in learning to live in mainstream society.

Children in her neighborhood gathered for pick-up games of football or baseball in the churchyard near her home. There weren’t structured activities like little league at that

time because “then the parents would be working somewhere, and everybody worked. I mean, everybody had to make money somehow and that’s what they would be doing.” They didn’t have the time to devote to these activities and the children took the initiative to manage their own games. She described a “tribal” atmosphere where...

*You protected your own. You could pick on them, if it was like your brother or sister, you could beat them up. But then if somebody else picked on them you were there and you were, they were in trouble. Everyone would come out against that. It was more cohesive. The kids, you know, all the neighborhood kids played together and, you know, there was a code of honor and things that you learned from the neighbors of what was expected. And now, I don’t believe that kids get together like that. Um, they still go out and play together at each other’s houses, but it wasn’t, it isn’t a community.*

Living in this neighborhood and the larger community presented other experiences that influenced Jackie in her formative years. She described:

*My cousins’ homes were on both sides of our home so we played together often. One of them had a swimming pool, one summer, set up and my aunt and uncle said any of the cousins could swim in it. I remember taking them at their word and swimming in it whenever I saw one of my cousins swimming (which was the condition our parents put into the equation). Two of the cousins were boys and much older than myself. For some reason unknown to me at the time, they delighted in bullying me when I came to swim. My survival mode kicked in every time and I believed it was right to be able to swim with them so I stayed. I know now why none of the other cousins or their sister would join them in the pool. The younger of the two would take me by my hair and dunk me underwater over and over just letting me up long enough to grab another gulp of air as the water rushed off my head yelling, “Do you give up, yet?” while the older brother would laugh and finally have a look of disbelief that I would not give up. That summer I learned that no matter how bad anything would get, I knew that I could take it.*

Jackie noted that this experience was just one of those that would eventually determine “who I was to become.” It was part of influencing her perception of the world. She said, “It made me determined.”

On several occasions, Jackie found herself in situations where men exposed themselves to her:

*The people that exposed themselves were not people I knew. My cousins and other people would overpower me and do things that I didn't like but um, not, none of that exposing like that. It was um, I was at the creek once. A driver pulled up and um, kept talking and as they finished their sentence they got lighter and lighter voice. And so, of course, you go closer because you're trying to hear the end of their sentence, what they're saying, and that person was exposed and so I got back on my bike and ran. And then at the fair grounds, I was walking by a stall and there was, you know, a guy was talking to me from over the stall, which I thought was normal. Of course then, he drew me closer and he was exposing himself. So, it was like, where do I, I'm like a magnet for these people (laughing). That's what I thought. But it wasn't anything you ever told anyone about, you just, it was like disgusting, but I guess you get used to it.*

As she spoke about this, these many years later, she reflected on the ways the exposure influenced her life and her development into later adolescence and early adulthood.

*"[Having these men expose themselves] did affect me," she admitted.*

*Those things probably affected me a lot when it came to, probably more reserved after that. At least around certain people [boys, as she grew into adolescence]. You know, I avoided things, being alone with a boy. And I developed early, there's no doubt about it. I'm sure it had a big factor. And, you know, whether it was, if it was a male I was trying to avoid ever being alone with them. I could tell you that. So that was real important to me. So I just adjusted my behavior so that I could alleviate as much as I could of that.*

Jackie's community influenced her in many ways. She related the support she had from her neighbors, most of whom were part of her extended family. These individuals provided emotional support and shelter in times of difficulty. She credited the experiences with her family and neighborhood for her acquired a sense of determination and accountability, a desire to act in age-appropriate ways and she learned responsibility for her actions. She understood the importance of honesty and integrity. She desired to be viewed as honest and truthful and valued others' opinions of her. As an example, she felt she could not discuss the sexual assault by her friend's brother while on the trip, even with her parents, because, the boy's family soon after the incident accused Jackie of stealing a bike:

*Stealing in my neighborhood was a bad thing. You didn't do that to your neighbors. You might go outside of your neighborhood, but nobody's going to steal from your neighbors. It was just a really bad thing. And so I kept saying, 'I didn't, I didn't and they [my parents] wanted to believe me but they [the other parents] calling up and saying you know, they made up a big story [that I stole the bike] the mom did, and so what they did was, I didn't even know it at the time, that [experience of their accusation] made me not tell.*

**Sexual assault.** Jackie was sexually assaulted on a trip she took with a neighboring family. She had been invited to go along with a girl who was the age of Jackie's older sister. Looking back now, Jackie admitted this seems unusual, but at the time she was excited to be able to travel. Unsure now, of the intended destination, but recalling they may have been traveling home from the Ozarks, the vacationers made a stop in a roadside park to sleep overnight in the station wagon. Jackie awoke in the back of this vehicle with her friend's brother's body over her and forcing his penis into her throat. She recalled the suffocation she felt and that she soon passed out, leaving no memory of what occurred later. By the time she got home, she was experiencing problems breathing, and a subsequent health exam resulted in a diagnosis of asthma. She had not been able to tell her parents of the sexual attack and soon the boy's parents had accused her of stealing their daughter's bike. In light of this, Jackie believed that her story of the assault would not be taken seriously because she denied the accusation of theft. She feared that her parents and certainly the boy's parents would think she was trying to shift the blame. *"You know I lost my, a reputation was a big deal."* I questioned her further about her various sexual encounters, this particular assault as well as the various times males exposed themselves to her. Having others believe her and believe in her came through again through her discussion of reputation. *"It makes you give up [sometimes]. I mean, why tell the truth if no one is going to believe you? You have to be believed. And if people didn't believe in me, it was a big deal."* She admitted that she didn't

really “*deal with*” the sexual assault until years later. She recalled that a even a year after the incident she didn’t remember it at all. It was as if she had blocked out the trauma. “*You accept it. It’s done and then you change your behavior to, so that, to avoid it again.*” I asked, “What kinds of things did you consciously change?” She replied, “*I wouldn’t be alone in a room with a boy if I could help it. I probably dressed modestly. Even though I didn’t really care about my body as much I just didn’t want to go through any of it again.*”

Later, dating became a challenge, and Jackie admitted she experienced trust issues. She explained that she really didn’t form emotional attachment to others. She didn’t “*open up*” emotionally. She protected herself by not allowing others to know her on a deeper level. Jackie admitted that she didn’t have a lot in common with most of the girls her age. “*They were more interested in boys and I wasn’t.*”

Jackie’s neighborhood experiences challenged her understanding of expectations as they differed from her own family’s culture. The intermingling of different ethnic groups, along with their respective view on gender roles, and the various religious affiliations posed questions for Jackie. She admitted that this setting was valuable in reinforcing her parents’ desire that she learn and have respect for everyone, regardless of their value systems. This neighborhood was not particularly safe for Jackie as her encounters ranged from bullying by cousins to inappropriate sexual encounters by men she did not know even to sexual assault on one occasion by a friend’s brother. To further complicate her situation, she was subsequently accused of stealing. She felt she could not share the details of the assault, even to her parents, because it might appear as a lie to cover up the theft.

### **The World of Peer/Individual**

As a young child, Jackie remembered always having lots of questions and desiring, needing definitive answers to those questions. She was very curious about nature and the world around her. She inquired of her father incessantly. He was able to answer many of her musings. Philosophically, she thought about differences in traditions between and among the various nationalities and religious affiliations she knew about in her neighborhood. She wondered about the belief systems of friends who attended other churches and the cultural traditions of the other ethnic groups. Her inquiring mind was satisfied only to a point. Her father would answer as much as he could, she told me. *“He could give me some [answers], but sometimes he just wasn’t in the mood for it.”* She knew not to *“push it”* asking only to the point where her dad’s responses informed her that was enough for now.

When asked about some specific questions she pondered, Jackie offered, *“What ‘perfect’ was. About God. Does He get mad?”* Attending the Lutheran church with her family only occasionally, Jackie didn’t get personally satisfying answers to her questions about God. During her preparation for Confirmation, she had the opportunity to visit with her pastor about the questions she had. She described her conversation with this pastor as a *“let-down.”* Although she recalled that he was *“a nice, loving pastor”* she came away disgruntled because she did not find the answers she was seeking. In particular, she remembered inquiring, *“So what exactly is the Holy Spirit?”* to which he replied, *“God with us today. Do you have any other questions?”* Laughing as she described this conversation, it seemed as though she went away frustrated.

Conversing with her father, she described as more enlightening, and I had the distinct impression that she pushed a bit more for the answers she needed. Generally only terminating

the inquiry sessions when she felt her father had reached his limit with her, she explored other avenues to help resolve the wonders of the world. She especially enjoyed the outdoors, spending countless hours poking around in the woods and along the river when she took the fishing expeditions with her dad and his friends.

Her parents, primarily her father's influence, propelled her to make decisions for herself, and to live out their expectations for her. Within her family, expectations included being respectful and responsible for one's actions, being a contributing member of society, and for a female, getting married and raising children. She described her father as one who put many obligations on himself, but resented others placing expectations on him:

*He didn't feel obligated to others, although he worked every time someone older in the neighborhood needed something he always went. He had obligations that he put on himself, but he didn't really like others to put them on him. And so, I really embraced that, I think, and then thought you could do what your wanted and think what your wanted.*

As a child, she thought being able to do what she wanted without others telling her what to do was empowerment. She viewed her father as an empowered individual. She recalled, "My dad's philosophy was very loose. You know, just pay your taxes and die and that's about all your have to do," she laughed. As she grew older, Jackie's vision of empowerment evolved and reflected the experiences she had with the opposite sex:

*I [thought] that people couldn't tell me what to do. I really felt like, even if they forced me to do things, I knew on the inside they could never force me to do things, you know. So, I learned to guard my spirit more than I did my body. I didn't really care about my body at that point. So, I guarded my spirit so that I [her voice trailed off]. That was the empowerment.*

I asked Jackie what she meant by "guarding her spirit." She explained, "After being abused I totally would, I seem real open and share easily with people but it's always the external



*things. I wouldn't, nobody really gets to your heart when you've been abused. You don't let anybody in there."*

As she grew and considered occupations, Jackie thought about becoming a teacher.

*I loved to help people. I think that I thought that was the way, I knew for a fact you could help people with education. So, that was probably driving it. I don't think it was any outside factor. I think it was probably who I was as a person. I knew that I wanted to be, make a difference and helping, that was it.*

As an early adolescent she expected to graduate from high school and go on to college, but no one encouraged her to consider post-secondary education and *"I didn't even know the name of a college."* In school, she recalled adults predicting her future saying *"you'll probably never do that. You'll end up pregnant and have a baby. And so I did."*

Discouragement from her high school counselor and a math teacher influenced her ideas about college, and lack of parental resources to finance college and no one at school to offer alternatives for financial aid further stifled her ambitions. However, this was not to keep Jackie from moving forward as an adult and earning a college degree.

Being able to have school clothes and other items important to middle school girls encouraged Jackie to take a job at about 12 years of age. Most children in her neighborhood took on jobs to help with family incomes. She first worked at a hotel making beds and later at a loading dock doing paperwork. She was not afraid of new challenges, especially when it garnered her things she wanted. *"I was motivated by wanting to buy school clothes,"* she laughed. She took the job at the loading dock. *"It didn't seem like any, it wasn't a burden, it wasn't a struggle, it was just what everybody did,"* she recalled about getting a job. *"I wasn't really intimidated by new experiences, for some reason."*

Her need to fit in was a motivating factor in choices Jackie made. *"I didn't use new experiences, the fear of anything. I didn't use drugs for the fear, I just didn't really fit in."*

Jackie recalled the tumultuous years of middle school and early high school being complicated by drug and alcohol use. Her introductions to this scene came during the summer after her sixth grade year. She admitted that, although she has never been formally diagnosed, she believes she has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):

*When you're ADHD they give you uppers because it makes you come down, and I took uppers. So they made me feel normal. I used drugs early because kids thought when I was being myself they thought that I was high, and when I was high they thought I was normal (laughing). So, I had real issues with, you know, I didn't like that people didn't accept me the way I was. And, you know, that was just a problem for me. Because they just, they never did. I don't know I was just either hyper or, they just . . . I don't know."*

I asked Jackie how she was introduced to drug use. She reported that when she was in sixth grade she was invited to a "party" by a male friend, and upon arriving she realized she was the only one invited. Her friend's older brother supplied the pot. After this, Jackie continued smoking pot eventually moving on to speed by the time she was in high school. The group that she hung out with all used drugs and they found it easy to acquire and use their drugs at school. At that time, students didn't really worry about getting caught possessing or using drugs. Jackie was convinced that school employees and even the police used illegal substances at that time. She admitted that laws are much more stringent now, and the consequences are infinitely more enforced than in those days.

After asking Jackie about her money being spent to support her drug use, she responded that in the drug culture:

*...people that use drugs like giving you drugs. They're the most accepting, the most generous people. They're the most generous people you're going to find in any school. Still. So when you see the kids that are really out on the fringe, they are much more accepting, much more generous, and they're going to share everything with you.*

She explained that this generosity and sensitivity to other's needs is also prevalent in the low socio-economic realm. Those who have electricity will share their homes with those who

don't; those whose electricity is discontinued for lack of payment. Families will often move in with other families to support each other, and this continues with the alcoholics and drug users today. Benard (2004) cited social competence as one category of personal traits of resilience. Social competence includes: responsiveness, communication, empathy/caring, compassion/altruism/forgiveness (Benard, 2004).

At age 16, after having dated her future husband for a couple of years, she was pregnant and married, thus fulfilling the prophecy that many in her world had held. Lack of education was not to entrap her for long, as Jackie, at 18 and mother of two, began working on her GED and eventually went on to earn her two year degree:

*My kids were a great influence for me to go back and get my GED and for keeping me moving forward as a person. I wanted to never disappoint them because they did believe in me. I truly believed that if I didn't do better and try harder and be the kind of person they could be proud of that they would not believe that they could be anything they wanted to be. My dad used to tell me that I could be anything I wanted to be if I put my mind to it and didn't give up. Someone has to believe in you and it truly helps to have someone depend on you to be able to push through the difficult time to be that person. I could count on God and He never let me down. I tried to let my kids know that it wasn't just me doing it along, but the He help me and that the same help was just as available to them as it was to me. I let them know when I was wrong or failed (as they didn't already know it) but it helped them to know that failure is not about loss but about learning from it and moving forward again.*

After age 19, Jackie decided to leave the drug scene behind and move on with her life, getting an education and raising her growing family with her husband. Her children were influential in her desire for an education. "I was growing up at the same time as they were" and she wanted them to be proud of her. She reminisced about the challenges that the drugs had placed upon her:

*Emotionally you quit growing when you use drugs. So any growth that occurs during those years, generally you miss out on, I guess. Being able to choose someone to date. That would definitely be one of the things that I lacked skills*

*in, dating. Totally did not have those skills. Um, all the ways kids mature, um, socially where you experience, um, social gatherings and how you experience them. You know, like if you have a run-in with somebody and you realize, I don't, I can't think of anything, kind of like watching a Patty Duke series where she learns, you know, you learn different things about growing up. You know, maybe the teacher, you might like a teacher then find out that he didn't really like you, he just was a teacher. That kind of thing. Any of those things, you don't get, you don't get it. You just don't get it because you're not able to go past that thinking and then collect your thoughts and realize. It's a realization. There's no realizations, you're just not thinking about them really.*

She described lacking many of the social skills that are developed during adolescence: dating, interacting appropriately with others, reading social cues, and understanding how to develop healthy relationships. Jackie explained how this lack of acquisition of skills influenced her future. Having been married 20 years, Jackie's husband moved her and their family for a "better" job opportunity for him. For Jackie, this situation meant leaving behind two children in high school or college and taking the only their younger children and moving away from her family's support system. Shortly thereafter, he left her and she was so devastated she made plans to end her life. *"I made a plan to kill myself when my husband left. I didn't, it didn't happen because one of my sons stayed home that day and did not go to school, and so, I could not do it while he was there. And so this time had passed and I got through that."*

Eventually, she moved back to her home area for the moral support of family. While she did not move in with her parents, she found the emotional support beneficial in starting a new life. She embarked on a career in selling real estate. In this venture, she became acquainted with a man who took advantage of the fact that this was her first time being on her own:

*When I went to do real estate, the guy who was, said well if you want to sell real estate and I have a house next door and you can just come over and your*

*kids can be next door and have this whole thing and I thought was going to work except he had other plans and we ended up marrying. After I got the loan through him, after I got the house, after I got the job, and that was the only job I had, then it became apparent what was going on. And I did marry him, and I really wasn't in a state of mind that you should marry anyone yet.*

This man manipulated the situation and they stayed married for five years, until she realized he was using her in an elaborate scam to steal from escrow accounts. As she later discovered, this man's daughter had financially come to his aid for the same situation in the past. As Jackie became aware of his unlawful use of the money, she sought help with local banking officials and was able to stay out of any allegations in this matter. However, Jackie's daughter recognized that Jackie might have been suffering from depression. At her daughter's urging, Jackie agreed to see a doctor:

*So I went to my medical doctor and he had me fill out a form and after I filled it out he came in and said, "Do you really feel like this?" and I was like, "Like what?" I really had no idea! And he said, "I'll give you medicine but you should also go to counseling." And so it was the Christian counseling in [a nearby town].*

After working with a therapist at the counseling agency where she sought help, Jackie divorced this man, and she was determined to live the rest of her life as a single person. Her resolve to help others brought her to assisting with a halfway house for ex-prisoners. In this capacity she checks in on them once they are released from prison and helps them with routine activities, a support system on the outside to facilitate their development of daily living skills. One of the clients eventually asked her to write to a friend of his still in prison. After some convincing, Jackie agreed and after much correspondence went to the prison to meet this man. Although he has life in prison, with no possibility for parole, Jackie has married him. She describes this person: *"he's better than anyone I've ever met outside, and he's, um, he's really helped me, um, kind of blossom, I guess, more after that experience*

'cause I would never have had an interest at all in marrying again." She added that there is peacefulness and an assurance that he is there for her, not for her body.

Retrospectively, Jackie revealed how she came to adapt to life experiences and decisions:

*When I was nine or ten my life was in survival mode. I could not figure out how I felt about things let alone share them with anyone. I found a coping mechanism [reflection and God] later in life to live by since I hadn't developed any as a child. I take some time away from others and the business of life to discover how I feel about something and then I can make a decision about what to do with those feelings. Then, I'm able to choose a better feeling that will motivate me to discover a better way or a path that will lead me to a place more in line with my desires or motivation or I might decide it was just a lesson learned and move on. The time is such an important factor. When I was little there was not time between incidents that I could even begin to discover my current feeling before I was feeling something else. I am not sure if this is when I came to dissecting information and asking questions of myself but at some point I learned to determine its effect on me, its relevance for who I would be, if it still has a place in my life and whether or not to toss it out of my life if possible. It wasn't until I was eighteen and had two children that I realized I could not keep up the pace of it all on my own and turned to God for help. It was the first time in my life that I had hope. Once I had hope I was free to move out of survival and into goals and dreams, well not dreams yet, that came much later. I learned to give to God what I could not figure out through praying. I learned to depend on His character because the Bible said it never changed. Whew! What a relief, someone who would not change and was good and perfect. And beside that, I was worth something to someone for more than what I could give them or a need I could meet in their life. I felt like a king had moved in and I wanted everything in my life to please Him since He loved me FIRST! I had rediscovered a sense of purpose and was learning to build trust."*

The ability to process information about life's experiences seems to have been one way for Jackie to build resilience in the face of adversity. Processing for Jackie meant having the time and the understanding that even though life posed challenges, such as inappropriate sexual encounters at a young age and feeling that these were just part of life, there were alternatives to keeping these events inside and dealing with them on her own. She admitted that during her early life, there was not time to discover how she felt about one experience

before another occurred. *“I was in survival mode,”* she said. Further probing for explanation, I asked how she dealt with the abuse and men exposing themselves to her. *“Were there times when you wanted to communicate that to [your parents] or somebody?”* *“Never. I don’t know why.”* She replied. *“You accept it. It’s done, and then you change your behavior to so that, to avoid it again.”* Without realizing it, those times she spent along the river, fishing with her father and his friends, might have provided some of the time she needed and later in life found to be therapeutic. She spent a lot of time outside as a child:

*I didn’t watch TV. I didn’t stay inside. There was a creek in the woods nearby [our home] and I would go to that when I could get away. I’d take a stick and put a hankie on the end of it and take some things with me and just go out into the woods. I would play hobo. [At that time] I really wanted to be a hobo when I grew up.”*

Talking with her dad, asking him questions about God and about life, may have also planted some seeds for her to pursue faith later in life. In one of our discussions, she admitted that much of her life is complicated and that she struggled with being secretive about situations. She explained that when she did try to “explain things that are in my life or have happened to me when I know that putting it gently would be easier for the person who is wanting to know but after a series of questions which I know they will ask, *“I end up in the same place anyway so why avoid it?”* She revealed that she believed people will *“fill in the blanks anyway”* so rather than have a fabricated story out there if it is passed along, she wanted the truth. *“I already know that the truth cannot hurt me.”* Jackie learned about the importance of honesty in her neighborhood. The experience of the family accusing Jackie of stealing the bike tarnished Jackie’s reputation. As a child she felt she was not able to overcome this stigma, so she chose not to reveal the sexual assault event just a few days prior involving the same family. Today she explained that being straightforward with information is a better

option. I believe it is important to note that Jackie did not make excuses for herself blaming unhealthy decisions on negative critical incidents. Nor did she emphasize the significance of one event over another. Many times Jackie reiterated two buffers that mitigated risks: (1) the belief her father held for her that she could achieve anything she chose, and (2) her faith that God would see her through circumstances she may not feel equipped to handle on her own.

I asked Jackie how she believes her childhood and adolescence influenced her parenting. *“I was growing up at the same time as they [her children] were, but I definitely know that I did not have enough . . . and I never lived on my own. I see the value in that now and I, it must have been a decade before I realized the value living apart from others, kind of, to get your own identity. I didn’t realize how important that was.”* She described her inability to *“see what human nature itself was like. I was clueless.”* I inquired further and she added, *“I didn’t mature on my own [alluding to the various ways she responded to her childhood/adolescent experiences and her drug use], I had to mature with [my children].”*

### **The World of School**

Jackie’s elementary school was within walking distance of her home, a *“brick building, all on one level,”* she recalled.

*The main entrance was the largest area, which had a long closet at the far end and was used as the lunchroom/physical ed. room/auditorium. There was an office just off that room and the kitchen opposite that. I worked in the office when I was older to help do office errands. I was a crossing school guard so I know where the kitchen was because after watching out for the younger kids to cross the street in the morning I was able to drink some hot cocoa that the cooks had made for us to warm us up.*

The elementary housed students from kindergarten through sixth grade. Classrooms for the older students near the front entrance provided for greater accessibility to the playground as the younger students’ classrooms were on the opposite end. *“Outside the kindergarten was*



*the large playground with a slide or two, swings and a merry-go-round. You could jump on it once it was spinning. It [the school] was close enough that I could walk to the school and home for lunch every day.”* She added that school pride was a major focus.

Although she had older sisters, she walked alone through the churchyard and then on a heavily travelled street to get to the school. Walking about a block and a half, Jackie recalled her first-day of school, seeing other children arrive and crying, not wanting to stay without their mothers. She was confused, unsure why they felt this way. Laughing now, Jackie said, *“I just stared at them.”*

Jackie loved school and was excited to go everyday:

*I remember going to kindergarten. I remember getting myself ready for school. Standing on a chair so I could reach the poles in the closet. I was really small and, um, I remember I went on a Saturday because I didn't know it wasn't a school day. So, because I just [always] went by myself, I got up and got ready and went there and no one was there.*

After some period of time she returned home only to have her sisters laugh at her saying, *“How stupid. Don't you know they don't have school on Saturday?”*

This was still at the time when girls were expected to wear dresses to school. On those cold days, they were allowed to wear pants under their dresses or skirts and take them off when they arrived at school. At school, a fond memory for her was the library, but not until her fourth grade year. They did not have a room for art, music or a library. The books were brought to the school in a van. She recalled being very apprehensive about getting into the van at first. Being wary of strangers and the experience in a friend's car taught her about the possibility of danger associated with vehicles and initially brought an uncomfortable feeling about the book mobile. Having taken the first step with lots of encouragement from a friend to go into the book mobile, Jackie's love of reading grew quickly as the world of print

opened up for her. Laura Ingalls Wilder was a favorite author, Jackie recalled. She was always more drawn to expository text, wanting to learn about the world and real life things. Historical fiction, like the *Little House* books brought the reality of life in a different time to Jackie and offered her the chance to escape and identify with Laura as a child in the pioneer days. Jackie described how, as a child, she aspired to becoming a hobo. The freedom and the independence of the hobo life appealed to her at that time. *“I’d take a stick and put a hanky on the end of it and take some things with me and just go out into the woods. There was a creek in the woods nearby and I would go to that when I could get away.”* Laura Ingalls and her family experienced a freedom and independent as well, although life on the frontier was fraught with challenge. Did Jackie see a correlation between her life and Laura’s?

*I did because she was close to her father and he called her “half-pint” and um, she wanted to be with him all the time but they didn’t always let her because girls didn’t get to do the same things. So I must have related to her well, and then after I read that series I tried to read Betsy and something like they were more teen things like boyfriend/girlfriend and they did not hold much attraction to me. She [Laura], I definitely clicked with her.*

Jackie sighed happily as she talked about how she eagerly awaited the book van’s arrival at school to return a book and check out a new one. Voraciously reading one book after another she eventually developed an appreciation for fiction, but her real allegiance was to non-fiction because of all the questions for which she could finally find the answers she sought. Her mother loved reading, supported by Jackie’s grandparents. While she did not recall ever having her mother read to her, because of her opportunities at school, she became a proficient and avid reader.

*“My junior high, as it was called then, was seventh through ninth grades, and a brick three-story building.”* Although she did not participate in many sports, *“I went out for basketball when I was in middle school and, um, and cheerleading the rest of the year. And I*

*did cheerlead, I think, every year that I was in school.” Her school offered basketball for boys and girls, football, wrestling, chess club, science club along music and band with were options for students at this level. Pep busses were available for non-participating students to attend sporting events to which the teams traveled. “This building was older than the elementary. It was across the street from the county’s public nursing home.” She added that social studies became an increasing area of focus during her junior high years:*

*My high school was joined diagonally by land to the junior high. This was hand for sharing sports fields. It was a newer brick building but he rooms were not divided off because it was supposed to be supportive of an open learning environment. There was a library, art room, science lab, band room and choir. I was in the DECA [Distributive Education Clubs of America] program and cheerleading. It also had an open campus atmosphere and the main areas all had seating for an open concourse area. We had a school paper, which I really enjoyed. I went there until the middle of my 12<sup>th</sup> grade when I had to give it up because pregnant girls could not attend school. I had two classes left to finish and get my diploma but that was not going to happen. Most kids drove their own cars they worked to own. There was a large parking lot. Half of the people could not afford a class ring or school jacket but worked outside of the school and made enough to get their own if their parents couldn’t afford it. We had school pride, and pep bus went to game along with team bus.*

Jackie explained that when she became pregnant in high school she was already aware that she would have to leave school. *“My older sister got pregnant before she was married and they [parents] put her in a home for unwed mothers. Now it wasn’t because of what the neighbors would say, they just didn’t know what else to do. That’s what people did.”* Later in conversation she briefly shared her own experience of teen pregnancy and school policy. *“Although I started school early, at four, I still had a half a year to go before I would graduate. And I didn’t finish because they wouldn’t let you go to school when you were pregnant.”* I was curious about how Jackie viewed this experience and how she perceived school officials addressed this issue;

*I felt like I'd been caught. You know, in an act that I shouldn't have been. And that I put the father's future at risk. It was definitely all on me. The school is not, would not allow you to go when you're pregnant. It was definitely a school official problem. You know I felt ashamed and a loss, but once I determined, you know, what I was going to do, you get married then. It was all for that. There was no looking back.*

In an effort to understand the circumstances of this teen pregnancy, I inquired, "Was this situation in which you got pregnant a consensual act? The sexual encounters on an intimate level, were those mutual decisions at that time?" Jackie replied, "Boy, I, I'm sure I was married before I ever felt like it was my choice. So, no. Most of those would be . . ." She paused, and I offered, "For a lack of a better word, forced upon you?" Jackie agreed, "Yeah." I pressed further, "How did you view sexuality as an adolescent?" Jackie clarified:

*It was already messed up for me by then, so I didn't really care. I mean I had feelings, I had urges, but I would have left it alone if no one had ever approached me. It was never me that was seeking it out. Although I felt like I was a magnet. I felt like it was never going to, like I was never going to get away from it. So, I wasn't really normal, I guess, about it. Maybe that is normal, I don't know.*

Although school was not difficult for Jackie, she does not paint her experiences there as a nurturing supportive environment. Student misbehavior was often drawn attention to by the classroom teacher:

*I remember I had to wear a sign all day for talking too much. They put a sign around me with a rope thing that was on it and said, 'I'm a talker,' and I had to wear it at lunch and at recess, and I'd put my coat on they made me wear it on the outside. I was very humiliated. I was very upset over it. I mean, I knew I deserved it, (laughing) but I didn't like it. I didn't like humiliation. I thought that was, it is, it's humbling (laughing) that's what it does.*

On one occasion, Jackie recalled she wet her pants. Rather than making arrangements to change into dry clothes, Jackie was set on the heater in the classroom to dry out. She described the smell that permeated the room from the urine as it dried in the heat.

Feeling humbled by these experiences, these memories are part of Jackie's resolve to stand up for those who are marginalized. She acquired this determination at an early age and feels this loyalty today:

*I remember once there was a girl that everybody was picking on and I, I thought that was wrong to pick on her because she was dirty. Because I knew she probably didn't have running water. A lot of people in the neighborhood did not have running water and it wasn't her fault her parents didn't have running water. So, to stand up for her, I took her hand which was really dirty, and she did smell, but I took her hand and I smiled and I walked down the hall with her everywhere we went so that people would quit picking on her "cause I really hated that."*

As an upper elementary student, she described a teacher singling out students of various faiths in the class. At this early point in her life, Jackie felt uneasy and, although unable to say why at the time, instinctively knew there was something rather judgmental about it.

Reminiscing about particular teachers, some positively and other negatively, Jackie spoke about a school decision to determine how climate control might affect test scores. As part of the test group of students, she was bussed to another school with air-conditioning where she encountered a teacher whose rules and social expectations were very strict and very different from those to which Jackie had been accustomed. Social norms at school, at least for some teachers, differed from those in Jackie's home. Jackie recalled, *"My dad had a loose philosophy, really. Um, no one can tell you what to do, basically is what he would preach. But then you took the responsibility for it. So he would say, "nobody can make you do anything" whenever we would come up against something."* While she did not recall exactly what *"social rules [this teacher had that] I didn't accept,"* Jackie admitted she eventually told the teacher that she hated her, and ...

*I never got another recess the rest of the year. And, I had to write the dictionary every recess at the beginning again. Which I resented because I thought was foolish to write the same words over and over, but I'm sure that was the punishment of it, and so, and she made me spell her name after that. It was S and it was difficult but she said, "you'll learn it." So, by golly I was going to, and I did. She would make me go out with the boys instead of . . . You know, the girls lined up first and then the boys would follow, but I had to go out with the boys because of my manners, I suppose.*

Jackie had more difficulty with math than with other subjects in school. But overall, she loved school. Embarrassed when she didn't know something that she felt certain other children her age had learned, Jackie worked hard to conceal that. She credited a teacher who discovered when Jackie was in seventh grade that she could not tell time. "Back then," she said, "if you missed something they didn't really go over it again." Jackie noted that telling time was more difficult to learn in the days before digital clocks. "It was important that you acted your age. So, I was embarrassed over things that I knew someone my age should know, 'cause accountability was a big deal in my neighborhood. Being, once you're old enough, you know, you act like that." She went on to explain that when she acted immaturity, adults would often "give you the 'oh' like disappointment, they were disappointed in you." That was one way she knew she hadn't "acted her age." I questioned, "So looking back on that now, how do you think that accountability or the responsibility that you took on that age influenced you or your perception of life in general?"

*I looked at it more sensibly. I thought that, I don't know anyone in my neighborhood who didn't have responsibility. So, it's kind of hard to compare. If I saw someone who didn't seem to know how to handle their own, take care of regular day-to-day chores, or things that were the expectations with the elderly or the weak. You know you just stepped in and did it. I don't know anyone in my neighborhood who didn't do it. Even the wealthier families did the same. It was more of just the time period. I'm not sure. So, if I saw someone who couldn't, who didn't know about taking care of themselves I would feel bad for them more than, it's just that the independence meant a lot. Being independent was a strength, not a weakness, to us, so if you couldn't,*

*one day they're not going to be able to do it on their own is what, why I would feel bad for them.*

Accountability for Jackie meant accepting responsibility for one's actions and being trustworthy. She had described for me how she faced challenges to her reputation when she was accused of stealing a neighbor's bike, her own determination to overcome older cousins trying to overpower her in their backyard swimming pool and rebelling against injustice as she saw it played out in the classroom with other students. Jackie took action as her parents, particularly her father, influenced her "*empowerment.*" She viewed the marginalized student as one like her and used her resilience to take a stand.

Jackie recognized the importance of being accountable, by neighborhood standards. She understood that children were expected to act according to their age. Embarrassed that she had not learned how to tell time, and this learning was an expectation, she tried to hide her deficit. However, one caring teacher recognized this problem worked to remedy that. This teacher took her aside and worked with her until she mastered the concept. Jackie did not recall this as common practice in those days. Once a skill was taught, teachers moved on assuming that all students had acquired it. The broad expectation of schooling at that time was that students would learn it if the material was presented and if the student was capable of learning.

Jackie's early memories of school were positive, and she recalled being eager to go every day. She recalled being so excited that she got herself up on a Saturday and wet to school, too young to understand it was not a school day. During her elementary years, there were a few supportive moments in her memory. One teacher took an interest in making sure she learned a skill she had somehow missed. She remembered being served hot chocolate in the cafeteria on those cold mornings when she served as a crossing guard. Overall, Jackie's

recollections of school were not positive. She noted that her teacher's expectations were often difficult for her to accept. These "rules" were different than those with which Jackie was accustomed. She found humiliation to be a form of punishment, such as sitting on the heater to dry out soiled clothes, "*writing the dictionary*" when Jackie told the teacher she hated her, and being required to line up with the boys because of her manners. Jackie recognized marginalization in her school. When other children seemed to be treated unfairly, she became an advocate for them. Like the lesson she learned in her cousins' swimming pool, all of these school experiences influenced "*who I was to become.*" Jackie did not leave school choosing to drop out, but becoming pregnant, at that time, required that you could not attend. Thus, her K-12 school experience came to an end. Again, Jackie's resilience was revealed when she eventually earned her GED and continued on to take college courses.

### **Multiple Worlds Resiliency Model and Jackie**

In my dialogue with Jackie, and later with my university committee members, I eventually became acutely aware of how I might visually represent the ways in which Jackie experienced life through the lenses of individual or peer factors, family factors, school factors and community factors. I shared the resiliency model I had developed and asked for her ideas. As I explained my thought process in developing a visual representation, she listened intently. Acknowledging that all of these did play a part in how she interpreted life events, she suggested that the critical incidents are "*bigger than the paper*" that it is difficult to represent this and do these events justice. For her, these events seemed to continually be coming her way. She admitted that she rarely had time to process one critical incident before another came along. Consequently, it is important to reiterate the possibility that the limitations of paper and model may not be adequate to represent the nature of this



phenomenon. Additionally, Jackie recommended an emphasis on the evolvement of learning and adaptation to new experiences over time. It was later in dialogue with my committee that I embarked on a more comprehensive model to represent what contexts and influences make up resiliency building experiences.

The following example (Figure 4.1) is a representation of Jackie's life mapped against this Multiple Worlds Resiliency model. Jackie noted, *"You're not going through life as just one thing, you're changing with everything you've gone through. You're morphing there, somehow."* As Figure 4.1 depicts, Jackie has met stressors in each of her "worlds." Consistent with the research on resiliency the buffers available to her in each of these domains has supported her in ways that enhance her resilience and to influence her perceptions for meeting new challenges. As her resilience was developed, Jackie was able to draw on these experiences to transition from one setting or "world" to another and to use her understanding in new situations.

The model provided in Chapter 2 demonstrates the four major "worlds" as influences in an individual's life: community, school, family and individual/peer. In this model, community can be represented as a component of the school and the peer and existing within the larger socioeconomic realm. Critical incidents are part of living, and the ways in which a person responds to these incidents are representative of the level of resilience the individual has developed. Protective factors or buffers may come from many sources. The level of support an individual receives influences how much resilience for future critical incidents might be developed. In Figure 4.1 the arrows indicate the constant exchange or interaction between the individual and each of the four general areas. It is impossible to negate the value of any one of these factors, just as it is impossible to measure the intensity of any specific

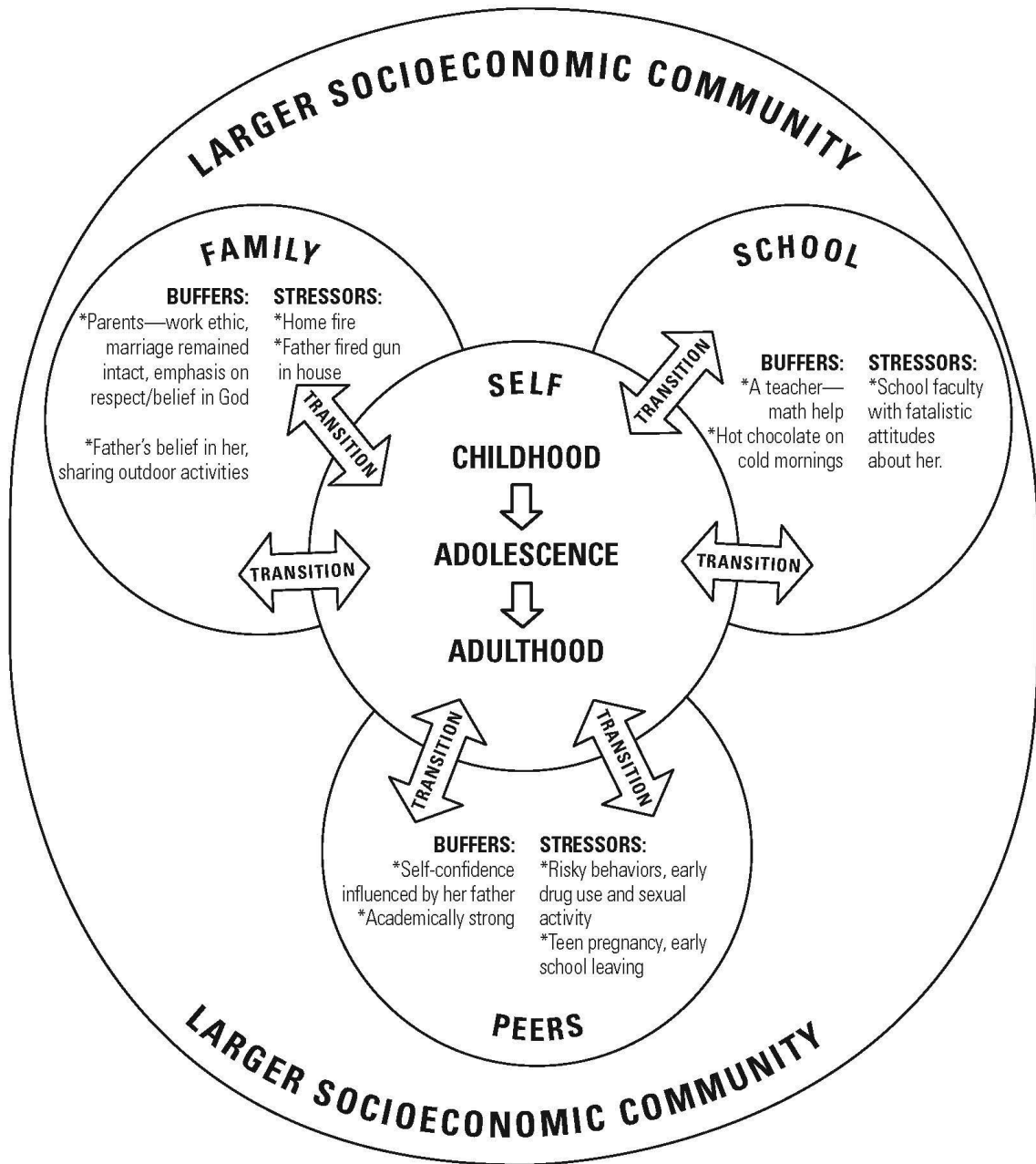


Figure 4.1. Jackie’s life mapped against the Multiple Worlds Resiliency model

factor. Each of these domains is in constant motion always available to the individual and informing his world view. Life is not static, nor is the human experience static. At times, borders are created between the multiple contexts in which a student must transition, both positive and negative, through the lenses of his community, school, family and peers and influence how he responds. Jackie explained how this became very evident in her life. At school, there were *“rules that I didn’t [understand], more social rules that I didn’t accept.”* Jackie described her parents as having expectations for them, *“not taking God’s name in vain,”* becoming *“responsible at an early age,”* and *“respecting your elders.”* I asked her more about that. *“My dad had a loose philosophy. No one can tell you what to do is basically what he would preach. But then you took the responsibility for it. So, he would say, ‘nobody can make you do anything’ whenever we would come up against something.”* This world view was conflicted for her at school. She didn’t understand why girls should line up together and leave the room before boys. Jackie recalled that a teacher made *“me go out with the boys. You know the girls lined up first and the boys would follow, but I had to go out with the boys because of my manners, I suppose.”*

Informing educators about how protective factors or buffers and the risk factors or stressors contribute to the way a student makes sense of his or her experiences is beneficial in meeting the needs of each student. Likewise, understanding cultural norms that may pose barriers to transitions for students from one context to another. Teachers and administrators must acknowledge that learning has occurred in each child’s life. This learning may include academic as well as social aspects inherent in each child’s experience. Children develop varying degrees of resilience to meet new challenges. Resilience may be displayed in

different ways, due to the nature of the buffers and risks that have played out in his or her life in conjunction with the challenges, or lack thereof, in transitioning between social settings.

### Summary

In this chapter Jackie's recollection of life have been revealed. I was privileged to have earned her trust to the extent that she was willing to divulge the various aspects of her life, some of which must have been very difficult. Jackie described events that were etched in her memory, and it was my challenge to extract the various themes that emerged and to categorize these memories according to the factors established in the literature and detailed in chapter two: family, community, school, and individual/peer. It later became important to recognize the influence of transitions between and among the various contexts in which Jackie operated and the "worlds" in which she experienced these critical incidents. I began this research for the purpose of examining what factors influence how resilience develops. Attending to this, in Chapter 2, I presented a visual representation of this conceptual framework, a model of multiple worlds resilience. Accordingly, I conducted an in-depth qualitative study of one woman's life experiences and encouraged her to share the details of a myriad of events in her life so that I could extract evidence of how resilience from a variety of sources defined in the literature played a role in her resilience. Because it is difficult to pull-apart the domains and identify one factor as being more influential or deny the influence of another factor, the Multiple Worlds Resiliency model represents how these "worlds" may have been at work day to day in Jackie's life.

## CHAPTER 5. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED AND WHAT SHOULD WE CONTINUE TO PURSUE?

The purpose of this study was to examine resilience and the ways in which interactions between life events and the internal characteristics of one woman influenced her resilience and enabled her to meet and overcome the challenges she encountered. Furthermore, this study informs educators about how schools might promote resilience, and what educators and schools can do systemically to improve or promote resilience in those who are most vulnerable.

### Discussion

Resilience is really a balance between buffers and risks. Buffers exist in varying degrees in everyone's life. Similarly, risks or critical incidents occur for everyone as well. Children considered to be at-risk experience multiple risk factors that generally accumulate over time. These children may have difficulty meeting the adversities, and without necessary supports they may struggle more than someone with protective factors to strengthen their resolve. Werner and Smith (1992, 1989) described resilience as the ability to "bounce back" from adversity. Mervlyn Kitashima, (2008) suggested that educators shift from labeling these children at-risk to children "at-promise." Likewise, might we also shift our thinking from these children having to "bounce back" to a paradigm of "bouncing forward" since they also apply their experiences as they adapt in new situations. For Jackie this came in the form of realizations. An example of this was a realization she recalled after her sexual assault:

*Once I realized that I lived instead of dying I wondered, "Why am I here? What will I leave? What can I leave?" After the abuse and years of suppressed feelings, I went to logic. When [that] child on the banks of [the]*

*Mississippi died that I was playing beside—it started me trying to make sense of why them and not me. [These] realizations seem to move me forward, onward.”*

As the field work for this study unfolded, and with each interview, I was constantly intrigued with new revelations both as I reflected on what Jackie had shared about her life and by the knowledge that, in spite of all of these experiences, she holds a fulltime job, owns her home, manages her finances and, by all appearances, is a functioning member of society. As she presents today, Jackie surmounted many obstacles or critical incidents in her youth including the emotional challenges associated with unwanted sexual advances on several different occasions, drug use, teen pregnancy and the educational challenges of dropping out of school and eventually earning her GED while raising her young children. She maintains friendships with some of her old classmates and has made acquaintances and developed meaningful relationships with others in her adult life. Jackie has accepted the critical incidents and has used those events to create a new life for herself, acknowledging the ways in which each of these has influenced her. As an adult, she attested to the sexual assault as an elementary school-aged child influenced how she later “*guarded [her] spirit*” or became unable to “*open [her] heart*” completely to another, even in marriage until well into adulthood. “*I really felt like even if they forced me to do things, I knew on the inside they could never force to do things.*” This belief solidified for Jackie that she must not open her heart, in case it became vulnerable as well. She admitted that becoming involved with drugs, as early as sixth grade and continuing through her high school experience, “*definitely affected my ability to make, to mature in a lot of ways.*” She explained that emotionally, “*you quit growing when you use drugs.*” She blamed her inability to choose someone to date, and eventually choosing a life partner, on missing this social skill.

Realizing the influence drugs had on her and the skills she “*missed*” growing up, she is willing and able to assist others as they transform from prison life and mainstream into society. Jackie is working through services provided by her church community to support others who need assistance in rebuilding their lives. Community resources such as this church group were identified in the resilience literature. So what were the experiences that positively influenced her and brought her to this point in her life?

Jackie frequently mentioned her parents’ influence as she grew. She spoke of how uneasy her mother was in social groups such as PTA at her school. Her mother described being looked down upon, but Jackie did not understand why her mother was unhappy or allowed these people to affect her self-esteem. During her youth, both of Jackie’s parents worked. They wanted better for their children than they had experienced. Serving others in need was important to her parents, signified by their willingness to provide food to neighborhood families when they could. According to Jackie’s account, her father’s belief that she could achieve anything she wanted was a pronounced support. She referred to this often in our conversation. At that time, getting married and raising a family were the main expectations for the girls in Jackie’s family. Although she had considered becoming a teacher, she didn’t have the resources or information available to her for preparing for college. This lack of resources was not to keep her from eventually attending college.

Jackie’s neighborhood consisted of many relatives who came to her aid, and her family’s in times of need. They celebrated holidays together, and were all at Jackie’s home one Christmas when a fire broke out that destroyed her house. These relatives took in the family, siblings were separated from their parents as they were taken in by those relatives while Jackie’s father rebuilt their home. In stressful times, such as the New Year’s Eve when

her father shot the gun in the living room, Jackie's aunt came to take her overnight, removing her from the stressful situation.

In this community she encountered people of different ethnic groups as well as various religions. Jackie's family was Lutheran, but she lived among other faiths including Catholics, who had *"lots more rituals and traditions"* than she cared to have. She reported that her family did not accommodate any of these rituals or traditions with their own, but she learned to respect others for their beliefs and ways of living because of the neighborhood experience. In this community setting, she also learned how important one's integrity and reputation were. Being accused of stealing a neighbor girl's bike and having no way to prove otherwise was challenging for Jackie. She did not elaborate on how she moved beyond this experience, but realized that this was considered very wrong. *"You didn't steal from your neighbors. You could go outside of your neighborhood, but nobody's going to steal from our neighbors. It was just a really bad thing. My parents wanted to believe me [when I told them I didn't do it], but the parents kept calling up and saying, you know they made up a big story."* Taking responsibility for her actions was instilled both at home and in the neighborhood. Her father would tell her *"Nobody can make you do anything."*

### **Theoretical Implications Played Out In Jackie's Life**

This purpose of this chapter is to aggregate the information gleaned from the interviews with the existing research on resilience in an effort to determine what part schools and educators can play in supporting and nurturing children. When we know what factors or combination of factors influence outcomes we can make more informed decisions about programming for our students. The conclusions presented in this chapter are consistent with



the research in many ways. Realizing the difficulty in isolating one category from another in terms of factors which have been found to influence resilience, I have chosen to consider each domain individually as it played a role in Jackie's evolution and summarize with the four major areas as a whole. Following that discussion, I have focused specifically on what educators can do to enhance the opportunities for children and adolescents to build resilience.

### **The World of Community**

Jackie's experience with how she believed others perceived her, and the acknowledgement and support she received from those in her community was consistent with the research on the influence of the community or neighborhood on socialization and resilience building. Jackie's extended family living next door provided her with security in difficult times when life in her own home was uncertain. These families supported one another, and contributed to feelings of acceptance and belonging by helping one another. Cameron et al. (2009) emphasized the role of positive supportive relationships within the community along with a perceived connection to cultural beliefs within the community. Whereas Werner and Smith (1992) found that children of economically challenged homes pursued relationships and advice from those not within the immediate family, Jackie did not describe relationships she sought in the community. Instead, it appears that she felt empowered by her father's confidence that she could do anything she chose to do with her life. Community resources evidenced in Jackie's oral history came in the form of aunts and uncles who came to her aid and her family's aid in times of struggle.

Other situations in the community often posed risks. Within her community, drug and alcohol use by adolescents was common and she became part of this culture during her junior high and high school years. This finding parallels Lewis and Sugai's (1999) findings that

when prosocial interactions and relationships were not modeled or available, problematic or deviant behavior was more likely to occur. Jackie described her parents' use of alcohol as a coping mechanism. She spoke of their loss of a child before she was born. She divulged the critical incident when her parents came home after an evening out and her father shot the gun in the house. She presumed he had shot her mother, because she saw her mother fall, only finding out later that her mother had fainted. With the challenges she faced and the coping mechanisms that were part of her family's response, Jackie sought acceptance in the drug culture. Jackie explained that people use the resources that are most readily available to them. For her parents, particularly her father, this was alcohol. For her and her peers, coping involved drug use. The Multiple Worlds Resiliency model resonates with Jackie's experience in the larger socioeconomic community. Jackie acknowledged that her values and beliefs were influenced by the expectations within the neighborhood and the broader community in which she grew up.

### **The World of Family**

In my conversations with Jackie it was apparent that the relationship between Jackie and her parents during her childhood was very important. Research emphasized the role of the family in the early socialization of children (Bennett, 1990; Benard, 2004; Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Krovetz, 2008; Werner & Smith, 1992). Jackie's description of her adolescence highlighted the strong support she received from her father, his unwavering belief that she could accomplish anything she wanted. Parental confidence in Jackie parallels Benard's (2004) findings noting that a positive belief by parents that their child will be successful is a predictor of the child's future success. Jackie has not doubted her parents' belief in her.

While the role of the family is important, it is not necessarily the most important influence in

resilience (Benard). Armed with the confidence of her parents, Jackie still searched for acceptance from peers and found that in the drug culture beginning as early as sixth grade and continuing through her high school years. She admitted that she was able to function in school because of the drugs. She explained that she used uppers, and that students with ADHD are often prescribed stimulants because these medications typically help them “*settle down*” and “*be able to focus.*” She found this to be true for her, although she was never formally diagnosed with ADHD. Her acknowledged inability to refrain from talking has convinced her that she is hyperactive, but as an adult she has learned to manage these symptoms through “*time alone to sort things out.*” Again, this is another indication that it is difficult to separate the various domains in terms of their relative influence on an individual. Similarly, we must consider the level of intensity of the buffers (e.g., Jackie’s parents) and Jackie’s need for acceptance, in this case, in how the buffer will influence future situations. In the report by the Department of Health and Human Services (2009) when substance or alcohol abuse was present in an adult caregiver, children were significantly negatively influenced physically and emotionally. These youth often engaged in risky behavior due to the lack of supervision when alcohol or drug use was a factor (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, n.p.). Jackie did use drugs to cope with life and to “fit in” with her peers.

Cameron et al. (2009) noted the importance of the accessibility of resources including financial, medical, education and employment opportunities in addition to food, clothing and shelter. Jackie’s experience aligns with this finding. Her parents were able to find adequate work to support the family, in a fashion similar others in the community, public school was readily available, and medical help was accessible when necessary. The family relied on a

large garden each summer to provide them with food and supplement their grocery needs. Jackie spoke of her family's willingness to share their food with their neighbors demonstrating their generosity in helping others. As Jackie noted, neighbors, many of whom were extended family members, assisted in meeting each other's needs. This finding is congruent with the literature on how the family plays a role in resilience (Benard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1992, 1989). Jackie's extended family supported her and other family members in times of stress including the house fire and her father's firing a gun in the home. In each of these situations, Jackie noted that due to the assistance that was provided she and her family were able to move forward. Jackie's experience is congruent with the research and the utility of the Multiple Worlds Resiliency model, emphasizing the role her parents and family played in her transitioning between home and the neighborhood. Additionally, the border-crossing that Jackie navigated is discussed in the next section.

### **The World of School**

Jackie's positive memories of school were few. She credited only a couple of teachers with taking an interest in her as a student. While she did not describe many negative experiences with the educators in her matriculation through public education, she displayed more of a noncommittal stance, with relatively little emotion, when she described her school experiences. I asked her about whether as an adolescent she thought about going to college. She explained that she wanted to become a teacher. *"I loved to help people. I knew that education was a way to do that."* However, no one ever spoke to her about college opportunities and she reported that she didn't even know the name of a college at that time. At school, she reported, *"people [teachers] would say you'll probably never do that [go to college], you'll end up pregnant and have a baby. And so I did."* She did not identify any

school employee who took a personal interest in her. She participated in her school community for a short time as a cheerleader, but did not go out for any sports or involve herself in any other clubs or organizations. She did not indicate that any school faculty member ever encouraged her to participate in co-curricular or extra-curricular activities.

These findings are consistent with the literature that students with low connection or involvement with school have an increased risk of dropping out (Yonke, 2001). Non-nurturing environments showed increases in problem behaviors among students when compared with nurturing environments (Benard, 2004). Teachers who appeared uninterested or disengaged academically were reported to be influential in a student's decision to drop out (Yonke, 2001). Research generally identified drop-outs as those with little connection to school and low academic motivation. Inconsistent with research on why students typically drop out, Jackie admitted that she loved school as a younger child and did not indicate that she ever became disillusioned with school, or suffered academically. She did indicate that while she was not generally dissatisfied with teachers, staff did not extend themselves to encourage her academically. However, consistent with drop out research, becoming pregnant in her junior year forced her to drop out of school because "*pregnant girls weren't allowed to go to school.*" Jackie recalled that in those days, alternative schools were not available to provide an education for students not considered "*typical*" or conforming to middle class societal expectations.

In the literature, poverty was cited as the most frequent predictor of dropping out of school (Deschamps, 1992). In Jackie's neighborhood and family, low socio-economic status was pervasive. Although Jackie did drop out of school for a time due to pregnancy, she continued to pursue her desire for education. After her second child was born, she earned her

GED and eventually her two-year degree. *“I did that because I wanted the kids to know that [education] was important.”* I asked how she accomplished this. *“I was in school almost every, you know, all the time. It was a few semesters off, but mostly I was. And I had to balance it all. So the decision to get married, I wanted it all. I wanted both, so I felt like I could do it, and I did, slowly.”* Jackie’s persistence and her desire to have it all—her family and her education—propelled her forward in spite of the challenges of marriage and caring for young children. Jackie’s persistence was influenced by her father’s belief that she could do anything she wanted and that she desired to be a good role model for her children. She was successful academically and this provided her a basis for a belief in herself where schooling was the focus. Where Jackie found support from her parents, particularly her father, with respect to confidence that she could accomplish whatever she chose, the school setting seemed to have erected boundaries or barriers in many respects. Jackie’s lack of understanding about teachers’ rules and expectations, her school faculty’s disconnect with Jackie on a personal level, and a few staff members who grossly underestimated her potential and blatantly delivered self-fulfilling prophecies regarding Jackie’s future (most likely) unintentionally erected barriers to her success.

### **The World of Individual/Peer**

Within the realm of individual/peer factors, Benard (2004) highlighted four areas found in the literature an influential in resilience: social competence, problem solving, autonomy and sense of purpose. Jackie’s story personifies many of these characteristics in various ways.

### **Social competence**

Jackie was responsive to others, exhibiting empathy for those she saw as marginalized. She described the time in her elementary school and the classmate who was treated poorly by other students because she was not clean. Jackie demonstrated compassion in responding to this girl's needs by taking her hand and walking with her down the hall, as a sign of solidarity. She admitted that while she acquired coping mechanisms, she "*missed out on*" many of the social cues that typically happen during the adolescent years, such as being able to open oneself up and "*attach emotionally*" to another person. Jackie was unable to trust others in a relationship enough to open herself emotionally. She believes she did not acquire this skill until her later adult years. "*I never trusted, I never went past the emotional, I would never attach myself to someone emotionally I was very detached.*" She attributed this to the traumatic experience of the sexual assault. She came to accept this as a part of life. It was later, as she embarked on her college courses that she would further investigate this deviant behavior. She began to use her experience toward a career in working with those who were incarcerated.

### **Problem solving**

Problem solving was evident as Jackie matured into a teenager having been molested as a child, and experiencing several situations where men exposed themselves to her. She learned to protect herself by avoiding situations where she might be "alone with a boy," by "*dressing modestly,*" by "*guarding her spirit.*" These were mechanisms she developed to protect herself. When she was unable to attend school because of pregnancy, as a young mother she pursued the option of earning her GED. This led to the availability of college programs where she was eventually able to earn a two-year degree.

Over time, Jackie came to realize that she was better able to make decisions when she could escape from everyday challenges. By doing so, spending time outdoors in thought and reflection afforded her opportunities to consider options, thus arriving at better solutions.

### **Autonomy**

Jackie developed autonomy through the ways in which she learned to “*walk my life.*” She admitted that, at times, she believed others have questioned her choices. As a result of her experiences, she noted, “*I was pretty skilled at being able to relate to someone without allowing them to know the emotional side of me or that, the spirit . . . I learned to guard my spirit more than I did my body. I didn’t really care about my body at that point. So I guarded my spirit . . . that was the empowerment.*” While she did not describe ever having a positive identity, she grew to understand that there were ways in which she could control her world. She protected “*the spirit,*” as a buffer against vulnerability. She developed an awareness of herself during her early adult years, but not before her plan to end her life was thwarted by her young son staying home from school. Jackie’s sense of purpose came when her children were young. She noted that she became determined to earn her GED in order to become someone they could be proud of, in addition conveying to them a sense of the importance of an education.

### **Sense of purpose**

Consistent with the research on spirituality, Jackie confirmed that belief in God or having a church was common to those who “*made it out of the neighborhood.*” Kim and Esquivel (2011) associated spirituality with life purpose and found that in the presence of adversity, having a purpose in life was shown to promote resilience. “*I loved to help people,*”



she shared. For Jackie, in her adult life, this purpose has been to serve God through service in her church and to the newly released to society. As a young mother, she found her purpose in raising her children the best way she knew and to become a person of whom they could be proud. Having a positive identity was also found to influence positive outcomes (Cameron et al., 2009).

While Jackie didn't describe herself in a way that was suggestive of having a positive self-identity, she navigated the challenges of life—inappropriate advances and actions toward her by older males, early onset of risky behaviors (drug use, sexual activity), teen pregnancy and marriage forcing her to dropping out of school. She also blamed her drug use for her inability to mature in ways typical of non-drug using adolescents. *“[I] totally did not have those skills. Um, all of the ways kids mature, um, socially where you experience, um social gatherings and how you experience them.”*

### **Resilience Not a Stage**

I cannot say that at any particular point, Jackie became resilient or achieved resilience. Based upon the research I have cited previously which explains resilience as a process and upon my own exploration of Jackie's life, it would be inappropriate to describe resilience as an event or a specific point in time. Resilience is not a stage. It may, however, be associated with maturity; not maturity as defined by age, but rather by wisdom and understanding of the world. Accordingly, it may also be related to the ways in which the individual is able to transition among her worlds. The accumulation of experiences and the process of navigating stressful experiences or critical events through the protective factors that are available in various facets of life provide the context for building resilience.

Individuals meet challenges with varying degrees of skills. The skills one has learned often

through trial and error may serve as supports to scaffold new learning and new ways of addressing critical incidents. Each individual has his or her own circumstances that either challenge or mitigate risk. No two lives are duplicates of each other, nor do two individuals given the same risks approach identical incidents in the same way. Differences in previous experiences, protective factors within the individual (personal traits) as well as externally from family, school and community interact to influence the individual response. With adequate buffers in place, the individual emerges stronger and better equipped to facilitate positive outcomes in the future. Jackie's personal character traits have likely developed as a result of her interactions with other people and the various worlds in which she has been a part. She has credited faith in God and her sense of who she is to her parents and the internal struggles she has endured and emerged from successfully. Whether positive or negative, Jackie has developed a resolve to stay true to herself and her beliefs, not wavering because of other's opinions.

### Summary

Listening to Jackie, and probing her memory and interpretation of incidents, it became apparent that there were two major forces that she identified as positive influences propelling her to overcome the challenges: her father's assertion that she could do anything that she wanted to do, and having faith in God. *"I think my dad always believed in me. I mean knowing that someone believes in you is a big deal. And then, he did make you know, he did talk like we could do anything we wanted. And that's a big deal to have possibilities in front of you because then you can just dream away."* Maybe, in some ways, the support of her father and her faith in God are intertwined. I had the distinct impression, each time she spoke about her family, and especially about the times with her father, that their relationship

empowered her to believe in herself and she continually sought answers relating to her belief in God. Although her present understanding of God did not come until she became an adult, she had always wondered about God and who He was. As a youth she asked these questions of her father and of her pastor.

Henderson and Milstein's (2003) work identified specific characteristics inherent in resilient children and adults. These include: social competence "with life skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and the ability to take initiative, a sense of purpose" and a positive outlook (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 8). I have found many of these same characteristics in Jackie. A willingness to give of oneself in service to others, Jackie exemplified this in her service to her church and the time she provided to those starting a new life in the world outside of prison walls. She made herself available to assist them in learning new life skills, helping them with daily tasks and coping with life on the outside. Resilient children and adults find effective ways of problem solving. For Jackie, this means taking time away for herself to get in touch with her inner thoughts, her true feelings about life events and connecting with God. She described her current state in life as one of acceptance for what she has endured and a realization that she has control of her life. She spoke about her children with a sense of great accomplishment. She wanted them to be proud of her and it seems plausible to conclude that she developed a sense of self-efficacy as a mother. Jackie has been a prototype of the Multiple Worlds Resiliency model, as her critical incidents have been mapped against two blended models and the basis for a new model or theory about how experiences influence our perceptions and outcomes.

### Practical Implications for Educators Serving “At-Promise” Students

The First Amendment to the Constitution may restrict public schools. Because of the requirement of separation of church and state, public school employees and public school curricula must not emphasize the importance of religion or preach about any particular religion or promote belief in God or other “higher power.” As professionals in a public school setting we are not at liberty to share our beliefs or evangelize. However, personally, I can attest to the power of God at work in my life, and Jackie has certainly identified spirituality and faith in God as “*the way I chose to walk my life.*” While I cannot presume to know the intensity and influence of faith in another’s life, I believe that faith can and does play a role for many in developing resilience. Within the model of resilience proposed, individuals may find faith through their community and within their families that promote resilience. School leaders and teachers, through their dedication to students, demonstrate that they have faith in the students’ abilities. I propose that educators can instill a sense of faith (autonomy) in students through the ways they model self-efficacy and through the relationships they build with their students. Accordingly, educators and theorists Linda Lantieri and Parker Palmer have provided avenues that school practitioners might pursue. Lantieri’s Inner Resilience Program promotes developing resilience through skills educators my employ. Similarly, Palmer’s focus is on leadership for social change in the areas of education and community.

Schools can become “havens of resilience” (Henderson, 2013). We, as educators, must always be cognizant of the ways in which various influences shape the worldview of a particular individual. Lee Atwater, political consultant and former Republican Party strategist, was credited with saying “perception is reality” (Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater

Story). What we perceive as supports or challenges largely depends on the individual's experiences, both internal and external. Acknowledging the research of the various influences including family, community, school and individual/peer, we as educators must determine what part we can play in providing appropriate support and guidance to our school population who need it most. It may be ineffectual to determine which students seem to be "at risk" and look more closely at the ways in which we can design school environments to support all students. Being reminded of Mervlyn Kitashima's encouragement to look at students as "at promise" rather than "at risk" puts us in a better position to plan for serving all students.

To the extent that buffers exist in their lives, individuals may consciously or unconsciously draw upon these strengths in various situations influencing choices and decisions to mitigate negative outcomes and build resilience. As educators, we become buffers for our youth and build social capital when we interact positively with our students. It is imperative that we acknowledge the experiences all students bring with them. While many come to us from disadvantaged situations, they all have learned responses and behaviors which influence the coping mechanisms they employ. Recognizing that, whatever their experiences, those situations have value and will continue to influence their worldview. McLaren (2007) advised teachers to put aside their "white privilege" and be willing to address needs of society (p. 45). I suggest parents and community leaders as well as local and national representatives must do the same. We must be prepared to seek first to understand our students and take the necessary steps to meet them where they are. Understanding and acceptance assist in the critical relationship-building process and lays the groundwork for future successes.

Educators must provide students good role models and encourage them to become the best they can be. Advisor/advisee programs provide settings for positive interactions to begin, and these can be extended in the classroom. Building professional relationships with students should be a goal of every educator. “By engaging [students] in conversations and other interactions, [school personnel] can help them recognize and grow these traits [of easy temperament, good reasoning skills, self-esteem, and internal locus of control]” (Henderson, 2013, p. 23). Lewis and Sugai (1999) reminded us that teaching expectations and establishing that logical consequences for misbehavior is a part of life lessons. Encouraging students to process their actions and feelings helps them understand themselves better and make better decisions. Research has found that by providing the right environment, “all students, regardless of where they fall demographically, are capable of academic achievement when administrators, teachers, and staff operate with effective instructional leadership, innovative curriculums, and high expectations for every child” (O’Connor, Hill & Robinson, 2009, p. 10). With this knowledge, we can no longer pretend not to know what we know. It is imperative that we structure our learning environments to reflect this knowledge.

While schools may not be able to change the environments from which their students come, resilience can be fostered given the right conditions. School counselors and other instructional/teacher leaders can take the lead in providing the setting and climate for reducing many of these barriers. Within this framework, clear and consistent boundaries, direct instruction of social skills, maintaining high expectations and providing a listening ear have been shown to reduce the effects of these barriers. Protective factors that are foundational to the success of these programs include a caring supporting environment (Bosworth & Walz, 2005).

Educational leaders must provide learning opportunities for staff in order to adequately address these areas. High quality professional development must focus on the social/emotional needs of students and build capacity and structures within the school buildings to assist in this process. One example of this is a committee or task force established within the school to which those adults who have concerns about their students can go to for help and support in meeting student needs. This group must be experienced in a process for identification of specific needs. Problem solving sessions with teachers or other adults in the school who work closely with these children as well as parents should be invited to help design personalized programs.

When planning programs that address the needs of students considered at risk, vital components to reducing barriers must be considered: changing attitudes and beliefs of the staff committing to high expectations that all students can achieve; ensuring that career planning is aligned with student interests and aspirations; monitoring and evaluating data to determine program effectiveness regularly; and providing relevant and high quality staff development (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). Krovetz (2008) supported using terminology such as “students from high risk environments rather than at-risk students since being proactive means impacting the environment, not defining the child” (p. 7). As educators, it is imperative that the tone of our discussions promotes positive thinking around providing services for each child. We must develop programs flexible enough to support the individual needs of the child. Ongoing data collection with regard to integrity of educational strategies and student response is necessary in program development.

Within the context of the school environment a continuum of services should be present. Bosworth and Walz (2005) identified three levels of service: universal, selected, and

indicated. Universal interventions include strategies to which all students have access in the curriculum. School-wide programs, such as Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS), have extensive research to support their implementation. These are generally explicitly taught in general education, special education and guidance classes, or small group settings, and are reinforced in school/building expectations. Selected interventions are those delivered to students who fall into high-risk categories due to ongoing situations or temporary issues, which have a potential for anti-social and/or risky behaviors. Indicated programs are those targeted specifically to those students who exhibit anti-social or risky behaviors. These programs may include services for tobacco, alcohol or drug use, violent behavior, or health compromising choices.

Practices that enable students to believe in themselves and see themselves as separate from their environments promote capacity building. It is imperative that those working within these programs and with these students refute a deficit model and, instead, adopt what Bosworth and Walz (2005) termed “[a] strength-based, resiliency-supporting approach” (p. 49). When students are provided opportunities to experience success focusing on their strengths they build self-efficacy skills. Belief in oneself strengthens resolve and becomes a protective factor fostering resilience.

It is highly likely that some of our students, particularly those students who experience challenging situations, might need more personalization within their school day. Engaging with adults in a mentorship or advisor role (teachers, administrators, counselors, deans of students, screened community volunteers), making connections with at least one adult in the school, may be one way to mitigate the risks many of our students encounter. Educators may not be aware of dysfunction within a student’s family. Even if they become



aware, teachers and administrators have little control over what the child experiences outside of the school day. When teachers become more aware of what protective factors are and what they can do to establish buffers within their classrooms and buildings, schools can become powerful agencies for resilience-building.

In order to meet the needs of each student, we must consider information from a variety of sources. Relying strictly on standardized test data is inconclusive in terms of determining how to provide the best education for our students. To attend to education of the whole child, triangulating data such as that derived from classroom assessments, intervention and progress monitoring, standardized testing, behavior incidents, observation of the student in various contexts, and interviews and conversations with the student about life experiences must all be a piece of the puzzle. Teams of people both inside and outside of school who know the student on a personal level can aggregate the relevant data and make informed decisions regarding interventions and supports arrive at better decisions when they collaborate for problem-solving tasks.

Aligned with culture, the influence of a nurturing environment is essential. Preserving the dignity of every student is imperative. Students must feel that school is a safe and inviting place. School staff that respects the student's background culture uses the child's background knowledge to support learning. They build relationships with students and empathize with them while setting high standards. These educators truly believe that all students can learn, and they hold students accountable. These educational professionals are willing to do whatever it takes to make students successful. Establishing classroom and school cultures "that are infused with environmental protective factors like regular structures, routines, civility, and caring" support developing resilience (Henderson, 2013, p. 24). School

personnel, as early as elementary school, must share information about post-secondary opportunities frequently and regularly, and ensure that learning opportunities support students' goals for living, learning and working beyond high school.

Another consideration is the reality of conflict between a community or family culture and that of school, which often plays a role in a child's academic and social success. To lessen the potential conflicts between family/community and schools, educators must establish and maintain open lines of communication. Parents must have ample opportunity to inquire about school policies and procedures, and be provided accurate information so that they are able to understand. In the end, this communication should lead to a better understanding from both the school and family perspective. This is more likely to lead to a stronger partnership, ultimately benefitting the student.

As mandated by No Child Left Behind (2000), schools have the responsibility of ensuring the success of every child, and being responsive to their needs. Educators must convey a commitment to each and every child, and carry out their work with passion. Providing opportunities for students to learn, practice and improve communication skills will lead to better understanding of other perspectives. From this beginning, developing social competencies, becoming better problem solvers, gaining a sense of purpose and autonomy of one's life are factors in resilience.

Child Trends provided research-based strategies for schools focusing on interventions for resilience building (Lippman and Schmitz, 2013). A synthesis of the research identified "individual behaviors, attitudes, and competencies" as well as "family, school and community support[s]" inherent in building resilience (Lippman & Schmitz, 2013, p. 2).

School cultures that support positive outcomes:

- Promote positive social connections between staff and students, among students, and between school and home.
- Nurture positive qualities such as empathy, optimism, or forgiveness, and give students a chance to use them.
- Notice and reinforce qualities that are key to resilience.
- Avoid focusing on failure or negative behaviors.
- Teach by example, which is an effective approach; train staff to develop the same qualities.
- Apply restorative justice techniques [that] can help schools by giving students a structured opportunity to work difficulties out by encouraging reflection and empathy.
- Foster feelings of competence and self-efficacy.
- Set high expectations for student; teach them to set realistic, achievable goals, and also how to reach out for help when needed. (Lippman & Schmitz, 2013, p. 2)

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study involved the lived experiences of one woman and provided a retrospective account of her matriculation through public school, it is important to examine the K-12 experiences of others in similar situations. Replication of this work with other participants can only add to the knowledge base of how protective factors and risk factors play a role in resiliency.

McLaren (2007) traced the evolution of democratic schooling as defined by American public education. As schools become more student focused, qualitative and quantitative research on the development of specific programs and strategies that mitigate risk in a child's/adolescent's life may illuminate new approaches for schools to address societal needs.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the First Amendment to the Constitution requiring that public schools and those in their employ refrain from discussions about spiritual matters as it relates to religion may pose barriers in meeting the needs of students. In order to examine this phenomenon, more in-depth studies examining how students in private

and faith-based educational settings experience parallel or diverge from those in public school institutions are suggested.

Secondly, examinations of other individuals and the ways in which their experiences have influenced their perceptions in relationship to positive outcomes is essential. Many additional accounts will support future findings on the ways in which resilience is developed. This will add to the literature on individual coping mechanisms and resilience.

A third focus for study should investigate how student resilience might be enhanced when schools join forces with social agencies. Schools, families and communities may all be strengthened through collaborative efforts. More intensive study of the synergy created through these partnerships will likely provide insight about the potential influence of the school as a hub for offerings that may mitigate social concerns and assist in transforming borders into bridges.

My journey with Jackie as she reflected upon her life forced me to look at my life as well. I have considered how my world view has been influenced by the various events and people with whom I've experienced life. As a school leader this study has further emphasized for me the critical responsibilities we have as educators. We can no longer pretend not to know what we know. We must continue to create supportive and nurturing environments where all students believe that by putting forth their best effort they can accomplish anything they chose, and that they are indeed "at-promise."

## APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Influence of Resilience in Overcoming Challenges Within Community, Family, School and Individual/Peer Experiences

You have been invited to participate in a study to examine how resiliency plays a role in navigating the K-12 school experiences. Explained another way, it is my intent to gain a better understanding of how your life events and experiences have either been supportive or have become obstacles as you progressed through your school years from early childhood through high school and have subsequently influenced your life as an adult.

To do this, we will engage in a series of interviews, one-on-one, in which I will encourage you to share significant events in your life and memories of various people, places, and things that have enabled you to become the person you are today. I anticipate that these interviews will take about 10-15 hours of your time. In preparation for these interviews, I will draft some questions that will help us focus on some specific aspects of your life, but the questions will be open-ended so that you may take this dialogue in directions you feel are relevant to you. These interviews will be video/audio recorded so that I may more accurately capture your experiences and emotions. Using these recordings, I will transcribe your words into written form, and periodically, I will ask you to review my reflections on our conversations to clarify or correct any misconceptions. If, at any point, you prefer that I not use information or include in the written copy any specific details, you will have the right to have the information removed. I would also encourage you to share any physical artifacts, (i.e., letters, certificates, awards) that you feel would contribute to my understanding of your experiences and anything that you are interested in sharing with me.

Confidentiality will be accomplished through my securing of any video/audio recordings, transcriptions, notes, consent forms, etc. Once I have transcribed our conversation, all video/audio recordings will be destroyed. All data collected will have information regarding your identity removed. De-identifiable raw data will be retained indefinitely. I will retain all study records, such as this consent form, for at least three years, per requirements of my program and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University. In the written study submitted for this dissertation, your name will be changed to protect your identity. I will not use the name of your hometown or current residence. Instead, when these details are referenced, I will use a pseudonym. The following information is included as a requirement from Iowa State University: *Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.* In the event that someone who may read my dissertation may have knowledge of your situation and be able to make connections, it is important that I inform you that there is a possibility that this may pose some challenges or embarrassment for you in your relationships, either personally or professionally, with respect to social stigma.

I anticipate minimal risk for you as a participant. While you will always be at liberty to share as much or as little about your background as you feel comfortable, I am very interested in how you have interpreted the many and varied experiences in your life. I will encourage you to recall and reveal memories that may be uncomfortable or even emotionally painful at times. Conversely, memories that evoke happiness and security will likely arise as well. All of these will be important in gaining a deep and rich understanding of how your experiences have influenced your life and interpretations of the world. At any point in the process, you have the opportunity to decline to respond to questions or to

conclude an interview or to withdraw your consent for participation in the study. While there is no compensation for participation in this study, there will not be any monetary expense incurred for you as a participant.

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study contact me (Linda Abbott) at 712-229-3841 or through email at [lmabbott@iastate.edu](mailto:lmabbott@iastate.edu) , You may also contact my major professor at Iowa State University, Dr. Jeffrey Brooks, at 515-294-4143 or email him at [jsbrooks@iastate.edu](mailto:jsbrooks@iastate.edu) .

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

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(signature of researcher/date)

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(signature of participant/date)

## APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Early Years

- What are your earliest memories in your childhood?
- Please explain your immediate family and who was part of that?
- What adults were influential in your life at this point?
- In what ways did they influence you?
- Where were you born and where did you live as a youngster?
- What were your school experiences?
- Who were teachers or other school personnel that you can remember?
- What made these people memorable for you?
- What expectations did your parent(s)/guardians have for you?
- How did you meet these expectations?
- What did you think you might want to be when you grew up?
- What factors influenced this desire?

### Adolescent Years

- What do you recall about your teenage years?
- Did you move from one school to another during your school age years?
- If so, how did this affect your relationships/friendships?
- What kinds of situations were positive ones for you?
- What situations felt challenging?
- What things confused you as you became a junior high/middle school and a high school student?
- Who were some adult figures in your life that influenced you either positively or negatively?
- What role did religion or spirituality play in your life as an adolescent?
- What expectations did your parent(s)/guardians have for you?
- How did you meet these expectations?
- How did you feel about these expectations as a adolescent?
- Did your plans for your future change as you became or evolved through adolescence?
- What influenced your decisions about what you wanted to do as an adult?

### Adult Years

- As you look back to your childhood and adolescence, what factors do you believe influenced your life decisions?
- What decisions did you make about staying single or getting married?
- Did you have children?
- How have your childhood and adolescent experiences influenced your parenting?
- In reflecting on your life what do you see as successes?
- What changes would you make if you could go back and do things over?
- Who do you see now as being influential and having an impact on your life and on the decisions you made and why?
- If you could describe your life in a sentence, or in a list of words, would that be?
- How would you want people to remember you?
- What do you see as priorities in life?

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