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# CONTEXTUAL PROCESSES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE:

# AFRICAN-AMERICAN URBAN MEN AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WORK

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Glenna Adell Mosby

May 1995

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This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, Alyce Mosby Johnson. Her steadfast faith in me was a driving force toward its completion. Alyce's optimism and laughter always still the din. In all things, she is a wellspring of unconditional love, optimism, support, compassion, and unbridled humor. She is truly her mother's daughter and her sister's friend.

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## ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen a resurgence in research related to poverty, the underclass, and African-American men. Most of the inquiry has focused on joblessness and has relied on quantitative methodologies. This research examines poverty, the underclass, and African-American men, but it is a radical departure on two fronts. First, this study was concerned with those inner-city African-American men who chronically work for low wages and are a part of the population referred to as the working poor. Second, this study used qualitative data gathering techniques to describe processes, develop detailed descriptions, integrate multiple perspectives, bridge intersubjectivities, and identify variables for future investigation. William Julius Wilson's theory of the urban underclass and an overarching human ecological ecosystems framework guided this research. This investigation used case study methodology (i.e., intensive interviews) to study contextual processes of success and failure in men who work for low wages. Data were collected from 12 participants on a three-interview schedule. Interviews were also conducted with members of two sponsoring organizations over the course of nine months. The sample consisted of African-American men between the ages of 22 and 58 who were raised in urban areas and were working in the low-wage sector of the economy. The interview questions were based on findings and trends derived from previous quantitative research. In this way, triangulation was used to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. An issue-focused analysis was used to generalize the findings to Wilson's theory and to the ecosystems framework.

The results showed that the social psychology of the inner-city is a potent shaper of the experience of work for men who reside in underclass census tracts. Their motivation and their commitment to work is related to their high personal efficacy. These men characterized themselves as middle-class, rather than a lower class designation (i.e., underclass) despite their meager wages. Because of their legitimate work in the face of constrained opportunities and the lure of the underground economy, these men consider themselves to be role models to whom other inner-city men can look as referents of success.

The study provided implications for public policy considerations regarding why men continue to press for work despite earning "poverty" wages. It also provided some insight into conducting qualitative inquiry with research participants, like the men in this study, who historically have not been given a "voice" in social science.

The results indicated that additional research should be undertaken to explore ecological transitions (e.g., going to school, finding a job, changing jobs, losing jobs, marrying) to better grasp developmental and contextual processes in the lives of inner-city African-American men. It is recommended that future research consider the relationship between personal efficacy judgments and modelled behavior, the dynamics of ecosystem trust/distrust as a predictor of labor market participation., and the meaning of latent functions of work for inner-city African-American men who are low-wage earners.

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction and Background

The composition of the nation's poverty population reflects the changing demography of urban Black America in terms of structure and scope (Henderson, 1994). Increasingly, when many social scientists consider combined demographics (e.g., race, residence, gender), they believe an intractable poverty affects more than thirty million people in our nation, the majority of whom are labeled underclass. The large numbers and manifest problems of the urban poor have become a major research focus for those concerned with urban social problems (Shannon, Kleniewski, & Cross, 1991). The search for solutions to social problems, compounded by the concentration of inner-city poverty, has led to reverberating interest in the swelling of an urban underclass (Brill, 1993). According to 1990 census data, 31.9 percent of all the poor in this country are African-American[1], 60.3 percent of whom live in central cities (Hacker, 1992). Compared to their numbers in the general population (Ropers, 1991), a disparate percentage of the poor in this country are African-American men (Jones, 1992), many of whom work full-time (Hill, 1972; Katz; 1989; Ropers, 1991) and live in the inner-city.

Multiple problems related to drugs, suicide, employment, violence, and discrimination that African-American males faced in the decade of the 80's (Blake & Darling, 1994; Gibbs, 1988) are now compounded by pronounced class division

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1

The term African-American is used in preference to "black" as a semantic distinction that connotes a positive heritage. "Black" or Negro" is used only when expressing the unparaphrased ideas of authors or respondents. Ghee (1990) demonstrates that the term black appears to be most predominantly associated with negative concepts and undesirable traits. Most importantly, it represents a "loss of control over the environment" (p.79). Madhubuti (1990), emphasizes that when defined particularly by non-Black people, "Black" means devious, dark, soiled, dirty, forbidding, disastrous, amoral, evil, sinful, fiendish, inhuman, treacherous, and diabolic (p. 264). However, he recognizes the political reality and power in the nomenclature "Black" that can provide some sense of control, since it was a term chosen, rather than ascribed, during the politically pivotal 1960's. Like other authors, he therefore uses the terms interchangeably. Selection of the term is thought to be borne out of more group conflicts, new and heightened concerns and insecurities this group has about their position and opportunities, and a greater emphasis on group identity. In a changing multi-ethnic environment, use of the term African-American asserts cultural autonomy and affirms identity.

(Henderson, 1994) and polarization in the African-American community (Farley & Bianchi, 1985; West, 1993; Wilson, 1987). These conditions heighten attention to the plight of the African-American male.

Various stereotypes of the African-American man have caused him to be perceived in the public consciousness as deficient and lazy (Blake & Darling, 1994; Cooke, 1974). It is easy to understand then how typically, stories of African-Americans who have tried to make it with few material resources become lost in the more exotic and appealing tales of ghetto behavior and pathology associated with the underclass. These stories obscure the study of how some poor have managed to transcend behaviors that undermine work and success. They also obscure historical and economic factors that created the underclass, urban poverty (Jones, 1992) and truncated opportunity for work in the inner-city, all of which can solidify poverty.

The nature and function of employment in the inner-city have been overshadowed by a persistence in examining unemployment. Research suggests that work anchors and socially grounds the individual regardless of the job held, although the degree of attachment varies by the nature of the job, as research linking type of job, consistency of work, and participation in criminal behaviors has suggested. Sobin (1973) argues that the social importance of work for men, as opposed to women, compels them to work regardless of the personal satisfaction or the prestige they derive from their particular job. The evolving focus of the economic fringe position of inner-city African-American men is an aspect of the underclass polemic that calls for clearer insight into work and chronic economic hardship.

Economic hardship in this country is consonant with employment hardship since most people rely on earnings from formal employment to make ends meet (Jensen, 1994). The steady upward trend in the proportion of African-American inner-city males either not participating in the labor force (Farley & Bianchi, 1985), or weakly attached to the labor force (Wilson, 1992b) has given rise to describing unskilled laborers and the working poor as part of the permanent underclass (Auletta, 1982; Jencks, 1992). Since the early part of the 1990's, the number of working poor has spiralled from the previous decade (Burton, 1992).

Contemporary explanations of the rise of the working poor place the cause in the structure of the U.S economy rather than personal deficiency (Jensen, 1994). In this way, attention given to the dilemmas of the working poor recognizes that a significant portion of the population is poor because of limited employment opportunities and concentration in low-wage industries - not because of a lack of motivation to work (Thompson & McDowell, 1994). In the case of African-American inner-city men, there is some slippage in this structural assessment. It is reflected in dissonance relative to structural interpretations of poverty and work, and cultural explanations of poverty and work applied to this group. It becomes rather clear that despite the focus on labor market outcomes in studies of economic disadvantage, differences in outcomes are often attributed to variations in individual-level attributes. We can begin to resolve the dissonance by understanding how motivation to work is fostered in imperiled environments where social dislocations are the norm.

The economic inequality that has placed African-American men in the underclass brings with it a need to understand environmental conditions and circumstances that shape their experience with work. The relationship between declining economic opportunities for African-American men and family instability, foretells a crisis in the African-American community (Blake & Darling, 1994) - a crisis that can be better addressed when we understand more about the experience of work for African-American men. Knowing more about how African-American men evaluate environmental and economic transactions calls for in-depth investigation. This type of investigation can lead to greater awareness of how some men can be successful (i.e., seek work and remain in the labor force) despite living in environments with few discernible resources to stave off protracted poverty. The interest of this study was to explore the context of inner-city African-American men's lives, to discern how this context impinges on their experiences and beliefs about work and poverty, and to understand how related processes contribute to perceptions of success and failure for these men.

The proportion of African-American males with earned income has fallen every year since 1970, and they receive lower mean incomes than Euro-Americans when they are employed (Swinton, 1991; 1993). This is particularly true in the South, where income

for African-Americans has traditionally been lowest and more unequal than anywhere else in the nation (Swinton, 1993). Consequently, low wage employment is often viewed as an aspect of the underclass condition since it does not insulate one from chronic poverty. Jensen (1994) suggests that employment hardship, in terms of job quality and access to jobs, is manifested in two major ways. First, the earnings of those who are fully employed are often related to labor market conditions, with jobholders in the secondary labor market having higher poverty risks than those in the primary sector. Second, poverty is related to the degree of attachment to the labor force. Other things equal, those who are laid off or who experience cutbacks in the number of hours of work available to them will experience greater deprivation than those who are employed full-time, full-year.

Labor market studies suggest a third manifestation of economic hardship. That is, that the labor market experiences of equally qualified minority and nonminority job applicants is qualitatively different. According to Bendick, Jackson, and Reinoso (1994), African-American applicants are treated less favorably than equally qualified nonminorities on five fronts: opportunities to interview, job offers or referrals, compensation, steering, and access to additional opportunities. Their controlled experiments of equivalently qualified pairs of African-American and Euro-American jobseekers measured employment discrimination in Washington, D.C. They offer disturbing findings. In 16.7 percent of the 149 tests, when both the African-American and the Euro-American tester were offered the same job, the Euro-American was offered a higher starting wage while the reverse never occurred. Moreover, when both applicants were offered jobs, there were race differences. Euro-Americans were favored in being offered a well-paid, upwardly mobile position. Conversely, African-Americans were favored for being offered a low-paying, dead-end job. As a proportion of the time nonminorities are favored over minorities, the likelihood that a Euro-American applicant is steered to a lesser quality job than the position for which they initially applied is *37 percent lower* than that for an African-American.

Access to additional job opportunities at the same level or higher than the advertised job, is *48 percent greater* for a Euro-American applicant than an African-American. Research of this genre continues to uncover the cognitive underpinnings of

bias. Bendick et. al., (1994) note that the standard advice to dress well for employment interviews can create suspicions of African-American men that are fueled by stereotype. They document that an African-American male tester wearing a suit and tie was asked by the interviewer at an employment agency whether his ability to afford such clothes indicated that he participated in illegal activities.

These findings corroborate similar findings of entrenched and widespread unequal treatment of African-American job seekers that Turner, Fix, and Struyk (1991) documented in their pilot study of employment discrimination in Washington, D.C. The fact that such discrimination is carried out in our nation's capitol, where prohibitions against it are signed into law, bears a troublesome twist of irony. The inescapable connection between jobs to which inner-city African-American are commonly relegated, and their socioeconomic class status draws attention to the empirical evidence that "color still constrains" (Jensen, 1994, p. 133) and predisposes one to poverty.

"Poverty is a comparative economic concept that can rarely be isolated from more general questions of inequality," according to Furnham & Lewis (1986, p. 71). Well-documented inequalities in neighborhood life, work life, and joblessness for African-Americans can signal enduring poverty (Bowman, 1991b; Jackson, 1991). Growing numbers of social scientists and economists believe these inequalities contribute to growth of the underclass and poverty that is not combatted through working. Theories of the causes of poverty and the underclass are offered from different disciplines, focus on different factors, and operate at different levels of abstraction. They become explicit as a result of different values and assumptions (Furnham & Lewis, 1986). Historically, social sciences' literature has conceptualized poverty as a process, the attributes of which are labor market segmentation, economic inequality, and distinct geographic isolation (Goldsmith and Blakely, 1992). The major macro sociological perspectives (i.e., functionalist, interactionist, and conflict perspective) explain poverty one of two ways. They view the problem as the failure of the individual as represented in the individual pathology and culture of poverty models. Alternatively, they view poverty as the failure of society, which is social structural (Baca Zinn, 1989; Rolinson, 1991; Wilson, 1987).

Poverty as pathology assumes that aberrant culture, values and attitudes are intergenerationally transmitted from parents and communities to future generations (Auletta, 1982). According to this view, chronic irregularity of work, unemployment, or low wages attributed to subcultural behavior may cause "primary poverty." It is labeled primary since it is thought to be within the individual's control. This perspective ignores unprecedented industrial changes that have occurred in this century (Brill, 1993; Staples, 1991; Wilson, 1980; 1987). It also minimizes the effect of geography (Brill, 1993), and its relationship to concentrated poverty and labor force prospects for African-American men (Wilson, 1987). The cultural perspective can yield information about ways in which specific individuals or groups become poor. It can do this by considering systematic cultural differences between the poor and nonpoor, and assessing how differences affect future chances (Shannon, 1991, et.al.) and employment. The cultural driven belief that poverty is within the individual's control (Jencks, 1992) has serious implications for African-American men who, because of inner-city residence, are commonly labeled as undeserving, threatening, nonconformist ( Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Mead, 1992) and more prone to violence (Bendick, et. al., 1994). A powerful implication of this mindset is that they are negatively perceived as workers (Bendick, et. al., 1994; Mead, 1992; Tienda & Stier, 1991; Wilson, 1991) whose "alien culture" often excludes them from employment consideration (Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991). Viewing poverty as a structural outcome ideologically confers blame on the system because of deindustrialization, racism, underemployment, and situational or environmental factors that are historical or institutional (Glasgow, 1980; Wilson, 1987).

Structuralists believe that society is *structured* in a way that limits the number of good jobs that are available. The increase in the number of working poor indicates a severe structural problem in the economy caused by transformations in the types of jobs that are accessible (Shannon, et.al.,1991). Because structural poverty hinges on "socially acceptable" reasons (e.g., old age, illness, disability, and steady low wage employment), it is referred to as secondary poverty that is beyond the individual's control (Jencks, 1992; Furnham & Lewis, 1986). The structural approach tells us that certain categories of people (e.g., African-Americans) are most likely to be poor (Shannon, et.al, 1991).

However, a flaw of structural theories is that they "obliterate human agency" by ignoring the complexity of responses to and interface between lived experience and structures of domination and constraint (MacLeod, 1987, p. 149). So, although the individual is exempted from blame, structuralists have little to offer about how individuals become poor and stay poor, or how individuals from the same neighborhood, or even the same family can turn out very differently (Shannon et.al., 1991). Inner-city African-American men who continue to seek and secure employment are frequently plagued by cultural interpretations of their fitness as employees. Workplace alienation and denial of opportunities for upward mobility and increased wages are widespread outcomes.

The cultural perspective on poverty fails to contextualize attitudes and behaviors as responses to objective structures (MacLeod, 1987). A contextual analysis of the phenomenology of manifesting a motivation to work, yet remaining poor, and relating this motivation to success merits investigation. This is what my dissertation did. Gurin (1970) offers a realistic situation-motivation paradigm that is based on an expectancy framework. This perspective assumes that motivation to achieve and external institutional forces operate in tandem as cause and effect. Relevant foci are those that are major determinants of an individual's expectancies of failure and success (e.g., competence, efficacy, and powerlessness), which determine feelings about one's ability to affect one's life. This view is not so widely held as the one that orthodox economists refer to as the "twin problems of jobs and wages." This is a causal relationship which implies a meritocracy (Beeghley, 1983, p. 153). This focus assumes a strong positive relationship between income and productivity, determined by individual differences in variables such as ability, education, skills, and expertise, rather than institutional or government factors (Furnham & Lewis, 1986). Findings from research conducted by Bendick, et. al., (1994) have shown this to be untrue.

Gurin (1970) has found that people with low expectancies of success, such as the African-American poor, will not automatically respond when opportunities are expanded or when there are gains in human capital variables if the disjuncture between motivation and the perceived ability to implement success and improve life chances is not resolved contextually. Perhaps the most realistic view of the cause of poverty, combines structural

or objective constraints people face; the way people interpret their situation through the eyes of their cultural group; the actions they choose based on these two factors, and the consequences those actions have for their life chances (Shannon, et.al., 1991).

Most studies of poverty, achievement motivation and attitudes toward work are drawn from large scale longitudinal surveys (e.g., Panel Study of Income Dynamics). Jensen (1994) suggests that social psychological variables such as efforts, aspiration, feelings of self-efficacy, and beliefs about local employment opportunities are not found in most U.S. poverty studies because they are not included in large data sets. Also, scant use of an insider point of view has prevented us from knowing the meaning of work in poor communities. This gap in our understanding fosters reliance on theories of work and poverty that are undergirded by flawed assumptions. The insider point of view is needed to ground our knowledge in the experiences and the perception of opportunity that inner-city African-American men hold.

Feather (1990) points out that so much appears to be obvious about the interactive effects of personal and environmental characteristics in environments with few opportunities, that little detailed research has tried to tease out these interactive effects. His statement is a challenge to researchers that must be met. It is a challenge made more urgent by worsening labor force prospects for African-American inner-city men (Wilson, 1987), coupled with the low earnings that characterize diminished labor force opportunity. The current national agenda of "personal responsibility" will be increasingly intolerant of what is construed as willful unemployment. This posture has further implications when simplistic explanations of poverty suggest that the work behavior of the urban poor differs from the work behavior and attitudes of the non-poor (Furnham & Lewis, 1986).

Therefore, the experience and meaning of work for special populations have received short shrift across disciplines. Moreover, preoccupation with joblessness and welfare (Farley & Bianchi, 1985), has diverted attention away from low wages as a primary cause of poverty in many cities across the nation (Mueller, 1994). When African-American men do work, there is growing evidence that they may earn wages insufficient to rise above poverty level because of their concentration in unskilled, low-

paying, unstable jobs (Beeghley, 1983; Bowman, 1991b; Farley & Bianchi, 1985). Further, urban residence is positively correlated with race (Tienda, 1991; Wilson, 1987), relative low wages (Hacker, 1992), and poverty (Tienda, 1991; Wacquant & Wilson, 1989). Patterned ecological features of urban residence that influence the process of labor force participation must be subjectively studied, especially since low-wage, low prestige employment can ultimately foster a desire not to work at all (Sobin, 1973).

Wilson's (1987) underclass hypothesis offers a connection between environmental milieu, access to jobs, and predisposition to poverty. Thus, the dimension he adds to the underclass debate is the relationship between jobs, concentrated poverty, and behavior in ghetto neighborhoods. He challenges conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the culture of poverty, which have had profound political implications and sustained social impact. An example of the latter is the widely accepted notion that the poor shun steady employment as "a matter of perverse principle" (Jones, 1992, p. 272). This opinion discounts lackluster performance of the economy, and the reality that many individuals work full-time year round but remain poor. It also overlooks the fact that even if the economy were booming, some of the working poor are concentrated in the peripheral sector which is frequently insulated from overall economic growth (Levitan & Shapiro, 1987).

While a few qualitative studies have underscored the importance of social psychological variables and work (Jensen, 1994), there is still a conspicuous void in contemporary qualitative inquiry into employment behavior. This has prevented fundamental insight that could clarify why some poor men work and others do not. Governed by Wilson's (1987) thesis, behaviors that are treated as cultural anomalies might more appropriately be seen as concentration effects of life in impoverished neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987). In this view, culture provides people with a way of seeing the world, and with assumptions about the reality of the world in which they live. The pervasive and striking divergence of traditional poverty and underclass analyses isolates individual problems that the unemployed or low wage worker may have, from any "systematic attempt to affect the opportunity and social structure" in the world in which the individual lives" (Gurin, 1970, p. 283).

## Statement of the Problem

Unemployment and underemployment have characterized African American work life each year since the transition from slave labor to free labor in 1865 (Bowman, 1991a). Studies show a positive correlation between the strain of underemployment for African-American men and suicide, mistrust, anxiety, and other mental and physical health problems (Blake & Darling, 1994). The inextricable link between increased inner-city social disorganization (Henderson, 1994) and the noticeable downturn in the labor market position of African-Americans (Swinton, 1991) places these men at risk on many fronts. In terms of actual labor force participation, year-round employment, and median and per capita incomes, inner-city African-Americans are continuously more disadvantaged than Euro-Americans (Ropers, 1991; Swinton, 1993), and African-Americans who do not live in the inner-city (Wilson, 1987). Some economic measures and reports do show that the status of African-American men, compared with Euro-American men, has improved along several dimensions over the past 20 years e.g., the wage gap has narrowed; and the number of managers and professionals has increased (Hacker, 1992; Jones, 1992). Yet the semblance of progress is illusory when considering that when they could find work, African-American men aged 25-34 experienced a 151 percent increase in earning poverty level wages in the decade between 1979 and 1989 (Goldsmith & Blakely, 1992). The growing belief in public and private thinking that their undesirability as workers is charged to their deviant culture (cf. Mead, 1992) compromises future progress.

The culture of poverty has dominated studies of the poor. However, this behavioral explanation has not been able to distinguish those who are poor, but not living in a self-perpetuating, intergenerationally transmitted subculture. Nor can it provide any systematic analysis of how the poor are stratified (Katz, 1989; Valentine, 1971). Cultural theories do not explain variance in choices the poor make, such as choosing to work. Typically, cultural-theoretic approaches are limited by analyzing African-American behavior within the framework of Eurocentric norms and culture-bound

theories (Cooke, 1974). Moreover, they treat social context as though it is monolithic, static, or inconsequential. Among the deleterious consequences of economic woes in the inner-city are a weakened sense of personal efficacy of African-American men and also their family members (Blake & Darling, 1994; Wilson, 1991). Discovering processes that encourage work and feelings of success might allow researchers to understand how to foster more affirmative work cycles in the inner-city. Therefore, it is constructive and instructive to interpret choices and labor force processes as responses to the environment and the social construction of work (Glasgow, 1980; Gurin, 1970).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore why some African-American inner-city men continue to press for work despite the ever-present joblessness of their environment. The absence of a discernible body of literature that contemplates the phenomenon of becoming a "success" as opposed to a "failure" suggested a fruitful area for research. Marks (1989) acknowledges this omission by proposing that examinations of how people make it in society may ultimately be of greater significance than examinations of how they fail. A more comprehensive approach, which this study used, is to examine conceptualizations of "success" and "failure" in relationship to working.

Williams and Kornblum (1991) assert that more is learned from the single success than from the multiple failures since the success proves it can be done. Jackson's (1991) Africentric focus exhorts the study of African-Americans from an emic perspective to unfold systemic constraints. This approach can uncover how individual strengths and community resources are marshalled by African-American inner-city men in their pursuit of work and success.

## Rationale

Wilson (1992b) advises that we must acquire more knowledge about the relationship between social psychological factors (e.g., negative social dispositions, failure identity; limited aspirations, hopelessness, and casual work habits), and structural outcomes (i.e., labor force attachment, constricted class networks and access to informal job networks). This knowledge can unravel the influence of residence in the process of engaging in the job search and participating in the labor force. In this vein, social scientists are urging the study of aspects of the social environment to learn more about the complexities and the interplay among economic structures, institutional practices, and minority behavior (Scanzoni, 1971; Stone, 1992; Wilson, 1987; 1991). Moreover, it is imperative that we study people in high-risk environments to understand what accounts for their success in spite of the odds. In this way, we can understand success and failure at both the individual and the communal level (Williams & Kornblum 1991).

As a corollary, environmental factors that constitute a "besieged, beleaguered and beguiled urban milieu" (Henderson, 1994, p. 11) may contribute to unemployment and underemployment in ways which research has not soundly addressed. Hill's (1972) statistical analysis of attitude toward work, positive orientation toward work, and self-help contradict the notion that African-Americans are alienated from work. Subsequent studies reinforce this finding. What has not been sufficiently documented is how or why African-American men can nurture a pro-work orientation in deprived environments. On this front, Cooke (1974) recommends that the strong work orientation construct of Hill's (1972) "Strengths of Black Families" thesis be studied. Hill (1972) believes the most powerful encouragement to work is a decent job at a decent wage. How relative is the notion of a decent job and a decent wage?

Mueller (1994) posits that "undesirable" characteristics and unstable work habits that resign workers to the secondary sector, where jobs are low paying, might actually be induced by the nature of jobs available to them. This view seems to assume that all workers in jobs that are not considered decent are plagued by personal impediments. It

also assumes that barriers to upward mobility are driven by the jobs available rather than by contextual processes. Assumptions on both sides need to be challenged.

Demographic reports consistently reveal that by the year 2000, minority workers will be expected to comprise a larger share of the workforce (Tidwell, 1993). Before this can happen, Bowman (1991b) urges a social psychological perspective that looks at the subjective aspects of labor force participation. He suggests that what we learn from subjective perceptions, expectations, and evaluations can provide a basis to examine how poor African-Americans actually experience work as we approach the 21st century. In this way, we might also discover how to move the working poor into better jobs, and the unemployed into the labor force. Ferreting out distinctions between conventional and less conventional conceptualizations of success can also be instructive (Williams & Kornblum, 1991). This dissertation tappred the subjective reality of work for a sample of inner-city men by using an intensive, open-ended interviewing approach. When interviews are used, the researcher can continue asking questions and getting answers until the context of each answer is made clear. This type of research experience might have brought some tangible benefits to the research participants as they contemplated the meaning of their experience with work. It might also have generated some information that would be useful to the participants or to the community (Triandis, 1983).

## Guiding Assumptions

The following six assumptions provide a frame of reference for this study:

1. African-American inner-city men are shaped by the structure of society (i.e., availability of work, remuneration opportunities by race and gender) and by their social environment.

2. Beliefs about work are linked to certain kinds of situational outcomes, such as success or failure in the labor force.

3. African-American inner-city men can be active agents with the power to shape aspects of their environment rather than passively be at the mercy of environmental factors (Feather, 1990).

4. Attributions and social cognition play a major role in determining how African-American men respond to their physical/social environment.

5. Continuing encounters with the environment help shape orientations and the kinds of subsequent situations in which African-American inner-city men are likely to engage.

6. Orientations are the product of past actions and are guides to present and future action.

## Objectives

This study was designed to meet the following four research objectives:

1. To determine how urban environmental features operate in tandem with personal characteristics to determine labor force participation for inner-city African-American males.

2. To determine the meaning of individual characteristics on the perception of opportunity for inner-city African-American males.

3. To develop a composite of African-American inner-city men who work.

4. To explore the context of inner-city African-American men's lives to discover how this context impinges on working and beliefs about success and failure.

## Nominal Definitions

**Concentration Effects** are a set of constraints and opportunities associated with changes in the urban economy and the social transformation of the inner-city where the population is overwhelmingly socially disadvantaged and disproportionately concentrated. The decreased access to jobs, the unavailability of marriageable partners, welfare dependency, serious crime, and the lack of exposure to conventional role models are among the effects of poverty that is concentrated in the inner-city, and are thus considered to be concentration effects (Wilson, 1987).

**Culture** is values, goals, definitions, prescriptions, and assumptions that define and rationalize individual motivation and participation in the environment (Leacock, 1971)

**Culture of Poverty** is the view that self-perpetuating qualitative value and lifestyle differences are intergenerationally transmitted and thus explain continued poverty.

**Economic Inequality** is disparity between African-Americans and Euro-Americans characterized by high unemployment rates, low rates of employment, inferior occupational distributions, and low wages and earnings (Swinton, 1991).

**Environment** is the set of social and cultural conditions and circumstances that influence an individual's life or community (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1986)

**Ghetto** is a neighborhood with truncated opportunities for work that is inhabited largely by an identifiable ethnic or racial group who live there mainly because of racial or social pressure but sometimes by choice.

**Ghetto Culture** is a response of ghetto residents to structural constraints, limited opportunities, and social isolation. Behavioral traits and adaptations that typify this response differ from the culture of poverty in that they do not "assume a life of their own" once they come into existence (Wilson, 1987).

**Inner-City** is the older, central part of a city that is densely populated and blighted. The term is often used interchangeably with ghetto.

**Labor Force** is the employed and unemployed who are available to work.

**Macro Level** refers to the large-scale structures and processes of society, including economic, demographic, and legal institutions; and the system of stratification.

**Micro Level** refers to the social organization and processes of small-scale social groups and individuals that emphasize individual motivations and behaviors.

**Mainstream Society** is the group whose attitudes and values are in agreement with the prevailing attitudes and values of society as a whole. In an economic sense, mainstream society is comprised of those who are steadily employed, not involved in public assistance, and who reside in economically stable areas (Wilson, 1987). In a social sense, mainstream is typically construed as middle-class.

**Opportunity Structure** is a multidimensional construct that includes the following three dimensions (Turner, Singleton, and Musick, 1986):

- Avenues or channels to equal participation in the economy within union job markets to find work and to be promoted.

- Avenues or channels to equal participation in the economy securing jobs and promotions in the open market.

- Avenues or channels to equal participation in the economy operating a business.

**Poverty** is income deficiency that prevents individuals from being able to provide for all of their material needs and for the needs of their family.

**Social Isolation** is the lack of contact or sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society and serve as feeder systems to job networks and employment (Wilson, 1987).

**Underclass** is a heterogeneous grouping of families and individuals who are outside the American occupational system and who are concentrated in inner-city poverty. They live in territorial conclaves that tend to be characterized as ghettos or slums (Wilson, 1987).

**Values** are culturally established standards for behavior and goals for achievement.

**Weak Labor Force Attachment** is a structural concept that signifies the marginal position of some people in the labor force because of limited opportunities in the labor market or because of lack of access to the informal job network (Wilson, 1991).

**Work** is a paid job.

**Working Poor** are individuals who do not earn enough to provide for their basic material needs or those of their family.

## Summary

A robust body of literature confirms that poor people want to work and be occupationally successful. Poverty so seriously affects their confidence, that this significant aspect of poverty is more important than the work ethic, and mitigates blaming poverty on the poor who may have been victimized by social processes (Beeghley, 1983). One can infer that economic inequality is related to aversive experiences, and is tied to social psychological processes. These processes require more examination to understand attachment to the labor force, and perceptions of opportunity. The purpose of this dissertation was to conduct such examinations.

Chapter I introduced salient issues that drove my proposed exploration of contextual processes of success and failure in the experience of work for African-American urban men. Chapter II uses eight subsections to review the literature. The first two subsections provide the theoretical framework and discuss the influence of macro and micro forces on labor force participation. Both subsections set the stage for the review's progression, which relates the position of inner-city African-American men in the labor force to their social environment. Other sections offer an indepth introduction and critical review of historical and contemporary elements of the underclass. Opportunity to participate in the labor force is the foundation of a subsection, followed by an overview of the working poor, and a section on the inner-city environment. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of inner-city social isolation. Chapter III discusses method, including research procedure, sample, and data analysis. Chapter IV presents the data and research findings. Chapter V offers a summary, recommendations, and conclusions.

# CHAPTER II

## Review of the Related Literature

Traditionally, social science literature has evaluated African-American men differently from the way men of other ethnic groups have been evaluated (McAdoo, 1993). This is evident in research related to labor force participation, where individualistic variables are more commonly evaluated. Studies of the labor market, and other econometric research, continue to document problematic labor market outcomes for African-American men. There are few problems more important in our society than understanding motivation to work and the pay-offs attached to working. It has been suggested recently that the objective character of the labor market and other structural forces have failed to address the specifics of the urban social environment. This gap is accompanied by the need to examine how perceived opportunity in the social environment of the minority poor begins, and how it influences motivation to work and labor force participation (Stone, 1992). This study explored connections between the social environment and working, and connections between working and perceptions of success and failure. The literature review in this chapter represents research findings from scholarly articles, books, papers, and relevant readings from the popular press. The following major sections are included:

1. Theoretical Frameworks
2. Macrostructural and Microstructural Forces
3. Evolution of the Underclass
4. Occupational Opportunity
5. Labor Force Participation
6. The Working Poor
7. The Inner-City Environment
8. Social Isolation

# Theoretical Framework

Theory driven research is needed to understand the problems of African-American men (Blake & Darling, 1994). A shortcoming of past research is that it has been fragmented. Gaps in broad bodies of literature suggest that single-focus frameworks do not capture the powerful dynamics between African-American men and their near environment. In order to grasp processes of labor force participation of urban African-American men, an overarching social-psychological and ecosystemic framework guided this work.

## William Julius Wilson's Theoretical Framework

Wilson (1987; 1992b) integrates major variables (i.e., cultural, social psychological, social structural) to explain the labor force experiences of African-American men in inner-city poverty. His work has inspired much of the empirical research on structural inequality effects and determinants of underclass status. His theory of the African-American urban underclass postulates that a structure of inequality has evolved that links contemporary behavior in the inner-city to a combination of constraints, opportunities, and social psychology (Wilson, 1991b). Social psychology is not aimed at analyzing macro-sociological variables, such as poverty, because of the level of theoretical and conceptual analysis related to such an investigation. Social psychology *is* concerned with the individual and the social and economic system within which s/he interacts. It can perhaps explain why some individuals from poor homes remain poor while others do not (Furnham & Lewis, 1986). An extrapolation suggests it can also explain why some poor men work, while others do not.

Wilson's (1987) theory identifies links between three contemporary phenomena; (1). increasing female-headed households, (2). declining earnings and labor force participation of young African-American men, and (3) the shift in poverty from rural areas to central cities (Muzzio, 1989; Peterson, 1991; Tienda, 1991). It is widely held that Wilson (1987) has presented systematic evidence that the underclass is growing and

has similarly proposed plausible hypotheses in an economic and demographic framework to explain this growth (Jencks, 1992). Duneier (1992) characterizes Wilson's ecological studies as contributing precision in exploring the well-being of African-American urban men by integrating social context into his framework. Wilson (1987) charges that modern liberals find it more productive to focus on the "positive" side of ghetto life. "In order to understand the unique position of inner-city ghetto residents it is important to emphasize the association between attachment to the labor force and the social environment.... (Wilson, 1991, p. 10). The present study began to accomplish this.

**An Ecosystemic Perspective**

Human ecology has been used as a framework to emphasize that the structural characteristics of a city combine with demographic forces to explain many historical features of metropolitan areas. The ecological tradition, as exposited by Hawley, recognizes that the history of a metropolitan area's migration, housing stock, and employment, influence the racial and socioeconomic configuration of its neighborhoods. The occupational status of African-Americans in such areas is one of the independent variables that explains levels and trends in residential segregation (Farley and Frey, 1994). The multidisciplinary nature of human ecology draws upon concepts and theories from various disciplines and can be used as an alternative to more one-dimensional thinking. The micro environment of individual beliefs, attitudes and behaviors converges with the macro environment of social institutions and processes. Ecosystems is a human ecology concept that captures this convergence.

According to Touliatos & Compton (1988), the notion of ecosystems underscores human transactions with the environment that result in a three-tiered set of processes. These transactions include orientation processes (e.g., factors that influence human perception of the environment); operation processes (e.g., behavioral adaptations through which people modify or respond to conditions in their environment), and evaluation processes (e.g., ways in which people express attitudes about the quality of their residential environment). An ecosystems approach extends consideration to the African-American man's internal and external environments to understand the range of his

dilemmas. In this way, problems like underemployment can be dealt with holistically rather than as isolated phenomena (Blake & Darling, 1994). In the ecological community with its physical environment, labor market (i.e., mesosystem) issues African-American men face can be addressed as an operation of the convergence of social (i.e., microsystem) and institutional processes (i.e., exosystem), and ideology and behavior (i.e., macrosystem) that sway self-appraisal and work behavior. Wilson advances a positive shift in this direction with his emphasis on the social environment.

It has long been thought that in unhealthy community environments, people eventually internalize social neglect and depredation in their outlook and their behavior. Therefore, the neighborhood has been an important locus for investigations of the causes and consequences of poverty. Moreover, many who are committed to neighborhood renewal recognize that the ongoing process of social and economic disinvestment that began to plague the inner-city two decades ago now prevents business start-up or growth in neighborhoods with abandoned buildings and other signs of decay (Halpern, 1993). This condition compounds issues that African-American men face in the urban labor market. These issues can be addressed as an operation of the convergence of social and institutional processes and behavior.

## Macrostructural and Microstructural Forces

Wilson (1991a) distinguishes two sources of weak labor force attachment - macro-structural changes in the economy; and a social milieu that does not perpetuate strong labor force attachment. These sources suggest that macro and micro forces operate to determine labor force participation. The macro-micro debate has to do with distinguishing the degree to which the former influences the latter (Kerckhoff, 1991). Interest in the macro-micro problem has broadened out of concern that causal arrows do not always adequately represent important interaction effects. The simplicity of either/or explanations does not grasp complex situations in which macro and micro level theories, variables, and concepts are at work (Huber, 1991). The overreliance on structural explanations that

do not incorporate behavioral bases and normative explanations, is problematic. Further, what has not been explained in looking at micro and macro distinctions, is the nature of patterns of behavior (Cook, 1991). The acceptance of macrostructural constraints (to avoid assumptions of a culture of poverty) dictates that attention be given to social context as a way to derive meaning about the cultural aspects of life in poverty and joblessness (Wilson, 1991).

Wilson (1987) explains racial stratification and contextual joblessness in a macro-historical fashion that actually blends micro and macro elements through its use of social psychology to link structure to action. In this way, he demonstrates that the sharp divide between micro and macro processes may be false. With these two levels blended in an explanation that creates the linkage, they form a single theoretical structure rather than two qualitatively different kinds of theory (Zelditch, 1991). "Because in the individualist view, structure is seen to arise as a solution to commonly held desires, the state of nature must be considered to be a very unpleasant social environment...." (Hechter, 1991, p. 47). As a result, factors that contribute to labor force participation and weak labor force attachment of inner-city African-American men can be viewed in terms of perceptions of opportunity that relate to personal experiences men observe around them in their environment (Anderson, 1990; McGary, 1992). Connecting structural constraints and perceptions of opportunity can lead to clearer insight into distinctions or contradistinctions between the unemployed poor in the inner-city, and those who are working, yet are frequently poor.

Liebow's (1967) classic ethnographic study of nearly two dozen African-American streetcorner men in Washington, D.C., made an invaluable contribution by suggesting that there are multiple processes by which some streetcorner men become "losers," adjust to a non-sustaining social milieu, and accept economic marginalization. This is insight about structural issues. He also appreciated that "the man-job relationship is a tenuous one" (p. 35). He did not explore *how* and *why* some men in these environments become "winners" while others become "losers." This issue can be approached by accepting that situations determine variations in behavior. Social psychology creates a link between structure and action (Zelditch, 1991), and macro and micro.

## Evolution of the Underclass

African-Americans who came to urban areas as part of the Great Migration of the 1930's elevated the status of Europeans that preceded them when they took over the bottom position (Forman, 1971). These African-Americans soon discovered that no group came to displace them as the lowest status group. In short order, they became identified with the ghetto and the slum (Forman, 1971; Wilson, 1980). In their new urban environments, the employment of inner-city African-Americans in the dirtiest and lowest paying jobs was a given (Jaynes and Williams, 1989). This type of employment set the parameters of their social mobility and steeped them in urban poverty. Nearly six decades of isolation in the ghetto have passed. Now across disciplines, scholars give attention to concentrated poverty and to the underclass.

When Myrdal (1963) began to describe the social reality of labor displacement in his book *Challenge to Affluence*, the term "underclass" found its way into the literature. In his discussion of unemployment and poverty, he observed the tendency of rising unemployment to trap an "under-class" (p. 34) of people in the bottom of society over the course of generations. The labor displacement of African-American men in today's inner-city seems to bear out his observation. Their low caste in the stratification system extends their risk of chronic labor force detachment and persistent poverty. In the 1970's, the term "underclass" began to encapsulate the notion that growing numbers of the urban poor were more anomic, unworthy and undeserving than ever before. Remnants of the culture-of-poverty perspective supported this conceptualization (Baca Zinn, 1989), and social scientists, politicians and journalists made haste to document its presence (Marks, 1991) and its effects. After a period of benign neglect in poverty research,[2] Jargowsky and Bane (1990) note three important events that brought

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[2] This grinding halt is most often thought to result from enlightenment about blaming the victim. William Ryan's (1971) book, Blaming the Victim, became widely-read in the late 1970's. It was a powerful expose' of the inequality and paralyzing effects of blaming people for their poverty. As Wilson (1987) points out, this was also a time when liberals were hesitant to conduct research that had the appearance of racism and that might appear to portray poor African-Americans as inherently deviant. Furthermore, because there were so few African-

issues of inner-city poverty to the forefront in the 1980's. First, the problem of urban homelessness enlarged. Second, the media gave attention to those urban African-Americans outside the American class system. Third, a series of papers published by sociologist William Julius Wilson[3] spawned interest in the social problems of urban African-Americans. Researchers have been responsible for an academic rebirth in poverty research and joblessness in the ghetto since that time (Wilson, 1991). Wilson (1989b) challenges widespread themes of the underclass by "attempting to relate the practices and experiences of inner-city ghetto residents to the structure of opportunities and constraints in American society" (p. 133).

This direction represents a new paradigmatic perspective in social science that acknowledges individual and group pathology as part of the systemic constraints that dictate the manner in which resources are allocated to address such problems (Jackson, 1991).

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American social scientists involved in the earlier analyses of poverty, alternative models to explain behavior were slow in coming. Robert Hill (1972) analyzed the same data as Moynihan and derived a resiliency model of African-American family functioning. He published, The Strengths of Black Families, followed by the works of other African-Americans (e.g. Joyce Ladner, Andrew Billingsley, Robert Staples, Joanne and Elmer Martin, etc.), who also offered more relevant models. Wilson (1987) is concerned that a new perspective that emphasizes positive aspects of ghetto life, so uniformly rejects earlier arguments which maintained that some aspects of ghetto life are pathological, that it stymied research and shifted the focus of social science away from discussions of the consequences of racial isolation and class subordination. The new focus was on achievement in the face of obstacles. While this new depiction of ghetto life was occurring, several social pathologies were brewing and increasing, two of which were unemployment and decreasing rates of labor force participation. Wilson (1987) relates these to other pathologies and social dislocations in ghetto neighborhoods (e.g. increase in female headed households, out of wedlock births, and increased violent neighborhood crime).

[3] Marks (1991) connects the publication of Wilson's (1978/1980) book, The Declining Significance of Race, with advancing a substantive correction to the earliest formulation of the underclass construct by hypothesizing that structural changes in the economy were responsible for racial tensions between lower-income African-American and Euro-American groups, both of whom were impacted by the changing economy. There is also growing evidence of a polarization between the African-American middle-class and the African-American underclass, cultivating a body of bifurcation literature.

## The Relationship Between Jim Crow and the Underclass

Many scholars believe that the African-American underclass presents a special agony for America that is a phenomenon of the post-Jim Crow (i.e., legally sanctioned racial separation) era, the residual effects of which continue. Brooks (1990) contends that the subordinating systems of slavery and Jim Crow should have been powerful clues to signal impending underclass status for urban African-Americans. Although some commentators think contemporary racial discrimination and separatism is waning (see Mead, 1992; Reischauer, 1987), most others do not. They credit it with causing and sustaining the African-American underclass (Glasgow, 1980). Wilson (1980; 1987) grasped the important social construction of class as part of the process of closure and alienation, and cast a distinction between contemporary and historical racism and the manner in which they are played out in society.

Many analysts believe the problem of an underclass is intractable[4] (Glasgow, 1987) because of five critical residual effects of the Jim Crow legacy. First, there is an unemployment rate twice as high as that of Euro-Americans (Brooks, 1990; Hacker, 1992; Farley & Allen, 1987). Second, there is a poverty rate more than three times that of Euro-Americans (Brooks, 1990; Farley & Allen, 1987). Third, income levels for African-American males and intact families is 58.1 percent and 61.4 percent respectively, of that for Euro-Americans (Farley and Allen, 1987; Brooks, 1990). Fourth, African-American men and women are concentrated in the secondary labor market (Brooks, 1990). Fifth, African-American male earnings are between 60 and 70 percent of the wages earned by Euro-American men with similar backgrounds (Brooks, 1990; Hacker, 1992; Swinton, 1991; 1993).

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The notion that an underclass is permanent is perhaps the outgrowth of a 1978 speech by Senator Edward Kennedy to Detroit's twenty-third annual NAACP convention in which he declared that the underclass is the "great unmentioned problem of America today--the growth, rapid and insidious, of a group in our midst, perhaps more dangerous, more bereft of hope, more difficult to confront, than any for which our history has prepared us. It is a group that threatens to become what America has never known--a permanent underclass in our society." In recounting this speech excerpt, Auletta (1982) cautions that using the word "permanent" serves as a prescription to give up on them.

## The Underclass Concept

Scholarly research and policy analysis have addressed poverty since the early days of the Lyndon Johnson administration (Wilson & Aponte, 1987). Only recently has serious attention been given to the underclass in this country (Innis & Feagin, 1989; McClanahan & Garfinkel, 1989; Singh, 1991). According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word underclass[5] was first used in 1918 to describe a social process (Inniss & Feagin, 1989). While Inniss and Feagin (1989) assert that Myrdals's (1963) usage shifted the description of a process, to the description of a population, Wilson (1991) proposes that the shift came when subsequent academics moved away from Myrdal's emphasis on joblessness, and moved toward persistent poverty as the defining characteristic. It was around this time that behavioral patterns were added to economic definitions.

The concept of the underclass that has developed in this country over the last decade is "not only ahistorical and noncomparative, but also highly ideological and political" (Inniss & Feagin, 1989, p. 14). This is apparent in the either/or distinction between culture and social structure that charges the debate (Wilson, 1991). The transformation of a preposition into an adjective (i.e., "under" ) incorporates a series of personal attributes and "suggests the lowly, passive, and submissive, yet at the same time, the disreputable, dangerous, disruptive, evil, and even hellish" (Peterson, 1991, p. 3). Because of these connotations, the African-American underclass is considered less deserving than the poor who garnered society's attention twenty years ago (Glasgow, 1987).

In addition to the spatial dimensions of poverty, there has been a prominent interest in the resilience of poverty, as was the case in the 1960's (Tienda, 1991). In the 1980's, the geographic concentration of the urban poor, and concerns about social

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Auletta (1982) indicates that a search by the editors of the Oxford Dictionary reveals that the term "underclass" was first used in 1918 but in a different context. Auletta defends use of the term "underclass" by indicating that the National Urban League and civil rights leaders use it. Its analysis in the post 1980 literature often incorrectly attributes the coining of the term to William Julius Wilson or Auletta. Taylor (1993) was of the mistaken belief that the word did not exist until after the Civil Rights Movement. West (1993) contends that there has been an African-American underclass since the end of slavery in this country.

dislocations in the inner-city (Wilson, 1987, 1991), brought the notion of an underclass to the forefront of social science and economic debate (Coulton & Pandey, 1992). It was seen as a preeminent domestic problem (Wilson, 1991). The mainstay of the debate has been "a rather sterile argument" between conservatives emphasizing cultural factors, and liberals stressing economic factors (Fainstein & Fainstein, 1989, p. 194). There is concern in the 1990's, that unbalanced attention to behaviors of the poor may overshadow other concepts and theoretical arguments that can provide direction for research and theory building (Wilson, 1991). There have been interdisciplinary perspectives, relevant levels of analysis, quantitative and qualitative data collection, and community studies that have been a part of the nature of underclass inquiry (Singh, 1991). A number of causes that represent a combination of structural, demographic, individualistic and systemic problems, polarize investigators and often undermine the acceptance of "underclass" as a viable concept (Marks, 1991).

## Theoretical Underpinnings of the Underclass

The intellectual underpinnings of the underclass literature are rooted in the culture of poverty. The implicit value judgments and conceptual confusion reminiscent of the culture debate is present in many discussions of the underclass (Glasgow, 1987; Harrington, 1984; Katz, 1989; Marable, 1984; Muzzio, 1989; Wilson, 1987; Valentine, 1971). Emphasis on individual and neighborhood pathology "tends to play down the intimate relationship between these areas and the larger racial system surrounding them" (Inniss & Feagin, 1989, p. 117-118). Public commentary that continues to posture the underclass as evidence of a culture of poverty, leads to insensitive public regard toward African-Americans in general and the African-American poor in particular (Glasgow, 1987). Such posturing can also result in overgeneralizing to the entire African-American community (Wilson, 1992a). It is important to critically analyze perspectives from which the underclass is viewed because of policy ramifications (Hammonds, 1989; Hill Collins, 1989; Marks, 1991;Wilson, 1987). If this condition is thought to be caused by personal deficit, government intervention or social planning is ineffectual. If instead the flaw is in the fabric of society, successful reformist programs can be created (Hammonds, 1989).

## Existence and Growth of the Underclass

Discussion of the causes of the African-American underclass has become the most controversial arena for analyzing the relationship between economic processes and racial outcomes (Fainstein & Fainstein, 1989). Social, economic, and demographic factors are associated with the causes and growth of the underclass (Auletta, 1982; Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Jencks, 1991; Kasarda, 1989; Nathan, 1989; Peterson, 1991; Rickets & Sawhill, 1988; Singh, 1991; Tienda, 1991; Waquant & Wilson, 1989; Wilson, 1987, 1991, 1992). The existence and growth of an underclass are attributed to racism (Glasgow, 1980; Inniss & Feagin, 1989), deficient culture and pathological ways (Taylor, 1992), structural shifts in the economy (Wilson, 1980); changing labor markets (Coulton & Pandey, 1992); racial segregation (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Massey & Denton, 1993); and the mass exodus of the African-American middle-class from the inner-city (Brooks, 1990; Singh, 1991; Waquant & Wilson, 1988; Wilson, 1980). Of these causes, the two that have the most credible empirical evidence are structural shifts in the economy (which often precede changes in local labor markets), and racial segregation. Census and census tract data have been widely used in the majority of instances to test the proposition that the spatial configuration of poverty is directly responsible for the growth of a large minority, urban underclass poverty (Sawhill & Ricketts, 1988; Tienda, 1991; Wilson, 1987).

The explanation with the least rigorous and sustained empirical support is deficient culture and inherently pathological ways. Arguments of this genre have questioned the reality that the ghetto market place, poor institutional support, and racial discrimination in hiring are perpetual problems for African-Americans (Singh, 1991). Most of the recent literature on culture and pathology, and its relationship to work, has resulted from studies of preference for welfare rather than work. There is a respectable extant, and growing body of qualitative research (see Anderson, 1990, 1991; Duneier, 1992; Liebow, 1967) that to some degree has dispelled this assessment. It has begun to drawn attention to the fact that an etic perspective has objectified and biased research on this subject. Accordingly, it has also drawn attention to the need for emic investigations.

Many of the quantitative welfare versus work studies have used female respondents and have generalized findings to males. They have also not considered the role of systemic male joblessness. Wilson, Aponte, and Neckerman (1987) have demonstrated that neither conservative comparisons, nor the empirical literature establishes the claim that liberal welfare policies are the primary reason for changes in the African-American family. They hypothesized that the "rapid contraction of the black marriageable pool is related to basic changes in economic organization that have occurred in recent decades" (p. 100). Notwithstanding, assertions of preference for welfare may also be related to the systemic problem that many of the second chance and training programs are not innovative enough to make working viable. In addition to a lack of innovative programs, little attention is given to the availability of jobs in a particular market, which in part determines success in moving people from welfare to work (Atkins, 1986). It must be a win-win situation (Hourihan, 1986) in order for individuals to transition from public assistance to paid employment. A Massachusetts program has demonstrated that a claim of preference for welfare in lieu of work is disingenuous. Atkins' (1986) evaluation of the "ET" program in Massachusetts found that in the period between 1983 and the publication of his findings in 1986, more than 20,000 welfare recipients chose job training over welfare. The element of choice is responsible for the success of this program. Most states, by contrast, have required welfare recipients to fail at mandatory job search before training is offered.

## Definitions of the Underclass

Definitional ambiguity is a major indicator of problems in underclass theory (Inniss & Feagin, 1989; Muzzio, 1989). There is not a consistent definition in the vast poverty literature. The Joint Center for Political Studies convened a group of social scientists to develop a common definition of the term "underclass" in March 1987. For research purposes, the group reached consensus that the underclass is "poor people who live in a neighborhood or census tract with high rates of unemployment, crime, and welfare dependency (Gibbs, 1988). Most researchers have included these concepts in their operational definitions. Others use nominal definitions that are behavioral

descriptors. Behavior, physical and social isolation, and weak labor force participation are common themes in most definitions of the underclass (Inniss & Feagin, 1989; Marks, 1991; McGary, 1992; McLanahan & Garfinkel, 1989; Muzzio, 1989; Wilson, 1991). Humphreys (1987) believes there is a duality of definition - the one held by social scientists, and the one held by the public. Progressively, both tend to convey unworthiness (Glasgow, 1980), which threatens analytic precision.

Taylor (1992) charges that the underclass rejects the conventions to which all other classes demonstrate at least nominal allegiance. Members of this group live outside the bounds of middle-class morality according to his appraisal. Nomenclature captures this sentiment. Terminology includes hardcore (Auletta, 1982; Padfield & Williams, 1973; Rosen, 1969); unanchored (Liebow, 1967); the bottom of the barrel (Auletta, 1982); disordered urban poor (Mead, 1992); subclass (Brooks, 1990); permanently entrapped, unused, and unwanted poor (Glasgow, 1980); the worst positioned persons among the African-American poor (Glasgow, 1987); a considerable burden to themselves and the public (Auletta, 1982); non-working poor (Jencks, 1991); the unreachables (Auletta, 1982); the disinherited (Rainwater, 1970b); and the static poor (Glasgow, 1980). Willhelm's (1983) research supports the alternate term "declassed." His rationale is that since African-Americans "hold no relationship to the means of production they cannot possibly possess a class position; being out of the class system they cannot possibly be 'under' the American class structure" (p. 156). Only Glasgow (1980; 1987), Jencks (1992), and Liebow (1967) use language that makes the connection between underclass status and labor force participation. Terminology commonly suggests they are undeserving. Modern conservatives use the term freely like the liberals of the 1960's. They often confine their judgments and definitions to individual characteristics, which overlooks heterogeneity of the underclass (Wilson, 1987). Reflecting a conflict perspective, conservatives do not relate characteristics to broader problems of society (Waquant & Wilson, 1989; Wilson, 1987). This minimizes the economic aspect of the definition. This is borne out in Taylor's (1992) global assessment of the underclass. He says "...the underclass is a group that has veered so far from conventional, responsible behavior that its members seemed to have completely dropped off the social scales that measure class" (p. 288).

## Underclass Characteristics & Schema

Many scholars propose sets of measurable characteristics or organized schema to "qualify," or to more functionally explain the underclass condition. Wilson (1987) proposes a view that accomplishes two things. First, it describes and explains developments in ghetto neighborhoods following the African-American middle-class and working-class exodus and its accompanying social dislocations (e.g., crime, joblessness, out-of wedlock births, female-headed families, and welfare dependency). Second, it addresses the collective differences in the higher concentration of the most disadvantaged segments of the urban African-American population who were left behind (i.e., the ghetto underclass). Sawhill and Ricketts (1988) measure underclass census tracts, the four dimensions of which categorize the people and the tracts. The dimensions include tracts that are more than one standard deviation above the national mean on welfare receipt, male labor force nonparticipation, prevalence of female-headed households, and prevalence of high school dropouts. Reischauer (1987) notes four characteristics, the second and fourth of which are value-laden. The first characteristic is persistently low income. The second characteristic is weak attachment to the labor force *despite the availability of jobs*. The third characteristic is lack of education and skills. The fourth characteristic is "a sense of alienation from mainstream society that manifests itself in *dysfunctional behavior that imposes costs on society or future generations"* (p. 28). Auletta (1982) stratifies the underclass into four categories, all of which infer pathology (i.e., criminals; those detached from mainstream economies who have developed an underground economy; the passive welfare-dependent; and the severely traumatized). Jencks (1991) offers four ranking schemes (i.e., income level, which determines the impoverished underclass; income sources, which determine the jobless male underclass; cultural skills which determine the educational underclass; moral norms which determine the violent underclass).

Recently, Wilson (1991a) has substituted the term "ghetto poor" for "underclass" to redirect the focus on research issues related to joblessness and inner-city dislocation. Use of the term without theoretical meaning has made some research on this group of poor, enigmatic. Wilson (1991a) hopes the framework he proposes will deflate the

culture versus social structure notions. This can be accomplished by presenting empirical and theoretical issues to guide future research, and by suggesting variables that have to be considered to satisfactorily explain the rise of inner-city dislocation. An outcome of such a shift would be the ultimate elimination of underclass "characteristics" and schema that do not rest in a broader theoretical context.

## Size of the Underclass

The conceptual vagueness of the underclass concept prevents consistent measurement (Jencks, 1992). Consequently, the size of the underclass has not been precisely estimated. Its size and attributes change with the definition chosen to describe it (Auletta, 1982; Brooks, 1990; Jencks, 1991). Nonetheless, the number is considered to be in the millions (Glasgow, 1987) and rapidly growing in both absolute terms, and as a proportion of the African-American population (Taylor, 1992). This might be explained by the fact that in 1970 the social composition of large numbers of neighborhoods changed (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Panel on High Risk Youth, 1993). There was a 75 percent increase in numbers of census tracts with concentrated poverty. During this time, there was also a 331 percent increase in the number of "underclass" neighborhoods (Panel On High Risk Youth, 1993). In 1980, there were 29.3 million Americans living in poverty 19.7 of whom were Euro-American, 8.6 million of whom were African-American, and 3.5 million of whom were Hispanic (Auletta, 1982). By 1980, more than half of those neighborhoods that were classified as poor in 1970 were reclassified as high-risk underclass neighborhoods i.e., areas that endanger the likelihood of chances to achieve successful adult lives. (Panel On High Risk Youth, 1993). Census Bureau reports suggest that 2.1 million more people became poor in 1990, than in the previous year, placing 33.6 million people in poverty. The African-American poverty rate rose to 31.9 percent during this period, in contrast to 13.5 percent for Euro-American poverty (Jacob, 1992). To provide perspective on thoughts about the depth of the underclass problem, Wilson (1987) says one third of the entire African-American population fits this category. More conservatively, Jaynes and Williams (1989) estimate that one third of the African-American poor are members of the underclass. Reischauer's

calculations (1987) place it at 0.8 percent of the total population, and 5.6 of the nation's poor. While there is no agreement on the size of the underclass, or even on the definition of the group for that matter, there is overwhelming consensus that it is growing.

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**Income Level**

Many scholars reject the notion that the underclass can be defined in terms of poverty and income alone, or that poverty is the single determinant of underclass status (Jencks, 1991; Peterson, 1991). Many who are poor (e.g., the elderly poor, widows, orphans, the severely ill and disabled, and those in the throes of episodic poverty) are not considered part of the underclass. Conversely, many who are engaged in questionable activities that typify behaviors often characterized as underclass (e.g., laziness, unreliability, drug addiction and alcohol abuse) are among the most rich in our country (Peterson, 1991). The de-emphasis on income as the principal characteristic of underclass status is inadequate if attention is not paid to the role that race and poverty play in the possibility for intra or intergenerational social mobility (Rolison, 1991). However, to dismiss the poverty dimension would hamper inquiry into the problem, and understanding of its correlates.

The poverty line is an attempt to count the number of poor persons in the United States (Beeghley, 1983). It represents an arbitrary income threshold (Wilson, 1991a). Since 1965, the federal government has classified people as poor if their reported or imputed family income for the previous calendar year was less than the official poverty line, which varies according to family size and the age of family members (Jencks, 1991). Income has different definitions depending on the situation in which it is used, and like many statistical terms, it can be viewed hierarchically such as personal income, disposable personal income, and money income (Garwood, 1990). The Census Bureau defines income as total money received; that is the sum of all amounts obtained in wages, Social Security payments, cash-public assistance benefits, dividends, interest, rent, unemployment, worker's compensation, pensions, and all other periodic cash received by the individual (Beeghley, 1983).

Using this definition, in 1987, 10.8 percent of the total population was below the poverty level. This degree of poverty affected 29.9 percent of the African-American population and 8.2 percent of the Euro-American population (Garwood, 1990). Recently, the Census Bureau established "the poorest of the poor" hardship category for those whose annual income falls at least 50 percent below the official poverty line. In 1988, 48 percent of the African-American poor fit this category because of their severe poverty (Wilson, 1991a).

## Correlates of Underclass Membership

There is widespread acceptance that the underclass is characterized by persistent poverty (Jencks, 1992; Muzzio, 1989; Reischauer, 1987; Wilson, 1991); inferior skills and education (Hammonds, 1989; Reischauer, 1987), and behavioral correlates that deviate from those of the general population (Auletta, 1982; Peterson, 1991; Singh, 1991; Taylor, 1992; Tienda, 1991; Wilson, 1987). Coulton & Pandey's (1992) research suggests that little is known about how a combination of social conditions, economic deprivation, and demographic characteristics lead to poor outcomes for children and adolescents in high-poverty areas. The interaction effects of class and neighborhood poverty *is* known to maintain or further weaken the weak labor force attachment and prospects for labor force participation of African-American men in high-poverty areas (Glasgow, 1980; Hammonds, 1989; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Reischauer, 1987; Peterson, 1991; Van Haitsma, 1989; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1991a, 1992).

Despite the inability of experts to agree on the definition, size, or causes of the underclass, there is wide concurrence in qualitative and quantitative literature that belonging to the underclass dictates life chances (Glasgow, 1980), imposes social isolation (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Jones, 1992; Marks, 1991; McLanahan & Garfinkel, 1989; Orfield, 1992; Peterson & Harrell, 1992; Wilson, 1987), welfare dependency (Jencks, 1992; Mead, 1992; Peterson, 1991; Wilson, 1987), and family splintering and disintegration (Cooke, 1974; Furnham & Lewis, 1986; Jones, 1992; Orfield, 1992; Padfield & Williams, 1973; Wilson, 1987). It also alters family structure and decisions to marry (Anderson, 1990; Bulcroft and Bulcroft, 1993; Fosset and Kielcolt, 1993;

Waquant and Wilson, 1989; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, Aponte & Neckerman 1987), and can seduce its members into business enterprises counter to mainstream notions of acceptable work (Fagan, 1992; Jones, 1992; Taylor, 1992; Wilson, 1992).

## Is the Underclass a Place or a Group?

There is continuing debate about whether the term underclass appropriately applies to people (i.e. culture) or to places (i.e. structure). One way in which this debate is reflected is in the two predominant research themes on the underclass. The first theme focuses on the evolution and deterioration of neighborhoods. The second theme centers on whether and how the social environment of the impoverished ghetto neighborhood shapes the lives of residents. Both themes are indispensable to discussions of the causes, consequences and cures of ghetto poverty (Tienda, 1991). The issue of place versus group is also important in determining how underclass areas are so designated. Although African-Americans are on the bottom economically almost all around the country (Swinton, 1993), in-depth analyses of the underclass have been essentially resigned to Northeast and Midwest industrial cities (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Peterson, 1991; Wilson, 1991a). Industrial centers, and the Northeast and Midwest regions of the United States are the two common denominators Wilson (1991a) uses to trace the rise in ghetto poverty. However, populations of poor, characterized as underclass, have become greater in areas such as Washington, D.C., which have never been industrial centers (Fernandez, 1992).

In the debate of place versus group, structural analysts focus on neighborhoods and local networks that become isolated from the mainstream and expose residents to negative conditions. Behavioral analysts perceive individuals differing from the norm in their values, aspirations, and expectations, so that value systems become self-perpetuating. Accordingly, neighborhoods become troubled when they contain many of these types of individual (Coulton & Pandey, 1992). This kind of rationale may result in the poor and the underclass being viewed synchronously. It might even identify those as underclass who live in high-poverty tracts, yet work. This is problematic since being African-American and poor does not ensure that the values and behaviors associated with the underclass will be practiced by all individuals in a given census tract (Muzzio, 1989).

The debate of group versus place is moderated by accepting that from its inception, the term "underclass" was designed to convey a progressively deteriorating and skewed economic situation, or a cause. What has evolved is a cumulative index of outcomes of economic displacement, or the effects. The economy, as a social structure, is often cited with giving rise to the underclass from its earliest introduction into the literature by Myrdal (1963). It would seem heuristic that evaluations of sequent behaviors remain nested in a framework that considers social psychology in the inner-city.

There is growing advocacy to fuse liberal and conservative thinking to allow an appreciation for both social structure and values (McGary, 1992; Wilson, 1987). This can lay fertile ground that allows real advances in scholarship (Marks, 1991). Wilson (1987, 1991a, 1992) is at the vanguard of blending liberal ideology that emphasizes social structural factors, including race, and conservative ideology that most frequently stresses the importance of group differences in attitudes and human capital traits. This strategy might better explain the behavior and experiences of the disadvantaged underclass. Progress toward this broader goal should be hastened by integrating the analytical implications of both themes (Tienda, 1991).

## African-American and Euro-American Underclass

Muzzio (1989) argues that contrary to the contemporary classifications many scholars use in their discussions of the underclass, Euro-Americans seem to comprise nearly 41% of this group. Since the underclass emanates from broad structured factors in society, it does cut across race (Glasgow, 1987). Scholars and writers (Auletta, 1982; Burton, 1992; Glasgow, 1987; Hacker, 1992; Inniss and Feagin, 1989; Jones, 1992; Marks, 1991; Wilson 1991a) accept the existence of a "white" underclass. There are some considerations that should be extended. First, a proliferation of research continues to document the relative disadvantage of African-Americans in the principal structures of society (i.e., government, education, economics, and family). Second, Glasgow (1987) insists that the African-American underclass differs from the Euro-American underclass because in addition to the structural forces, they must also contend with the ongoing impact of racial discrimination. Third, Rolison (1991) cautions ..."it should be understood

that the Black underclass differs fundamentally from the White poor because of its exclusion from the labor market as a result of the cultural construction of racial membership as an axis of social closure in a multiethnic, multiracial society such as the United States " (p. 298).

Muzzio (1989) himself realizes it is impossible to ignore the minority character of the underclass. Although there are greater numbers of white poor in this country (Burton, 1992; Hacker, 1992; Ropers, 1991; Wilson, 1991), the 1980 census showed that 28% of the poverty population was African-American, although they made up only 11.9% of the entire general population (Ropers, 1991). The 1990 census data reveal that the poverty gap between African-Americans and Euro-Americans widened (Jacob, 1992). Consequentially, the African-American underclass represents a higher percentage of African-American poor than the Euro-American underclass represents of the Euro-American poor (Brooks, 1990; Glasgow, 1987; Wilson, 1991). To some degree, confusion about the status of a "white underclass" may be nested in the place versus group argument. Since poverty has not been as concentrated in Euro-Americans urban areas as it has in urban areas where African-Americans live (Jones, 1992; Wilson, 1991a), discussions of this group's poverty has not occurred in underclass debates (Jones, 1992).

## Images of the Underclass

From the earliest analyses, the composite image of the underclass is that of a demoralized group unable to get ahead because of a lack not so much of opportunity, as of personal organization (Mead, 1992) and social disorganization (Clark, 1965). Some concerns about the term "underclass" and its popular usage have to do with disdainful images that the term connotes ( Humphreys, 1987; Wilson, 1989a). Gibbs (1988) charges that five "d's" (i.e., dumb, dangerous, deviant, deprived, and disturbed) stereotype young African-American men. These stereotypes become ingrained images which contribute to a pervasive fear of African-American men (Mead, 1992).

Derisive images detract attention away from historical class inequality, and the allocation of differential opportunity, resources and privileges. They also detract from awareness that some behaviors that give rise to the images are analgesic (Beeghley, 1983).

They are manifestations of hopelessness in neighborhoods (Anderson, 1990; Majors and Billson, 1993; Heintz, 1987). Images of African-American men are reified in decaying inner-cities (Cisneros, 1987; Reischauer, 1987). These images include the unmarried teenage father, the unemployed high school dropout, the long-term welfare recipient, the corner drug dealer, the mugger in the alley, the pimp, and the homeless person (Reischauer, 1987).

There is evidence that these images, coupled with the five "d's", may be internalized by young African-American men (Barbarin, 1993b; Blake & Darling, 1994), and by prospective employers who believe such men cannot be trustworthy, reliable, or desirable employees (Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Mead, 1992; Wilson, 1992). Thirty one years after the 1963 introduction of the term, members of the underclass are pervasively likened to Marx's lumpen proletariat designation, that is, the dangerous class (Auletta, 1982; Duneier, 1992; Innis & Feagin; Jones, 1992; Marks, 1989, 1991; Rainwater, 1970b; Wilson, 1987). This has perhaps prejudiced research agendi. Journalists, who may unwittingly honor an unspoken mandate to sensationalize, set the tone for conceptualizing the underclass. After backlash to the vitriolic Moynihan Report (1965), a research void was created by liberal scholars who wanted to sidestep hurling criticisms of conducting insensitive research on the ghetto poor (Marks, 1991; Wilson, 1987; 1991a). For more than a decade, journalists responded by generating conclusions about the behavior of inner-city residents without the benefit of systematic empirical research or insightful theoretical arguments (Wilson, 1991a). Many scholars point to journalist Ken Auletta as the one who popularized the word "underclass" through the publication of his 1982 book The Underclass (Brooks, 1990; Burton, 1992; Duneier, 1992; Jencks, 1991; Marks, 1991). In this work, he depicted the underclass as aberrant and self-destructive. It is charged that the widespread acceptance of the ideas in Auletta's book planted the seed for public perception of this group of poor as being unworthy of assistance and intervention.

Another journalist, Bill Moyers,[6] watered the seed Auletta planted. Moyers examined the values, attitudes, and behavior patterns of African-American teenagers from single-parent homes. His 1986 CBS documentary, "The Vanishing Black Family: Crisis in Black America", is thought to have advanced the term underclass into a household word (Brooks, 1990). In the same year, Leamann's (1986) article in the Atlantic Monthly condemned the culture of the sharecropping South and its lack of values that he believed evolved into its present pathological proportions and lack of progress in the North. Taylor (1992), a journalist, has a raging opinion about the collective underclass. In xenophobic fashion, he states that, "If someday, social engineers were to event an equivalent of the philosopher's stone, whose touch would galvanize the lazy, inspire the irresponsible, and reform the criminal, blacks would rise with everyone else" (p. 282). Wilson (1987), a social scientist, altered and informed perspective with groundbreaking demographic research that connected underclass behavior and macrostructural constraints.

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Madhubuti (1990) assails Moyers documentary because of what he considers to be "a short-sighted, stereotypical, racist and destructive" portrayal of African-Americans as the blame for the situation they are in (p. 180). Also lambasting this "blaming the victim" sentiment, Hill Collins (1989) criticizes Moyers documentary and characterizes it as a work "strikingly similar" (p. 875) to the infamous Moynihan Report. The latter is reputed to be of the cultural deficiency school, marked by insights that are derived from psychoanalytic theory and emphasize pathology in the family (Ropers, 1991). The similarity rests in the contention of both works that deviant values and a deficient cultural system impede social interaction of African-Americans. The central thesis of both reports is that deficient values and their accompanying behaviors, moreso than any structural impediments such as racism and discrimination, result in economic penalties. Hill Collins (1989) also accuses the Moyers documentary of portraying the economic marginalization of African-American men as a fact to be accepted, and one that cannot be remedied. Moyihan's cultural model is evidenced in Moyer's suggestion that the African-American family is not available to instill values of any kind to their offspring (Marks, 1991) and that a disintegration of family values has allowed African-American men to renounce their traditional breadwinner role, leaving women to bear the economic burden of raising their children (Baca Zinn, 1989). This sweeping view of willful abandonment of their families by African-American men, and acceptance as fact, that they do so without remorse or cause, neglects the explanatory power of a respectable body of ethnographic research that relates ability to support a family and assume headship in the household, with values of decency that are very important in the African-American community (See Anderson, 1976; Hannerz, 1969; Liebow, 1967).

## Summary

The nation's weak economy, demographic pressures, structural changes in the economy, the deteriorating condition of the inner-city, pathology in the inner-city, and the economic alternative provided by the underground economy and the welfare system are among the explanations offered for the swelling of the underclass (Marks, 1991; Mead, 1992; Reischauer, 1987; Wilson, 1980, 1987). Little definitive work has been done to understand reasons contextually. In spite of the existence of national and local cross-sectional data, the absence of in-depth qualitative data compromises our understanding of the character of the underclass, as it relates to employment. Although there is ample awareness of some characteristics/variables that are associated with underclass membership, there is inadequate knowledge about the intersect of these variables (Reischauer, 1987). At the same time, there is some concern that divisive demands have been placed on government by a nonworking underclass whose efforts to seek employment seem to have declined (Mead, 1992). Social science is practically mute on the issue of the working poor, whom many may consider to be a part of the underclass. Having a job and income does not necessary insulate one from underclass status since all jobs cannot withstand the structural downward pull toward underclass status (Glasgow, 1980).

Although Marks (1991) suggests that it is not generally disputed that an underclass exists, Lynn and McGeary (1990) have said "data adequate to determine the existence of an urban underclass do not exist" (p. 258). This controversy may well have to do with the way "underclass" is conceptualized. Despite characteristics (e.g., welfare receipt and weak labor force attachment) consistent with underclass hypotheses, Lynn and Geary (1990) argue that cross-sectional rather than longitudinal census poverty data reported at the tract, not individual level, prevents linkages being drawn between social pathologies and concentrated or persistent poverty. They caution that there is some confoundment in contextual effects. They question whether living in the ghetto causes higher rates of social and economic problems. Or, are people who move into the ghetto

systematically different from people who move into other neighborhoods? Are the people who remained, different from the people who left? Research can move more quickly toward resolving some of these issues by receiving the answers directly from those who are considered to be part of the underclass. More questions can be answered if research is not conducted in the same sort of quagmire that plagued the culture-of-poverty explanation of poverty. It may be more meaningful to distinguish how the urban working poor escape the label of underclass, if in fact they do, or how they "merit" the label despite their income-earning behavior (Marks, 1991).

## Occupational Opportunity

During the 1980's, it became apparent that the enlarged risk of poverty shifted from people in rural areas to those living in central cities (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Jencks, 1991; Peterson, 1991; Ropers, 1991; Tienda, 1991; Tienda & Stier, 1991; Wilson, 1987). Typically, the city is identified with accelerated opportunities that help to dismantle barriers that confine people of a certain class, race, or ethnic group to permanent stations in life (Peterson & Vroman, 1992). Yet, the fact that urban opportunities for advancement are fewer, and the reality that consensus surrounding equal opportunity has eroded over the years, threatens the American ideal of opportunity (Peterson and Vroman, 1992). Nearly 75 percent of the general population lives in an urban area (Ropers, 1991). Therefore, poverty, unemployment, and underclass status are increasingly considered phenomena of industrial urban centers (Auletta, 1982; Brooks, 1990; Glasgow, 1980, 1987; Wilson, 1987).

The first major appraisal of the social and economic status of African-Americans was Myrdal's (1944) landmark treatise. He surmised that "The economic situation of the Negro in America is pathological. Except for a small minority enjoying upper or middle class status, the masses of American Negroes, in the rural South and in the segregated slum quarters in Southern and Northern cities are destitute" (p.205). In the slum quarters, labor market situations are deteriorating for African-American men (Swinton, 1993).

Many scholars place the deteriorated economic position of African-American men in historical perspective. In 1940 a typical African-American man, very nearly identical to a Euro-American man, would be employed for 37.8 years, unemployed for 4.0 years, and out of the labor force for 3.2 years from age 20 to 65 (Wilson, 1992). In 1960, 83 percent of both African-American and Euro-American men were working or looking for work. By 1985, as he ages from 20 to 65, the average African-American man will be employed for only 29.4 years, unemployed for five years, and out of the labor force for eleven years. His Euro-American counterpart will experience only two years of unemployment, and seven years of non-labor force participation (Brooks, 1990). By 1988 the Euro-American rate dropped to 77 percent while the African American rate spiraled down to 71 percent (Mead, 1992).

As a consequence of the reality reflected in the foregoing statistics, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that members of the African-American underclass do not experience opportunity to obtain a reasonable standard of living and to "reinvent themselves," commensurate with that of poor Euro-Americans (Brooks, 1990, p. 122). Black/White differentials in employment opportunity (Billingsley, 1968; Peterson, 1991; Ropers, 1991; Scanzoni, 1971), and low wages when employed (Bluestone, Murphy & Stevenson, 1973; Burton, 1992; Liebow, 1967; Ropers, 1991; Swinton, 1993; Wilson, 1980) provide a two-dimensional picture of the African-American man's opportunity outlook. They also affect opportunity expectancies for disadvantaged African-American youth. Simons and Gray (1989) hypothesized that youth from impoverished neighborhoods are likely to perceive the system as unfair and respond to failure in ways quite different from other groups of youth.

These researchers used data from the National Strategy for Youth Development Project to test the relationship between perceived blocked occupational opportunity and delinquency between four groups of males (i.e., 177 lower class whites, 146 lower-class blacks, 1,729 middle-class whites, and 385 middle-class blacks - grades seven through twelve in nine sites around the country). A respondent was considered lower-class if the head of household had less than a high school education and either worked at a semiskilled or unskilled job, or was on welfare.

Perceived blocked occupational opportunity was measured as perceptions of whether or not an individual believes his chances of achieving a desired occupational outcome are less than that of others, and believes that the aspiration is realistic for others, but not for him. A nineteen item self-report delinquency measure was used. Regression tests for the difference between correlations showed that the coefficient for the 146 lower class African-Americans, is significantly higher ($p. \leq .05$) than coefficients for the other three groups (family structure and parental rejection variables were controlled). There is a relationship between perceived blocked opportunity and delinquency for lower-class African-American males. This finding has serious implications for labor force participation. It can be clarified by exploring how beliefs are developed and nurtured in the environment.

## Summary

The degree of commitment to values of individual achievement, motivation, success, and hard work is often a function of the extent to which would-be workers can access an opportunity structure (Rubin, 1975). For African-American men especially, their opportunity structure is compromised by the capriciousness of white society (Scanzoni, 1971). Signals from the urban labor market over the past three decades have been discouraging for African-Americans in general (Jacob, 1992; Jencks, 1991; Peterson, 1991; Peterson and Vroman, 1992; Ropers, 1991). The relative disadvantage for African-American men in particular has been nearly constant during this period (Henderson, 1994; Swinton, 1993). The absence of opportunities to earn a living in the inner-city causes poverty and underlies the social problems that are so intense in the inner-city (Peterson and Vroman, 1992).

Labor market segmentation (Goldsmith & Blakeley, 1992; Wilson, 1980) and residential segregation (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Massey & Denton, 1993) are two powerful determinants of urban opportunity for African-American men. Because they are more likely to live in central cities and metropolitan areas than Euro-American men

(Hacker, 1992), and because their employment is connected to the secondary labor market (Hill Collins, 1986; Wilson, 1980), inner-city residents have been particularly dependent on declining industries for work (Goldsmith & Blakely, 1992; Tidwell, 1986; Wilson, 1987). Consequently, urban opportunities for advancement have narrowed because of jobs moving to the suburbs and the Sunbelt, and the decline of the manufacturing sector of the economy (Johnson & Oliver, 1992; Wilson, 1987). These conditions have made entry-level, low-skill jobs harder to find in many cities (Goldsmith & Blakely, 1992; Hacker, 1992; Wilson, 1987). Complications associated with isolation from new suburban labor markets (Fernandez & Harris, 1992; Johnson & Oliver, 1992) threaten opportunities for employment outside the contiguous area.

## Labor Force Participation

The conventional view of the labor force includes those who are employed and those who are looking for work (Tienda & Stier, 1991). The literature consistently regards labor force participation as the normal and natural status for all healthy men beyond high school and between retirement (Jencks, 1991; Peterson, 1991; Ross, 1967; Scanzoni, 1971), irrespective of structural conditions. "Labor force participation" is a technical term that means membership in the world of work (Ross, 1967). Rates of labor force participation vary according to age, gender, race, ethnicity, and place of residence (Tienda & Steir, 1991). African-American men are at multiple risk for nonparticipation related to race and residence.

An African-American man's current work status is an inadequate index of his degree of attachment to the labor force, since status does not indicate whether the jobless are willing to work, and under what conditions (Tienda & Stier, 1991). The perceived lack of real opportunities (Glasgow, 1980; Scanzoni, 1971) and the refusal to accept jobs that are not intrinsically rewarding (Glasgow, 1980; Hacker, 1992; Hill Collins, 1986; Leonard, 1985; McGary, 1992; Wilson, 1980) stigmatizes some poor African-American men in a number of ways. They are considered lazy and unwilling to work (Kirschenman

& Neckerman, 1991), fundamentally flawed (Jencks, 1992; Lemann, 1988; McGary, 1992; Murray, 1984), and shiftless (Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Tienda & Stier, 1991).

Murray's (1984) heralded explanation for escalating inner-city poverty and male joblessness implies that African-American men born after 1950 voluntarily withdrew from the labor force. His conservative cultural analysis of the problem of chronic joblessness disregards the notion of structural unemployment and socio-structural conditions in ghetto communities (Hammonds, 1989; Wilson 1987). Instead, it stresses an environment that is not conducive to developing positive habits and attitudes toward work (Hammonds, 1989). Challenging this singular explanation, Wilson (1987) claims that the growing concentration of low-income African-Americans in the inner-city does give rise to contagious, dysfunctional social behavior. However what Wilson, along with other scholars (e.g., Glasgow, 1980; Goodwin, 1972; Hannerz, 1969; Jencks, 1992; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Rose, 1971; Sobin, 1973; Swinton, 1991) adds to the equation, is evidence of the intersect of social and economic behavior in the inner-city.

## Determinants of Labor Force Participation

Values and attitudes are determinants of individual and group mobility (Bluestone, Murphy, & Stevenson, 1973; Goodwin, 1972). When these are factored into the big picture of labor force participation, personal characteristics of the workforce are considered correlates of labor force participation and low earnings (Bluestone, Murphy & Stevenson, 1973). Considering the tenets of the two pervasive poverty paradigms (i.e., pathology/blaming the victim; structure/blaming the system), the preponderance of labor market and employment stability literature implies that labor force participation of African-American men in urban areas hinges largely on determinants characterized as either individualistic, or as structural (Maume, 1987; Ropers, 1991).

Individualistic and structural determinants of labor force participation are not necessarily mutually exclusive for African-American men. Kluegel (1990) investigated explanations for the socioeconomic gap between African-Americans and Euro-Americans. He found that generally, most individualistic/behavioral explanations emphasize a lack of motivation among poor African-Americans. Euro-Americans, who

otherwise express little or no traditional prejudice, commonly hold this view. Individualistic interpretations of poverty are "a more socially acceptable way to express anti-black sentiment", (p. 513). Employers often express this view by confining recruitment and selection of employees to those with "favorable" individualistic traits. They accomplish this by statistically discriminating against inner-city African-American men. By not advertising jobs in areas in which these men are likely to learn of them, or by screening out applicants with inner-city addresses (Mead, 1992), employers in effect exclude this group from the labor force. Their absence from suburban jobs is often construed as structural by the structuralists, and as an absence of work ethic or some other personal failure by the culturalists.

Torrance's (1990) pilot study examined the extent to which African Americans support the American ethos, and reasons for it. She separated support for capitalist ideals into economic individualism (i.e., attitudes toward capitalism, hard work guaranteeing success, and government intervention in the economy) and equality of opportunity (i.e.attitudes on civil rights, government programs for racial equality). More than the work ethic, she found that Black consciousness (i.e., self-esteem and beliefs about what the individual can achieve as a member of his/her group) is the important variable in influencing beliefs about economic individualism.

Goodwin (1972) found positive correlations between the work ethic and lack of confidence in the ability of inner-city and suburban African-American males to succeed. There is a chasm between employment status and adherence to the work ethic when people who identify with work are insecure because they have not achieved a high level of success in it.

## Summary

Discussions of determinants of labor force participation and values related to labor force participation, must be grounded in clear analyses of the political and economic context of African-American communities (Hill Collins, 1986). The valence of

social-psychological factors that impinge on values, perceptions and expectancies can determine labor force status. The extent to which this is so, is vague in the literature. The participation of African-Americans in the occupational sphere cannot be fully appreciated without referencing those who do not work (Billingsley, 1968). Those men chronically outside the labor force, either because of discouragement (Bowman, 199b; Stevans, Register, & Grimes, 1987), idleness (Tienda & Stier, 1991), or underground pursuits are increasingly African-American (Fagan, 1992; Ross, 1967), and are more predisposed to poverty.

## The Working Poor

As long as there have been poverty studies, there has been controversy about whether or not the poor want to work (Goodwin, 1972). The last decade has brought a substantial increase in the number of people who work, yet remain poor (Hacker, 1992; Ropers, 1991). The wages paid to those who perform low-paying jobs with no opportunity for upward mobility has led to the term "working poor" to describe this group (Jencks, 1992; Sobin, 1973). These job holders are more likely to be African-Americans. Inner-city ghetto residents with discrepant skills are typically concentrated in these jobs (Hacker, 1992; Sobin, 1973; Wilson, 1987, 1992). While Levitan and Shapiro (1987), Thompson and McDowell (1994) and Jensen (1994) challenge common thinking that the working poor are clustered in the inner-city, they agree with their urban oriented contemporaries that problems of the working poor are related to supply and demand side factors.

Macroeconomic policies and industrial shifts have caused many people to experience poverty for the first time in recent years (Thompson & McDowell, 1994). However, for many others their poverty is intergenerational and is considered pathological. Although much attention is given to pathological behaviors of the poor, except for crime, the behavior of the poor that most offends the nonpoor is not working (Jencks, 1992; Kluegel, 1990; Mead, 1992). Working is favorably treated as directing

efforts toward individual success (Mead, 1992). Therefore, the poor who work are often dealt with more sympathetically (Hacker, 1992; Ropers, 1991) than the nonworking poor.

Preference for low-wage work over the receipt of welfare (Tienda & Stier, 1991), and upholding the work ethic (Jencks, 1991; Mead, 1992) distinguishes the working poor from the underclass in many scholastic circles. What we know about work motivations and social-psychological work orientations of the inner-city poor, is largely speculative and is built on a research base that is decades old (e.g. Goodwin, 1972). Although some scholars consider the working poor to be more competent than the nonworking poor (Mead, 1992), Goodwin (1971,1972) and Sobin's (1973) findings refute this global generalization. They have found there are problems with efficacy and hope that subvert positive labor market expectancies. For this and other reasons, ghetto men employed in menial jobs sometimes do not see themselves as better off than their unemployed neighbors (Sobin, 1973). We also know that the irregular work history that may result from racial constraints, statistical discrimination, and labor market displacement may be treated as a lack of work commitment by prospective employers (Jensen, 1994). Clearer insight into why the poor continue to work has heuristic value.

## A Review of Relevant Studies of the Working Poor

A number of studies analyze the congruence of work and poverty. Investigations of motivation to work and work activity, have typically been undertaken as analyses of federally funded "second chance" programs, or as public policy pieces. Work orientation and issues related to the social psychology of work can be seen in varying degrees in studies of training for in school and out of school urban adolescents (Walther, 1970), hard core unemployables integrated into an industrial training program (Padfield & Williams, 1973), and assessment of work adjustment facilitation for the hardcore unemployed (Rosen, 1969). Qualitative studies that tap issues related to this topic have mainly been ethnographic research and case studies in which work orientation was a tangential piece of a larger investigation of streetcorner life (cf. Liebow, 1967), life in the ghetto (cf. Rainwater, 1970b), or differences between African-American and Euro-

American aspirations (MacLeod, 1987). The use of a social psychological variable (i.e., aspirations) in the latter study represents a departure from typical studies of poverty and work. Wilson's (1991) research in Chicago's inner-city emphasizes the importance of social psychological variables in labor market research. His findings uncover a strong relationship between perceptions about local employment opportunities, feelings of self-efficacy, effort in entering and remaining in the labor force, and labor force attachment.

Quantitative studies have been more express in their intention to unveil such factors. Goodwin (1971) surveyed African-American and Euro-American welfare trainee participants in a work incentive program. He used structured rating items and open-ended questions to compare work orientations in a sample of poor and nonpoor, including a subsample of African-American delinquent males. Goodwin (1971) measured psychological elements (i.e., attitudes, goals, beliefs, intentions related to work). He found that the psychological orientations of African-American trainees indicate lack of confidence in their abilities to perform successfully. This orientation tended to result from continuing environmental factors.

Goodwin's (1972) survey of differences and similarities in the work orientations of 4,000 poor and nonpoor males and females, assumed that the statistical relationships among the orientations held by the poor and the nonpoor would correspond to psychological processes that guide their actions. Because environmental conditions also affect action, Goodwin fit certain features of environmental conditioning (i.e. goals, attitudes, beliefs, intentions) into his action model. Of the nine orientations he tested, number three was the lack of confidence in the ability to succeed in the world of work. Using between group (Black/White) and within group comparisons, two interesting findings emerge. First, teenage males who have spent most of their life on welfare have positive orientations toward work (i.e. there is no negative transmission). Second, and most intriguing, is that both poor and nonpoor Black fathers showed a great lack of confidence in their ability to succeed, whereas the White poor and more affluent White males were reasonably confident. Goodwin (1972) concludes that poor African-American males start with the same positive orientations as do affluent youth. A later change

indicates a later loss of self. This finding may support beliefs that identification with work is dynamic rather than static, and that it results from environmental experiences and transactions. Previous studies assumed this aspect of work orientation stemmed from childhood rejection of the importance to work.

Sobin's (1973) survey research of 108 urban African-American men used a 350 item questionnaire to determine two things. First, he wanted to find out if there is a correlation between work-related behaviors and attitudes, and non-work related behaviors of lower level (i.e., unskilled) and higher level (i.e., paraprofessionals) men in the ghetto. Second, he wanted to determine whether or not menial, dead-end jobs have social, economic, psychological, and political implications for the people who hold them. He found that unskilled workers have maladjustment problems that include "feelings of powerlessness, persecution, deprivation, insecurity, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and despair." Unskilled jobs send "psychologically assaulted" people into the community, whose feelings and attitudes reflect mistreatment. He also found that the psychological wounds produced by the jobs for both groups of men negatively affect behavior away from the job, in family life, social relationships, and in other respects (p. 69). A serious limitation of Sobin's (1973) study is that it involved only employed ghetto residents. This study suffers from the same limitation.

Thompson and McDowell's (1994) topical review of contemporary previous research revealed several startling findings. First, a new trend is noted in that we see sons earning less than fathers. Second, about 80% of the able-bodied who head poor households with children worked during the year. Third, despite tremendous work effort, poor households remain in poverty because of low annual earnings. Fourth, very few full-time working poor earned as much as $5.00 per hour, with the typical average wage for such a worker being between $3.50 and $4.00 per hour. Fifth, poverty is a function of the amount labor market opportunity market relative to the size of the population. In the case of the working poor, it has been found that while the poor are found across industries, they will always be found in the lowest ranking, least noticeable jobs, with wages that do not transcend the poverty threshold. Sixth, worker characteristics (e.g., poorly educated, minority group membership) largely determine which workers will be poor.

In their own study, Thompson and McDowell (1994) used Current Population Survey data to investigate selected factors affecting work and poverty in metro and nonmetro areas of the South, and to identify characteristics of the working poor. Logistic regression equations using demographic and labor force variables revealed that the odds of an African-American worker being in poverty (because of industry structure, number of weeks worked, educational level), are greater that those of a Euro-American worker. Moreover, escaping poverty for this group of workers is linked to the number of earners in the family. While African-American workers comprised only three percent of the population, they constituted nearly thirty six percent of the workers in poverty.

Research related to commitment to work despite earning poverty wages may help to extend findings of studies in three domains. First there can be a refinement in studies related to employer perceptions and prediction of job performance of inner-city African-American males, if we know more about the values and orientations that keep men working. Second, perspective can be shared about the relationship between earnings and marriage from the male perspective since the male tends to set the stage for the decision points about marriage in our society. Third, social science can benefit from learning how these men transcend some of the effects of labor market conditions that threaten African-American male employment.

## The problem with poverty wages

The poverty population is thought to encompass all of the lower class and cross over into as much as one-third of the working class (Ropers, 1991). Poor and working-class people possess less economic power or resources than members of other classes (Brooks, 1990). An explosion of people who survive on incomes less than half of the official poverty level contributes to the growth in poverty. It is estimated that over 12 million people fall into this category, representing an increase of almost 50 percent since 1979 (Burton, 1992). Although there are more Euro-Americans in every poverty category, poverty disproportionately affects African-Americans (Jacob, 1992). In 1987, more than forty percent of all poor people in this country over age fourteen worked at minimum wage jobs and at other employment that made them ineligible for welfare.

Despite their work, income was insufficient to meet their basic needs (Burton, 1992). The low-wage, dead-end jobs available to ghetto residents cause social, psychological, economic, and political problems. They give false hope that poverty can be overcome (Sobin,1973) by hard work. Consequently, many are becoming discouraged about the payoffs of hard work (Thompson & McDowell, 1994) since they have seen that rarely do the poor escape poverty in Horatio Alger fashion (Beeghley, 1983). Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of poor men continue to work.. Many of these men inhabit the core of some of the most depressed environments in this country.

## Summary

Ellwood's (1988) analysis of poverty clearly reveals that in many ways the working poor are no better off than the non-working poor, nor does public policy operate to their betterment any moreso than it does to the undeserving poor. There are overwhelming problems related to health care, nutrition, education, social conditions, and the like for both groups. Thus, conformity to the norm of working is still problematic and dissonant. A review of the literature does not reveal the use of relevant and heuristic theoretical frameworks to understand why the poor continue to participate in the labor force when their labor does not necessarily provide discernible tangible rewards. In the main, investigations of this type, and those related to barriers to upward mobility for the working poor in their present employment, have been nearly overlooked in the literature (Osterman, 1991).

No research stream is committed to clarifying assumptions about the working poor, or to distill differences between this group and other inner-city men who do not work. The presumption appears to be that all motivations and behaviors are conscious, isolated phenomena and require little investigation. Whether there is a significant difference in the way different members of society view work should be important to social scientists and to policymakers (Goodwin, 1972). This does not appear to be so. It is a damaging oversight, since it is only through such research that social science can

understand how the poor who have virtually no attachment to the labor force, differ from those who work at least some of the time (Osterman, 1991).

## The Inner-City Environment

The inner-city environment does not offer many high-wage jobs, opportunities for advancement, or the development of a sense of competence (Tienda, 1991). Today's poor are much more likely to live in conditions of concentrated poverty in the inner-city than they were two decades ago (Coulton & Pandey, 1992). These areas are characterized as ghettos.[7] The literature suggests that the modern "black ghetto" began with the Great Migration of the early 1900's in which African-Americans migrated from the South to the North in search of employment and improved life chances (Feagin, 1989; Forman, 1971; Jaynes & Williams, 1989; Rose, 1993). African-American migrants found housing in the cheapest parts of town, which eventually became places of confinement (Rose, 1993).

The ghetto is a hostile environment (Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1972; Pierce, 1974), in which adaptive behaviors are often natural responses to group conditions and social conditions perceived as beyond personal and immediate control (Jaynes & Williams,

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Hannerz (1969) explains that the term "ghetto" is commonly used to refer to the inner-city (i.e., a location), or "slum" (i.e., a run-down and poor area). However, he opines that the ghetto reveals something about the nature of the community and its relationship to the outside world, namely that it is constrained by broader society, despite its heterogeneity. While he conceptualizes heterogeneity moreso in terms of stratified socioeconomic status and resulting behaviors and lifestyles, Wilson's analysis (1987) treats the heterogeneity more in terms of the multiple groups who are the most disadvantaged of the urban African-American community. In most analyses of the ghetto poor (cf. Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Jargowsky & Bane, 1990; Lynn & McGeary, 1990; Wilson, 1987), classifications are based on the census tract as the unit of analysis, with poverty rates of the poor living in such neighborhoods being derived as percentages (e.g. Wilson, 30%; Jargowsky & Bane, 40%). These percentages reveal that nearly two-thirds of the ghetto poor is African-American and that within metropolitan areas in the United States, 28 percent of poor African-Americans lived in ghettos in 1980. The ghettos in the metropolitan areas of the South house some 26 percent of the African-American population. Rose (1971), relying on census tracts as territorial units, connects the size of the ghetto with the size of the African-American population. As a territorial entity, the ghetto can extend over only a few contiguous blocks, or it may cover many square miles as is the case in Chicago.

1989). There are two prominent and abiding features of the scholarly literature on ghettos. The first feature is that their harshness is economic, social, cultural, and educational (Clark, 1965; Fagan, 1992; Jaynes & Williams, 1989). The second feature is that intentional racial segregation maintains it (Forman, 1971; Katz, 1989; Jones, 1992; Massey & Denton, 1993). Segregation creates an unhealthy situation for urban society that leads to misunderstanding, suspicion, and hostility toward ghetto residents (Forman, 1971). This condition tends to foster a lack of direction, and a tenuous set of options, opportunity, and hope (Ellwood, 1988; Wacquant, 1989; West, 1993). Crime, drugs, the underground economy, and welfare contribute to the nexus of ghetto life, culminating in factors that would be difficult for the strongest and most concerned people to fight (Ellwood, 1988).

The black urban ghetto in this country is the contemporary urban form that most incontrovertibly demonstrates social and political struggles over competing uses of space, resources, and people (Wacquant, 1989). In addition to institutional causes, there are historical processes that created poverty and resulted in stranded communities (Jones, 1992). As a stranded community, the black ghetto exists within a social context and is better understood by relating it and the behavior of its residents to that context (Forman, 1971). The influence of social context on individual behavior has an impressive array of empirical studies in the social psychological literature, the demographic literature, and the educational outcomes literature. This longstanding research has attempted to show that there are systematic regularities in behavior according to social context (Tienda, 1991) Recently, studies of substance abuse and delinquency (Brounstein, Hatry, Alschuler, & Blair, 1990), adolescent pregnancy (Hardy & Zabin, 1991), and general neighborhood contagion effects (Crane, 1990) have investigated the role of the inner-city environment in developing social problems. The body of employment behavior literature in this regard is in need of more directed concrete assessments rather than general attribution of neighborhood effects.

Because of where they live and what it connotes, Glasgow (1987) and Katz (1989) characterize the national climate as one of moral meanness toward the ghetto poor. This climate may compromise scientific understanding and corrective policy

action (Glasgow, 1987). Wacquant (1989) warns that ghetto residents begin to evaluate their objective chances to escape poverty, and to adjust economic and social conduct to a closed opportunity structure that is nested in the environment. Subjective hopes and expectations reinforce objective mechanisms that limit chances of mobility.

### Concentration Effects

Concentration effects are "ecological niches" that residents of socially disadvantaged neighborhoods face, in terms of access to jobs, the availability of marriageable partners, and the exposure to conventional role models (Wilson, 1987, p. 144). Using an ecological perspective, Coulton and Pandey (1992) present evidence that the effects of poverty are mediated through the concentration of other adverse social conditions and forces. "The social transformation of the city has resulted in a disproportionate concentration of the most disadvantaged segments of the urban black population, creating a social milieu significantly different from the environment that existed several years ago" (Wilson, 1987, p. 58). Characteristics of such environments include an asymmetric presence of minority group members, principally African-Americans; a distinct difference in family structure and demographics, with the modal family type being a single parent with children; a greater proportion of ghetto males age 25-44 not participating in the labor force at all, or if participating, earning poverty wages; and harsh social characteristics that include their being perpetrators of crime and victims of crime (Jargowsky & Bane, 1990). Economic disinvestment, fed in part by environmental characteristics, worsen unemployment and underemployment in ghetto areas (McGary, 1992; Wacquant, 1989; Wilson, 1978).

## Social Isolation

An inherent understanding of the context of the poor is that their neighborhoods are isolated. Life chances in such neighborhoods are reflections of social forces and arrangements that shape mobility in poor neighborhoods (Halpern, 1993). Myrdal's

(1963) benchmark conceptualization of the underclass includes the fact that it is cutoff (i.e., isolated) from society. This feature, evidenced in residential segregation, has contributed to the subordinate status of African-Americans in this country (Farley and Frey, 1994). Lack of mobility compromises contact and distinguishes the lower class from the underclass (Glasgow, 1980; Wilson, 1987).

Peterson and Harrell (1992) treat isolation as an overlapping multidimensional concept that affects opportunity patterns in profound ways. The four dimensions they recognize are physical separation (e.g., distancing inner-city residents from the suburban locations where jobs are being created); racial isolation imposed by segregated housing patterns; social isolation (e.g., class homogeneity of contacts and weak participation in social organizations), and isolation imposed by high rates of crime and drug activity. In addition to these dimensions, Peterson and Harrell (1992) contend that habits of inner-city street life and neighborhood behavioral norms can progressively cut off access to mainstream society. The inclusion of social isolation as a prominent feature of African-American poverty and underclass status has been borne out in a broad body of qualitative literature (Auletta, 1982; Clark, 1965; Duneier, 1992; Glasgow, 1980; Jones, 1992; Liebow; 1967; Rainwater, 1970a), and more recently in the literature on neighborhood effects (Jencks & Mayer, 1991). The relationship between labor force attachment, as a behavioral variable, and social isolation as a structural variable has been empirically tested and validated (Van Haitsma, 1989). Wilson's (1987) theoretical concept of social isolation is a critical link between the macrolevel social and economic processes (e.g., shifts in industrial composition; suburbinazation of jobs; exodus of African-American middle-class from the inner-city to the suburbs) and the behavior of poor people (Fernandez and Harris, 1992), which involves microlevel processes. He defines social isolation as "the lack of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society" (p. 60). Wilson (1987, 1991) is careful to distinguish social isolation from the culture of poverty and from interactionist perspectives on adaptation to poverty.

Social isolation involves a "qualitatively different social and institutional environment, where the structure of social and economic relations make it increasingly

unlikely that individuals will have access to minimal resources and channels needed to escape poverty" (Wilson, Aponte, Kirschenman, & Waquant, 1988). Social isolation means that ghetto residents do not have stably employed parents, friends, and acquaintances (i.e., social networks) who represent diversified ties to job opportunities and are a critical link to the labor market at a time when recruiting practices are becoming more formal. Their inability to provide information and contacts on job prospects, precludes the building of a reservoir of personal contacts that mediate occupational mobility. Concentrated poverty and social isolation thus exert "a cumulative negative effect on work opportunities and mobility that goes well beyond the mere shortcomings of aggregate job supply" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 516).

## Summary

Quantitative and qualitative evidence related to indicators of social marginality (e.g., long-term receipt of welfare, lower educational attainment, weak labor force attachment, chronic male joblessness, female-headed households; out of wedlock births, and lack of positive role models) suggest that today's African-American urban poor are different from both their counterparts of earlier years (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Marks, 1991; Massey & Denton, 1993; Peterson, 1991; Ricketts & Sawhill, 1991; West, 1993; Wilson, 1987; 1991) and from the Euro-American poor (Wacquant & Wilson, 1989). They are "becoming increasingly concentrated in dilapidated territorial enclaves that epitomize acute social and economic marginalization" (Wacquant & Wilson, 1989, p. 9). They are also reviled and blamed for their poverty and weak attachment to the labor force because of what the word "underclass" connotes.Social scientists, policymakers, and the public often accuse those entrapped in the ghetto of having created their condition and their social problems because of their culture (Brill, 1993; Glasgow, 1987) and their social context. Withdrawal of support is the public response to a perceived lack of non-conformity with society's value of hard work. In this way, the "offenders" will learn how to conform (Ellwood, 1988) and assume personal responsibility for themselves.

The inner-city is a mundane extreme environment (Pierce, 1974) in which African-Americans tend to feel psychologically degraded, economically ignored (Pierce, 1969), and powerless (Madhubti, 1990; Staples, 1991). Peters and Massey (1983) have linked stress in the mundane extreme environment to unemployment and the catastrophic problems related to poverty. The sustained effects of problems that urban African-American men perceive, or experience, in accessing or creating opportunity structures requires more investigation from social scientists, economists, clinicians, and policy-makers.

# CHAPTER III

## Method

The major objective of this study was to explore the context of poor inner-city African-American men's lives to discover how this context impinges on work, and beliefs about success and failure. Qualitative research methodologies were used to clarify findings from quantitative studies and to expand findings of earlier qualitative research. Previous research relying upon quantitative analytic approaches provided the frame of reference for this study. The tradition of "statistical" studies that examine labor force participation in urban markets still left a door open for qualitative analyses of processes related to work and perceptions of opportunity, and success and failure in neighborhoods typically characterized as "underclass" neighborhoods. It is believed that qualitative investigations, and the findings of this study in particular, can shed some light on the study subject and offer some understanding of the social psychology of the inner-city environment. It is hoped that in this way, social science will be better informed about how to prevent the labor force condition of inner-city African-American men from experiencing further decline.

Studies in the field of human ecology, like the vast majority of social science studies, have relied heavily on gathering data quantitatively. This approach has often neglected the lived experience of those being studied. The need to impact social problems requires the development and use of research strategies that focus on specific problems in specific situations (Stoecker, 1991). Qualitative strategies, which lend themselves to studying situations and phenomena in situations as they actually occur (Touliatos & Compton, 1988), seek to understand the perspective of the people studied. This is preferable in many cases to documenting their world from the perspective of the researcher (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975); Hammersley, 1992; Yin, 1989). To assess qualitative strategies in terms of a phenomenological position, captures the belief that the important reality is what people imagine it to be (Seidman, 1991). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that placing artificial boundaries on qualitative research neglects and

underestimates several important factors about substantive theory, the basis on which grounded formal theory is based. Moreover, they balk at the exclusive treatment of qualitative research as a preliminary to quantitative research. They argue that credibility with qualitative methodology has much to do with getting the reader to understand the theoretical framework. By so vividly describing the social world of research participants, they almost come alive on the pages. They are then seen and heard in relationship to the theoretical framework. The fundamental caveat is that no single method is perfect (Triandis, 1983). Qualitative and quantitative research both have their strengths and weaknesses as a way to conduct social science research (Bryman, 1992; Triandis, 1983).

The 1980's brought the beginning of an acceptance and value of qualitative work into the social science mainstream (McLaughlin, 1991). Hammersley (1992) says somewhat tongue in cheek, that non-statistical quantification of qualitative data contributes to acceptance. Nonetheless, the foci and rigor of qualitative and quantitative research are still generally considered to be quite different. Social scientists reify the dichotomy by debating several issues which fuel claims that one approach is superior to the other. Many issues evolve from divergent assumptions considered substantively different enough to separate researchers into two camps. Yin (1989) offers three conditional gauges to determine the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative and quantitative research. The first condition is the type of research question. Questions can be categorized in the familiar scheme of "who," "what," "where," "how," and "why." Research that attempts to answer "what" questions would likely call for an exploratory study that could be used with different research strategies (e.g., exploratory survey, exploratory experiment, or exploratory case study). "Who" and "where" questions are likely to favor survey strategies or the analysis of archival data. If the research goal is to describe the incidence or prevalence of a phenomenon or to predict certain outcomes, surveys or analysis of archival data might be advantageous. "How" and "why" questions tend to set out to explain operational links that need to be traced over time. Case studies, histories, and experiments are the most advantageous strategies for "how" and "why" questions. Because of overlap among the strategies, a choice of strategies may exist for some research questions. After defining the research question, the second condition is the extent of

control and access the investigator has over actual events. When relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated, the case study is preferred. When the investigator can directly manipulate behavior in a precise and systematic manner, the experiment is used. The third condition is whether the focus is on contemporary or historical phenomenon. When contemporary events are being examined and living people can report on what happened, the case study is the favored method. In addition to dealing with evidence such as documents and artifacts, direct observation and systematic interviewing add two other sources of evidence to the case study approach. In spite of these ostensibly clear and reasonable guidelines, there still appears to be a gulf between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The chasm predisposes qualitative research to be maligned as less rigorous than its quantitative counterpart.

Qualitative and quantitative researchers are thought to be committed to different epistemological positions (Hammersley, 1992). Bryman (1992) believes that the two research approaches can and do have independence from their epistemological beginnings and therefore do not have to be forever rooted in them. McLaughlin's (1991) review of the debate suggests that it may be more a matter of academic convention than epistemological position. The qualitative/quantitative disjuncture extends beyond just ways of gathering data. It reaches to the nature and purpose of research (McLaughlin, 1991). Any discussion of methodological divergence implies that quantitative work uses strategies and data collection techniques that are often thought of as a macro approach. In contrast, qualitative investigation is often viewed as a micro-perspective which depends upon case studies or evidence from individuals in particular situations (Bullock, Little & Millham, 1992). The many pairs of terms such as micro versus macro; insider versus outsider; naturalistic versus rationalistic; inductive versus deductive; subjective versus objective; atheoretical versus theoretical; descriptive versus predictive; art versus science, and understanding versus explanation reflect the division (Bryman, 1992; McLaughlin, 1991; Stoecker, 1991).

A specific concern raised by quantitative researchers is the generalizability of the qualitative researcher's findings to other subjects. This accumulation of unrepresentative data is a second problem related to researcher effects (i.e., the impact of the observer on

the observations). Bogdan and Taylor (1975) suggest that as the investigator studies certain social processes, s/he hopes to observe and understand them as they occur under specific circumstances. In this way, all subjects might be considered representative of all others. They add that the effects of any unrepresentativeness related to the researcher's presence can be minimized by gathering and reporting sufficient detail that allows the reader to weigh the researcher's influence on the phenomenon being researched. Yin (1989) addresses the criticism of external validity by responding that generalizability has to do with theoretical propositions - not populations or universes. It is believed that the validity of findings can be enhanced by checking the findings of one type of study (e.g., qualitative) against the findings derived from the other type (e.g., quantitative). This logic is referred to as triangulation. Triangulation can involve data, investigators, and theories as well as methodologies (Snow & Anderson, 1991). Major theoretical and empirical contemporary issues cannot be addressed through adherence to the natural science model, which uses methods such as social surveys and social experiments (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughn & Sjoberg, 1991). Qualitative research can facilitate the interpretation of relationships between variables. While quantitative research allows the researcher to establish the relationship between variables, the reason for those relationships is generally left unexplored. Since quantitative research taps the large scale structural features of social life, qualitative research tends to address the behavioral aspects. When both levels are of concern, integrating methods becomes all the more powerful (Bryman, 1992) and the results are treated as all the more valid.

Many types of qualitative research are written up as case studies. Rather than being treated as the by-product of other forms of qualitative research, Yin (1989) advocates that the case study be accepted as a formal empirical research strategy that investigates phenomena contextually by answering "how" and "why" questions. He believes there is a common definition that embraces his three-condition decision model for determining the research approach. These conditions distinguish the case study from other forms of qualitative research such as ethnographies and participant observation. He offers that "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and

context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). In this way, the case study is a versatile technique than can explore, describe, and explain real life contexts (Touliatos & Compton, 1988). Thick descriptions of life gleaned from intensive interviews are the mainstay of this type of research.

Qualitative interviewing, seen in phenomenology and ethnography, intends to get inside the heads of people to understand how they perceive and interpret the world. As Seidman (1991) notes, "interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior" (p. 4). The analytic information, accounts, and descriptions that research participants provide verbally are not inherently inferior nor superior to analysis presented through numerical scales, categorizations, or measures (Palys, 1991). The processual aspects of qualitative research in general, and the fact that qualitative methods seek to understand phenomena as a totality of a situation (Touliatos and Compton, 1988), made intensive interviews in particular appropriate for this research on four fronts. First, there is a lack of contextual research in the area of labor force participation for inner-city African-American men. Second, the perceptions of participants may differ sharply from those of outside observers in a way that explains their work behavior. Third, there is a need for more complete and more finely drawn descriptions of the processes that contribute to labor force participation and work in the inner-city. Fourth, the focus of this study was on these processes and internal dynamics that are nested in the environment.

In studying process, which is the core of the exploratory method, Stoecker (1991) argues that the case study can analyze this type of causation and meet internal and external validity by interpreting causal evidence based on observable concrete interconnections between actual properties and people within an actual concrete setting. The concept of the case study has not always been clear in the literature because of its many different uses, the manner in which its meaning has changed over the years, and the absence of a universally accepted taxonomy to classify the different types of case studies (Touliatos & Compton, 1988). Unlike other research design strategies, considerations regarding codification and classification of the case study (Touliatos & Compton, 1988; Yin, 1989) is not fully developed in Touliatos and Compton's (1988)

opinion. Even if this is so, Stoecker (1991) defends the case study method by redefining it as a research frame with several properties. These properties include structural and historical boundaries, an integral theory component, an involved researcher, subjects viewed as research participants, and multiple methods. In this way, the adequacy of case work is measured against standards which ensure that the case study is clearly developed as a research design. Snow and Anderson (1991) present five characteristic features of the case study which serve as strengths. First, there is a holistic orientation of these studies that manifests itself in a commitment to the contextualization of social actions, events, and processes. Attempts are made to understand how actions or processes are produced and reproduced or changed by examining their ongoing interaction with other elements within the particular context. Contextualization articulates the linkage of the phenomenon of interest to the surrounding world in which it is embedded. Second, the contextualization of social activities, issues, and processes requires multi-perspectal analyses. Third, the case study calls for a triangulated research strategy, which can occur with data, investigators, and theories, as well as methodologies. Fourth, case studies allow social processes to be analyzed more readily than other types of research. This is related to beliefs that the case study can be considered as longitudinal since it is conducted over time. Finally, case studies tend to have an open-ended, emergent quality that allows discovery of both unanticipated findings and data sources. While the serendipity pattern is not unique to case studies, Snow and Anderson (1991) point out that the dynamic, recursive nature of the case study make new avenues of investigation more likely to occur.

Some researchers limit the use of the term "case study" to an exploratory study in which no hypothesis is tested. The main purpose of the exploratory case study is to gather information in order to describe a phenomenon. When it is an exploratory study, its purpose may be to determine relevant variables for a particular area of the study. In this way, the hypotheses for subsequent studies may be formulated (Dixon, Brouma, & Atkinson, 1987). This suggests one way in which it is used as a forerunner to a quantitative study (Touliatos & Compton, 1988). There are other ways in which case study research can fill gaps in quantitative science (Stoecker, 1991). It is especially

important to round out investigations in which many "conclusions" are drawn based on statistical associations. Stoecker (1991) adds that research which shows historical causal processes and associations helps us to see which theoretical perspectives and theoretically deduced causes provide the best explanations for statistical associations. He cautions it is important to consider the extent to which concrete empirical processes guided by different theoretical perspectives exist in the case. In a similar vein, Yin (1989) captures the need to link the data to theoretical propositions in what he refers to as "pattern matching." Stoecker (1991) clarifies that the mark of a heuristic case study is its ability to dig deeply into a problem and approach its complexity. This allows theory testing, theory building, and it suggests new theoretical tasks and generalizable principles.

While many researchers contend that the case study is neither necessarily phenomenological nor qualitative (Stoecker, 1991), there is little debate that it facilitates the gathering of thick data related to thoughts, beliefs, feelings, motivation and other important processes. It is all too common that econometric and other quantitative approaches to employment problems ignore the context and the perspective of the men, who are all too often treated as a social problem. How African-American men in the inner-city evaluate the opportunity structure, and how this active evaluation relates to efforts to achieve work and success is important. In this era of impending welfare reform and the elimination of many social programs, decisions in this arena should include perspectives and insights from inner-city men. The understanding which this study yields may drive policy analysts to refine their reform "agenda." Inner-city African-American men should not be treated as a monolithic group, all of whose members are increasingly and willfully withdrawing from the labor force. Analysts may glimpse an intransigent spirit among some of these men that fuels their indefatigable search for work. This warrants further investigation. There is a dearth of contemporary research on motivation to work and notions of success in the inner-city. We know too little about the behavior of the contemporary inner-city African-American male. We need thick descriptions of the contextual processes connected to these phenomena. The focus on qualitative processes and its internal dynamics support a qualitative research approach for such an investigation.

Much thought was given to the selection of the research methodology for this

study. I chose the case study as a way to conduct qualitative inquiry. Qualitative methodology allows us to know about people that we otherwise would not know. As they talk about themselves and their experiences, research participants share a reality that suspends the beliefs and predispositions of the researcher (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The myriad of quantitative reports related to the urban underclass and the weak labor force attachment of inner-city residents are prominent in the literature. Findings from these reports have directed public thinking and public policy, and some trends regarding the productivity and worth of African-American men in this society have been mapped. Attention to within-group differences in employment can detect a meaningful constellation of factors that could advance intervention and assistance to inner-city African-American men who experience weak attachment to the labor force. In this study, it appeared more expedient to address the "hows" and the "whys" of working men in their urban context rather than revisit already well-documented issues. How are contextual processes influencing perceptions of success and failure in the inner-city? How are these processes related to the experience of work? Why do some inner-city men refuse to get mired in joblessness? The most precise way to answer these questions is by querying the men affected by that environmental context. Patterson (1989) is concerned that when quantitative methods are used to study African-Americans, they lack the instruments to make vital distinctions between cultural problems and problems that persist because of socioeconomic conditions Sjoberg, et.al. (1991) assert that the case study "may well be the only tool by which social scientists can provide the truly disadvantaged with a voice" (p.65). The need to give voice to African-American men in the inner-city posed an exciting challenge. Meeting this challenge through the case study outweighed any drawbacks or fears of potential accusations of "lightweight" research inherent to this approach. Tapping the subjective realities of participants may countermand the class and culture bias that characterizes much of the literature on individualistic causes of underclass unemployment and weak attachment to the labor force. Using intensive interviews to test assumptions and underlying themes, this research intends to add uniquely to a body of knowledge that has a long tradition of relying on quantitative findings. The ability to define the world from the perspective of research participants

required many methodological techniques such as interviews, life histories, documentation (i.e., formal evaluations of the neighborhoods in which research participants live), direct observations (i.e., field visits), and nonreactive measures (e.g., observation). These approaches yield descriptive data that enable the phenomenologist to see the world as subjects see it (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

The twelve cases in this study will not provide sufficient evidence for generalizability in the positivistic sense. However, being able to generalize to theory is certainly possible with this number of research participants.

## Design

Research design involves stating procedures through which gathered information can address the research purpose in a simple and systematic way. Working is a process which for many inner-city African-American men is connected to how and why they believe the environment will provide positive consequences for having a job. Process, which is both historical and idiosyncratic (Stoecker, 1991) is best captured by the case study. Research design in the case study should serve as an action plan from getting from the initial set of questions to be answered, to a set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Touliatos and Compton (1988) and Yin (1989) suggest there are four types of case study designs. They are the single-case holistic, single-case embedded, multiple-case holistic, and the multiple-case embedded. The single-case holistic design involves one globally studied case (e.g., program; person; town; event) without identifying subunits. Alternatively, the single-case embedded gives attention to a subunit or subunits in addition to the one case. For example, a case study analysis of a single public program might include outcomes from individual projects in the program. The individual projects would be the subunits. Single case designs are justifiable when the case represents a critical test of existing theory, when the case is a rare or unique event, or where the case serves some revelatory purpose. The multiple-case holistic design contains more than one case with each case being globally studied. A multiple-case

embedded design uses more than one case with the variation being the inclusion of additional data collection at some level for each individual case. Although the single-case design is most commonly used (Krathwohl, 1993), the multiple-case design is also popular (Yin, 1989). This study used a multiple-case holistic design. Yin (1989) urges that the decision to undertake a multiple-case study not be taken lightly because of resource and time commitments. However, he makes the point that a distinct advantage of this case design is that it provides stronger evidence and is therefore considered more robust. With this type of case study design, individual case selection was guided by replication in order to predict similar results, which Yin (1989) refers to as literal replication. This research was triangulated in respect to data. The two primary data sources were the men themselves and the representatives from sponsoring organizations. This also involves two different contexts - the communities in which the research participants reside and the institutions which served as sponsors. This study availed itself of the perspective of African-Americans and Euro-Americans, male and female, the working poor, and those who assist the working poor.

**Questions**

Questions were developed to determine what events, activities, and dimensions to explore as a way to connect that data to what I already knew about theory. The "case study frame" establishes the boundary of the case based on theory, so that questions initially asked are determined theoretically. Because this is so important, when the substantive frame is established, the relevancy of theoretical perspectives, supported by extensive research findings, should be determined (Weiss, 1994). Focused, open-ended questions were part of the suggested interview guide. Having some structure to interviews presents the major advantage of producing data that are amenable to quantification (Touliatos & Compton, 1988). Generative questioning was driven by the two overarching theoretical frameworks (i.e., Wilson's theory of the underclass and an ecosystems framework), both of which supported many lines of inquiry that went beyond the "study-specific" topics. Generative questions stimulate the line of investigation in directions that can lead to hypotheses, useful comparisons, the collection of certain classes

of data, and even to general lines of attack on potentially important problems (Strauss, 1990). Questions tapped relationships and relational processes, resources, and norms across parts of the ecosystem. This type of questioning lessened the likelihood that during analysis, I would have data that primarily remained at just a descriptive level.

**Instrument**

The review of the literature presented in Chapter II provided the foundation for developing questions used in interviews with research participants. Interviewing provided access to the context of the respondents' behavior and offered a way for me to understand the meaning of that behavior. I used a focused, open-ended interview guide that provided a theory-based foundation for developing and sequencing questions. The interview guide facilitated open-ended interviewing, and asked a core of questions to all research participants. These questions allowed other lines of inquiry to unfold and to be posed to individual participants. Core questions allowed easier data management and analysis to some extent since responses could be located and analyzed individually and in relationship to other respondents. Every effort was made to ensure that questions were neutral. I did not want to prejudice the responses by suggesting the valence of answers. It was also important for me to remember as a middle-class, female researcher, that I had to be particularly conscientious about not sounding judgmental in phrasing initial questions or in moving from the general to the concrete. Many African-American men in the inner-city have had difficulty with the police and other unpleasant encounters with "outsiders" that are often characterized as assaults on their manhood. I did not want to be guilty of this type of offense. Similarly, questions were also phrased according to the perceived level of understanding of the research participant. Educational levels differed, making the latter important. Filter questions, which attempt to determine if a line of questioning is appropriate in light of the individual's experiences (Touliatos & Compton, 1988) were used to help participants reconstruct the role of neighborhood milieu in negatively or positively perceiving opportunity and success. This resulted in other topics that needed to be explored which involved events and processes that went beyond what happened to just the respondent.

Questions were posed in a variety of ways. Some questions were structural to solicit information about different domains (Spradley, 1979). For example, "What are all of the strategies you use to find out about jobs?" "Can you think of any other strategies you would use to find a job?" There were also descriptive questions. For example, "Can you tell me what your neighborhood is like?" Contrast questions were included. For example, "What's the difference between success and failure?" Questions were asked in the present, the past, or the future tense. There were fewer future oriented questions because of their lack of reliability. Questions of this type also tend to glean only highly speculative data unless it can be linked to something else more meaningful, such as learning more about processes. Regardless of format, questions were designed to tap experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. There was a focus on inner events that involved perceptual, cognitive, and emotional domains. Questions were predominantly social psychological and ecological in nature. The literature review suggested four predominant themes or domains that should be explored in the interviews. Questions were therefore formulated that tapped the meaning of work and finding a job, conceptualizations of success and failure, perceptions and operation of neighborhood context, and confidence and expectations. Aggregately, sets of questions that embrace these subject area domains reflect issues related to the social psychology and ecology of the inner city, and thus capture interactive relationships between men and their environments.

Several questions from which demographic data were derived also were related to concepts in the social science literature. Although the interview guide was an important feature of the interview process, (Seidman, 1991), I was aware of Weiss's (1994) admonition that closely following the interview guide must not be done at the cost of attention to the respondent and the flow of the interview. It was critical that this caution be remembered since the forces of social class, gender and other possible identities might impose themselves on the research process and affect relationships with participants. At the same time, bearing on the interview process was evidence from the literature that women interviewing men are sometimes reluctant to control the focus of the interview (Seidman, 1991). Accordingly, it was necessary to strike a balance between this

possibility and the manner in which the interview guide was used. Regarding cross-sex interviewing, it was also imperative to structure questions and then to study interview transcripts to detect sexist assumptions so any instances could be corrected. Moreover, I considered it important to be alert to assumptions connected to the socio-economic status of the participants and to waylay any apparent tensions tied to gender and class (Seidman, 1991).

**Respondent Recruitment**

An especially challenging aspect of this research was the recruitment and retention of responsive informants. After consultation with community activists, I decided to work through two community based organizations, each of which serves the population of interest, and each of which could provide not only a safe place to carry out the interview portions of this study, but more importantly, could legitimize me and "vouch" for the importance of this research. Both sponsors are dedicated in part to self-help initiatives, economic development, community capacity building, empowerment, and leadership development.

Opportunistic sampling techniques were also used to identify research participants. Urban Community Vision (UCV) and Inner-City Development Corporation (ICDC) are the two organizations that assisted me in several ways. Both helped to identify, screen, and access research participants. UCV provided space - a safe place - for interviewing all participants they referred. ICDC on occasion transported research participants to locations where interviews would take place.

Both sponsoring organizations regularly conducted follow-ups with me in-person and by telephone to determine if there were any problem areas or if there were other ways they could assist the research process. UCV and ICDC shared information about many of the issues they field on a daily basis in their work with inner-city men. Their assistance in helping me to develop an entree to the research participants also insulated me from some of the anxieties and apprehensions I might have had in the absence of their enduring support. They validated my "harmless" intentions and advanced a rapport between me and the participants they identified.

## Urban Community Vision

Urban Community Vision (UCV) describes itself as a non-profit Christian ministry in the Mechanicsville area. Mechanicsville is historically rich but over the past twenty years has experienced growing poverty, crime, and decay. Over the past five years, the infiltration of drug related activity and lack of jobs has pushed the community into a form of economic and social blight. Currently, Mechanicsville is home to 5,500 predominately African-American people living within one square mile of combustive inner-city blocks. The UCV Ministry House, located at 747 College Street, is directly across the street from College Homes housing project. As a part of its inner-city mission, UCV assists in rebuilding the community, promotes interracial understanding, and helps to develop indigenous leaders.

## Inner-City Development Corporation

Inner-City Development Corporation (ICDC) provides services and development activities to improve the quality of life and the economy of the inner-city. Services they provide for the socially disabled include entrepreneur schooling, budget counseling and training, prison outreach and support, GED training, and vocational assistance and training. Located in East Knoxville on Magnolia Avenue, they assist populations from the eight most densely populated and poverty prone census tracts in Knoxville. They operate a Community Development Bank and sponsor several other organizations that provide out-reach to economically distressed men and women. One such organization, National Order of Nehemiah (NON) served as my point of ICDC contact. NON has an outreach to African-American males to prepare them for the world of work. Its mission is to foster the practice of economic self-reliance and self-sufficiency through work. The personal and professional development they offer places them in particular proximity to a wide range of inner-city African-American men in Mechanicsville, Beaumont, and Lonsdale.

## Contacts with Sponsoring Organizations

I met with administrators and counselors of ICDC and UCV separately to explain the research approach in full detail and to garner their support for involvement

and assistance in the study. These organizations are also part of the database as a result of ethnographic interviewing with staff representatives. Questions asked of them served as alternative and independent sources of information to triangulate data. They also were key informants throughout the research process, providing vivid descriptions of the inner-city and the men who live there. An informed consent document was signed by each organizational representative after they agreed to participate in the prescribed manner. This was an appropriate step to ensure the integrity of the research process. Informed consent required communicating a respect for issues of confidentiality they face, and protecting the privacy of the informants. As a follow-up to the initial meeting to solicit their support, I prepared a formal letter to administrators restating the parameters of the research and their involvement. Cognizant of Weiss's (1994) warning of the downside of sponsorship, I made it clear to sponsors that their able assistance should not include "preparing" respondents for any conversations with me. They were discouraged from engaging in any dialogue with me or respondents that might affect the respondents "presentation of self" (p. 34). No information from participant interviews was shared with sponsors. The letter to the sponsor is included as Appendix B. The informed consent for members of sponsoring organizations is attached as Appendix C .

## Sample

"The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry might have more to do with information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size (Patton, 1990, p.185). Six working inner-city African-American men between the ages of 22-58 were identified by ICDC and UCV. Six research participants were recruited through opportunistic techniques. Only one of the twelve research participants did not live in an area served by either of the sponsoring organizations. His involvement with one of the sponsors resulted in his referral and acceptance as a participant. Two of the research participants are bi-racial brothers and one participant is homeless. The seemingly small

number of cases becomes more powerful when recognizing that "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (Seidman, 1991, p. 45).

Administrators of these organizations were asked that their recommendations conform to four criteria that I presented. First, men should live or have lived for their most formative periods in the inner-city. Second, they should be between the ages of 21-55 (a 58 year-old participant was accepted). Third, they should be engaged in some form of lawful, low-wage work. Fourth, they should be inclined to want to participate and cooperate in intensive interviewing. Since researchers can slant the sample toward particular points of view in the qualitative study, I considered the inclusion of opportunistic sampling an attempt to minimize experimenter effects and to broaden the range on critical and important dimensions (Weiss, 1994). I took advantage of situations (e.g., a meeting for a local homeless shelter; at restaurants; receiving services) in which I found myself in direct proximity to African-American men I could approach to determine if they were part of a population (i.e., inner-city experience) affected by the situation of interest to this study (i.e., low-wage work).

The beginning age of 21 was chosen to avoid confounding this sample with an adolescent sample and the special problems that African-American teens in particular have in the labor market. Further, the adolescent identity literature reveals that adolescence has become protracted because of industrialization. Therefore, many men under age 21 are still living in the protective care of parents/guardians and may not have a definitive employment perspective yet. Determining the beginning age as 21 also served to reveal more about years of labor market experience of those men not attending four year college, but who have been out of high school for probably a minimum of three years. The adjusted cut-off age of 58 reflects my belief that though men past this age still may have labor market expectations, they are nearing retirement and their work focus and perceptions of success and failure may be quite different from a man 10, 20, or 30 years younger.

There is some controversy in the literature regarding whether or not financial remuneration should be offered to research participants. Weiss (1994) has observed that with very low income respondents, payment can be an important incentive for them to participate in the study. Lansing, Withey and Wolfe's (1971) analysis of response rates from two panel studies in poverty areas conducted by the University of Michigan, indicates that respondent losses have been smaller when respondents were paid. Although this study was not funded, I opted to pay participants for each of up to three interviews. I felt this would facilitate obtaining reinterviews and would be sensitive to their financial situation. Each respondent was paid ten dollars per interview. In surveys of the general population, interviews from female respondents are generally easier to obtain than interviews from males. One might reasonably conclude that interviews with inner-city men might be impacted by feelings of suspiciousness toward a middle-class, female researcher who may be seen as an interloper, full of demeaning curiosity. This possibility solidified my decision to value their participation by compensating them for their time. It also might demonstrate a genuine regard for them and their economic situation and validate their participation as critical to the success of the project. A profile of the research participants appears as Appendix G.

## Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis extends the possibilities of case study design (Touliatos & Compton, 1988) and is specified by the research design. In anthropological thinking, the unit of analysis has an ethnographic locus and a theoretical locus (Reminick, 1988). Although the environment (i.e., the inner-city) is discussed in terms that seem analytic, in this research, the individual man was the unit of analysis. The focus of data collection was on what each individual man experienced in the inner-city environment, and how their work behavior and beliefs about success and failure are affected by that context. The context could be considered the ethonographic locus of the unit of analysis.

## Interview Procedures

In this research, open-ended questions were used to allow the research participant to reconstruct his experience with work. Open-ended questions were asked to tap not only their experience with work, but also job-seeking behavior, expectations of success in the labor market, perceived attractiveness of employment, processes involved in labor force participation, perception of opportunity in their environment, and the like. Questions also asked participants how they feel about work and the perceived rewards attached to working. Illustrative questions are shown in the Interview Guide included as Appendix A. In formulating questions, the intention was to help the participant understand the areas that were being developed rather than attempting some magic formula. Probes were used to elicit and encourage elaboration from research participants. Markers were used to signal me to refer a participant back to something that was referenced during the interview but was not developed at its first mention. Background information was also gathered. This demographic data represents the first set of questions of the interview guide. However, to avoid the appearance of bland and regimented documentation, these questions were commonly interspersed throughout the interview.

I followed the structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing. This model involves a three-interview series (Seidman, 1991). The first interview established the context of the participants' experience with work up to the present time. Using "how" rather than "why" questions was very important at this stage of data gathering. The second interview allowed participants to reconstruct concrete details of their experience with work within the context in which it occurred, and to recount how it relates to success. The third interview encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning their work experiences hold for them in terms of emotional connections between work and life (Seidman, 1991) within the context of the inner-city. The face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately one hour each time, were conducted with 12 working men over a period of nine months. In Seidman's (1991) discussion of interview spacing, he observes that there must be latitude to allow alternatives to the structure and the process of the model.

While he proposes that interviews be spaced three days to a week apart, he acknowledges that the imperfect world in which we live can require alterations to the process. I found this to be true. There were six times when participants failed to show up for scheduled interviews, forcing either a reschedule or their removal from consideration to participate in the study. There was a six week block of time when one research participant had to leave town for temporary work and quite naturally was unavailable for interviewing. One participant's income depended upon a customer base which prevented him from setting concrete times to talk with me at length. I would just "appear" periodically in the hope of lag time in his schedule. One of the sponsors had emergency surgery which caused an ebb in the scheduling. He was so concerned about the continuity of the research process, that during his recuperative period he continued to sanction the use of his office for safe and private interviewing. So, between illness or competing agendi, there was not a well-ordered interview schedule. The average time between interviews was two weeks, although in some instances interviews were scheduled and conducted on consecutive days. The three-interview schedule was taxing but infinitely rewarding. One of the twelve participants was interviewed only twice because we had reached saturation. Another of the 12 was interviewed only once but I talked with him by phone twice. All other participants were interviewed three times. The thirty three interviews took place in a variety of settings depending on the participant's preference and what was most convenient for him. Interview settings included sponsors offices, respondent's homes, a Chinese restaurant, Shoney's, a parking lot, a deli, a church, a radio station, a homeless shelter, and Market Square Mall.

Interviews were audiotaped with a microcassette recorder. Taping captured the vividness of speech and did away with the tedium and impossibility of taking accurate verbatim notes. It also allowed respondents' direct comments to be included in the dissertation. Moreover, capturing respondents reactions to and perceptions of their environment that affect contextual processes could best be done vis a vis taping. Although tape recorders can be intrusive and deterrents to candor in qualitative research (Weiss, 1994), respondents shared intensely private and perhaps compromising material without ever asking that recording temporarily stop. There was only one instance when a

participant waited until the tape had ended to share details of a situation to which he had alluded earlier in the interview. All tapes were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. In common instances in which the interview lasted considerably longer than the anticipated one hour, participants were paid either five or ten additional dollars. The total financial outlay was approximately $400.00. This amount includes the cost of interviews and an infrequent dinner or lunch for research participants. It does not include the cost of microcassette tapes and batteries.

**Other Data Streams**

There are many ways and techniques to obtain meaningful data for human ecology research (Touliatos & Compton, 1988). In addition to gathering "formal" data from open-ended interviewing of respondents and sponsors, I gathered data via observation in natural settings, observation of the environment, and archival records (i.e., statistical data). Observation involved observing physical appearance, content and structure of language behavior, and kinesic behavior (i.e., gestures, posture, facial expressions) of respondents. I also observed how the interview began and ended. Some observational data was collected during the course of the interview. For instance, I conducted all three interviews with one participant at his work site as he literally performed his job. I was able to observe the context of his work in this way. Although one might argue that my presence could have introduced reactivity (i.e., a contaminating influence on his behavior), the observation process was unobtrusive and should not have affected his behavior. Observation of the physical environment provided documentable information about external forces that shape behavior. I employed a free description method in which I used a narrative approach to describe what I saw. These observations were ecological descriptions of the interview settings and the neighborhoods. Some observational information was recorded simultaneously. Other observational data were captured in an anecdotal record after the fact. All of the observation was unstructured although not all of it was concealed. Notes of these observations served as a triangulation method. Touliatos and Compton (1988) see observation as a way to identify relevant variables to study more intensely and to generate hypotheses.

I also used nonreactive archival data as a source. For the purposes of understanding more about the context of neighborhoods in which some participants reside, I used demographic data on Knoxville from Cities and Counties Information (CACI) data base within CompuServe Information Service. This source of on-line information reflected data from 1990 -1994, including national census data. Neighborhood information was formatted by zip code. Neighborhood reports contain information on 1994 population by age, population by race, and households by income. Reports also contained 1990 occupations, households by type, occupancy status and tenure. Zip codes analyzed include 37902 (Central Downtown); 37914/37915 (East Knoxville); 37917 (North Knoxville). This was an extensive and cost effective way to view uniform data about neighborhood conditions and demographics. Data is presented as Appendix E.

## Procedure

### Preliminary fieldwork

Before any interviews were conducted for this study, I talked with approximately 15 working African-American inner-city men. This unstructured contact often occurred surreptitiously. I contrived reasons, but always with forethought, to talk with men on the street or in places of business. All kinds of questions could be effective. For example, "Can you tell me how to get to the employment office ?" "Do you work on Gay street?" "Do you know where the Urban Community Vision office is?" Sometimes I mentioned that I was about to begin a research project. Sometimes I chose not to. When I did note the research I was pursuing, they seemed flattered that I chose them to ask an entree question. Each instance was consciously undertaken to learn more about the Knoxville front on particular issues related to African-American men, the inner-city, poverty, and work. These informal conversations took place prior to and after the pilot study. They might reasonably be referred to as mini pre-tests. This approach exposed me to some of the nuances of accessing and talking with men who were strangers. This was an experience that was too rich to have gotten from a manual. Casual comments men made

sometimes made me think of study directions. At other times it was an exercise in learning to listen effectively. These contacts gave me more ease in developing and asking questions related to life experiences of African-American men whom I had never met. None of these men were selected to participate in the study. Some of them I never saw again. They informed my "street" perspective.

Prior to the study, I also participated on a committee of about 35 local Euro-American and African-American businessmen, bankers, consultants, educators, leaders of community-based and grass roots organizations, and local and federal government officials who were creating strategies to revitalize the inner-city through a non-traditional banking concept. My on-going dialogue with members of this group directed my attention to issues that bear upon inner-city poverty and employment. It also helped me to recultivate my thinking about situations I might directly encounter in field research in local poverty zones. They informed my "academy' perspective without discussing my research project.

Finally, I evolved to the pilot study, which was a foretaste of this study. Many social scientists recommend that a pilot case study be conducted to refine methods and to "iron out any snags" (Dixon, Brouma and Atkinson, 1987; Touliatos & Compton, 1988; Yin, 1989) before data collection for the actual study. Yin (1989) suggests that the pilot study not only be undertaken as part of the case study protocol, but that it be treated as a methodological necessity that yields a clear and explicit written report about the lessons learned for both research design and field design. Following that directive, this study was preceded by a pilot study that involved four interviews with two inner-city men who work and, based on objective criteria (i.e., federal guidelines), are poor. Both of these participants, identified through convenience, were asked to and agreed to participate in the follow-up study and were re-interviewed.

While the selection of pilot cases can be a matter of convenience, access, or geographic proximity, the main concern is to improve understanding of the phenomena and the theoretical propositions, and to get acclimated to the logistics of the field (Yin, 1989). Both participants for the pilot study were identified and selected with the three aforementioned reasons in mind.

The purpose of the pilot study was three-fold. First, I wanted to improve my understanding of the phenomena and theoretical propositions. Second, while getting acclimated to the logistics of the field (Yin, 1989), I wanted to refine case study methodology before undertaking a larger scale study to examine contextual processes of success and failure for poor inner-city African-American men. Third, I wanted to clarify the aims and the substantive frame (i.e., the set of topics to explore) of the study before the primary respondents were interviewed. The pilot study field tested a draft of the proposed interview guide and suggested other questions and lines of inquiry (Weiss, 1994). Face-to-face audiotaped interview data and verbal protocols were collected. The interview focus was to learn how a contextual system of operation produces beliefs about respondents' evaluations of success and failure for themselves and others, and the extent to which these evaluations are related to working. Questions elicited understanding of: (1) the experience of work for inner-city African-American men; (2) how environmental factors operate in tandem with personal characteristics to determine labor force participation for working poor inner-city African-American men, and (3) the meaning of individual characteristics on perceptions of opportunity and success for working poor inner-city men.

The analysis and report of the pilot was issue-focused and generalized to tell a coherent story. Weiss (1994) points out that the issue focused analysis presents findings from qualitative interview research in a way that reports what has been learned from all respondents about people in their situation. It is concerned with what could be learned from specific issues, or events or processes from all respondents. Discussions of issues within different areas are logically connected to create a whole that describes an experience in a number of areas. The report from the study pilot described what had been learned from the two respondents about men in their situation. In this way, it contributed to my theoretical understanding. A summary of the pilot is included as Appendix F.

## Data Management Analysis for the Pilot and the Actual Study

A retrievable database that includes case study notes, case study documents, tabular materials, narratives (Yin, 1989), respondent profiles derived from the interview

data, microcomputer diskettes, and audiotapes was created. Case study notes include unrecorded information, words or phrases that stimulate recall or reconstruction of an observed event, supplementary information about respondent's personal characteristics, the environment, or other valuable observations (e.g., content areas with which the research participant was uncomfortable or caught off guard) that were useful in summarizing and interpreting findings. Sponsoring organizations are also part of the database as a result of ethnographic interviewing with representatives of these organizations. Their participation in this regard also served as an alternative and independent source of information to triangulate data. Collectively, the data created and organized an evidentiary base (Touliatos & Compton, 1988; Yin, 1989) that identified emergent types of success/failure processes.

All field notes were transcribed after each meeting with organizational personnel and after each contact with each respondent. The audiotapes of the respondent interviews provided a large body of material for analysis. When interviews have been recorded, Weiss (1994) offers several approaches for transcription consideration that relate to the question of how much to transcribe. The first approach involves transcribing everything and using transcripts "as a set of materials to be mined, accepting that a good deal will be dross" (p. 55). Because this is expensive, alternatively the investigator can listen carefully to a tape, transcribing what seems to be useful, and paraphrasing the rest or noting the nature of segments of the tape. A third approach is to take notes on the tapes's content, transcribing only quotations to be used in the report. A fourth approach is to take notes during the interviews even though they are being tape recorded. The typed notes can provide an index to the audiotapes and then transcription can be done selectively as needed. This study combined the first and the fourth approach in the transcription process. That is, all tapes were transcribed, but notes were also taken during interviews as an adjunct to the interviewing. This procedure helped me to denote setting events, behavioral dispositions, contextual activities, and other lines of inquiry that emerged as the interview unfolded.

I used four analytic techniques advocated by Weiss (1994) to render the data from the issue-focused analysis more manageable after verbatim transcription. First, interview

data were coded to link them to the concepts that relate to contextual processes of success and failure, and to give them more meaning. Weiss notes that some categories are brought to the study before interviews begin because they are related to the problem under study, they represent an aspect of the problem under study, or they are an explanation or consequence of the problem. He goes further to say that we bring other categories with us in the form of a readiness to interpret the data based on our training, our reading, our life experiences, or our general understandings. Data were coded as transcripts were reviewed. Coding involved identifying instances of processes, what I was learning about the processes, and different questions that the materials raise. Like Weiss (1994), I found that it worked well to do some codings in the page margin of the transcript. Codes dealt with the experience of work, the environmental milieu, support networks, job-search strategies, success and failure, and institutional issues that relate to their manhood as African-American men. Because all issues were not equally explored with all respondents, there are instances in which coding reveals there is inadequate material to judge an issue.

Second, as a part of the data analysis, data were topically sorted into excerpt files, as needed, for manageability and easier retrieval. The personal computer supported this process through the use of commercial wordproccesing packages that can perform sorting and other related file management functions. These files are essentially serving as statements of what the analyst thinks the data are saying. Third, observations and understandings in each section of the report were organized and integrated. This process, referred to as local integration, was achieved by summarizing excerpt files and their codings (i.e., here is what is said in this area, and this is what I think it means). This was done in part by summarizing what most respondents said about a particular issue and then summarizing what respondents said that was at variance with the central theme. This also served as a way to assess the truth of what was thought to be the main line. If there was too much variance, it was a red flag that the initial main line needed to be reassessed and perhaps reformulated. In this research, for example, if feelings of success were based on working for most men, cases that did not fit the main line could be also summarized. This allows data to be assimilated to the theory or for mini-theories to be developed.

Fourth, inclusive integration was used to weave into the framework, isolated areas of analysis that were not a part of the local integration. The two core analysis areas were (1) working; and (2) success/failure processes related to working and accessing the opportunity structure. These were anticipated as part of the analysis. However, there were other processes, either unanticipated, or those which were not captured by the local integration that needed to be considered for additional meanings. Inclusive integration allowed these meanings to be considered in terms of the overarching frameworks that guide the study and lead to some general conclusion.

## Regard for Research Participants and Informed Consent

In their discussion of human ecological research on environmental stressors, Touliatos and Compton (1988) caution that the study of vulnerable populations in their natural setting must be guided by certain considerations that protect their welfare. They define a vulnerable population as "a population of persons who, relative to the majority of society, have less power, opportunity, or freedom to determine outcomes in their lives or to make decisions that affect their situation because of their age, physical or mental condition, race, economic or political position, or captive status" (p. 498). Several of these issues were salient enough in this study to exercise care in protecting the rights and well-being of research participants. The pilot for this case study sensitized me to ways in which the dignity and the welfare of the informants must be considered, protected, and enhanced. The rapport that would ultimately develop between me and the research participants, the sharing of potent life events, and a surprising candor in the depth of data was glimpsed via the pilot. In this vein, I became acutely aware that forthrightness was required to explain the use of all data collected, and to protect research participants against any vulnerabilities and risks associated with their participation in the research. In the actual study this was accomplished by having each participant read and sign a letter of "informed consent" [Appendix D]. This was done after participants were identified and agreed to participate, but before interviews began.

Although the letter of informed consent indicates that they would receive a copy of the signed consent form, only one participant chose to retain a copy. The members

of sponsoring organizations also signed a letter of informed consent regarding their participation in the research project. In both instances, obtaining informed consent is also a safeguard that the ethics of the research enterprise and the profession are followed. Research participants abandoned their privacy and tolerated my intrusions into their thoughts and their "world." This certainly warranted every measure to protect them from harm.

## Reflections on the Methodology

This study yielded more than 600 pages of single spaced interview notes, including the 33 participant interviews and two sponsor interviews. Despite the financial, time, and energy investments, this approach was extremely illuminating and "alive" for me. Through my presence on their turf, I become better acquainted with many of the daily issues that affect African-American men in the inner-city environment. Moreover, it allowed the research participants to get to know me and to better understand my interest in their lives. The three-interview schedule also had some practical applications and utility, the foremost of which was establishing validity vis `a vis internal consistency over a period of time (Seidman, 1991).

On the down side, the extent of involvement with the participants made it bittersweet for me to disconnect at the end of the final interview. These men had been a preoccupation for many months of my life. They shared enough with me to allow me to know their backgrounds, their families, and their friends. Most of all, I knew their struggles and their disappointments, as well as their successes. They invited me into the inner sanctum of their privacy and their fears - into the secret places of their lives that held their joys and their letdowns. I was acutely aware that they were giving so generously to me, and that I had so little to give in return. I at least hope that they know my acquaintance with them was not borne out of some morbid curiosity or a need to research some hot button, but rather that I genuinely care.

Since the men in this study work and are attendant to schedules and making and keeping appointments, they were relatively conscientious about meeting with me at the appointed times. There were instances which were governed by Murphy's Law or some other quirk of ill-fated timing. In this regard, illness, either respondents' or mine, forced the cancellation of meetings. Sometimes they received calls from a temporary agency to work and needless to say, that was their priority. At other times, catching up with a participant was an agonizing task either because of him not having a telephone; multiple missed telephone calls; the vagaries of electronic communication (them getting my voice mail or me being reluctant to contact them by pager); no transportation; the demands of some participants working two jobs, or uncertain schedules related to itinerant work and jobs secured through temporary agencies.

All things considered, whatever inconvenience I experienced was inconsequential considering how patient these men were with me when some single interviews approached the two hour mark. Commitments to talk with me were honored while friends and family sometimes waited. During the three times that I provided transportation for participants, the ride was a rich source of collaborative data and an opportunity to get to see their world.

**Interview Settings**

There were multiple interview settings (e.g., respondents homes, church, sponsor office, deli, participants' home; restaurants; homeless shelter). Frequently, these settings precluded privacy which I thought might undermine the verisimilitude of the interview. In one interview situation in the respondent's living room, his invalid aunt was present for the entire interview. I was initially concerned that her presence might interfere with information he shared. As she napped, he proceeded to talk as though he and I were alone. Apparently this was a normative situation and was more disconcerting for me than it was for him. As she awakened when I was leaving, she invited me back, totally oblivious to the exchanges that had taken place. More often the problem ended up being background distractions and noise rather than hesitation on the respondent's part to open up to the interview.

Participants seemed less inclined to consider the environmental exigencies than I. I was thinking ahead to whether or not I would be able to hear the dialogue clearly during transcription. Distractions created by prominent background noise included loud music and televisions, noisy cars passing, shrill phones ringing, and other people talking and laughing. While there was no way to mute or distill such sounds on the tape, they did not tend to interfere with the overall tonal quality. A soft spoken participant who was interviewed all three times in a deli for his convenience presented a challenge to be heard over talk shows that blared in the background.

**Issues of Personal Safety**

Weiss (1994) introduces a strong dose of reality related to women interviewing men. His experiences with teams of researchers prompts his forthrightness in saying that it might be problematic since it can involve a challenge by male respondents to test sexual accessibility. It behooved me to be selective about my dress and demeanor and to be careful that my mannerisms and the rapport that I established with respondents always had at its core the research process. There were times when I breathed a sigh of relief when the interview ended because I felt vulnerable to the environment in which the interview took place. At the early onset of data collection, I was momentarily frightened when I was left alone at the sponsor's office when the interview concluded. No staff members were present and the respondent waited with me as long as he could before having to leave to perform a job. When he left, he reminded me to keep the door locked because the neighborhood is dangerous.

The sponsor had asked if I was concerned about being left with the respondent who I was meeting for the first time. My honest reply was "no." It never dawned on me that I might actually become fearful at the prospect of being left there alone and not knowing if the next man for whom I opened the door was actually my scheduled interviewee. Should I answer the phone if it rang? If the doorbell rang should I ask "Who is it?" or should I just open the door? The daylight lessened my anxiety somewhat, but it was still a salient reminder that I was in an alien environment and that I felt powerlessless. Perhaps I was experiencing some of the same feelings of apprehension and

dread that so many men from the inner-city experience when they venture out into unfamiliar environments. I was sure it was obvious that I did not "belong" there. I was hoping that nothing I did, intentionally or unintentionally, would betray my superficial ease with the social context. I was approaching a level of empathy with social processes that impact the lives of the research participants. I had not anticipated this firsthand introduction, but it was a level of experience which I felt was preparatory for the remainder of the fieldwork.

While conducting an interview with a homeless research participant at a homeless shelter one night, the police arrived at around 10:00 p.m. looking for a man who needed to be taken to detox. About fifteen minutes later, an obviously intoxicated man appeared at the locked, see-through glass door on two separate occasions looking particularly disheveled, pleading to be let in and cursing when entrance was denied. It was approaching 11:00 p.m. and the respondent did not have to talk long at all to convince me to let him escort me to my car when the interview ended. There was yet another time when I was en route to a respondent's home and observed a young man in a yard in the neighborhood with two other men, pointing a semi-automatic weapon.

## Data Collection

Acquainting myself with the "how to's" of qualitative research were beneficial and kept me from making some mistakes which otherwise might have been inherent to my personality. Seidan's (1991) caveat to compare the relative length of participant paragraphs with the interviewer's to gauge listening skills prevented me from talking excessively. On the other hand, being attendant to this may have resulted in some generative questioning being less well developed than it might have been had I not been concerned about dominating the interviews. The literature on conducting field studies and qualitative inquiry urges researchers to shed any "therapeutic" inclinations. This was a sage piece of advice. In this way I could stay clear of interjecting my own thoughts rather than exploring the participant's experience. Once, a participant was responding to a question and ended by asking me what I thought about the issue. I dodged temptation and surprised myself by answering that I was more interested in what he thought. He seemed

flattered. Six of the respondents were so intense during the interview process in talking with me about their lives, that my interjections were minimal. During the second or third interview, when they had become exceedingly comfortable, it was almost as though they could anticipate my questions. A participant who had been more reticent during the two previous interviews, pleasantly surprised me on the third interview with an outpouring of information.

**Language**

There was no discernible language barrier between me and the participants. Perhaps as an African-American, the common jargon and slang I know transcended class. As a matter of fact, once or twice I found myself probing in the vernacular (e.g., "What d'ya think was up with that?" in lieu of "Why do you think that may have happened?"). During another interview, the respondent commented that his mother earned a good living as a beautician, to which I responded that "she musta been gettin it dyed, fried, and laid to the side." He found this enormously humorous and began to relax somewhat and appear more comfortable with the interview. I believe this exchange made him acutely aware that he did not have to piece everything together in some perfect way. These attempts to "relate" to the participants were not disingenuous and were representative of things I may have said had I been talking with friends. Because these kinds of comments were the exception rather than the rule, they did not appear to detract from the "professionalism" of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, nor the interviewing process. The area of difficulty had more to do with transcribing language which I heard accurately but grappled with how to render some spellings understandable. In the 600 single-spaced wordprocessed pages of data from taped sessions, several words for yes (e.g., umhuh, unhuh) and no (e.g., unhun, n$\breve{}$ay) and stilted contractions (e.g., wadn't for wasn't) were problematic initially. Word endings (e.g., "ing") were commonly dropped, and word substitutions were commonly used ("fittin to" rather than "going to" or "about to" ). The inclusion of slang with which I was unfamiliar was surprisingly minimal

## Time Investment

The time investment for qualitative research makes it not for the faint of heart. The enormity of many of the foundational tasks was often overwhelming after a preceding task of little strain. For example, holding a 90 minute interview was effortless since I did little of the talking. However, the nearly eight hours required to carefully transcribe the tape was tiring and demanded considerable attention to detail. Listening to tapes again after transcription to evaluate accuracy and refine narratives required an additional two hours, including the interruptions inherent to editing transcripts (e.g., having to rewind and listen to the same passage several times).

I transcribed every tape myself, having made that decision before the study and having had the positive aspects of that decision reinforced during the pilot. The task was magnified more than ten-fold during the actual study. Although it was a laborious and tedious process, it was by far the most productive approach to have taken. There was also a sense of anxiety that crept in when interviews were rescheduled several times. These events called for adjusting timelines and reminded me that the analytic nature of qualitative research is quite dynamic. It was also a salient reminder that my clock for the endurance of the field experience was driven by the participants and their on-going willingness to participate in the study.

## Limitations

Many social scientists think that the best social scientific work is comparative. The methodology for this study is limited foremost by the decision not to include comparison cases (i.e., non-working poor inner-city men). Comparative analysis was an epistemological consideration in this research project but this design feature was reluctantly abandoned in the interest of expediency. Weiss (1994) also acknowledges that it is desirable to interview comparison respondents. But, it is also often "all an investigator can do to collect information from an adequate sample of people in a situation; to also collect information from an adequate sample of people *not* in the situation can seem an unmanageable burden" (p. 29). For this reason, comparing chronically unemployed men from the same urban contexts was not undertaken.

According to Weiss's assessment of previous qualitative research, we can often make comparisons within the sample we are studying. In many instances, respondents served as their own comparison, contrasting notions of success and failure having earned money the "honest way" and the "dishonest way." Feeling states (e.g., how do you feel with a job; how do you feel without a job) were also approached comparatively for each individual respondent.

The inclusion of questions that tapped the respondents experiences with joblessness may also mitigate the lack of comparison cases. The self-reports suggest that their perceptions of success and failure, and their commitment to work are different from those of "non-working" inner-city men who have availed themselves of an alternative opportunity structure that supports their money-earning endeavors. Many of these non-working men are their brothers, former friends, neighbors and others whom they know. In times past, some of these men relied on alternative routes to "income" earning.

Another limitation has to do with a commonly cited flaw of case study research - generalizability. Snow and Anderson (1991) note that since generalizations can only be ahistorical and context-free, case studies, with their commitment to contextualization of social actions and processes are challenged in terms of standard positivistic social science. They question the reliance on the traditional positivistic conception of generalization as the singular most worthy pursuit and virtue of social science research.

Snow and Anderson (1991) conclude that there are alternative approaches, the first of which is proposed by Yin and has to do with generalization to theoretical positions rather than to populations and universes, which is a significant issue within itself. The second alternative approach (i.e., naturalistic generalization) has to do with data from case studies resonating experientially or phenomenologically with a broad cross section of readers, so that greater understanding of the phenomenon in question is more easily understood. The latter may minimize the generalizability issue. In spite of limitations cited in regard to this study, I think the case study is the most appropriate and insightful method for understanding why African-American inner-city men continue to press for work although earning low wages. The case study is a sound way to understand how their involvement with work drives conceptualizations of success and failure.

## Interpretation and Confidence of the Findings

Findings were interpreted by analyzing each case within the framework of Wilson's social psychological theory of the underclass, and a human ecological ecosystemic framework. Patterns, themes, and categories of analysis came from the data, consistent with an inductive approach which does not lessen emphasis on theory (Patton, 1990). The issue-focused generalized analytic process, used in this study, is designed to contribute to our understanding on the level of theory (Weiss, 1994). This is commonly referred to as "analytic generalization" (Patton, 1990; Weiss, 1994). In generalizing from case study to theory, the latter is a template against which the empirical results of the case study are compared, in a process which Yin (1989) refers to as pattern-matching.

A final issue is that of causality. Quantitative studies demonstrate causation minimally by correlation, time order, and no common antecedent cause as an alternative explanation or cause. This demonstration unfolds differently in qualitative studies. Instead, there is a search for visualizable processes during the interviews. At the end of the interviewing, the investigator can feel confident describing how some aspect of the respondent's life or situation came to be.

If very similar descriptions fit multiple respondents, the investigator can comfortably demonstrate causation. Each new interview can test this (Weiss, 1994). Consequently, we are increasing our ability to generalize (Stoecker, 1991) through this process of replication (Yin, 1989). The existence of a respectable body of quantitative data, and their use as a lens through which to view and analyze the subject matter of this study, as well as to assess consistency of these findings, heightens causal interpretations.

In summary, interpretation of findings was guided by an issue-focused search for common patterns uncovered in the study (i.e., similarities and universals) as well as differences and individual uniqueness. Learning about specific issues, events, or processes from all respondents guided the analysis. Moreover, the development of nominal classification schemes (or evolving taxonomies) were used to allow me to investigate unanticipated issues. This taxonomic analytic technique not only helped to summarize

data, but it also clarified distinctions among processes of success and failure as they unfolded over the work life of the individual respondents.

# Chapter IV

## Results

All case interviews were treated in three ways. First, issue-focused analysis was used to attempt to generalize the results to Wilson' social psychological theory and to human ecological theory (i.e., ecosystem framework). Second, the five assumptions presented in Chapter I were examined. Third, the data were treated summatively to suggest a composite of the prototypical inner-city African-American man who considers himself to be successful. The twelve cases are reported in relationship to the two theoretical frameworks. A profile of each participant is presented in Appendix G. Excerpts from selected participant interviews are included in the text of the results. They provide thick descriptions of the processes that were the subject of this study, and they provide evidence of the assertions this study makes (Weiss, 1994).

### Participant Responses in Relationship to Wilson's Theory

Wilson's theory formally expresses the interactive effects of the marginal economic position of the urban poor and their social isolation. His framework prompts the investigator to explore the relationship between the social environment and labor market experiences and outcomes of urban African-American men. Restricted labor force opportunities associated with concentrated poverty would be expected to influence the experience of work for these men. It is widely held that in addition to macrostructural processes, concentration effects of poverty are assumed to support weak labor force attachment and negative workforce behavior in the inner-city. Wilson's theory says that the lack of neighborhood material resources, the relative absence of conventional role models, and the circumscribed cultural learning that occurs in poor neighborhoods converge to produce outcomes. These outcomes are the concentration effects of poverty which are thought to restrict mobility. Some outcomes that are produced are structural (i.e., lack of labor force attachment; lack of access to informal job networks). Other outcomes are social psychological (e.g., limited aspirations, and casual work habits).

Wilson (1991) makes it clear that certain variables are important to understanding the experiences of all low-income urban groups. These variables are best understood by looking at exogenous and endogenous factors. Exogenous factors represent the sources (i.e., racial discrimination, deindustrialization, political processes) of racial concentration of urban poverty. These factors have resulted in bifurcation among African-Americans in urban areas. The endogenous factors are created by exogenous factors. Several demographic variables are related to endogenous determinants which are created by the exogenous factors. They include urban migration, age structures, the pool of marriageable men, the distribution of employment and income, and social isolation. The endogenous factors contribute to the social psychology of the inner-city.

Wilson's theory identifies weak labor force attachment, reinforced by the neighborhood or social milieu, as what distinguishes members of the underclass from other economically disadvantaged groups. In economically thwarted environments in which illegal income-generating opportunities overshadow opportunities for stable and legitimate employment, weak labor force attachment is the consequence. In Wilson's framework, weak labor force attachment does not imply the willingness or the desire to work. Instead it connects structural constraints to the vulnerability of African-American men to joblessness. This being the case, should it be presumed that work in the inner-city is not as influenced by subjective beliefs about opportunities for work and as it is by the objective opportunity structure - legal and illegal?

Questioning this fundamental tenet drove me to review findings from earlier research. Researchers who have not yet begun to appreciate the diversity of social psychological processes in the inner-city environment may anticipate that the frail legitimate opportunity structure predisposes men who want to be successful in their environment to seek "alternative" models (i.e., the underground economy) of employment. In this regard, they may also assume that a lack of legal opportunity for success converges with concentration effects to prevent chronic involvement in low wage work and feelings of success from being compatible. These assumptions reflect middle class bias. Respondent narratives reviewed in the next several pages bear out the absence of opportunity in their neighborhoods, and the influence of patterned concentration effects.

However, they also point to a pervasive belief that anyone who really wants to find work, can. Perspective painted for me by Harold, the ICDC sponsor, was an aggregate of what the literature pronounces and what many of the participants affirmed about the geophysical, economic, and psychosocial environment of the inner-city:

**Harold: The inner-city itself is a living thing - but dead. It's like the tree that you see in the winter time. And in the springtime you expect that tree to have leaves and be a thing of beauty - but it never does. A black man grows up in that, and sees that all day long, from the time he's able to open his eyes. That's his world. It's a bad world. He didn't create it. He's almost forced to live there. It's destroying them. It's destroying them because they get to the point where they don't care anymore.... The government is taking care of your family - feeding your family, and you're overlooked to do that. And when you're not looked at to do it, you're taken out of that position of responsibility. And when you're not responsible, then you don't make any demands on yourself to better yourself.... The peer pressure that's on the young men in the city is very strong. It's very strong. Some people don't realize how strong it is.**

**If you were to walk through the inner-city, you would see a lot of young men - able-bodied, standing on different corners playing different games to be entertained. Some of them are sellin' drugs. If you walked a little farther, you would see maybe a group of young children playing - some of them with shoes - some without, with nobody watching over them. Walk a little farther and you probably hear loud music and a lot of laughter and a lot of gaiety. But there would be nothing around to suggest any reason for being gay. The buildings you're walking past would reflect nothing living. There's a deadness all around them. Where something once was, there's bare earth and it doesn't seem like anything is going to grow.**

**On the playgrounds, equipment is twisted - some of it's rusted. It looks like no one has been there playing for a long time - but kids play there - inventing games. In the neighborhood you'd walk through, you'd see broken glass laying around so that it seems like someone just brought out all of the liquor bottles and broke them. They're not breaking the bottles to litter, symbolically they're destroying something that's destroying them but they don't know how to get rid of it - so they break the bottles.**

**In the inner-city you come upon furniture that has been thrown out. Maybe someone just got a new living room suit - or maybe someone got evicted and they now have no place to go and no use for the furniture. You'll see a rental truck pull up and out comes a big screen TV or a stereo system. And then that same truck is pulling up down the block and taking back a big screen TV or a stereo.**

**There's more activity in the night than there is during the day. It seems like there's no sleeping in the place. There's a siren - maybe it's a fire truck, or maybe it's a police car. You hear gunshots.... It's really hard to understand it - even when you go inside of it [the inner-city].**

No doubt, this concatenation of factors can portend dubious social psychological and work experiences because of a deluge of negative exposure. When participants were asked "What are some of the most unappealing things about your neighborhood?" there was a vivid outpouring of distressing conditions:

**Carlos: There was a lot of gambling, prostitution, and things of that nature.... A lot of the people I associated with, their attitudes sorta rubbed off on me and I wasn't really used to it. So there were few positives here....The first person I saw got killed was when I was eight years old....He was a friend of my father's. They were gamblin' - shootin' dice and he beat this guy out of some money. And the guy got mad and didn't wanna pay him and he shot him twice in the back....The only way I could see myself having a career was to get out of there. I joined the Army....**

**Daniel: I don't think a lot of the men were excited about working where I was growin' up 'cause they see the other guys [involved with] you know D-R-U-G-S [spells it out] and sellin' that stuff and they want to do the same thing. They wadn't thinkin' about workin'.... I coulda did it but I just couldn't do it.**

**Gabby: Most of 'em [men in his community] are sellin' drugs and they got more money than me. They never broke and they say "Why don't you come and do this? You don't have to be outta gas in your car. I always have gas. You ain't gotta worry about nothin'. Just do this." They say "I wouldn't work this hard if I was you." And I tell 'em I work cause I don't wanna be watchin' my back - the police.**

Respondents revealed that neighborhood disadvantagement had a direct influence on their formative thinking. Social science's concern with the exodus of the middle class from the inner-city suggests they were economic and social bufferes against some of the concentration effects of community poverty. A participant captures this when asked "What must a man in your environment do in order to be successful?":

**Joshua: Let's see. You either had to be a good thief or a good con man in order to be successful. You see all the con men and all of the drug dealers had all of the money. I mean they certainly made more money than teachers and stuff, so growing up as a child, I was influenced by that.**

Joshua eventually became involved in illicit activities. He connects that involvement to his post-Viet Nam disillusionment, resentment toward a capitalist system, and a more accessible illegal opportunity structure. Walter was raised in the same neighborhood as Joshua. When he responded to the inquiry about successful men in his neighborhood, his reflections typified a mainstream success construct in terms of commitment to work, but it also captured the concentration effects:

**Walter: They were decent people, they were respectable people, and they were hard workin' people. Everybody was just strivin' to better theirself and to better their family and to survive. A lot of people that I grew up with became successful with pretty good jobs.... When I turned 14 or 15 we used to sit on the stoop and watch 'em come out of the whiskey house - just to see how they would move and how they talk. It was fun to us. Oh, it was funny! But every last one of them drunks was a workin' person. Like my father - he did a li'l drinkin but he was a hard workin' person. These were all workin' kinda people. I guess they felt like they was workin hard and makin' five or ten dollars a week, so I guess they felt like it was okay to spend a dollar to have a good time.... I've had them illegal offers so many times before. I refuse it. I don't want no part of nobody else's illegal money. Rather than have an easy million dollars, I'd rather have just a dollar. I can sleep in peace, I can eat in peace, and I can feel good about myself.**

It is impossible to resolve the disjuncture between Joshua's and Walter's accounts of what determined success in their community. Perhaps it is attributable to timing, inner circles, exposure, or perhaps one choosing to see what is most accommodating. When posed the question "Do you think there are more opportunities for success or failure in your neighborhood/inner-city?", there was little diversity of opinion. Gabby and Ned believed there were more opportunities for success as opposed to failure in their neighborhoods. The other ten respondents overwhelming believed that failure was the most likely outcome of being raised in the inner-city environment. Harold expressed what he perceives to be a contradiction in expectancies. He also cites the importance of helping inner-city men to discover their sense of agency to lead to successful outcomes. The following passages from narratives are representative of participants belief in the likelihood of failure:

**Harold: They expect to succeed but at the same time they know failure is waiting for them. After graduating from high school, maybe some of them expect to play sports, but none of them see themselves ever with that corporate job - never see themselves**

**sitting behind a desk and running the company....I help to encourage them. I tell them about the opportunities that are available. I keep them dreaming that they have the ability within them to succeed. And that's basically what they need to hear - that it's within them. It's not up to somebody else.**

**Ty: There were opportunities for success, and there were opportunities for failure. Failure really came more or less easier because everybody more or less gave up and got to the point where they either had to depend on the government to take care of 'em or work two jobs. I think more or less people in my neighborhood were more or less looking toward failure because they were scared to take that one step further because of all the odds that was against them.... That's why a lot of people consent to go ahead and go to the drug franchise because they feel like hey, "I'm gonna fail if I do it this way [working]. If I sell drugs, I still might fail, but at least I have what I want." And that's the typical line that you'll hear from any black male that you talk to.... Sellin' drugs would be the way they could be successful - that was a way they could live for the rest of their lives. You either got the opportunity to work or you got the opportunity to sell drugs. It's your option.**

**Antoine: There are more opportunities for failure because everything mostly is old. In East Knoxville you have a high school right next to a funeral home. When you walk out of the door what do you see? Death. The system is designed to make our communities old. It's more designed for failure. But if they had some help, they could look at the hope of it because Jesse Jackson is from here [the inner-city], Martin Luther King came from here; Colin Powell came from here. So the hope is here. But on the surface it's negative.**

**Lorenzo: Absolutely failure. You're motivated by those people you're around and to hear what they say and to do what they do. And basically all that you would hear or see was drug trafficking or all types of cunning acts - a lot of illegal acts right there in the environment. So, basically, you were trained to do more illegal things than you were actually to become a hardworking citizen.**

**Daniel: I'd say more likely to be a failure 'cause it's just too much goin' on in housin' projects. It's too much and you can get into something just like that [snaps his fingers] and there you go. Down the drain.**

This study found that these men recognize that opportunity for failure was a consequence of growing up in the inner-city environment, but that individual effort can counter the effects of limited opportunity. Moreover, this study found that men who work ultimately reject the influence of the behavior, beliefs, orientations and social perceptions of other disadvantaged men (i.e., concentration effects) in search of opportunity. In this way, they do not have to passively accept the limitations of environmental factors as

many middle class notions of ghetto life have supposed they do. Chris, the UCV sponsor, elucidated this point in discussing the resiliency of the inner-city:

**Chris: I see enormous resourcefulness. I see vitality. I see a kind of interior strength which I speculate that had I been given that kind of surrounding, I wouldn't have survived. I see a lot of strength even though at times it seems like it will be a very bad ending.**

Among respondents who reported a belief that opportunity for success was much more likely, it was found that personal effort can prevail over macrostructural forces. In other words, endogenous factors played a more pivotal role than exogenous factors.

**Ned: I was in the black section so opportunities was slim to none. You have to make opportunities come to you. Let somebody know what you want to do. I mean you have to let somebody know something. You can't just hold everything in all the time. Let it out. Let 'em know. Tell 'em and they'll tell you. Just keep trying.**

**Walter: Opportunities was very scarce when I was coming up. You just had to just kinda take what you could git and git what you could and be satisfied with it. A lot of people felt depressed and they felt down, which they was discriminated against. I was too. I think we all was and still is today. I never used that for an excuse. I always kept my head up. I just kept strivin' for what I wanted.**

There was also the likelihood of success being linked to the community and family values as Gabby expressed:

**Gabby: There were more opportunities for success because they [men] wanted to bring money into the house and they had a family value.**

I specified to sponsors that one of the four conditions of participant eligibility was not being dependent on the underground economy for the source of "income." My pre-research naivete was quickly replaced by the recognition of the superimposition of the underground onto the legal economies. Five of the participants opened my eyes to the fact that illegal opportunity in the inner-city is not always an either/or situation. It is often undertaken in conjunction with lawful employment. When talking about success and failure, the reality of providing for their needs and the needs of those around them introduced this type of activity as the most lucrative prospect in the opportunity structure. Representative responses of the superimposition follow:

**Ty: I been workin' more or less all my life until the two incidents when I did have to get out there and hustle [sell drugs].... I did work. But my job wadn't enough.... I didn't have anything to show for it but just enough to pay my bills.... It was not something that I wanted to do [deal drugs]. I wanted out worser than I wanted in....I can't think of any [reason] that would make me go back to it again.**

**Rodney: I was sellin' drugs to get out of debt. I had just started workin' and I wadn't makin' that much money. I did that to make some extra money to get up on my feet. I was tired of strugglin' - strugglin' and not havin nothin'.... I was just a very confused individual.... Now I'm tryin' to teach my daughter that you don't have to do wrong in order to succeed.**

**Joshua: When I was growing up, opportunity was so limited. They could only have one black principal because they only had one black school. Back then it was always I wanna be the first black to do this and the first black to do that. And then, when they amalgamated you into the system that sorta took some of the [community] identity away.... I was at a stage where I just didn't care. I didn't see any future in doing anything else [but drugs]. I felt like I didn't wanna be a token and I knew that where the money was, was in the streets. I felt like it was one of the only opportunities, and that it was the best opportunity.**

When asked if they considered themselves to be working while they were selling drugs, Ty's clarifying response is provided as representative of the responses:

**Ty: No. I knew I wadn't workin'.... I'd deal when I wanted to deal and if I didn't wanna, I wouldn't. You know, on a job it's different than sellin' drugs. 'Cause on a job you got a specific time you gotta be there and a specific time you gotta leave. When you sellin' drugs you can stay in the bed until 12, 1, or 2 or 3 in the afternoon 'cause people still gonna be there knockin' on your door wantin' it.... You can never characterize it as a job 'cause you make up your own time.**

When asked if they viewed themselves as successful while selling drugs, Ty's response distinguishes between two important dimensions of success (i.e., taking advantage of an "opportunity"; the need for a feeling of success that mirrors the mainstream). The third dimension, material success, is what propelled him and others to do it:

**Ty: Well, there for a while I was successful because I - because I didn't just bam get into it, and pop, get busted. It went for a while. It went on for almost a year before they knew what I was doing. You know it went successful until I did get busted.... I feel like I was successful in certain aspects but not within myself. Not from my benefit. No I don't feel like I was successful. But for other people yeah [the people who materially benefitted] - but for myself, no.**

A casual reading of the foregoing glimpses of perceptions of opportunity might lead to two assumptions about African-American inner-city men. First, that the milieu of the inner-city predisposes or orients them to have a negative social predisposition or orientation. Second, that this predisposition or orientation prevents them from being committed to work where the extrinsic rewards are ostensibly so few and the prospects of conventional success are tempered. Liebow's (1967) classic ethnograph discovered that the attitude poorer African-American men have toward employment in the secondary labor market evolves from their failure to derive self-respect from jobs that wider society does not value. Wilson (1980) has suggested that the attitude these men have is actually a reflection of the general societal attitude toward menial jobs. Nonetheless, without exception, every man in this study said no job is beneath him as long as it's "honest" money. This is not to suggest that there were not some feelings about what type of work they would prefer to do. Only two men conveyed disdain for particular jobs but said they would perform them to earn money:

**Ned: Washing dishes, washing windows, and cuttin' grass are unacceptable to me 'cause it's not work. I call it slave labor.**

**Carlos: I consider washing dishes and things of that nature to be unacceptable. I would do it if I had to but as long as I don't have to I'm not gonna do it. Those jobs are unacceptable because they're meaningless. To me they don't signify anything. To me it's not being anybody - just a dishwasher.**

Antoine's enlightening assessment of acceptable versus unacceptable jobs places the contemporary situation in historical perspective:

**Antoine: We've been forced as men of color to work and not to really think about what we're doing other than getting a paycheck....We've been conditioned. The slave mentality of the person of color hasn't been eradicated.**

None of the twelve men in this study was oblivious to the fact that macrostructural factors do impinge on the availability of jobs. However, they believed that they, and other African-American men, can always find work. These men received messages from the home and the community that suggest it is their moral and civic responsibility to work in order to help people. The following comments represent those two perspectives:

**Carlos: Why can't they [young non-working African-American men] go to work? Don't you understand what I'm saying? Why can't they just get out there and work? They don't want to. They're lazy. See, I don't have any respect for them. I don't consider them as brothers [fellow African-American men]. The brothers I know work. That's what I like.... It's not that hard to find another job. You may not find the job you want, but you can always find another job. [I've worked] in restaurants, construction, mental hospitals, and places like that. Working in hospitals - that's my basic career. I like to help people. I figure that's my way of giving back to the community. I don't mind helping my fellow man.**

**Ned: There are different opportunities. People just have to wake up to go out to see [the opportunities]. It's always a way.**

When asked what that way was for him, Ned answered:

**Ned: To get a job and just work, and to benefit myself and anybody that needed my help.**

**Walter: When I was comin' up, everybody my age and older was always in the mood to do their work. Seemed like everybody just got a chance to do that and everybody liked that.... It seems like a lot of the younger dudes are feelin' sorry for themselves.... I consider my job community service. In other words, I'm tryin' to say that just like a police officer protects and serves the people...my job is also servin' the people.... And I feel good about doin' it.... Anybody can go out and contribute on their part. But I don't care whatever job you do - you can be a dishwasher or shoe shine guy, police officer, or a doctor or a lawyer. Any kind of work you do, if you're servin' people, it's just the right kind of thing to do. I can say well, I did my share. I hope somebody benefitted from me washin' that plate or doin' my job. Whatever kinda job you do, I feel like there's somebody out there who benefits from it. I honestly believe that - that somebody benefits from whatever kind of work you do.**

Intrinsic to Atoine's statement is the perception that certain low-wage jobs are reserved for African-American men. Joshua categorized these jobs as "black jobs." Walter specified them as janitors, housekeepers, busboys and the like. Perhaps Antoine's reaction appear not to legitimize such work endeavors because of his belief about the meaning of work:

**Antoine: To work is a noble thing. It's an honor. I look at work as an opportunity to be respectable and noteworthy as an individual.**

Lorenzo's perspective about his job may shed some light on how men are able to derive respect from the functionality of low-wage work:

**Lorenzo: There's nothing too low of a degree for me because I feel like what I do now - custodian - is not high on the totem pole, but I also understand that if they didn't have any [custodians] in the building, they'd have to shut it down.**

The foregoing explication of findings should not suggest that there were not problems inherent to working in the secondary sector. Some men reported feeling disrespected on low-wage jobs: Carlos provides representative insight.

**Carlos: I've already delved into his [work supervisor] subconscious. I know he don't like me anyway because I'm black. The only reason he gave me the job is because I got that college background and I have a family. He figured then "that nigger can't be that bad. Maybe he'll work hard." I think I'm gonna have to leave. 'Cause if I don't, me and one of those guys will be out here tearin' up the pavement [fighting]. I'm gettin' tired of them disrespectin' me like I'm less than a man.**

These men also reported feeling taken advantage of by employers who hired them for one job but expected them to perform the functions of multiple jobs without additional pay:

**Terrell: I got fired, which I understood why I got fired. 'Cause they couldn't change how things operated around me and I was trying to change everything.... They're not gonna dump on me. I'm old enough to see what's going on. I was the dishwasher. I was the prep guy. And I was the server. But I didn't think it was right that they dump on me. I was doing a job that required an additional two people and if anything was to go wrong, which it did, they're gonna look at me.**

Only two participants, Gabby and Rodney, indicated any confidence that their jobs portend some upward mobility.

## Isolation

As reported in Chapter II, the inclusion of social isolation as a prominent feature of African-American inner-city poverty has been borne out in a broad body of qualitative literature as it was in this study. Participants offered several interpretations of their non-interaction or interaction with others outside their immediate environment. These interactions reflect the four dimensions of isolation that Peterson and Harrell (1992) distinguish (i.e., physical separation, racial isolation, isolation imposed by high rates of crime and drug activity and social isolation). Participants were asked "Did you go outside of your neighborhood much when you were growing up?" The question was phrased in

the past tense purposely to gauge the range of active agents (e.g., parents, school, social support organizations, etc.) involved in their exposure to the world beyond their home ground. Representative answers are as follows:

**Lorenzo. Living in a community like public housing pretty much means to me "that apart from the normal population of society." I felt isolated and I felt captured in my own little world. But fortunately, while I was in that isolation period, as I see it as isolation now.... I felt like I was kinda in a hole.... It was like you were trapped because everybody there - mostly 85 or 95 percent of the population were non-working people. And I had to do something to get myself out....**

**Joshua: No. Lord no. No. No. No! That was unheard of then. I grew up in a segregated community. You didn't leave Lonsdale.... I suffered from the effects of segregation.**

**Daniel: When I was younger I always stayed at home - just stayed in my neighborhood really. I wanted to go other places but I didn't feel comfortable. I knew I wouldn't have [felt comfortable]. I wouldn't know any people. I just stayed in one position. I did go up to UT one summer to play ball and we was dunkin' on the rim and some white woman came up and ast us for some ID and told us we had to leave since we didn't go to UT. It was a negative experience. I just stopped goin' up there.**

The prevalence of criminality and incarceration as a prominent feature of the African-American urban male experience poses daunting implications for isolation of this group. The isolation enjoined by drug activity has been manifested in the lives of two of the research participants, Rodney and Joshua. It hangs over Ty's head as he awaits trial on a charge of possession with intent to sell.

**Rodney: I felt like an animal in jail - somebody caged up. I felt like dirt on the ground. Being in jail cuts you off from everything. Bein' in jail is where you find out who your friends are - you don't have any. I couldn't even go to MacDonald's. I was really cut off.**

The previous passages give voice to the frustration and futility that arise from social isolation. They also demonstrate how social process (group isolation) is tied to a social psychological process (the development of futility). Carlos connects isolation directly to institutional process - in this instance, racism:

**Carlos: It was real racist so no, I didn't go out of the projects much. I just felt like I was being held back and I felt like I was gonna end up there all my life.**

Perhaps one of the most searing experiences with isolation is that which the homeless person experiences. The number of minorities who are homeless has increased. Being homeless often compounds the difficulties that are part of the minority experience (Nooe, 1992). Terrell, who is currently homeless, explains:

**Terrell: I know I'm cut off from the mainstream. I know I am. I don't associate with anybody. I don't associate with anybody! I've learned through trial and error that 98-99% of homeless males - they're not very positive. I do sometimes have conversations like the talk we're having now but it's with this one guy and it's not often that I see him - maybe once a week. People who aren't homeless - well the people that I know of that were homeless that aren't homeless anymore, I'd still rather not be in their company.... The ones that haven't been homeless, or at least yet, they - both male and female, they don't want to have anything to do with homeless people. Generally they don't. I'm sure there's some out there, but generally they don't want to have anything to do with homeless people. They have a preconceived idea of homeless people. We're either drunks, drug addicts or there's something missing upstairs. Which for the most part it is true.**

His present condition is not his initiation into isolation. His alarming experiences as a youthful victim of repeated racial hatred are captured by the following excerpt:

**Terrell: I didn't have very much exposure to white kids when I was growing up and my observation of them was that they were terrible people so I strayed from associating with other ethnic groups because of the terrible things I witnessed as a child growing up.... A white man in a car tried to run me over on three occasions. Then some white guys killed my friend. They knocked him a hundred feet in the air. So you know I've always had a fear of going into white areas of town or the white neighborhoods.**

Joshua contributes a brooding analysis of the systemic design to prevent African-Americans from becoming a part of the mainstream:

**Joshua: Well I'm gonna tell you about the mainstream. The blacks have always had a subculture up under this culture and we never felt a part of the mainstream. Never - from the very beginning. Even the constitution... said you was 4/5 of a man. You was 4/5 human! So we never felt a part of the mainstream.... We felt at home or at ease in our section of town with our culture.**

For those respondents who did not experience a sense of disconnectedness, they present a clear picture of social understanding possibly resulting from contact with others outside of their environment. Comments also depict the role of family members and organizations in creating opportunities for contact:

**Ned: I met people from different cultures. People have different ways. I learned that. I learned that they got different ways in every sector of town that people live by. And if you can learn, you'll get along well with those people. It's like in this day and time, you can't get along with people if they don't know you.**

**Antoine: I was blessed because I had white friends because of my mother [who worked as a domestic for a local Euro-American banker]. Also, being in the band afforded me the opportunity to be with the preacher's kids and the elite of the community so to speak - you know the educated people's kids because they always put their kids in things like band and cheerleading.... Being in the band, we got a chance to travel all throughout Mississippi. I went to different communities and met different people. Very few poor kids with uneducated parents were in the mainstream of town. But fortunately we belonged to a church where my pastor was a teacher too.**

It is often overlooked that the respite from isolation that adults can provide to inner-city children is temporary. Isolation often resurfaces when those individuals deal with the vagary of the inner-city milieu as adults:

**Ty: I went out a lot [as a child] 'cause I had a friend that took me different places and then I stayed a lot with my grandparents. When I got to a certain age, I teamed up with Landon Smith [Big Brothers organization] who was a former football player for the University. He got me involved going different places. When he went to Mexico he sent me things back. I was on television and on P. M. magazine and I was on one of the brochures promoting Big Brothers. I don't really get out now cause I don't have transportation. You know, if I don't get the bus, I really don't get to go anywhere until I go to church. Sometimes I get bored and I just wanna go anywhere. But I have to take a lot of sacrifices and this is one of 'em.**

A well-documented finding of previous research with inner-city populations is that transportation is related to accessing opportunity. It was also a finding in this study. Respondents reported that isolation and inaccessibility to opportunity outside of their community is a problem. This also characterizes the physical separation dimension of isolation that distances inner-city residents from the locations where jobs are created:

**Ivan: Transportation would help a lot of people as far as success is concerned. Without a car you're on Pat and Turner. That means you got to walk. Pat your foot and then turn the corner. Even with the bus - it don't go to where the jobs are.**

Role Models

Social isolation is more than just a state of being - it is also a process. It is a process of successively transmitting a limited repertoire of modes of behavior that overtime become classified as typically ghetto specific behaviors (e.g., idleness, public drinking). When these limited sets of behaviors are modelled and imitated by younger members of the community (Anderson, 1990; Wilson, 1987), their social isolation from mainstream society is exacerbated. Thus, the processes of social isolation and constricted role model choices become mutually reinforcing. Among researchers and lay persons, it is common knowledge that urban opportunity has declined. The importance of the role model in simplifying job search networks has been largely inferred but rarely documented in social science research. Wilson's framework would propose that the social isolation of the men interviewed was intensified by a lack of positive role models. That is, there is a relative absence of conventional middle-class role models in the inner-city to buffer the effects of poverty. Some of these men named basketball players and other sports figures as people they looked up to and admired. However, economic success was not the most important aspect of being a positive role model. The inability of eight of the research participants to readily identify community role models outside of their immediate family corroborates Wilson's conclusions. However, it opens up a door to look at the family as a socializing agent and as a viable source of role models:

**Carlos: [There were more opportunities for failure] Well like I said, there just weren't the right type of role models there.**

**Lorenzo: Living in public housing in the Lonsdale community as I lived, it was very dim a far as whether or not you would ever get out or have opportunity for jobs. Even people being in that neighborhood motivating you to work was not there. It was like you were trapped because everybody there - 85 or 90% of the population were nonworking people. And those that did work, they were not working jobs where they were in a position to say anything to anybody else to encourage them to take that same kind of job they had.**

Family role models were found to be more common than community role models for these men. Nine of these men grew up with working fathers in the home, one had an older working brother, and two had working grandparents. This suggests an active and permanent source of contact as opposed to a shortlived exposure via a community member. For these men, the acknowledged value of the role model did not depend on class status. Instead, it related more directly to whether the individual was considered to have good character and whether the person was working. Generally role models were models of success - family members who had beaten the odds, worked, and achieved when desolation and constraint were all around them. Carlos would not refer to his father as a role model since he characterized him as a gangster. His father was involved in underground pursuits, although employed as a factory worker. Carlos did however assent that his father played a constructive role in his life by being gainfully employed. Lorenzo, Ivan, Ned, and Gabby reported that their father was their role model. Ty's role model was his grandfather. Both Antoine and Daniel had older brothers who were role models. Antoine also had a working father. Joshua recounts how he abandoned the influence of his family role models, but returned to it:

**Joshua: Well, my father and my grandfather was a big influence on me.... Now when I got out from under their control and influence, that's when I started gettin' mad at the world you know. And even today, I consider them a great influence on my life because they instilled in me a good work ethic at an early age, even though I did lose it in my early 20's and 30's. It somehow never left me because when I became a Christian it just sort of intensified. My grandfather owned his own home fifty years ago when black people pretty much didn't own too many homes and all this. He was really a role model.**

Lorenzo captures the tangible features of the family role model and directs attention to work behaviors and outcomes that merit imitation :

**Lorenzo: I'm sure that as I talk to you and as I look back at my ethics or whatever you want to call it toward working, it comes from the fact that I had a working father. His going to work was most encouraging. It might sound funny or it might not, but his actually bringing a paycheck home was encouraging because I knew and I understood that that piece of paper meant he was rewarded for whatever he was doing when he left home. I always wanted to see what that felt like because I knew from that piece of paper came groceries and school clothes and those kinds of things.**

In addition to role models demonstrating that "goods" were attainable, they also were more like friends rather than part of the job network as Ty demonstrates in his discussion of his Big Brother in the Big Brother Association:

**Ty: Yeah at one point in time he was [a role model]. He was like a friend that I never had.**

Antoine's perspective on the role model is very interesting on three dimensions. First, his remembrance of his community role model strikes a chord for some extension of the way the literature has viewed the role model:

**Antoine: My band director was really influential in my life in terms of his dress, his demeanor, his cleanness, and his knowledge of music. So there were those in the community, very few though, that I looked at. But no man, no person of color, no African-American - not even my older brother came to me and sat me down and told me what to think about and what the system is like. I was never questioned about what I'm thinking or what my goals and plans are. I have everything I've gotten by trial and error.**

Second, his evaluation of why his brother was his role model amplifies the success construct:

**Antoine: My older brother was my role model in life.... Because he was successful in going into the Marine Corp and coming out. He's still my role model. He came out and stayed at a company for 20 something years. His wife is a housewife - she does what she wants. He got 'em a house and a nice piece of land. He bought cars. And he did this working in this factory taking all this abuse. I mean starting off with little or nothing.... He was respected in the community. So yeah my brother was still my role model.... He wasn't making much money for what he was taking. He paid for 2 cars and his sons grew up well.... He made the choice to work and to be respectable and he raised his son that way.**

Third, he does not restrict the African-American man's role model to another male. This gender neutral view may be driven by the presupposition that a paucity of male role models forces a look at any viable alternative that could be psychologically edifying. The preferred active nature of the role model is borne out in Antoine's appraisal of what the African-American man in the inner-city needs as part of his success arsenal:

**Antoine: He's [the African-American male] gotta find somebody - female or male, to help him..., someone who will take him under his or her wings to help them - to**

**mentor them and to teach them what's happening and not to allow situations and circumstances to throw them off.**

This study found that there were females who were role models for these men. Rodney reported that his grandmother was his role model because her schedule was never too busy to include his needs. He valued the expressive functions she performed that made him feel like he was worthy of such love and attention although he was poor.

Wilson (1987) argues the modelling benefits of vertical integration common to the African-American community before residential segregation was declared illegal in the 1960's. Ivan, the oldest research participant in the study recalled a socioeconomic mix of people in his neighborhood. Terrell, who grew up in an industrial city also recalled the social class blending in his neighborhood where he grew up. Neither of these participants ever lived in public housing. In response to the question "Were there many working men in your neighborhood when you were growing up?" the following evidence is provided:

**Ivan: Well you see, I lived in a neighborhood that was kinda like - well Mr. Palmer was retired. I don't know what he done, but Dr. Martin was a dentist and Mr. Peterson was a funeral director. And my aunt that used to live next door to us, she was a school teacher. That's the kinda people I grew up around. My family was kinda between middle class and poor.**

Despite this mix of professional people, Ivan initially said he did not have any role models when he was growing up. When I asked him who taught him the value of work and how to perform certain work related tasks, he said without hesitation that his father was a role model in that regard. This suggests that the "messages" from the home were more powerful than community messages:

**Terrell: There were lots of successful men in my neighborhood. One was a banker - a black man. He lived across the street. Our neighbor was a banker! Another guy was a veterinary assistant. Another guy was a bus driver. Another man was a very successful minister.... You had some upper middle class like doctors, on down to people who were on food stamps....**

He did not report considering any of these men to be a role model for him in any way. Men in this study viewed themselves as a role model to males outside of their home because of their drive to work and their persistence in obtaining work. Carlos was the

exception and his position was not quite definitive. He believes it is the responsibility of the father or some other family member to be the role model. He did concede that it is important for him to register a positive influence for young African-American men through his tenacity in the workplace. Lorenzo's quest to be a role model is more representative of the reasons these men provided. His inclusion of the word mentor incorporates the active nature of the role model which Antoine also captured :

**Lorenzo: I want to be a type of role model and a type of mentor to other young black men. And in order to do that, I have to be able to show that I can be independent - that I can be sustained by my own working...and that I am accountable to all of my obligations.... They'll [people in the community] say "Here's a mark. Here's something that I can use as a mark." Remember, the reason that I wanted to be successful and to have more was basically to put me in a position so that I could be motivating to other people.... I think a lot of times young black males are in the condition they're in because nobody's saying to him that "You are better than this."**

**Social Networks**

According to Wilson (1987), another feature of the urban underclass is that their social networks are splintered and do not facilitate the job search. Social networks is an important element of his theory because isolation is thought to exact a toll on developing networks. In this research, only Terrell, whose network has been fragmented by homelessness, did not report having dependable social networks. He admits being angry with his father for not having instilled in him the importance of such contacts. Excerpts from men in this study draw a distinction between formal organizational ties and informal social ties as job networks. When asked the question "Do you have a strong support network?", Terrell expresses his anger over his disconnectedness from formal ties:

**Terrell: If you want to get the job that you want or a good job....well I know for a fact, it's very very very important that you do be a part of your community. Do your civic duties cause that goes a long way. People will recognize you for that, and affiliate yourself with as many organizations and civic duties as you're able to and I think that will help a man go a long way.**

While he did not report a support network, information he shared during our five hours of interviewing uncovered several types of structured, formal support and assistance

he has received from local agencies, and networks he has cultivated through his requests for assistance. He has elected not to avail himself of potential support networks in the Tennessee town where his parents currently reside. Illustrations of the existence of strong formal network ties and some of the functional aspects of those ties is provided through the following excerpt:

**Lorenzo: The job from KCDC [Knoxville Community Development Corps] was an overlap from the summer youth program.... I was beginning to do what they call network, and communicate with people, and people would come and say "Let's sit down and see what we can do for you." And so the first job came just from being in contact with the summer program over the course of years and making myself approved to the adults. I'm able to do a lot of networking through Knox County Schools. I'm involved with the Chapter One program...in the parent involvement aspect - I'm the mediator between the administrator and the parent, the teacher and the parent and the parent and the child.**

Despite the implications of formal organizational ties to facilitate work and job search, I was not stymied by the finding that not one man belonged to a labor union or any job-related organization that represents formal ties or a formal support network. The lack of affiliation has some historical bearing as Joshua brings to the forefront.

**Joshua: .... See, blacks were excluded from labor unions down here for so long that the idea of it never took hold. Now up north, a lotta black men were in the union and I said well wow, our unions are segregated - they don't want us to have it.**

I was surprised not to find that any of these twelve men reported being a member of the society of Free Masons. This is an entrenched organization in the African-American community, whose activities have civic dimensions as well as an undisclosed cluster of activities, many of which may be directed toward economic sufficiency. Curiously, none of the participants referred by UCV or ICDC mentioned those organizations as part of their network. Several men belong to and hold leadership positions in community based organizations and churches. Carlos and Joshua are former members of the 1960's revolutionary group, the Black Panthers. When elaborating on aspects of their social networks, some could be judged more helpful than others in identifying or obtaining work. The church outdistanced all other networks as the most supportive in the job arena, in responding to material needs, and in shoring up an enduring source of solace.

Informal social networks play a major part in job placement in the urban social environment (Stone, 1992). All respondents were easily able to name someone in their community, generally a friend or a neighbor, who had assisted or could assist them in identifying or securing employment. There were also reported instances of developing contacts through their present employment:

**Carlos: I have a strong support network because they know I'm serious.... Some of the older brothers [African-American men], they try to help me out. If I ever need that kind of support, I get it from who I know and stuff like that.**

**Walter: I get a chance to talk to some of the richest, some of the smartest, most educated people in the United States. I shine senators shoes. Howard Baker, John Duncan - the old man. I used to go get his shoes down to his office. I worked for him personally shinin' shoes. I know a lot of good people and I had a lot of good opportunities and offers, but I preferred to shine shoes. Call it crazy if you want, but I had some decent job offers but I always had shoe shine on the side.... By me shinin' shoes for a lot of years I have a lot of connections. Like I say, at least twice a week I get offers. I had a guy come by the shop twice last week and once this week.... I turned it down 'cause I like my freedom.**

Gabby perceives that older African-American men in the community are reluctant to endorse many younger men for employment. This may suggest that social networks in the inner-city have not deteriorated. Instead, they may be highly protected and intentionally used very selectively. Older men may fear that a young man's failure to take a recommendation seriously may impugn their credibility and jeopardize the acceptance of their future referrals.

**Gabby: And then I had one guy - he's been a whole lotta help here lately. He's just been findin' me jobs. Callin' me and tellin' me to call this person.... After I got laid off... he said I'm gonna find you a job.... He's an older guy. I think he's 48 or 49 and he just know a lot of people. He gives me good recommendations and it make me feel good. I just appreciate that man's help. I wouldn't say he's a role model. He just a good man. He good in heart. [A lot of the older men] they don't have much confidence in young people today. They gotta basically know you when you was growin' up and know how you are. Just to see a black man come, and try to give him a chance, they hesitate on it 'cause they don't know him. When I was growin' up, they probably just said "Yeah go ahead - go ahead, I'll give you the chance" 'cause they know he's probably gonna come out to something. But nowadays, it's no tellin.'**

By and large, most examples of support were informal (e.g., friends, relatives, co-workers, the church). When asked "What are some of the strategies that you use to find jobs?", a curious finding was Rodney's revelation that social capital is not just enhanced by contact with employed people. He reported that many times he was told about jobs by unemployed men who had a vested interest in his employment, perhaps seeing him as a source of their own future borrowing.

A surreptitious finding is that a major drawback of living a life committed to work in a deprived environment is that friendships wane and social contacts become minimal. This may be a protective device to remain untouched by the contextual elements. In possibly avoiding contamination by the concentration effects, these men may be sacrificing some fraternal needs. This finding was derived when they were asked "Do most of your male friends work?". Only Walter reported having close friends who all work (since he "has no use for a non-workin' man"). Ty said that the majority of his friends are his classmates. Several of the men indicated that they keep to themselves and mind their own business. Gabby's comment encapsulates what many of the men shared about the physical or social risks of involvements:

**Gabby: The best thing to do is to stick to yourself. Go to wok and go home. If you start hangin' out, somebody'll get you or something - it wouldn't be wise to hang out..**

Antoine laments the absence of male friends. The strength of his lament is that it suggests an avoidance of contamination effects and flight from possible contagion of behaviors that do not support work:

**Antoine: I don't have any male friends here. I've been trying to bond with some men but a lot of men aren't as disciplined as I am.... But the people I've associated with in the past d have jobs. But I can't associate with anybody's who's not doing nothin'. I'm a man of substance and I believe nothin' from nothin' leaves nothin.'**

Lorenzo elevates attention to the transient nature of the inner-city which decreases the formation of other than superficial relationships from being formed:

**Lorenzo: A lot of the males who were there [in the housing projects] are not there anymore. So what I'm beginning to do now is to make new male friends and to help them. The men are just so transient in these communities.**

## The Underclass

Based on findings from the pilot which was conducted as a forerunner to this study, I assumed there was a strong probability that respondents would self-report as poor when asked to which social class they belong. Respondent perceptions of their class were more behaviorally derived than based on earnings or other objective criteria. Carlos, Daniel, Gabby, Ivan, Ned, Terrell, Ty, and Rodney consider themselves to belong to the middle class, even though four of them reside in housing projects or other federally subsidized housing. In order to counter artificial distinctions which say nothing about what kind of person you are, Joshua said he belongs to the Christian class, which extinguishes all class divisions. Walter said he belongs to the human class. Antoine reported belonging to the best of the best class, strenuously objecting to being pigeonholed into a class. Only Lorenzo reported being poor. Nonetheless, he consistently referenced his strong positive character which has earned him the respect of people across social classes. Self-perceptions seem to reveal that these men are able to establish their own meaningful and evaluative class distinctions that promote their dignity and their self-worth.

Common behavioral themes in this study underlie contrasting continua of decency and indecency, and working and nonworking as the most prevalent aspects of the "class" landscape. This study found that respondents are intellectually aware of class strata. They choose to self-identify independent of social science convention and prescribed stratification hierarchies. Men in this study cast aspersions on the wisdom of myopic assessments of who fits into the underclass. The following quotes affirm their acute awareness of class realities and their exemption from underclass status. The reality of social dislocations is also addressed in respondent narratives.

**Antoine: The reality is that you have two or three generations of people who have been neglected in the housing projects. They've been dumped there. So who's gonna come there? People who are like them. Street people. People who have been pushed out. People who didn't get their education. People who have dropped out of high school who, when they try to speak, they can't talk properly. They're not articulate. They're not skilled. So when they become 19 or 20 something happens to them. [They become] people who spend too much time watching television - looking at the world through rose colored lenses - who get stuck in patterns of self-debauchery.**

**it is a fact that these are people who have been neglected....There's no nurturing for these people.... It's a fact that there is a class of folk that have been neglected and that's the only word I can use.**

**Walter: The people down there [in the housing project] are just not my type. They act like they just live for a day at a time, for a drink, or for drugs, or whatever. They unconcerned. They don't respect nobody. They don't respect theirself. It's just a terrible environment. I came from the projects when I was growing up but it wadn't like this. Everybody worked and we stuck together. When I get off the bus after work or I get me a ride or whatever, it's like my mind goes blank. I don't wanna speak. Don't wanna talk. Don't even wanna associate. I go in that li'l room and I don't come back out until it's time to go to work. This is a different kind of environment and I won't adjust to it. I don't wanna adjust to it. I feel out of place. I feel like I'm in the wrong place.**

Men in this study were conscious of the varying motivations of people in their environment. People living in housing projects, though not necessarily representative of the inner-city, were stratified by one of the participants in much the same way that Jencks or some other social analyst might typologize the deserving and the undeserving poor.

**Ty: Well, there's three characteristics that live in the housing projects. There's the people that - here's how I'm gonna characterize 'em. The people that wanna accomplish, the people that just don't care, and the people that can't accomplish. The people that can't accomplish are like the handicapped and the elderly. The people that don't want to accomplish are people who feel like the only thing in life is just havin' kids and receiving government funding. Then you have your people that are there 'cause hey, they didn't have nowhere else to go. They're there just for a length of time until they can find something better. There's been a lot of people that's been there wanting to get something better and they pushed right back to the same spot where they was. It's like they get one foot on the ladder and get dropped back down because the government cuts off everything and they don't have anything.... All of this 'cause they want to better themselves.... I'm the first kind - the people that wanna accomplish something.**

This study found that the rejection of government assistance in the form of food stamps is another indicator of what constitutes unacceptable behavior for a working man. Lorenzo is the only man who reported receiving food stamps. Several of the men in this study objected to this form of federal subsidy to help them make it. They consider it a soft option for some, but not a viable option at all for them:

**Walter: I definitely prefer not to [accept food stamps] because I think it's kinda greedy. 'Cause as long as I got my health and strength, I'm gonna work. Some of 'em deserve food stamps and some of 'em don't. Some of 'em can get out there and work. I'm pretty sure I could get it, but I feel like I'd be robbing somebody that really needs it.**

The fact that some men who meet eligibility criteria reject this form of assistance, may indicate a belief in their ability to rise above their situation. It also represents the inculcation of a family value and the intergenerational transmission of independence, which was a word some of the men used:

**Ivan: I won't receive no assistance. I never applied for any. I'm independent. I work. I make enough money here and there to keep me from gettin' hungry and keep my car goin'. Like my mother - she coulda gotten food stamps but she said "Let the needy get 'em." I'm able to work. You see what I'm sayin'? I don't wanna take food out of a child's mouth. I don't want 'em just cause they free - that don't make sense. I just go to work.**

Both Ivan and Walter live in housing projects while Lorenzo is becoming a homeowner. One might argue that they receive the most grandiose form of public assistance (i.e., subsidized housing versus a tax-assisted home loan). The gauge that some men use to evaluate acceptance of public assistance reflects an "entitlement" paradigm like the one that Joshua suggests by saying "if a man has paid something in, it is not a hand-out to get something out."

This study found that men who work for low wages are not oblivious to the term "underclass." Antoine and Ty express their views concerning the pejorative and racist undertones of the term. Their insightful analyses of the underclass construct places the emphasis on the consciousness of people who live in poverty census tracts. Their comments separate the spatial dimension of poverty from behavioral and racial dimensions of poverty:

**Antoine: That [term] conjures up America. The slave mentality - the second class citizen -the person who is not a person. That's what that says to me. When they use "underclass" that term lets me know that that's a very prejudiced term.... My reaction to that term is that that's something that should never be used.... I heard that word "underclass" in the 70's. It was used to depict folk who weren't skilled - who weren't knowledgeable enough to get skilled jobs - they were unskilled laborers.**

**Even now when you look at people and notice how the trend has changed, you see that people who built the houses and had related jobs were people of color. And now, you'd be hard pressed to find African-Americans on any of those jobs.**

**The term underclass depicted a group that was outcasts and uneducated, so that reaction was terrible. I didn't understand the term then because I accepted the term. But as I look at the term today, that term should never be used for any people.... I think in the South you can get away with that - classifying individuals. There are houses in the so-called underclass neighborhoods where people are avid taxpayers. They have relatives who have gone on to be successful - lawyers or doctors or professional folk who have a different class of living. I think now it's a whole different surge.... It's about qualifications.... [Underclass] is a state of mind rather than a neighborhood.**

**Ty: The definition for it has been different every time I've read it. Sometimes they say underclass is people who are underprivileged. Sometimes they characterize somebody as a underclass somebody that's like at a high school level. They had it in that term. Then they had it another term where it was like underclass, middle class, and high class. They considered an underclass person somebody from the ghetto. More or less an Afro-American. It was always heard that an Afro-American or a Spanish person or a Latino or something of that nature. It was never characterized as a Caucasian. They felt like a Caucasian could never be a low-class person. He would always be middle class or high class. And I read that in USA Today.**

**Sometimes I try to prove 'em wrong. Sometimes I try to show 'em that I am just as intelligent, or I am just like they are. Even though I might live in this place [the projects], I'm not this place. I am who I am. I'm just like you. I'm no different. And a lot of times they will make you - even if you - like for an example, I can use you as an example. Even though you might have a job at TVA or wherever you might work, you still will be looked at in a Caucasian's eyes as an underclassman. They would just think that you were just decorated, you know - somebody gave you that [job] you know just as a favor to you. They still look at you as underclass - because you're Afro-American. You will never be considered a high class person because of your skin color. It goes back to racism. You will always be considered that way no matter how much you looked at it. And I heard that on the radio.... You can be like at the middle of the ladder and still be considered a low class person because of the way that they characterize us all. They characterize us all as minority, underclass, or just regular Afro-Americans.**

The need to disprove the perceptions that Euro-Americans hold of African-American men was a recurring theme in this study. It surfaced thematically in different processes (e.g., having to work harder; having to outthink the white man, having to beat

him at his own game; having to prove their intelligence, etc.). Nonetheless, every man in this study arrived at the same conclusion - that their economic and social vulnerability forces them to guard against accusation that they are not inclined to work. Gabby's response depicts the extent to which African-American men feel they must go in trying to disprove negative perceptions that Euro-Americans hold of them. It also evokes pathos since it is apparent that they are attempting to prove more than just their willingness to work. They are trying to prove their personhood:

**Gabby: It makes me work harder to tell you the truth. It makes me feel bad on the inside, but it make me wanna try harder to show 'em that all black men - just because I'm black don't mean that I can't do it and don't mean that I won't be trustworthy and don't mean you know - I can be as good as the next person.**

## Success and Failure Processes

Although findings about individual assessments of success fit within both macro and micro frameworks in this study, failure was consistently individualistic (i.e., micro). This was evidenced in their individual definitions of success, whether it was their own or someone else's. Because of his emphasis on joblessness, social dislocations, concentration effects, and female-headed households, it is easy to construe that failure is integral to Wilson's theory of the urban underclass. Perhaps it is for this reason that his theory has little to say explicitly about conceptualizations of success. However, Wilson (1983) does assert that processes, rather than cultural values, determine success. These processes include low aspirations, inability to hope, and failure to plan for the future. These processes are considered responses to restricted opportunity and feelings of resignation related to bitter personal experience. Participants were asked a battery of questions to tap dimensions and concepts related to aspirations, confidence, competence and future orientation. For example, they were asked if goals are important to them in their lives; whether they are comfortable that their skills will allow them to get a good job; whether they've met their expectations they had earlier in life, etc. All but one man said that goals are important in his life.

Three of the eleven men who report valuing and setting goals were betrayed by the absence of any discernible "action" plan to seek upward mobility. Joshua has set a goal which is not within his purview, or his realm of agency, to accomplish. It can be accomplished only supernaturally. His goal is to be a millionaire. When I asked what he thought he would have to do to reach that goal his response was to "give a million." When I questioned where he thought he would get the million to give, he replied "God will provide it you know. Seems like the more you give the more you get." When I pursued the inquiry by asking "Well if God gives you a million and you give that away to be a millionaire, couldn't you just have kept the first million he gave you?", his answer quelled the emphasis on actually having the money, and made it appear more of an exercise in faith and ministering to the needs of others. He responded, "Not really. Because if you bless somebody, you'll be blessed." The only three men who felt that they have unmet expectations related to success are Terrell, Ty, and Carlos. All three of them anticipate completing school and getting better jobs to help them feel more successful. They, along with other men in the study, still contend that globally they are successful because they have overcome the odds of their situation and they pursue work despite structural limitations, they measure up to their own standards of success, they are competent in their work, and they self-assess:

**Carlos: I've accomplished a lot for where I came from. I came from nothin' really. I didn't have any money to start. I didn't have anything. That's why I thought I'd end up in the penitentiary. I consider myself a success because I try hard and I take my work seriously.**

**Lorenzo: I consider myself to be a success. Of course, different people measure success different ways. And having been able to overcome some of the obstacles I've overcome, such as living in public housing and which being a black male which some people say the odds of a black male being successful coming out of the low income environment I came out of are pretty much against me. And I feel like just beating those odds and being a contributing person to society [makes me a success].**

**Antoine: Definitely, I'm a success. Nothing less. I judge myself daily... so that I get better everyday. So yeah, I'm a success.... It's something that's with me that will not have anything less than to be a success.**

**Ivan: I'm half and half 'cause see in my opinion, Knoxville doesn't have a lot of good jobs to offer. Well, I would say a success because I pick up work. I basically do something all the time. It might be a little two or three hour job but it puts a dollar or two in my pocket and keeps gas in my car in case somebody calls me [for a job].**

**Ned: I'm successful because I know what I'm doin' [on the job]. I don't have to be told twice. I can look and see if somethin's wrong and I can straighten it out.**

Middle-class assessments of success might question the viability and the reasonableness of these men's feelings of success. All of the men shed light on how they are able to feel successful in low-wage work by responding to the question "What are some of the things that are important to you about work other than the money?" and "If you could receive the same amount of money that you currently earn just to stay home, would that appeal to you?" Findings from answers to the first question suggest that the latent value of work, including carrying on family traditions of work, building character, and facilitating social interaction, are driving forces to their labor force participation. Every man had some reason why work was important to him, other than the money. Representative responses include:

**Carlos: I'm more productive working - learning new skills [is important].**

**Ivan: It keep your mind occupied. I mean, to me idle time just ain't good for nobody. Not for me. All of us have worked all our lives. My sister, my brother, my mother, my daddy. We grew up workin' so that may have a lot to do with it."**

**Antoine: What I'm accomplishing while I'm working is important.... The money doesn't place value on the work. The work places the value and the money is second.**

**Walter: It keeps your mind healthy and your body strong.**

**Lorenzo: The most important thing about work for me is completeness. The whole reason for doing a good job is so that through your work, people can see your character.... People can draw from that. If they're thirsty and I were a fountain, they could come up and get 'em a little drink.**

**Rodney: Work teaches me something. It teaches me how to survive. It teaches me how to have something when I ain't got nothing and it teaches me how to manage better. And it teaches me how to be a better person.**

**Terrell: The joy of being busy and being with other people - interacting with other people is a joy on the job. Maybe you find the right clique to fit into....**

**Daniel: ....Comin' to work every morning - meetin' people. Just to come to work in the mornin' - getting' up in the mornin'.... To get up and go somewhere - not stayin' in the house all day.... It keeps me on a schedule.**

Walter reports that until he learned better, he used to think it was successful for a man to work a lot of different jobs. Most of the men in this study reported working 30 or 40 jobs since high school. Would Wilson be surprised that men are finding jobs so easily or would he contend that this supports his weak labor force attachment thesis - they are getting jobs but are either not seeing much value to the jobs or are having difficulty holding them? Some respondents suggested they had worked hundreds of jobs since high school graduation. While this is related to the fact that many men are engaged in itinerant work through temporary services (as they indicated), it has significance in another arena - the large number of jobs is either a cause or an effect of their exposure to lay-off, dismissal and other negative work experiences. Only Ivan had been involved in what one might call a career. He was a long distance truck driver for 21 years. Although all of these men feel successful because they are determined to work, this study found that more than half of them have also experienced feelings of failure related to their experience with work, or to be more precise - nonwork. Only Antoine and Ivan report never having felt like a failure. In Antoine's case, certain expressions and his body language when he recounted his wife's expectations of him suggest that while he may not feel like a failure, there are some issues which may prevent him from actually feeling like a success. Because the labor market problems of African-American men make continuous employment so precarious, all of these men, except Walter, had some experience with joblessness which they were able to recall. These men were asked the questions "How do you feel with a job?" and "How do you feel without a job?" The range of responses to the latter included feelings of failure and confusion which are exemplified through the following anecdotal evidence:

**Ned: Without a job I felt like the lowest man on the totem pole. To me I was a failure because I wadn't doin' nothin'.**

**Carlos: I felt like I was worthless - like I didn't mean anything to anybody. I just felt like I couldn't offer anybody anything because I didn't have any money. And I just didn't have that sense of security.**

**Lorenzo: I remember one time when I was terminated from a job. I had worked on this job for about five years and I was terminated for about eight months. The dangerous thing about that [being unemployed for that period of time] and I guess the hurting thing about that was that I almost got comfortable being unemployed. And that scared me. I knew I wanted to work - that I needed to work and it was like I was starting to get comfortable with not working and I didn't like the way that felt.... It was just beginning to be easy to do nothing - just to sit home and to be idle.... It was just the absolute reverse of everything I believed in. It was like I got a chance to lay my standards down.... People were helping me to be comfortable, so they were enabling me to be unemployed.**

**There were some people who did financial favors. Some people would say it's okay - you gonna be okay. You know a lot of people hadn't worked - have never worked, and they began to make statements like that and that it was going against everything that I believed in but I was listening to them and I became people dependent. I would always wanna be in with helping people to grow and I found myself becoming people dependent. Some people have a way of helping you to be lazy. Occasionally I would cut a little grass or do a few things, but basically, we lived on the government. I was in my early 20's then. I'd substitute by being a do-gooder. The old lady around the corner needs me so it's good I'm off [unemployed] or I never would have had time to do this for her.... We have the ability as human beings to justify slothfulness.**

**When I thought about what society expected out of me, I certainly felt that I was failing, but when I thought about who I was and what I was all about, I knew this was just a moment in my life that was teaching me some discipline and that it would not take me away from the things that I knew. I had to get up and get out there and start doing.**

When I asked Lorenzo if he ever had another extended period of unemployment after that experience, he revealed that personal growth, maturity, and community involvement had prevented that from ever happening again. Failure was often diffuse. Some men discovered that when they viewed themselves as a failure, others often considered them successful. Moreover, when they were trying to succeed by doing the "right thing" (i.e., working), people who had benefitted from their illegal exploits often attempted to deter their conventional success and lure them back to the underground:

**Ty: I feel like I'm right in the middle. I'm not at the point where I'm gonna fall back to failure but I'm not to the level of success yet. I'm like right in the middle. I'm going this way, but for some reason it's like they [the people who benefitted from his drug dealing] wantin' to pull me back this way. It's like a tug of war right now.... I'm tugging myself for success but I feel like the people around me are trying to get me back to just - it's pulling me back to just givin' up on school and going to work, but I'm pushing harder toward success.**

Conceptualizations of failure also highlight the problem with unstable work, the frequently static nature of the labor market for African-American inner-city men, and the potential for discouragement that could lead to unemployment. I asked what was the precise failure he was looking back on, to which he responded:

**Ty: Basically dead end jobs you know that's gonna be the same job ten years from now. You know, never really gettin' anywhere on a job - just stayin in the same position until you get tired of working.**

While many of these men reported being self-determined and self-motivated to succeed, Ty connects overcoming failure and striving toward success, to affirmations from others:

**Ty: It took a lot of people talkin' to me. Really, people giving me the confidence that I could do it. You know, really motivating me.**

During the course of the interviews, Carlos shared that he had narrowly escaped prison, and that he engaged in some self-destructive behaviors (e.g., smoking marijuana, fighting, troubles in school, driving under the influence of alcohol). I was curious if he thought his behavior was considered objectional by some older men in his community, and whether they may have considered it a barrier to working. In order to better understand his indictment of younger African-American men in the inner-city (i.e., his assessment that they are lazy and do not want to work), I asked him if he thought that when older men observed his mischief during his joblessness, if he thought they perceived him to be lazy and did not want to work. He responded:

**Carlos: Yeah. I did. And that's what some of the older guys told me. Those older guys sorta helped train some of us - the ones that listened. Yeah. That's it.**

I then asked if what those older men thought of him made any difference, to which he responded:

**Carlos: Yeah. The ones that worked. The rest were just old drunks who are still runnin' around talkin' that same crap.**

The preceding and following narrative disclosures suggest that three predominant social psychological processes (i.e., hopelessness; powerlessness, and "nobodiness") temporarily suspend feelings of success for some of these men. Findings from this study provide further evidence that these social psychological processes are conceptually related and that they are linked to contextual processes. High self-efficacy, and the social cognitive processes that it embraces, facilitates hope, empowerment, and feelings of somebodiness.

## Hopelessness

Hopelessness is conceptualized as lacking confident expectation that one can attain goals and aspire to success. Daniels (1986) found that the manifestation of hope is often missing in the lives of young African-American men who do not believe they can attain their goals. This study found that because material evidence of goal attainment is often lacking, some of the men have experienced hopelessness. While these men reported being able to attain their goals, they were often unable to see possibilities and alternatives. Hope had the opposite effect. By and large, for the nine men who experienced it, hopelessness was related to feelings of inadequacy related to job loss or inability to see beyond where they were to get better employment at the time. Representative comments to the question "Have you ever felt hopeless?" capture these processes vividly:

**Daniel: I felt like I would never get a job because I didn't go to college - and I started thinkin' I should go out and sell the stuff they sellin' [referring to drugs] so I could have something. 'Cause I wadn't doing nothin' else. I was feelin' hopeless. I didn't have anything - no money...**

**Gabby: For a while I lived in the projects with my kid's mother and I lost my job. I'd wake up everyday and sit out there wit' the fellas and drink beer and sometimes me and her would fight.... I wadn't workin - just drinkin'. This went on for about**

**four months and I felt hopeless until one of my brothers came from out of town. He stayed with me for about a week and he just motivated me. Every mornin' he'd get up and he'd get me up and say "Come on man. Let's go somewhere." After he left, I kept gettin' up and kept gettin' up and found a job. Every since then I haven't ever gone back to that hopeless stage at all.**

**Rodney: I felt hopeless in jail. I felt like a person with AIDS... and I had so many people against me. I felt like a person that was caste into the sea and wouldn't nobody pull him back from the sea. I just felt like I would never get out. I felt like I was dying without a reason.**

**Joshua: Being in the penitentiary made me feel hopeless but it also made me feel desperate. I mean I was at that point in my life when I would do anything 'cause what else could they do to me? I was already in jail... I mean they couldn't do anything else to me but kill me.**

Lorenzo connects hopelessness to the larger issues of social isolation, concentration effects, and negative self-evaluations:

**Lorenzo: .... As a matter of fact, the drug scene or the drug situation now is much larger. As a matter of fact, the communities now exist for drug traffic - totally. There are no more social services on site. There's no more health clinic on site. These things used to be on site but now all it is is just a place to go in, lay down, come out, and do your 'business.' So yes, they are tremendously isolated. They are not only isolated, they have been stereotyped to the point where they're [African-American men] starting to believe what people believe about them - that they are hopeless and helpless.**

In the absence of Daniel's (1986) findings it might be quizzical that while Ty was young, he always sustained hope, but as an adult he sometimes feels hopeless:

**Ty: I know I stepped off here and I stepped off there. But I never really felt hopeless. I knew there was hope somewhere among those dark clouds and that something was gonna happen and when I got older, I knew at a young age, that I was gonna have to work. At a young age I took up being a paper boy in the worst neighborhood I could be a paper boy in but still I knew then I had to learn how to work. I would do whatever I could do - mow yards. I'd go to the football games and sell line-ups. Whatever I could do to make that extra dollar. You know, to have money in my pocket to where I could buy the things I want cause I knew that mom couldn't give 'em to me and I knew that dad wadn't nowhere to be found. I knew that I had to get it some way. If I really wanted it, I would have to work for it. I would have to earn it on my own. I couldn't depend on nobody else. So, at a young**

**age, no, I didn't feel hopeless 'cause I always knew that I could make it or there was hope if I went out and tried - went out and put forth the effort to get hope for myself. Every now and then... today, I feel hopeless, like there's no hope because of so many closed doors that arise when you do try to meet that standard that you wanna be.**

**Powerlessness**

Powerlessness reflects participants belief that their behavior does not allow them to attain parity with those in power. Economic powerlessness compounds the powerlessness that many African-American men in this society experience, irrespective of their socioeconomic class. Economic powerlessness has driven men in this study to commit crimes, resulting in hindrances to their future employability. Powerlessness is also related to the inability to exercise control over circumstances. Terrell's feelings of economic powerlessness are more disturbing since he has two jobs but is homeless. His economic powerlessness suspends the performance of his provider role for his family, deprives him of fundamental comforts, and compels him to live among people of questionable character:

**Terrell: I mean I don't see how this country allows this to happen. Minimum wage is just not enough. Last time I was in high school - I graduated 1977 - I worked for $3.35 minimum wage. Minimum wage is only a dollar more and it's over 10 or 15 years later and prices have gone up through the roof. I felt that way when I did have a job. I feel that way now and I'm working two jobs - two jobs combined is paying me $10.55 an hour - 16 hours a day. And that's still not enough. I have responsibilities that I can't even meet - my child support. So yeah I feel powerless - even with a job. Yeah I'm working, but at the same time there are other factors that come into play. I can't - I'm not allowed to be comfortable. Because my situation at hand - I'm not allowed to be comfortable. If I move over here to the Fifth Avenue Hotel - there's nothin' but a bunch of drunks and drug addicts over there. Even though the mission is not the greatest place to be, that's the best place to be as far as I can see. If I go down here to the Eliot [hotel], a bunch of derelicts are down there you know. That's all that's there at the mission is derelicts and drug addicts. The only thing at the mission is a bunch of derelicts.**

The inability to envision prospects of moving out of poverty via working appeared to convey a feeling of powerlessness:

**Rodney:... You can't work your way up for $4.25 an hour....**

Economic powerlessness was found to have other dimensions, one of which was a feeling of being perceived as an underdog with little ability to rebel against maltreatment. The underdog syndrome in the workplace seems to represent a social assault that these African-American men were trying so desperately to extinguish:

**Ty: Minimum wage is the lowest that I had to work for, and I felt like working for minimum wage made 'em more or less look like you were an underdog - like they could make you do whatever because of your ranking more or less on the job. You were like the low man on the totem pole so they could throw you with anything and you have to accept that.**

Feelings of economic powerlessness were often countermanded by a job title that was perceived to have status, and by job responsibilities that afforded the job holder the opportunity to have authority over people. Several respondents said that a job title which provided a sense of power, influence, status, or authority is important to them. When asked "What are some of the things that have attracted you to jobs in the past?" speaking from his previous work experience Joshua indicated:

**Joshua: It's been money, but it's also been power and influence because you have a lot of power when you're a security guard. You got a lot of power over people. I know we had the authority to apprehend people, arrest 'em, cuff 'em and put the siren on and everything. You see, throw those blue lights on and that gives you a sense of authority. You throw on that uniform and you're a guard for the state and you could stop people.**

Authority was also found to be problematic for Rodney and Carlos. They both revealed they resist being told what to do by white people.

**Nobodiness**

Nobodiness captures the feeling that men have when they perceive they have no importance. Feelings of nobodiness related directly to poverty and the environmental milieu. When asked "When you were growing up did you feel more like a somebody or a nobody?", the following representative response is offered:

**Ty: I always had that feelin' like I wadn't nobody. Like I was just a regular black person from the projects.**

Feelings of nobodiness were replaced by feelings of somebodiness through a sense of agency:

**Carlos: Sometime I *feel* like a nobody and sometimes I feel like a somebody, but I *know* I am somebody because I have certain skills, and I know what I've done. And I've got a lot of natural talents that some other people don't have. I've grown up. I've become a man. I'm more responsible than I was and I've tried to make a way.**

**Joshua: Well, I felt like I wanted to be somebody but I was a nobody you know because I didn't have any money. There was hardly any opportunity, but you know - I don't know, I just never could feel like I was a nobody you know. Maybe I was, but I just couldn't feel that way for so long. I just couldn't because I always thought that I would somehow make it - to have it - or do it. I mean I really did. I had a lot of self-confidence I guess.**

## Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is part of a broad literature that has developed around the issues of human agency, mastery, and control (Bandura, 1977; Gecas, 1989). Self-efficacy is an important social psychological process that contributes to feelings of success and somebodiness. This was demonstrated in the pilot study as well. When asked "Looking at your life now, do you feel more like a somebody or a nobody?" and "Do you ever feel like your life is aimless?" instances of agency, mastery, and control surfaced:

**Lorenzo: I feel like I'm probably one of the most special people in the world. I really do. And I wouldn't say that just for the sake of the interview. I feel like I've only just begun to make a difference. And I've been able to make some tremendous difference. I've won numerous awards - the advisory committees with the board of education, with the school system and things like that.... With the things I'm getting ready to accomplish more toward community outreach, I feel like it's just another phase of great things happening in my life.**

**Terrell: It [having a supervisory job] made me feel important. It made me feel like I was somebody. It kinda thrust me into a leadership position and you become not just a role model, but you become a parent figure at times. And you become a brother figure or a sister figure. And carry yourself in the right manner and you get a lot of respect - the upward feeling that you get.**

Perception of ability and competence that an individual experiences is physically and socially contextual (Gecas & Schwalbe) and emanates from beliefs about the self in

that environment (Gecas, 1982). Wilson (1991) theorizes that self-efficacy might be a useful concept to relate structural problems of weak labor force attachment and the cultural problem of transmitting self in the ghetto. When asked the question "Are you confident that you have the necessary skills to get a good job?" all of the respondents answered yes, though in some instances rather tentatively. All but one respondent believed that an employer would benefit from having him as an employee. When asked, none of them reported having any self-doubts about their ability to do a good job. All of the respondents believed that the actions they take control their future. They also reported having overcome, or being motivated by many obstacles (e.g., drug addiction, reactions to the violent death of family members; the lack of objective opportunity in their environment; imprisonment) in their lives, some of which were outside their control:

**Lorenzo: As a young man I was not trapped into it - but pressured into the drug scene and I have been addicted to drugs and alcohol in my youth. Fortunately, through a salvation experience [refers to Christian experience] and the help of other people, I was able to have been able to overcome that particular problem which I felt was a very large obstacle at the time.... One thing is that you have to try to find some type of escape from that environment - some type of relief. It was hard to be happy in those times because of the circumstance - being poor and not being able to get out of what I refer to as a brick city - a city of bricks - an environment where once you came into that environment - the projects - that's what they refer to them as - there was no way out so you use drugs as a temporary relief and as some form of happiness.**

These findings would suggest that these men have high self-efficacy on two planks. First, for some, being able to leave the housing project or working toward the goal of leaving the projects demonstrates high self-efficacy:

**Lorenzo: They [people who remain in the housing project] look at me as somewhat of a model and an example because it's not how far and how successful you are when you leave, it's your attitude when you come back.... I always come back to do more work. I'm not working in the community anymore because the community as it was is dead and gone. I'm working with the people.**

Ty's determination to "move on" is in step with the original intention that public housing be considered temporary until permanent housing could be secured:

**Ty: Yeah that's my objective. I wanna move out and try to find a home - you know something that I can say is mine you know... you know where I can get it paid for and when it's time to retire I can say this is my home. You know it won't be somebody telling me - cause the way I feel about it, you can never call an apartment in a housing project your home. 'Cause it's always gonna be the government's. You're just paying to lease. You just leasing it for the time that you're there. You can't really call that home. That's just a place to stay until you can better yourself or until you get the opportunity to move on.**

Second, being able to find and leverage resources to find jobs has given these men the agency to continue to press for work.

**Daniel: I think I got enough records [referring to his employment history and stuff to go and find me another job. Plus they [the newspaper] have a job search every Wednesday.**

## The Ecosystem Framework

Understanding contextual processes of success and failure in the inner-city can be enhanced through the lens of an ecosystem framework. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) comprehensive work suggests that reform in the social environment where human development takes place can alter the choices available to and preferred by humans. This implies that communities can be shaped and that once shaped, they can meet the needs for achievement, affiliation, security and freedom from hunger of African-American males. (Ferguson, 1992). This study's interest in the experience of work for African-American men in the inner-city prompted me to consider the macroecological and the microecological settings and systems of the men in the study. Several settings reveal more about processes that determine work and success and failure.

### The Microsystem and Work

A microsystem is the complex of relations between the individual and the immediate setting that contains the individual. The various roles that an individual plays are part of the microsystem. A level of interest is whether or not the individual can

sustain a home for himself in the role of provider (McAdoo, 1993). Four of the men in this study were married, four were single, and four live with women. Generative questioning led to an interest in whether or not the single men considered themselves to be marriageable. Two of the men said they felt they could provide for a wife. Ty and Rodney added a twist to the Wilson paradigm by indicating that their standard of living can be improved if they find a marriageable woman. This finding was recounted when they were asked "Do you think you'll ever get married?":

**Ty: I would like to get married. That's what I'm lookin' for. Somebody that works and has her head on straight. Somebody that works. I want her to work at first but if I got a job where I can handle all the bills on my own I prefer her not working. But in this day and time, you know both parties have to work just to basically live - to survive.... Right now I'm not ready for marriage. 'Cause I know dealing with marriage, eventually it's gonna be children comin' along. I don't want my children to go through the life that I went through with my dad. I wanna be able to support them. I don't want them to end up being another statistic for the government. Just another government baby more or less. You know I wanna be able to take care of my wife and my children. You know, it's a bad thing to say, but it's true in a lot of ways that you can be more successful cause a lot of times when you're married, if she has children - if you marry a woman and she already had children then you got claims to claim her children on your taxes. You get the earned income on that. So your money is gonna double. Then both of you - her credit could be better than yours and you can use her credit for things and automatically she's gonna have credit with the phone company and with the electricity company, and she's gonna have rent references cause she's had to live somewhere. You got her to fall back on. It's bills that can go in her name... that's just the way it is.**

I found that the majority of men in this study had responsibility thrust upon them at an early age, which may explain their feelings of competence. They frequently assumed a caretaker role for younger siblings, an ailing relative, or for themselves. As caretaker, they performed both instrumental and expressive functions to maintain the continuity of the household. They spoke of cooking, cleaning, ironing, earning money, watching for the mailman, going to the store, and being a protector. Rodney intones:

**Rodney: I never really had a chance to be a child because even as a child I was prepared to be a man. In other words, I was a man before I was a child. The time that I was supposed to be a child was the time that I was more a man. I was doin' things just like a man.**

In addition to their own roles, the home and the school have assumed important roles as parts of the microsystem that hold consequential outcomes for these men. All but one participant had received very strong messages from family members about the value and utility hard of work and family values. Their commitment to work suggests an early influence from which they have not departed. This finding is consistent with the literature that African-Americans families, even of lower social class ranking, hold a strong work orientation (Hill, 1972; Torrance, 1992, Scanzoni, 1971) which they transmit to their children. Families also transmit a success expectation related to education (Hill, 1972; Scanzoni, 1971). The following excerpts are representative of the influence of the microsystem at different levels of interaction:

**Carlos: I wanted to go to college to get a better job. I really and truly didn't know what career I wanted - I just wanted to go to college. Basically for my parents. You know, I was always told that I wasn't gonna make it because I was kinda mean. You know she [his mother] was a big influence. You know, she just wanted me to shine in the community basically....She just wanted me to make something of myself so they wouldn't say that, you know. So I've tried. I've tried hard just to make her look good.**

Lorenzo recalls how the environmental context limited his parents frame of reference and altered his processes, forcing him to become more self-motivated:

**Lorenzo: Unfortunately, when you're raised in a low-income community and both of your parents have basic educations - maybe eleventh grade or something, they're not gonna sit down and say to you "Well son, you need to build this, and go to college." You have to dig in and get those things on your own.**

Despite the environmental constraints that limited both his parents worldview and the manner in which they were able to help him plan for his future, Lorenzo, like other men in this study, experienced family solidarity which earned them respect in the community:

**Lorenzo: It's always been like a family goal that everybody move on and do better.... A lot of families were not as concrete or were not as glued as my family. For example, in my family there's probably every month of the year that there's a birthday...and people would come and they would come and watch our birthday parties out in the ghetto - out in the yard with balloons and everything... and they would say "You all celebrate everything." So our immediate gratification was that we celebrated one another.... That's why I'm so happy being a family man... and I**

**think I've been taught this as a child. And we still presently celebrate everything. We do it today.... A few months ago a young man said "You know, I used to hate you. I hated you in a different kind of way because every time I would come by your house "ya'll were celebratin' and we never celebrated anything. Now that I'm older, I'm doing that with my family." So people have been watching.... The only thing that I regret out of all of this, because it sounds like a story too good to be true - there are some regrets. One of those regrets is that at the time there was nobody telling me that I needed to further my education to its max.... If I had done that, I probably would have done more for people.**

**Terrell: I had two good parents - outstanding [and] nine brothers and sisters! Everybody is still surviving.... And my sister, she's the oldest of the girls and the fourth oldest in the family. She started the trend and it trickled down for just a few of us. She was the first one to acquire her college degree in the family. So that was very important. It made my parents very proud and the rest of the members of the family proud, and I too myself wanted to do the same thing....**

**Gabby: Our parents brought us up the best way they could. We had a lot of respect for people and then people had a lot of respect for us and they seen that we was tryin' so they'd give us a little more opportunity than the other kids maybe. Like in school, they'd get one of the Morgan [his last name] boys.... If it's a job out there - a summer job - they'd get one of the Morgan boys.**

This research found that the intergenerational transmission of the work ethic is important to the men in this study with children. It was especially strong for those with male children:

**Walter: I come from a big family - a hard workin' family and we all worked together. My daddy was a hard worker. He started me out workin' when I was nine years old.**

**Carlos: That's one of the main reasons why I do it [work].... I hope I'm able to leave him something that he can get started with. That's something that I didn't have. I know the struggle tryin' to get something. I'm gonna leave him a home or whatever else I can - a little money. And I'm gonna see to it that he goes to college.**

**Antoine: I talk with him about everything. I share with him that success for him right now is to do things right and straight. Everything I do is designed for my son. I'm telling him when he's nineteen to own a complex. Don't think about renting - own something,. That's what I'm doing now. The things that I've learned, I'm teaching others.**

**Gabby: I find myself doin' some of the same things that my father did with me - I do that with my kids... I let 'em speak to me and tell me how they feel.**

The relationship between the individual and the educational system is a part of the microsystem. None of these men reported any uniquely positive experiences in the school setting, except Lorenzo who was first introduced to organizational participation through his school. A disaster of education for African-American men which is tied to the social, economic, and environmental problems of their community are the middle-class norms and expectations that drive processes in the school. These processes, coupled with the cultural insensitivity of Euro-American teachers, tend to dictate the way African-American males are viewed (Majors and Billson, 1992). Terrell, who had wanted to be a doctor, feels he was diverted from his goal by the veiled message of not being good enough:

**Terrell: I was in special education.... And you look back and see how some of these teachers and counselors would actually guide you in this direction. You say you wanna go this way, and they're going to guide you that way and you tend to believe it because you don't know any better. You're young. You're a kid. These were white counselors and teachers. I wanted to take a speed reading course real bad. I loved intelligence. I loved reading books. I loved it and I wanted to take that speed reading course real bad. But she [the counselor] wouldn't allow me to do it. As a mater of fact, I can recall her trying to get me to go into some kind of mechanical trade - take up welding.... And I'll be honest with you. My grades and my attitude toward education plummeted.... This all goes back to what the counselor had said.**

**Ty: I still feel to this day that I never got the opportunities while I was in school, to get the education that I needed to help me when I did get out of school.... I never did take any algebra courses. I didn't take no college prep classes - no foreign languages - no typing - no nothing.**

Robert still feels branded by his negative experiences in the school setting:

**Robert: Being in Resource [made me feel like a nobody]. I felt like I wadn't good enough to be in class around regular kids.... That made me feel like I was different. It made me feel like they was showing pity on me.... It was hard for me to overcome. It still bothers me sometimes because the people that was in the class with me crack jokes and make fun.... I went to college on my own. I went because I wanted to achieve something and I wanted my mom to be proud of me....**

Respondents report that few proactive attempts were made to involve them in beneficial programs delivered through their school. Lorenzo points to the need for African-American males to seek their own best interest in a school setting that may disregard their needs:

**Lorenzo: It was open to anybody [the distributive education program in which he participated] but I think that all programs are as good as their recruitment. And there were no people in the program who would come out and say to the young black male like myself "I think this is something good for you." Fortunately, I was motivated or beginning to become motivated enough to go and seek after those kinds of needs and going to the person in charge or the instructor. She took some interest in me and gave me the opportunity to get involved.**

The school served as a reminder to some of these men of their assigned second-class status and their poverty:

**Lorenzo: There were occasions in school when a person may have gotten an opportunity to see things through field trips or something like that. But they were very rare because field trips were limited to - if you lived in a low-income community then your school was targeted low-income because it catered to low-income people. So, we didn't have all the things they would in the outside areas.**

For those men who grew up under segregation, when trips were possible, they tended to reinforce the inability of their educated teachers to insulate their students, and themselves, from the bigotry and rejection of the larger community. The assault impacted feelings of personhood:

**Joshua: Back then you lacked identity because you very rarely seen a black man in an authority position. Like when we would go somewhere, even or teachers were made to feel subservient to the white man. If we went on a field trip there were certain places branded for "coloreds" .... and even our teachers couldn't break the color line.... Back under segregation if they had given us the money that they gave the white schools, we woulda been much better off being separate.**

## The Mesosystem and Work

The mesosystem comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his/her life. The church is an element of the mesosytem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that influenced the commitment to work for ten of the twelve participants in this study. Hill's (1972) resiliency model of African-American families includes strong religious orientation as a source of their strength. This research

found that religious grounding was central to the work perspective of these participants. For most of the men, their religiosity was cultivated in organized religion - the Christian church. The church has been a significant force in the willingness and desire to work for many participants who responded:

**Ty: It's stated in the Bible that if a man don't work, he shouldn't eat.... I like to eat, so I need to work. And I feel like it even makes you feel better as a man if you do work. The sweat of the brow is supposed to be from the man [another tenet of Christianity].**

**Joshua: I'm a Christian now. I believe in God and Jesus Christ. When I met Jesus Christ, He changed my whole life. And in the process of changin' my life, my whole opinion about things changed and I learned that there is a good and a bad - a right and a wrong. I try to devote my time toward the good now insteada the bad. I've been at both ends of the extreme. There was a time when I was so motivated that I worked sixteen hours a day.... and just threw myself into the workforce. And then there was a time that I threw myself into drug dealin' and [being] a con man.... I would smoke reefer all day long and lay around and I might go to work.... But when I got saved, my whole work ethic changed.... I look at my life and I just thank God that I was saved because it's no tellin' where my life might have gone.**

**Walter: What gave me faith a lot of years was that I came from a Christian family. I'm fifty years old and I was brought up the hard way where we had just a little and we had to share ... and I continue to live like that all these years.... I kinda feel like it was God's path for me.... to keep on workin' and doin' what I'm doin'.**

**Rodney: You go forward by focusing and keeping your mind on God.... God worked all the way down from Genesis to Revelation.**

Certain influences in the African-American community itself tend to perpetuate a middle-class outlook, even among the proletariat. The church is the predominant point of community influence. In the churches, leaders extol middle-class ideals and conceptions of life that somewhat influence allegiance of workers in service occupation to those values (Frazier, 1939). The church also reaches out to motivate men:

**Lorenzo: I would honestly have to attribute the strength and the growth I've experienced to the salvation experience - knowing God and believing in God. Because at that time, if there was anybody out there [in the community] trying to motivate you, it was coming from your local church - your local black church.**

There were other expressions of religiosity that were influential and contributed to self-development and the work lives of these men. For example:

**Terrell: I'm not a religious person by any means but I'm very spiritual. I can't see where I'd fit into any denomination, but I'm a very spiritual person. You got to have faith and I think that's what sets me apart [from the homeless person who doesn't work].**

Carlos, who said going to church is a part of his philosophy for how to make it through life, talked about the role of the Nation of Islam in his life.

**Carlos: They made me strong - just the conversations they had with me. They kinda swayed me away from robbin' and stealin' and things like that. They broadened my mind. They gave me the idea of wantin' to become someone - that I could help my people with the right kind of knowledge.... I think God smiles on you when you work.**

Gabby believes his lack of economic progress may be related to not being on a Christian path. Feelings he shared suggest the intersect of religion, values, and social interest:

**Gabby: I feel like that's why I'm not gettin' anywhere now because I fell out of the church. We were brought up in the church and it seem like you know you have more just being involved in the church. In the church I felt like a better person - happier. I felt healthier. I felt happier.... I need to get back into the church.**

Only Ivan, who reports having been raised in a Christian home, did not associate his willingness to work with any prescriptive behavior dictated by his Christian upbringing. Lorenzo and Antoine are both ministers who report that their religion keeps them centered and drives them to develop outreach to inner-city men.

## The Exosystem and Work

An exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem which embraces formal and informal social structures. Some of these structures are the world of work, characteristics of the neighborhood, transportation systems, law enforcement, the mass media, and informal social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is at this level of the ecosystem that the most far-reaching processes occur for these men. Some influences from the microsystem setting were countered by institutional processes in the exosystem. One

process was a collective sense of stigmatization evidenced by multiple processes. Since most of the men in this study were raised in housing projects, most had experienced events that made them feel that "outsiders" looked down on them. As Ty reported:

**Ty: A lot of times you know people would look at you differently if you told 'em where you was from - where you lived at. They would look at you differently - like he's just somebody from the projects. They would more or less be kinda watching you if you came to their house. They would think "Oh he's gonna steal something in my house, or he's gonna send some of his friends over to break into my house." I had a lot of friends that lived out West, but once they found out where I lived at, they were like more or less trying to shy away from me.**

**Carlos: Most of em [kids from other neighborhoods] were afraid. When we were younger, they basically stayed away from us. I guess they didn't wanna be around us.... We were poor. I mean there was always somebody gettin' shot, there was gamblin' down there, liquor being sold down there and you know drugs was hittin' the scene....**

Not surprisingly, some respondents viewed their manhood in reference to the way they were treated on the job, or by society at large. This process of demasculization is connected to institutional processes, the most formidable of which is racism.

**Carlos: It's like a lot of 'em [white patrons] look at me all suspicious.... I might be paranoid, but I get the feelin' that they think "He's just out here to make some money - he's trying to overcharge us to try to make him some money." It makes me feel like I'm dirty. Like I'm cheap. Like I'm shiftless or a con man - a thief or something you know? And I'm not!**

I observed his work during the three interviews I conducted with him and detected what I would consider suspiciousness from some Euro-American customers at his parking booth. Walter was the only participant who did not report ever having encountered any interaction with "whites" that he would label as racist. Even so, he was cognizant that Euro-Americans (particularly women) often move to the other side of the street when they see him coming. This serves as a salient reminder to him of the dangerous image of the African-American man and his damaging minority status:

**Walter: Well, in my opinion, blacks have the hardest way to go regardless of their education or their financial means or whatever. Like I said, they always gonna be looked at just about like this black minority.**

Ned offered a global assessment of a black-white dichotomy that is supported by racism:

**Ned: White people think they smarter than black people. Black people smarter than the white people think. A black man knows what he's doin.' And when he say somethin' he know what he talkin' about. That's the way I look at it. That's racism. I don't know why they think they better than we are. And they ain't. To me they don't know what they doin' - that's cause they screw up everything. Why you think the economy is the way it is today [he laughs]? They screwed up!**

All of the men in this study voiced some concerns about the way the mass media, particularly television, portrays African-American men. Without variation, men in this study felt they were affected by the stereotypical, distorted, villainous image of the African-American man in this society. The fact that their self-image is discredited struck the most resounding chord with all twelve of these men. Rodney's evaluation of the stereotypical image of African-American men, and its relationship to opportunities for on-the-job interactions, and even opportunities to obtain jobs, is shared for it's representativeness:

**Rodney: We are stereotyped - like the white man says we can play sports. Accordin' to the stereotype, black men are abusive, they drink, they lazy, they don't wanna work, we not worth anything but livin' in the 'hood. We nothin' but gangbangers. All we wanna do is fight, cuss, steal, and rob. We don't ever wanna do anything good -we just wanna get over on people. We're two-faced - one minute we like you and the next minute we stabbin' you in the back. That's enough to make you dislike a black person. A lot of people who can hire you for jobs believe that. Once the black man works hard and shows himself to be different, they start to change their attitude toward blacks. Job performance has caused them [black men] to learn to be respected.**

Men have left jobs because of what they perceive as being shunned by Euro-American co-workers. Gabby speaks out of his personal experience:

**Gabby: The whole crew - everybody else was white and they just kinda made you feel like that [uncomfortable] 'cause when they take breaks wouldn't nobody talk with you. And you go and try to talk to 'em and they have to get up and go use the phone or go somewhere else you know.... They wouldn't hardly hold no conversation and talk [with me]. They would talk to me some, but it was noticed that it was not cared too much about me being there. It made me feel real bad. I didn't wanna go back. I only stayed there for about three or four weeks.... I told them [temporary service] to send me somewhere else and they did.**

When I asked if he would have stayed if his co-workers had talked with him and had not made him feel like he did not belong there, Gabby responded:

**Gabby: I think I woulda stayed. I probably woulda tried to stay.**

Joshua reported that the negative image of African-American men that he internalized gave him a failure identity earlier in his life:

**Joshua: It makes you feel bad. It makes you feel less than - you felt like - you learned to carry your race as a badge of shame. And that's unfortunate because you know people are hurt by that.... Everything that was black was bad. You know they taught [in school] that it's a cold black night - it's a black day and all this. You were feeling ashamed that you were black. While a lot of black people were so bright [light complexion] that they could pass for white or half white. This sorta created a subcultural race - the mulatto you know. In other words, if you was real bright skinned, you could go up and get a job and serve the white man before I could. I had to stay back in the kitchen you know. So this created a feeling of you know, oh boy, I just wish I wadn't so black - or maybe if I was a little lighter. And people began to bleach themselves and go through all this and straighten their hair you know and do everything but to be black you see.**

Joshua also encountered unintended assaults on his manhood from presumably liberal Euro-Americans. These assaults were more painful than intentional ones because of the breach of some anticipated immunity:

**Joshua: I was speakin' at this neighborhood dinner function... and this white lady had got a li'l tipsy and she came over there and said, "Joshua, good speech. You know I told my husband, that boy outta be a preacher." Something just rose up in me but I caught myself - being a Christian.... But even to this day you know it's there. You know that racism is so institutionalized that.... this is supposed to be a bunch of your liberals down here [at the event] and they're talkin' this way. You can imagine what the right wing is saying.... What does somebody have to do to be a man? You know he can be 45 years old and be "boy."**

Both Ty and Rodney, bi-racial brothers, felt negatively impacted by the racist remarks and the stigmatization they have had to endure as African-American men. They reported feeling that at times, their lack of racial identity has made them feel ashamed of who they were.

## The Macrosystem and Work

The macrosystem does not refer to the specific contexts affecting the individual's life. It refers to general prototypes that exist in the culture or the subculture. These prototypes set the pattern for the structures and activities that occur at a concrete level. Thus, the macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems of which the micro-, meso-, and exosystems are the concrete manifestations. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The legal system is a patterned feature of life for most African American men. The men in this study were no exception by and large. Five men had encounters with the police, some as "innocuous" as DUI or public drunkenness. Both Rodney and Ty have been arrested on drug related charges which have compromised their opportunities in the work place. Ty reported that his encounter with the law has eliminated his dream of going into the Navy to pursue opportunity and training. These men also recalled incidents of a police presence in their communities which made them feel almost as though they were under surveillance.

Participants were distressed about the "system" that African-American men must contend with in their daily lives. The system includes social factors and forces. These factors and forces are structures of social and economic systems; specific institutions and/or institutional regulations and demands; political programs and policies; various cultural, ideological, and educational beliefs; and entrenched patterns of social interaction, such as racism, sexism, and ageism, which deny certain groups access to equal opportunities and resources (Ropers, 1991). Men in this study voiced concern about pervasive racism, as a political process, and the social misunderstanding of them that is a natural consequence of racism and other forces and factors of the system. These were common themes that can counter objective and subjective feelings of success. Chris, the UCV sponsor, drew a connection shared from his Euro-American perspective about the assault of inner-city African-American men and the system:

**Chris: My experience has been that all African-American males are - their humanity is constantly under assault. That comes from my experience listening to friends who are tenured professors on down to the man on the street. I think that it's such a complex issue that even to understand the assault that African-American males**

**experience is to some extent to understand the entire system itself. To understand what's going on now, you almost have to, or need to have some kind of perspective of what went on before.**

The following excerpts provide insight into respondents' beliefs about processes in the various arenas of the macrosystem:

**Rodney: The government is always talkin' about they doin' so much but what are they doin' for me? They have a liquor store on every corner. Do they expect to have a liquor store on every corner and us not go in there and get a drink? And then we get arrested. It's like the government is settin' us up to be failures.... I don't like the way they do that. I think that's wrong.**

**Joshua: Racism and segregation... is really abnormal for a human being to live in. It puts a certain amount of stress on you that's automatically passed on and built in him. You must be stressful in ordinarily unstressful situations. Black people been goin' through the same identical situation for 400 years.... So you can imagine how some of us must feel never gettin' that opportunity to break free.... This is how come you take two average people - a black and a white and you can flash a siren across the board and you'll see the white people react different to the siren than the black people. The blacks react to it out of fear because they feel like it's comin' to get them. Most white people react like "Oh, there's help." You find this situation because black people are on the short end of the stick. That's perpetuated through racism and prejudice....**

**Antoine: The white man had never let us go. We've been emancipated through legislation but he never let us go.... It's been put into the person of color to have a lot of kids. Now they're talking about deadbeat daddies. The white men are the deadbeat daddies. The black men can't get the jobs....**

Men in this study echoed the concern of other African-American men in this country who perceive that the system is creating divisiveness between African-American men and women:

**Antoine: They [the system] put women in position and if the man doesn't have the degree or the right kind of education he's cut down. If you notice the system now, the women are being elevated and ... now the question is, is he working?**

The perception that the system was not in his favor altered Joshua's commitment to work earlier in his life:

**Joshua: I had been illegally workin' since I was 12 or 13 [in a hospital] and legally since I was 17. I always did like to work until I got discouraged by the system and found out I could make a lotta money off drugs. And then, I just didn't care.**

This study also found that perhaps Moynihan's (1965) political and social treatise was the genesis of the widespread belief that military service would "build character" for African-America men. Men in this study also believed it would be an avenue to opportunities which were blocked in the civilian sector. Five of them had prior military experience, two of whom were drafted. Ned had wanted to go into the Air Force, but when the Viet Nam war escalated, he opted to take his chances in the labor market instead. Ty has had his hopes of a military career dashed because of drug related charges. For the men with prior military service, it was an overwhelmingly positive experience for four of them. They credit the military with teaching them more about how to work and how to be self-disciplined. Joshua's experience was exceptional. He went into the Army to pursue opportunity which was not available to him in his community. His anger and bitterness upon his return altered his experience with work and directed him toward the underground economy as a way to deflate the system. He concedes:

**Joshua: My father and my grandfather had instilled it in me to work. But when I came back from the military, I was a very angry young man and I called myself a revolutionary.... And that's basically how I started into the life of crime. Because before that I had not been in a life of crime. But the Viet Nam experience was so negative and so detrimental to me that when I got back I swore that I would never work for the white man.**

## Ecosystem Trust/Distrust and Work

Ecosystem trust suggests that most entities in one's environment are seen as potentially beneficial, and a person believes he is able to act on the environment to make it even more beneficial. Conversely, ecosystem distrust means that most entities in the environment are considered potentially harmful, and the individual does not see himself as able to improve his situation (Triandis, Feldman, Weldon, & Harvey, 1976). Feldman (1976) points out that "eco-system distrust is a pervasive phenomenon in disadvantaged groups, caused by the lack of access to resources and resulting in intense competition and a perception of the world in zero sum terms" (p. 161).

When a person feels that he is unable to trust the ecosystem, he is likely to feel he cannot do much to change it. He feels like he is unimportant as a result (Triandis, et.al., 1976). When an individual sees relationships in zero-sum terms, he is not a good member of institutions in which the assumption is that people cooperate, conform, and adjust to rules set by the leadership. The workplace is such an institution where trust is required. Distrust here may cause men to become discouraged and drop out of the workforce (Triandis, et. al., 1976). Carlos, who was working two jobs during his participation in the study, left one job because he felt disrespected. He expressed that his sense of empowerment on the job was co-opted by the Euro-American supervisor who resented his ability to perform the job well without direct supervision.

African-American men negatively encounter the police more commonly than any other group of people in this country (Majors and Billson, 1992). In ghetto areas, the common presence of the police has led to distrust of them by the men who live there. Feeling that the police are watching was a finding of this study as Ivan's representative comment suggests:

**Ivan: .... These drug dealers, they gettin' caught. They think they gettin' away but they watchin' 'em. They [the police] watch me and I'm not doin' nothin'. I think they mostly be curious. A lot of people watches each other to know what you're doin' and how you gettin' by. A lot of 'em know I'm laid off from the school system so they wonderin' how I'm gonna make it. They see me goin' out mostly every mornin' and if I don't have on these dirty tennis [shoes] I have on my work shoes so they know I'm doin' somethin'.**

Anecdotal evidence presented throughout this chapter has conveyed instances of ecosystem distrust in which participants felt they were not able to freely move around in their environment or that their environment was not a good place to live. There were illustrations of participants acting on the environment to make it relatively more favorable and to improve their situation suggesting ecosystem trust. However, the preoccupation with danger in the environment, social minimization, and community withdrawal signal distrust.

## Conceptualizations of Success and Failure

Distillations of participant responses drawn for each man, serve as their interpretations of processes related to success and failure. While middle class constructions of success suggest that fame or prosperity are the linchpins, this is not the case for these men. For them, success reflects seized opportunity, community interest, agency, mastery, and positive behavioral dimensions. Many of the behavioral elements contribute to healthy and orderly work lives for them. Mainstream constructions of failure tend to emphasize ineffectiveness, improper functioning, and nonperformance. The impressions of failure that these men have developed mirror the mainstream moreso than the perceptions they hold of success. Both are persuasive in the experience of work for these men. The following individual conceptualizations of success and failure place Chapter IV in perspective:

## Antoine

**Success** is not being self-destructive.

**Failure** is being self-destructive.

## Carlos

**Success** is creating your own career.

**Failure** is not taking your job seriously.

## Daniel

**Success** is having something - trying to have something - to get where you wanna be.

**Failure** means not trying - not trying at all - just giving up.

## Gabby

**Success** is if you set a goal and reach it and it doesn't hurt anybody else.

**Failure** is being lazy and not doin' anything.

## Ivan

**Success** means you have accomplished somethin'.

**Failure** means you're not tryin' hard enough.

## Joshua

**Success** is being saved [Christian] and having something to hope for, and to believe in.

**Failure** is anybody unsaved [not a Christian]

## Lorenzo

**Success** is when you have been given the opportunity, through your character and your attitude, to walk into certain doors.

**Failure** is when you can't convince people that your ideas are not coming from selfish motives.

## Ned

**Success** is being strong-willed and knowing what you want outta life.

**Failure** is somebody who don't wanna do nothin' to help theirself.

## Rodney

**Success** is knowing what you want out of life and not backing off - getting it and keeping it. Always going forward and not going backward.

**Failure** is to know that you have the skills and the tools to do better but you don't do better; and to know that you can get a better job but you don't get a job. Knowing that's there's nothing physically wrong with you, but you're just lazy.

## Terrell

**Success** to me is just being comfortable. I don't think that having a million dollars a year is successful. I think being comfortable, being happy - being able to enjoy your life.

**Failure** is not having done anything that you dreamed of doing. Just going through life just existing. That's failure.

## Ty

**Success** is to be able to go through life and do whatever you put your mind and your head to accomplish - to be able to say that I wanna be a teacher and have the chance to go to school, make the grades, graduate, and be what you want.

**Failure** is to give up and you more or less depend on other people to carry the load for you.

## Walter

**Success** means to be able to live 30, 40, 50 years and continue to do one job. So I think that's success for me. I haven't made a lot of money but at least I did my part.

**Failure** is a nonworking man.

### Composite of the Men Interviewed

A composite was developed as a way to synthesize the data and to review common characteristics of African-American inner-city men who believe they are successful. The interviews with research participants in this study asked what

characteristic or traits they felt contributed to their success. Answers to this question, along with general interview data, form the foundation of this composite. Based on this study, a typical successful man came from a father-present home or a home with an older male sibling. His father and other male family members were working and instilled in him the value of work. He began work at an early age as a matter of necessity and responsibility. He believed it was a moral obligation to work and wanted to model that behavior for other young African-American men. He was aware that his financial status was lacking but there were non-material aspects of work that kept him in the workforce.

He was a man who had overcome life-threatening environmental obstacles and had demonstrated to himself his competence and confidence to "make it." His work has been motivated by a need to make a social contribution and not to have a wasted life. He is determined to be set apart from the stereotypical inner-city African-American male. He values education and advocates that it is important to the success of an African-American man. He is basically a loner who has some spiritual grounding, primarily Christian. He has a positive, upbeat attitude and is persistent in maintaining work. He believes his life is not aimless and that opportunities are available as long as he continues to seek them. He believes he has missed a lot of opportunities in his life but he prefers not to dwell on them. He feels more productive looking forward rather than looking backward

## Assumptions Revisited

**Assumption #1**

African-American inner-city men are shaped by the structure of society (i.e, the availability of work, remuneration, opportunities by race and gender) and by their social environment.

The findings of this study provide evidence that these men respond to structural constraints in both negative and positive ways. Data reveal the use of drugs to overcome the hopelessness of graphic joblessness in the environment. Participating in the

underground economy as a feasible opportunity structure was also related to structural constraints. Hustling was sometimes considered a more profitable situation in the earlier lives of these men. This clarifies subjective notions about remuneration and opportunities by race and gender. For all of the men in this study, their social environment has ultimately had a positive influence on their motivation to work. For many, they are attempting to work their way out of that environment. This form of escape allows them to be viewed as even more successful in a social context in which they are an anomaly because they work.

**Assumption #2**

Beliefs about work are linked to certain kinds of situational outcomes, such as success or failure in the job market.

None of these men have experienced protracted rejection in the labor force over the past years that they were able to work. They have experienced positive outcomes in finding jobs which allows them to feel successful. While many of them have also experienced failure in the job market at some time, these outcomes are tempered by their internal drive to work. Because they have found jobs, they believe work is available to anyone who wants to work. The obtainable job may not be what the individual prefers, but they believe some type of work is always available.

**Assumption #3**

African-American inner-city men can be active agents with the power to shape aspects of their environment rather than passively be at the mercy of environmental factors.

The finding that some of these men are trailblazers in leaving the housing projects is indicative of their agency. Their uncompromised belief in their confidence to get work, and to do a good job, relates to the finding that they perceive themselves as successful in geographic areas where the economic and social odds are against them. They

demonstrated an overcomer's mindset in refusing to settle for the objective reality of the local labor market. Many of these men who have gotten jobs and left the projects are dedicated to changing the lives of other men who might otherwise become discouraged about work. This a further mark of their agency.

**Assumption #4**

Attributions and social cognition play a major role in determining how African-American men respond to their physical environment.

All of these men attributed their success to the fact that they work. When some of the men were involved in illegal activities that were more lucrative, they did not feel successful. Social cognition can be understood in terms of information processing, acquiring skills for daily life, and using mastery behaviors to be goal-directed in life. These men did not entertain serious doubts about their capacity to overcome difficulties. It is a quality of their conformity to this mainstream norm that allows them to feel that they have risen above many of the negative influences of their environment. They all reported that they were able to take actions to control their future. The chief action was to continue to work. Their conceptualizations of success and failure optimized their belief that much of what happens in their job experience is dependent on them and their personal characteristics. The fact that they believe they can find, and have found work, in spite of the objective nature of urban labor markets, supports this assumption.

**Assumption # 5**

Continuing encounters with the environment help shape orientations and the kinds of subsequent situations in which African-American inner-city men are likely to engage.

The general inclination of the men in this study is to work. While it may appear that the encounters with the environment do not shape this orientation, this investigation has shown that the confrontational nature of the inner-city sets up in them a need and

desire to distance themselves from negative elements that exist there. In this way, their work minimizes environmental hostility and allows a more positive sense of self.

**Assumption #6**

Orientations are the product of past actions and are guides to present and future action.

For all of these men, their inclination to work has been nurtured by their competence in the job market. Success in finding jobs has instilled in them a belief that they can and will always work. Moreover, many non-monetary needs are met through work. For some men, working met their need for social contact; for others, it was a need to avoid idle time that portends trouble. These men were in touch with their need to derive latent benefits from work, which they cogently recognized and expressed.

# CHAPTER V

## Discussions and Conclusions

The following discussion focuses on the two overarching theoretical frameworks (i.e., Wilson's theory of the urban underclass and the ecosystem framework) that provided the foundation for this examination of contextual processes of success and failure. This chapter set out to accomplish two goals. Its first goal was to evaluate the research findings, to determine whether the results were consistent or inconsistent with Wilson's (1987) theory. The second goal was to assess whether or not the ecosystem framework expands our thinking about contextual processes of success and failure.

### Wilson's Theory and Opportunity

Wilson's (1987) theory of the urban underclass and concentrated poverty proposes that opportunity in the inner-city is principally structural. Along with this, the structural origins of poverty lead to cultural pathologies that further impact labor force participation. Weak labor force attachment addresses the conditions of the working poor. In Wilson's theory, macrostructural processes in larger society and the social environment are the two sources of weak labor force attachment. Wilson (1983) has said that economic vulnerabilities influence attitudes, values, and aspirations in the inner-city. In other words, if those who are poor have low aspirations or fail to plan for the future, it is because these processes are a response to restricted opportunity, feelings of resignation, or negative personal experiences. Conversely, if those who are poor have high aspirations and motivation, it is because they respond to perceived opportunity. Wilson does not make the analytical distinction between aspirations and expectations that MacLeod (1987) makes. While both involve assessments of desires, abilities, and character of the opportunity structure, MacLeod suggests that aspirations have more to do with preferences while expectations deal more with perceived capabilities and available opportunities. In other words, aspirations are the individual preferences that are not inordinately impacted by anticipated constraints; expectations take constraints into account.

The objective character of the labor market matters, but research has demonstrated what Wilson has said - that people see opportunities in light of the personal experiences they observe around them (Anderson, 1990; Stone, 1992). Wilson (1989 in Moyers) believes that people will respond to what they perceive to be real opportunities presented to them; and that when the opportunity structure is opened, African-American males respond. While Wilson does note the value of perception of opportunities, he tends to assume that men will not perceive opportunity in areas which he characterizes as ghetto neighborhoods. Moreover, Wilson, Aponte, Kirschenman, and Wacquant's (1989) proposition is that the social perception of opportunity determines social strategies related to education and job search strategies which are likely to reproduce the conditions that produced them in the first place.

When the objective probability of achieving a stable and rewarding life, symbolized by the presence of stable working and middle class families, falls below a certain threshold, high aspiration can no longer be maintained and individuals begin to adjust to a condition that appears unchangeable and inevitable. Wilson's treatment seems to presume a middle-class notion of opportunity that values only certain types of jobs - those that mirror the middle class or the high-wage working class of yesteryear. This presumption disregards the existence of certain castelike elements in American society that restrict opportunity in ways that present an inferior opportunity structure that is fraught with adverse situational factors which do not affect Euro-Americans (Goodwin, 1972).

Wilson's posture also seems to assume that the agency (e.g., efficacy) that predicts work performance is strictly collective rather than personal. It also seems to assume that the most influential messages about work orientation come from the neighborhood rather than from the home, or even from some inexplicable yet persistent internal drive. This research validates previous research undertaken by other social scientists and by Wilson and his colleagues pertaining to the power of social perception of opportunity. However, there are some challenges. On this point, deficient opportunity in the social system was acknowledged by some men in this study, with implications that there is a very real ceiling on where they can go. This ceiling is akin to the social inequities that have

tempered their occupational self-development, but does not overshadow their attitude toward work or their efforts to control their success. Wilson's theory also submits that the structural changes in the economy that impact African-American men in the inner-city are embedded in the loss of high-wage jobs related to deindustrialization. Wilson's theory would then hold that many African-American inner-city males who are employed in low-paying service jobs were once working in smokestack industries. This was not borne out in this study. As a process, the shift from a goods-producing to a servicing economy began around 1948 and accelerated since 1967 according to Wilson (1987). The occupational distribution of the men in this study reveals they are all blue collar and low-end service workers, and for the most part, have always been. There was no evidence that the two older respondents, aged 50 and 58, were adversely impacted by the departure of manufacturing jobs. Walter, aged 50, was the only respondent who reported ever having worked in manufacturing in any capacity. The factory that employed him remains in its original location and he did not characterize the job as high paying.

One might argue that perhaps these men were unable to secure high-wage industrial and manufacturing jobs because such jobs had already disintegrated by the time they entered the labor market. The oldest respondent was 58 and the youngest was 22. Of the ten respondents who grew up with their father in the home, only three reported that their fathers ever worked in manufacturing or smoke-stack industries. The other fathers were service workers, mainly janitorial and related. This might prompt social science and economists to question whether the connection between inner-city poverty and employment can continue to be viewed through a deindustrialization lens. Because most of the research on the underclass has been generated using large northern industrial cities as the referents and indices to problems associated with deindustrialization, it may not be an appropriate model for cities and towns that have never had an industrial base but continue to have high African-American unemployment and weak labor force attachment. Moreover, if the sustained impact of deindustrialization cannot be measured as equally unfavorable for Euro-American men who surely must have felt its sting, there is even more reason to question its utility in the case of contemporary African-American men.

The respondents collective mention of transportation as an impediment to opportunity leads one to lean more heavily on a spatial mismatch hypothesis to explain their low-wage work.

A skills mismatch hypothesis might also be more appropriate since there are innumerable high-skill, high-wage jobs in the downtown Knoxville area which are accessible by bus line. The unfettered reliance on a deindustrialization model that Wilson imposes, promotes uni-dimensional thinking about what constitutes the service sector and the kinds of wages one can demand in various echelons (e.g., education, medicine) of the service sector. One might ask whether African-Americans in the inner-city are being discriminated against in the workplace. Are they being relegated to low-paying, low-prestige jobs with forethought? Are they now being forced to compete with Euro-American males and immigrants for jobs which were once earmarked for them? Are they accepting mediocrity? Just as MacLeod (1987) found in his ethnographic account of aspirations in a low-income neighborhood, in this study middle-class orientations toward employment could not adequately explain approaches to work. The men in this study had been widely exposed to men in their community who had not "made it." Nonetheless their connection to family members who worked gave them a sense that the opportunity structure was relatively open to them. They were also able to perceive work, even without the trappings of material success, as more intrinsically rewarding than either unemployment or participation in illegal activities.

**Wilson's Theory and Isolation**

As Chapter II stated, Wilson's (1987) concept of social isolation is a critical link between the macrolevel social and economic processes and the behavior of poor people, which involves microlevel processes. The inclusion of social isolation as a prominent feature of African-American poverty has been borne out in a broad body of qualitative literature as it was in this study. Because Wilson's conceptualization of social isolation is narrowly construed, social isolation would mean that these participants do not have stably employed parents, friends, and acquaintances (i.e., social networks) who represent diversified ties to job opportunities. Through the reported life experiences and

environmental conditions of these men, they have been disconnected from the mainstream. However, they have learned a vast repertoire of survival skills and have adapted to job-seeking strategies (e.g., temporary services, newspaper, word of mouth) that tend to work best for African-American men in their setting.

Peterson and Harrell's (1992) penetrating view of isolation draws attention to the shortfalls of Wilson's view. They articulate the danger of an alternative perception of life among the poor which depicts the city's poverty areas as agglomerations of workers or would-be workers deprived of affiliation with the social and economic mainstream. They sought to disentangle the empirical evidence to clarify the different aspects of inner-city separation and to determine along which dimensions urban neighborhoods are becoming more differentiated. This study reached conclusions based on Peterson and Harrell's (1992) isolation model which parallels other social science findings. First, physical isolation was an unambiguous index of separation. Second, racial isolation was a factor as reflected in patterns of residential segregation. Third, behavioral norms, evidenced in deviant behaviors such as drug selling and violent crime was an isolating factor that had driven out people and institutions that would normally provide sources of interclass contact. Fourth, social isolation, even for those who do not report having friends, is not necessarily a natural consequence of living in an impoverished neighborhood. Other avenues of contact, predominantly though the church, reduce isolation and increase exposure to possible job contacts and examples of middle-class values. Even for African-Americans who have "abandoned" the inner-city or never lived there, they continue to have a presence there for church services and some personal care services e.g., beauty salons, barbershops (McGary, 1992). This study does not support Wilson's uni-dimensional social isolation abstraction since none of the men reported feeling that they had difficulty finding out about jobs because of isolation. Instead, it supports Peterson and Harrell's (9992) multi-dimensional concept of isolation.

A finding of this study is that many of these men engage in self-imposed isolation (i.e., shutting themselves off) because of the crime that pervades their community. The possibility of depression and stress that could ensue as a result of powerlessness and fear in their own environment warrants more detailed analysis.

**Role Model**

Wilson (1987) is foremost in drawing attention to the salience of vertical integration (vis `a vis the departure of the middle and working class), to mediate the concentration effects of impoverished neighborhoods. One such effect according to Wilson, is the dearth of positive role models and the growth of negative role models, an argument which Marks (1991), has characterized as one that "seems somewhat forced" (p. 59). One might expect that with so little vertical integration in the inner city since the latter part of the 1960's, that Wilson's supposition regarding the departure of the role model would be correct - that these men would have little exposure to positive role models. Other researchers (cf. Rainwater, 1970) have made similar assertions. Williams and Kornblum (1991) distinguish between conventional success and success in the inner-city. It is the conventional notion of material success from which the role model construct emerges.

Duneier (1992) reproaches modern social theory about urban poverty when it comes to the role model paradigm. He suggests it fails to recognize that the working poor provide role models and contribute to the solid moral base in the community. Glasgow (1987) objects to the idea that the inner-city lacks constructive and positive role models because of middle-class flight. Findings from this study support both scholars. Participants in the study perceived there were role models available to them within their family. Their ability to identify people who had a major influence on their life, or someone who they wanted to be like, supports Duneier's (1992) findings. Moreover, findings from this study call into question Wilson's argument that the mere presence of the middle class role model is an effective force. These respondents would suggest only a mild effect, if any at all.

The idea of the role model has been a part of American sociological thought for quite some time. Most recently it is used in the debate over the future of the inner-city, as exemplified by Wilson. Duneier (1992) suggests that usage in this manner may be inappropriate. His position hinges on whether the underclass would be more inclined to ignore working-class role models (in favor of middle-class models) if the former are most likely to provide entry into relevant job networks. If contact between those who

have left and those who remain is inevitable because of family ties, friendships in the old neighborhood, personal care services, and institutional contacts such as the church (McGary, 1992), then the notion of the middle-class role model may need to be refined. This should not be taken to trivialize the documented findings that in urban areas, many poor children are growing up without adults who can model the convention of work. Young people do need exposure to adults who can be prototypes for "making it" without being involved in the underground economy. This study extends Duneier's (1992) proposed adjustment to the role model paradigm by finding that the working men in this study consider themselves to be community role models and/or role models to their family. They can also be referents for the middle-class.

Marks (1989) considers the possibility that the middle class role model paradigm is more attributable to a mythical past in which the African-American middle-class is romanticized. Alluding to E. Franklin Frazier's work, she contends that the small African-American "middle-class" of the 1940's and 1950's lived at the edge of poverty. Those who had money, participated in quasi-legal and illegal activities as did many emerging immigrant groups. It is the idealized piety and moral soundness of this middle-class that Marks (1989) seems to question. She believes that as role models, they may be suspect and their role may be overstated. The emphasis on their presence might better be reshifted to the importance they played in maintaining the tax base rather than on moral soundness. Wilson's (1987) construction of the role model linchpin of his theory does not address the structural issue to which Marks alludes. Instead it unwittingly solidifies the cultural deficiency of the poor, even those who work, by not considering that the poor can act in ways that are in step with mainstream society, and therefore imitable.

It is not surprising that one of the respondents in this study had a female role model. If more of the men had been raised in female-headed households, the number of female role models might likely have increased. Wilson (1989 in Moyers) recounts growing up in poverty in rural Pennsylvania, the oldest of six children, and being temporarily on relief. He was able to rise out of his poverty because he always had a role model - his aunt Janice who was the first person in his family to get a college education. She exposed him to museums and gave him books to read. His mother always reinforced

the idea that he would eventually go to college although they did not have the resources. In turn, Wilson served as a role model for his other brothers and sisters. He does not emphasize any job feeder role that his role model played. A review of his own personal experience should prompt him to increase the scope of his role model thesis.

**Social Networks**

Individuals often draw upon resources provided by family, friends, significant others and contacts that they develop through membership in formal organizations, to implement strategies of social mobility. Wacquant and Wilson (1989) have presented data to indicate that residents in areas of extreme poverty have fewer social ties, and because of the social worth of ties they do have, they have lower volumes of social capital. They also assert that ghetto residents in Chicago were less likely than other African-American Chicagoans to have a close friend, and that if they did have a best friend, he or she is less likely to work, is less educated, and is twice as likely to be on aid. The men in this study reported having strong networks, many of which they have cultivated through their work. I do not think this was prejudiced by the fact that six participants were recommended to me by sponsoring organizations. None of the six cited these organizations as being a part of their support network.

Every man reported having been helped to identify and locate jobs based on some informal social network ties. To suggest that the social worth of these ties may be deficient, as Wacquant and Wilson (1989) might suggest, is pejorative and demeaning. It also overlooks the fact that if one considers the truly objective nature of the opportunity structure, one could have mainstream contacts and still remain unqualified or unqualifiable for particular jobs. The likely result is that the jobs inner-city men end up with, irrespective of the source of contact, will be clustered in the secondary market.

Wacquant and Wilson's (1989) finding related to the absence of close male friends was confirmed in this study. It did appear however, that many participants consciously limited their friendships as a protective measure against being taken advantage of, or through association, getting into some form of social or legal difficulty. Unlike their finding, the men who reported friendships, reinforced that their friends are working men

and that they do not socialize with men who are willfully unemployed. So while this aspect of Wilson and Wacquant's (1989) social networks analysis does not hold true, the men in this study tended not to belong to formal organizations, other than the church. None belonged to any labor unions and only two belonged to neighborhood organizations.

**Wilson's Theory and Self-Assessments of the Underclass**

Wilson (1987) suggests that the mass exodus of the African-American middle-class and accompanying changes in the poorer inner-city neighborhoods have left behind groups that are collectively different from neighborhood residents of earlier years. Wilson's theory also proposes that inner-city social dislocations have been exacerbated by structural changes in the economy and that labor force market opportunities explain certain types of social problems. Wilson says that changes in behavioral norms have isolated those left behind, from the mainstream. On the other hand, Wilson (1989 in Moyers) is also convinced that the majority of poor inner-city African-Americans endorse the mainstream value of work and are critical of welfare. Although these participants were working low-wage jobs that would cause them to be classified as poor, and many did report experiencing financial difficulty, working was the preferred method to generate income. They sternly rejected the welfare ethos, which should suggest that in this regard they do not belong to the underclass.

It is charged that Wilson's (1987) theoretical framework of the underclass has caused some renewed analysis of how such a construct may further serve to demoralize and cast aspersions on the poor (Duneier, 1992; Marks, 1989). Duneier (1992) challenges the notion that value-laden descriptors and cliches importuned to discuss the departure of the middle and working classes from the ghetto, contribute to distinguishing the character of those who have departed, from those who were left behind. The men in this study talked about issues of decency and morality which distanced them from people, even people in their community, who do not share similar values. All of the men in this study perceive that they have middle class values, most prominently seen in their devotion to work and their faithfulness to their standards of decency and morality. Although occupation has traditionally been regarded as the key element of socioeconomic status,

the central issue for participants in this study was their behavior. As Jackman (1979) has advised, class membership vannot be viewed strictly in terms of shared objective characteristics, such as type of occupation and income. It encompasses expressive characteristics, such as feelings and beliefs. Similar to Jackman's (1979) finding, the way that these men self-define in terms of class membership indicates that class is experienced more as a social or cultural affinity rather than just as an objective economic affinity. This has resounding implications for the continued use of the term "underclass" as Wilson (1987) has presented it, since it conveys the notion that people who live in certain census tracts may be culturally deficient by default.

**Processes Related to Success and Failure**

A basic social and economic tenet of capitalism is that it rewards work with material well-being and success. Processes and behavior more directly connected with other structures in society influence work behavior and beliefs about success and failure. The power of Wilson's theory in this research is its explanation of the role of social dislocation in the inner-city, and his intended devaluation of dependence on cultural theories to explain success and failure in the labor force. Most of the literature on success operationalizes this construct in conventional terms that mean wealth, achievement in school and community, upward mobility, steady employment, and later forming a family. Less conventional success for those in high-risk environments might mean coming back from trouble and failure; defeating the failure cycle; beating the risks of gang membership; and overcoming a difficult homelife, educational delay, and social failure (Williams & Kornblum, 1991). This notion of success draws one's attention inevitably to contextual processes. How do inner city men who work for low wages construe success? Why do they continue to press for work although mainstream society and even many in their own environments may not consider them to be successful? What are the social structural forces and social psychological processes that have the most bearing on work and success for inner-city African-American men?

As Chapter IV revealed, research participants tended not to define success in material terms. Instead their conceptualizations of success were embedded in overcoming

social forces and conditions that are extensions of processes related to working. The way they become successful and "make it" may not be aligned with the views of the vast majority. Notwithstanding, there are powerful processes that prescribe behavior and thinking about work and success. This research uncovered five processes (i.e., latent functions of work; hope/hopelessness; nobodiness/somebodiness; power/powerlessless; and self-efficacy).

## The Meaning of Work - Latent Functions

As Chapter I suggested, work anchors the individual to society regardless of the job held; and the nature and function of employment in the inner-city are overshadowed by a persistence in examining unemployment. Wilson (1991) agrees that regular employment provides the anchor for the temporal and spatial aspects of daily life. Its absence makes life incoherent. Findings from this research substantiate the anchoring process that creates a link to success and failure. When men in this study recalled their dilemmas with periods of unemployment, they cited the latent functions of work foremost over the income. The feeling of not being anchored ushered in feelings of failure. Although the participants reported problems with the manifest domain of their work (i.e., earning low wages), a driving force for all of these workers is the latent functions of work. The latent functions of work have been given little treatment in examining the labor force experiences of African-American inner-city men. Furnham and Lewis (1986) cite five nonexhaustive latent functions of work, all of which were identified in this study and moored the men to work:

1. **Work structures time.**

For participants who valued this aspect of work, they expressed being able to orient their day and the use of their time in some meaningful way through work. They expressed having an orderliness to their day that dictated what time they got up in the morning, what time they ate lunch, and even what time they went to bed.

2. **Work provides an important source of social contact.**

Because by and large these men were unable to report having male friends with whom they interfaced, regular contact with non-family members was beneficial. This level of contact provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and even gave them an opportunity to talk with men of similar positions about issues that were important to them.

3. **Work provides experience of creativity, mastery, and a sense of purpose.**

Several men were enthralled by the ability to see something they had done. In instances where the work was not particularly satisfying because of work conditions, low pay, or strained relationships with co-workers, these men continued to value being able to use their abilities and their talents to make something happen. This connection between work and producing something or providing services helped them to feel useful and connected to society.

4. **Work is a source of personal status and identity.**

Several men were concerned with job titles and the appearance of status. Because of a perceived assault on their manhood, these men felt socially and personally validated by an indicator of status which they received through their job. Work gave them a sense of power that they perceived unemployed men in their communities did not have.

5. **Work is a source of mental and physical activity.**

These men expressed that not working would result in boredom and restlessness which they consider unappealing and destructive to the mind and the body. There was the belief that many of the self-destructive behaviors rampant in the inner-city today are the result of idleness and few productive things in which inner-city men can invest their thoughts.

In the absence of involvement with social clubs or organizations, which tends to reflect the situation for many of the men, latent functions and benefits of work become critical. There are many job fields and professions that depend upon the persuasiveness of these functions to keep positions filled. This is particularly true in many of the helping

professions where workers are notoriously underpaid yet they derive a sense of purpose from the work they do. There are many starving artists who persist in their artistic pursuits because they respond to an internal drive to create. Soldiers and police officers risk their lives daily to don a uniform for low pay in most instances, but high status and identity. These kinds of extrapolations are rarely made in our treatment of the working poor. Social science almost approaches the topic with a schizophrenic zeal. On the one hand, because this group adheres to the Protestant Work Ethic they are acceptable; but on the other hand, it is difficult to deny that people who work yet remain poor are suspect in some way. There must be some tragic character flaw or they would be more "successful." This study suggests that the confusion must be resolved contextually.

**Hope/Hopelessness**

Wilson (1989 in Moyers) believes that if you open up the opportunity structure and give people in the inner-city some hope, you will see changes. Some scholars have charged that inner-city men are locked into hopelessness and self-perpetuating poverty because of an autonomous subculture. The subculture is marked by fatalism and resignation and is correlated with a lack of confidence about employment prospects (Wilson, 1987). Hopelessness becomes an affective response to unemployment and the perception that goal attainment is short circuited by a non-sustaining environment. Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary (1984) defines hope as "A wish or desire accompanied by confident expectation of its fulfillment." In keeping with Wilson, my respondents report that hope is a salient contributor to their labor force participation and their perceptions of success for themselves and for other inner-city men. Hopelessness is connected to failure. They relate their feelings of hope to the perception of opportunity and their experiences of hopelessness to a perceived lack of meaningful opportunity. When they experienced hopelessness, it was generally linked to contextual community problems and negative expectancies. When they felt vulnerable to their poverty, joblessness, and their environmental context, hopelessness was a common response.

Hopelessness where the ghetto poor reside is pervasive (Anderson, 1990; Heintz, 1987; Majors & Billson, 1992). It is a paralyzing force that diminishes confidence (Pierce,

1974). When this occurs, there is a type of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and nihilism (West, 1993). These factors foster a denial or rejection of values and goals that may once have been important to African-American men, and lessen their expectations of attaining goals, just as Goodwin found (1972). Reports of prior participation in the underground economy, which this study uncovered, confirm this. Nonetheless, Wilson's proposition that low opportunity for stable and legitimate employment and high opportunity for alternative economies perpetuate weak labor force attachment, was not supported by this study. Incidents of illegal activity were episodic and augmented legal activity. There was also some proof in this study that the evolution of hopelessness is related to social isolation, both of which were outcomes of participation in illegal income generating activities.

**Somebodiness/Nobodiness**

Feeling known or not known appears to be related to the process of developing self in impoverished environments. The notion of self allows one to feel either important or unimportant. The social transmission of self is within the purview of what Wilson (1987) refers to as concentration effects of poverty. Living in a neighborhood that is overwhelmingly poor does take a toll on feeling important and valued. This study supports a finding of concentration effects in this regard. Men in this study expressed feeling like they were nobody when they were being raised in poverty, and at times when they were unemployed. They conveyed feelings of somebodiness with a job. Jesse Jackson's "I am somebody" slogan is not just rhetoric when juxtaposed with the experiences of these men's lives. It is an affirmation designed to minimize the effects of poverty and social stigmatization. These words go to the core of what many of the men in this study felt - that during periods of their life, their social and economic conditions made them feel like they were nobody. Somebodiness is related to working and success; nobodiness is related to not working and feeling like a failure.

**Power/Powerlessness**

Implicit in Wilson's theory is the powerlessness of African-American men in the inner-city to have strong attachment to the labor force, to form families, and to experience

an unbridled access to the opportunity structure. It has become common to view motivational problems of the poor as deriving from feelings of powerlessness to confront an environment that is perceived as bewildering and uncontrollable (Gurin, 1970). Glasgow's (1980) focus on the hopes, aspirations, and ultimate despair of ghetto men in Watts, Los Angeles revealed a sense of disconnectedness of these men from the mainstream which tempered their hopes. Powerlessness, and the social political impotence of the African-American community, promotes disaffection as hope is abandoned (Rose, 1971; West, 1993.). Men in this study reported feeling more powerful when they had some sense of control over the environment and environmental situations, and when they were working. Both gave them a feeling and perception of independence and power. Nevertheless, this study also discovered that working at minimum wage jobs sometimes causes a sense of powerlessless. It is a salient reminder that self-improvement, interpersonal relationships, and economic independence are at the mercy of the low wage. This can lead to feelings of nobodiness. This pattern should not be construed as weak labor force attachment.

**Self-Efficacy**

Wilson (1991) hypothesizes that weak labor force attachment will tend to lower perceived self-efficacy. While these men expressed overwhelming confidence in their abilities to get a good job, do a good job and to be an asset in the workplace, there is evidence that many of them have failed to improve their employment situations through traditional avenues (e.g., more schooling; training). They may believe their efforts will ultimately be futile because of the unresponsive, discriminatory, or punitive environment, as Wilson has hypothesized. Vicariously derived information may influence individual's judgments of their capabilities by comparing their performance to the performance of others. These respondents all reported that as African-American men, they know they are viewed in a negatively stereotypical way by society, and in many instances by employers. There is also the finding that traditional education has not always been a conduit of success for them.

Confident belief in their ability to be instrumental in controlling environmental factors that might predict occupational success distinguishes the poor from the nonpoor, and those who have failed from those who have attained somewhat higher status (Beeghley, 1983). The perception of ability and competence that an individual experiences is physically and socially contextual (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983), and emanates from beliefs about the self in that environment (Gecas, 1982). It has been noted that vicarious experiences are achieved through modeling (Sims & Lorenzi, 1992) which has special implications for impoverished men who may have few role models. Wilson (1991) theorizes that self-efficacy might be a useful concept to relate structural problems of weak labor force attachment and the cultural problem of transmitting self in the ghetto. For these respondents, their sense of self was inextricably linked to their confidence in obtaining and holding a job.

Self-efficacy is part of a broad literature that has developed around the issues of human agency, mastery, control, and performance feedback (Bandura, 1977; Gecas, 1989). Self-efficacy is a set of subjective beliefs about one's own ability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances and to achieve goals (Bandura, 1977, Sims & Lorenzi, 1992; Wilson, 1991). Therefore work, a primary component of socio-structural conditions, forms a basis for self-evaluation that can result in individuals either viewing themselves as active agents, or as passive subjects. The work men do, the methods they employ for initiating the job search, and the adaptive strategies they develop for survival (Gecas, 1983), have implications for how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived (Gecas, 1983; Mead, 1992). This study has shown that the sense of self is connected to the environment and to work.

Successful performance can enhance self-efficacy (Lorenzi & Sims, 1992) and raise mastery expectation; repeated failures lower expectations (Bandura, 1977) and increase feelings of futility. This study has also shown that finding a job after a period of joblessness increased future expectancies much as Wilson would predict. Low self-efficacy expectations related to job searching may undermine attempts at certain related tasks because of the subjective expectation that the skills required to execute the task are lacking (Rife & Kilty, 1989). These participants did not experience low-self efficacy in

this regard. There is no evidence that their perceived self-efficacy was low on any front. Accordingly, all participants expressed high expectations. Respondents earlier work experiences were the most influential on job-seeking and job-holding behavior and were the most indicative of high self-efficacy.

To allay the confounding that exists in social-psychological thought about the distinctions between self and self-concept, Gecas (1982) proposes that "self" be considered a process - a reflexive phenomenon that develops in social interaction. Though self cannot be empirically validated, it serves as the philosophical underpinning for processes that affect self-evaluation in a number of venues. This is borne out in the distinct relationship between goal attainment and future performance (Gecas, 1983). Beeghley (1983) offers an untested hypothesis, the covariance form of which is that the lower the social class, then the less people experience control over their environment, the more frustrated they become, the lower their sense of self-esteem and personal efficacy, and the more likely they are to develop patterns of coping behavior that have long-term nonadaptive consequences. One consequence is judging oneself competent or incompetent to experience success in the labor force, or competent to pursue upward mobility in employment and to become all they are capable of becoming (Moss, 1991). In this vein, respondents expressed steadfast beliefs that they have some measure of control over their environment and that they are successful. Beeghley's (1983) hypothesis would have to be rejected.

## Ecosystem Framework

The ecosystem includes the individual, the environment, and the interaction between the two. In the human ecological tradition, there are three assumptions about human-environment relations that can inform perspective about contextual processes. First, social and physical environments are interdependent and influence human behavior, development, and quality of life. Second, the environment is a source of available resources. Third, individuals can choose, design, or modify resources and environments

to improve life and well-being, and should do so. These assumptions extend from the worldview that humans can exert some control over their lives and their environment (Bubolz and Sontag, 1993).

There is a social structural nexus reflected in an analysis of microecologies and macroecologies (Ferguson, 1992). Much of the research that relates to the inner-city, African-American men, work, and poverty focuses attention almost exclusively on individual characteristics rather than on the social contexts in which the men are found. As a result, little new information is provided about the process of accommodation between the individual and the environment which is at the core of an ecology of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ferguson, 1992).

## The Microsystem and Work

The educational setting was a context at the microsystem level that produced long-term effects for the men in this study. Extant studies reveal that the elementary years are pivotal to a child's successful transition into middle and senior high school. During these formative years, teachers can successfully nurture and develop self-esteem, enthusiasm, and a willingness to learn; or they can focus on failure and what the child is doing wrong. Because the school is a major socialization agent (Blake & Darling, 1994), the child anticipates his eventual experiences as an adult. Background, personal attributes, and previous school experience contribute to placing the child at educational risk (Johnson, 1994). Risk outcomes have been disproportionately assessed for poor African-American children and hence for these men. Men subjectively experience the microsystem as adults in much the same way they did as children. It is difficult to overcome earlier environmental messages about the value of education for an African-American inner-city man. It is also difficult to undo the damage that was done in a classroom that was insensitive to his characteristics. This study found that messages from the educational setting are so brutal that men have difficulty dismissing the messages of inferiority they have internalized. Kunjufu's (1984) case studies reveal that as early as grade four African-American boys begin to show signs of a "failure syndrome" when they perceive that teachers are not investing in their learning process. He points out that urban youngsters

are often viewed by Euro-American female teachers as a bother and a threat. They are then subjected to placement in special education. This can later hamper them from acting on acknowledged needs for additional training and education since such schooling and training seems ill-advised based on their earlier experiences. Only one of the twelve participants in this study did not have a high school diploma or a GED. Six were high school graduates, five had one year or more of college, and one of the five high school graduates is currently enrolled in training. In the main, several participants who did not complete their college education or pursue post-high school training suggested that their earlier cumulative educational experiences did not predispose them to envision additional schooling as obtainable. Those who did go on have had difficulty overcoming the likelihood of academic failure that teachers implanted in their psyche during their youth. Although there were some positive experiences in the school setting, these experiences tended to be more related to extracurricular activities. There was a finding that the school system prepared them poorly for the world of work and higher education.

Family formation is another focus at the microsystem level of the ecosystem. Decreasing marriage rates among African-Americans is central to the underclass debate. Discussion of the rise in female-headed households is a mainstay of that debate. Many scholars postulate that African-American women are confronting a shrinking pool of marriageable (ie., economically stable) men who can support families (Wilson, 1987). Wilson (1987) presents evidence of this hypothesis and uncovers the dimensions of the problem through the construction of the "Male Marriageable Pool Index" (MMPI). The index shows the ratio of employed men to women of the same age and race, as an attempt to reveal the character of the marriage market for women. The underlying assumption is that a man needs to be employed to be marriageable. Scarce prospects of jobs for African-American men compromise their success as breadwinners and their traditional role as a husband (Anderson, 1990). Supporting a wife and children over sustained periods of time traditionally and legally defines the principal obligation of a husband. The acceptance of this standard as a demarcation of manhood has surfaced in various ways in the literature. This study found that decisions to marry are certainly based on economics but are not restricted to the old family wage concept. African-American men are looking for

marriageable mates who can contribute to the upward mobility of the family. They also subscribe to a traditional ideology that assigns the family provider role primarily or exclusively to men.

**Mesosystem and Work**

This study found that religiosity plays a predominant role in motivation to work and feelings of success. Scanzoni (1971) studied 400 urban working class households to examine the link between economic resources and African-American family structure and its corollaries. He found that 68% of the men credited the church with helping them to get ahead. As a purveyor of the Protestant Work Ethic, Scanzoni's study showed that the church was not only perceived as teaching them how to use God-given motivation to succeed, but was also thought to help them to get along better with all types of people. This study corroborates that finding. Moreover, in this study, religiosity was also a source of solace during periods of joblessness and a rich source of contacts to plumb job leads. For these men, who are often struggling to be viewed as successful according to mainstream notions of success, their religious grounding provided an alternative criteria for measuring their success.

Historically, the African-American church, under the domination of men, reflected the man's interest and authority in his family (Frazier, 1939). In this way, the church reinforced the male ascendancy and authority. Viewed contemporaneously, the role of the male in the church allows the church and the African-American father to be powerful and reinforcing socializers that fortify family and religious messages. The religious experience of African-Americans is significant in terms of family life, community life, social expression, political involvement, providing guidelines for moral behavior, and actively encouraging social progress. In the African-American community, organizational religious involvement has been positively associated with self-esteem and feelings of personal control (Taylor and Chatters, 1991). This study found that prayer is a coping strategy to impart a sense of power over the environment and to gain a sense of peace about overall well-being in dangerous environments. Religion was also found to prevent these men from retreating to a life of hopelessness and underground pursuits. Further,

this study found that active religious involvement deterred men from identifying with and internalizing elements in their environment. Religion allowed them to move beyond objective socioeconomic class designations and indignities associated with poverty.

**The Exosystem and Work**

Wilson (1989 in Moyers) has suggested that African-American inner-city males are perceived as threatening by Euro-American employers and that they are viewed as "representing the dangerous inner-city" (p. 75). He suggests that Euro-Americans overgeneralize this perception to all African-American males and as a result are more likely to hire African-American women, Euro-American women, Hispanics, and Asians rather than hire African-American males. He contends that this form of racial discrimination is increasing in the experience of work for these men. Perception is an important human ecological concept that denotes the process of selective response to environmental stimuli (Bubolz and Sontag, 1993). At the level of the exosystem, the processes that were most related to work and feelings of success or failure were stigmatization, dehumanization, and a distorted image enmeshed in media-induced stereotypes.

The discredited self-image of the African-American man results from the "stereotypical albatross" that African-American men must wear. They are seen as black first and as a man second (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 24). This study found that men try to alter the negative opinion that this society widely holds of them and to overcompensate by working harder when employed. In this way, they hope their role in society will not be circumscribed to some menacing persona that the media has promoted. In addition, overcompensation is an attempt to prove themselves as individuals and to validate the worth of the "black race." This is a considerable burden that leads to stress, anxiety, and other physical or psychological disorders. This study found that many of the men contend with burdensome issues related to the color of their skin. The badge of inferiority that black skin connotes was found to be no less harsh for the bi-racial men. As a matter of fact, for these men, being "forced" to renounce their "whiteness" has led to feelings of alienation, resentment, and mistrust in this society.

Participants reported feeling taken advantage of because employers know the "burden" they carry. They also reported being ridiculed by some men in their communities because they work for pay that is not commensurate with their hard work. Understanding processes at this level of the ecosystem contributes to understanding contextual processes of success and failure.

**The Macrosystem and Work**

The macrosystem of the urban African-American man exposes him to neighborhood crime and violence which are often a part of the opportunity structure and alternative "work" that exists there. Alarming crime statistics that describe the African-American urban man's dilemma cannot be singularly attributed to the twin problems of institutional racism and blatant inequities in our criminal justice system. Criminality is commonly a social symptom of misallocation of power and resources, processes of repression and isolation, and overcoming invisibility (Wilson, 1990). The linkages among race, crime, and poverty are obvious. There is a structural criminality that jeopardizes the equal opportunity of African-American men to achieve in an allegedly free society which has victimized them. They pay a high price in isolation (Majors & Billson, 1992).

Many men in this study could be seen as prototypes of the African-American urban male in terms of his relationship with the legal system. This study found that crimes committed out of desperation, economic necessity, and lashing out at the system have cost these men. Those who have criminal records or arrests often lie to conceal it in order to receive employment consideration. Conditional and probational employment linked to past criminality led to humiliation and stigmatization for these men. Criminality forced them to be artful dodgers during interviews. They fear probing questions that might uncover their criminal past which they often omit from their job applications. Fear of being "found out" is stressful. It is even more devastating to be relieved from a job with decent wages when the truth surfaces. This happened to Joshua earlier in his work life. Criminality limits the range of job prospects that these men pursue. Some jobs however, such as construction, do not seem to treat a prior conviction and incarceration as an issue. This study found that men who have spent lengthy periods incarcerated are more

distrustful of the system. They more openly express problems with authority and authority figures such as white supervisors and the police. In general, the "system" is viewed as antithetical to African-American men and their families.

**Ecosystem Trust/Distrust**

This study suggests that the phenomenon of ecosystem trust and distrust were in operation in the lives of these men. There were some instances in which they felt they were able to bring about changes in their environment for their betterment. There were other instances in which they were mistrustful of parts of the ecosystem because of prior negative experiences or because of the disapproving perception society holds of them. In addition to a sense of individual powerlessness, ecosystem distrust includes a perception that if one is not terribly careful, he will get into trouble (Triandis, et. al., 1976). This feeling was present in this sample.

Suspicion, cynicism, expectation of disrespect, and distrust of authority are variables related to ecosystem distrust. These variables are manifested in behaviors that are seen in the workplace (Feldman, 1976). Some of the behaviors this study tapped include absenteeism when angry, job turnover attributable to feelings of disrespect, and abrupt departure from the workplace. The everyday experiences of lower-class life are such that people from poor neighborhoods are inclined to perceive the system as unfair in its treatment of poor people. They might therefore be expected to be more likely than higher-status people to blame the system for anticipated failure. Men with immediate rather than future perspectives do not see a connection between their own actions and success in the world. They believe that most good things in life "just happen" or some entity like the government makes them happen i.e., an external orientation (Triandis, 1976). In this study, men were able to say that they see a clear connection between the actions they take and their success.

When they blame the system rather than themselves, it exempts them from supporting the norms of the system, and instead to experiment with delinquent behavior rather than collective political action for change. This study found that participants tend to blame themselves for failure on the job rather than blaming the system. Therefore they

fail to actively challenge the norms of the system. Their one-down position may prevent them from feeling a sense of entitlement to blame the system - after all, they do at least have a job. Outside of the work arena, participants blamed the system for many of the ills in the African-American community and in African-American family life.

Because of limited resources (Feldman, 1976; Triandis, 1976; Triandis, et. al., 1976) and the exploitation that it implies, trust is a luxury that most ghetto residents cannot afford. Recognition of ecosystem trust/distrust syndrome appears only once in the post 1976 literature and less than five times in the pre-1976 literature. In each instance, its use was in connection with an examination of employment issues of African-American men. The pervading sense of hopelessness in the inner-city environment and the determination of many African-American men not to work for "the man" (i.e., Euro-Americans) should prompt concern about developing trust in impoverished environments.

**Family as a Contextual Factor of Success**

The pervasive effects of poverty do not necessarily prevent poor children from developing into effectively functioning adults. Their resilience is an individual quality as well as a product of embeddedness in a social context that offers protection against forces that might adversely affect development. The family and the church are both protective factors and elements of a social network that buffers adversity (Barbarin, 1993a). The problems associated with being African-American and poor (e.g., aggression, impulsivity, substance abuse, diffuse racial identity, low academic achievement) affect emotional adjustment and adaptation to the demands of the environment (Barbarin, 1993b). Farley and Allen (1987) direct attention to the role of families in smoothing adjustment and transition to life's stresses and strains. The role of African-American families is typically discussed within a framework of social and economic well-being. Farley and Allen (1987) suggest that the negative views of African-American families as pathologically deviant provide little information about how they develop individuals and the community. This is attributed to a predominant perspective that African-American families that do not conform to conventional societal norms (i.e., conjugal, monogamous, nuclear) are deviant. In this study, deviations from that norm were reported, but they

were the exception rather than the rule. Even in the face of non-conformity to mainstream family forms, this study demonstrated that the family was able to be a powerful socializing agent and a conduit to effective adult functioning.

Men in this study reported high levels of family cohesion and perceived their families to be warm, loving, and supportive. Frazier's (1939) influential analysis of African-American family life in the United States presented a new panorama through which to view family organization. As he addressed issues of social isolation and minimal opportunity, his investigation demonstrates a direct relationship between social characteristics of the African-American family and social and economic conditions. He points out that for many African-American families, they developed feelings of solidarity and community interest under the authority and discipline of the father. For the men in this study, family structure and function were found to be salient contributors in developing ideas about work and in creating pathways and connections to community. Their family structure was a departure from what is treated as normative (i.e., female-headed) for poor African-American urban families. These men reported having a heightened sensitivity to work and issues of manhood because of the influence of their fathers. For the few men without fathers in the home during their formative years, there were grandfathers or brothers who were agents of socialization in this regard. This finding suggests that discussions of inner-city social structural problems should prompt social science to minimize the middle-class abandonment and the male abandonment theses. It should forge zealous inquiry into what I will term the male commitment thesis - that is that men remain to strengthen and chart the family path as their social (i.e., moral) and economic responsibility mandate. The belief that African-American fathers have willfully abandoned their families serves as a backdrop to characterize the poor African-American family as a tangle of pathology (Moynihan, 1965). Family, as a form of informal social support, mediates social and economic distress. Some men in this study lived in extended family households. Family members helped each other cope with financial woes, socialize children, and provide psychological support. The family transmitted religious values, encouraged hard work, and was important to these men in their construction of self. Like Frazier (1939), Barbarin (1993a) suggests that the African-American family today is a

source of help to stave off the negative influence of the environment and to minimize its isolating effects. Such was the case for men in this study. Families that are able to provide a safe haven and a nurturing environment mediate the exposure to or protection from debilitating environmental stressors (Barbarin, 1993b).

Wilson minimizes the role of family as a social and economic buffer against the incalculable risks of the urban environment. On the other hand, ecological theory (e.g., ecosystems theory) encourages the evaluation of relationships between external social systems and internal family functioning. Ecological theory assumes that African-American families encourage in their children, the development of behaviors that are integral to their survival as competent adults who face barriers related to racism and other ecosystemic factors (McAdoo, 1993). In this study, men proudly recounted the esteem in which their communities of origin held their families. They spoke positively and powerfully about the values that were inculcated in them through family interactions. The men who are fathers now strive to instill the values of hard work and decency in their children. They consider these values to be the foundation of work and the underpinnings of success.

## Recommendations

McAdoo (1993) lauds ecological theory for its ability to help describe, explain, and predict experiences (e.g., social isolation) that impact the roles of African-American men in their families. Nevertheless, there continues to be tremendous Eurocentric bias that limits our understanding of African-American paternal role functioning in the urban context, and the self-perception of that role. Research that is driven by an ecosystems framework might help to distill those forces impinging on the African-American man's provider role and his socializer role - those which are within the African-American man's control and those which are not. We need to unravel the ways in which structural problems and community disorganization may undermine his attempts to socialize his children. Equipped with this knowledge, social scientists can further develop tools to assist poor African-American men socialize their children for success.

Patterned ecological features of urban residence that influence the process of labor force participation must be studied. Since low-wage, low-prestige employment can ultimately foster a desire not to work at all (Sobin, 1973), social science must derive some answers about how to move men into the labor force and keep them there based on what has been learned about why men continue to press for work. This knowledge must be communicated to businesses, policy analysts, economists, and other who have an interest in the economic soundness of our country. In order to turn the tide of ruin and decay in the inner-city, some meaningful ways must be created to introduce holistic approaches to understanding work and conceptualizations of success. Granted, such approaches cannot counter pervasive human capital gaps that constrain men to low-wage industries. Nonetheless, it should not be beyond our natural thinking to believe that if we find creative ways to elevate the status of men engaged in low-wage work, we can garner some interest from the men who do not work. For example, could our government consider funding or subsidizing WISDOM (Work Indemnifies Self and Develops Opportunities for Mastery) clubs which could be a new spin on the Boys club, but for mature men who work? We need to research the viability of this type of organization, as well as other more sophisticated forms of "Big Brothers/Big Sisters" programs for adults. Our society has reached out in some organized and structured manner to every segment of the population with "exposure" programs - except for working adults who may need self-development assistance. This could combat the effects of isolation and move African-American men into new and challenging spheres of interaction that heighten their perceived personal efficacy.

Personal efficacy judgments are often made through social comparisons (Bandura, 1986). According to social learning theory, "symbolic modeling influences the development of moral judgments by what it portrays as acceptable or reprehensible conduct and by the sanctions and justifications applied to it" (Bandura, 1977b, p. 44). Add to this the dictum that "When in Rome do as the Romans do" and the possibility of rewarding outcomes for similar behaviors (Bandura, 1977b, p. 86), and we have implications for mentoring and role modelling in the inner-city. As part of a broadened research agenda that relies on programmatic outcome data (e.g., rites of passage

linked. These men see a connection between their ability to "create" opportunity by overcoming environmental constraints - by becoming successful in this way rather than submitting to failure. The latter would be active evidence of yielding to neighborhood concentration effects.

Some analysts have noted that Wilson's (1987) theory tends to overlook the ways that inner-city residents continue to strive for mainstream goals although they do not have direct access to the channels to facilitate goal attainment. The meager manifest benefits that the poor derive from their work do not prevent their firm embrace of a work ethos that is entrenched in American culture. Discussions of work and poverty that are undergirded by Wilson's thesis of the underclass must move beyond preoccupation with joblessness. This fixation detracts from portraying the heterogeneity of people in underclass census tracts and confines thinking about how to improve the economic standing of those individuals and families who have subscribed to the normalcy of work. It also results in sweeping generalizations of all people who live there in poverty. Wilson (1989 in Moyers) claims that many African-American men in the inner-city are unable to live up to the mainstream values they endorse because of the constraints and limited opportunities in their community. Despite the fact that some of the men in this study had engaged in illegal activities, they hold fast to the work ethic and soundly denounce illegal opportunity structures.

The insight I gleaned from my direct contact with those who are often considered part of the underclass does not blind me to the limitations of this small and non-comparative sample. Nonetheless, I hope that to some degree, this research has contributed to that body of qualitative inquiry that has begun to fashion a bridge between culture and structure in explaining the motivation to work in the inner-city. Such work provides keener insight into how the press for work demonstrates a theoretical connection between individual predilection and perceived opportunity. Understanding the linkage of agency and structure is critical to any on-going discourse of what the agenda for the inner-city should be. Moreover, the acceptance that contextual processes of success and failure are part of economic processes should drive us to want to improve community conditions, and in that way improve the human condition.

could contribute impressively to our understanding of how hope is manifested in environments with severely compromised resources.

We must also conduct more imaginative research on marriageability which is not delimited by traditional notions of marriage. Drawing from the comments of men in this study, it should be instructive to further explore men's perceptions of marriageability and what they perceive as their readiness for this institution. Moreover, it would be fruitful to learn expectations that inner-city men hold of marriage, especially perhaps their instrumental versus emotional goals in marriage. In the case of the working poor, processes related to mate selection should be studied to better clarify the goals of marriage.

## Conclusion

Wilson's theory may give the impression of excluding the working poor from his conceptualization of who constitutes the truly disadvantaged. It is clear that the structural origins of poverty and the social and capitalistic processes of poverty require attention to differences among the poor. Characterizations of the inner-city as heterogeneous are frequently only rhetorical given the sweeping generalizations of behavior in the inner-city that are more usually found in public discourse (i.e., media, magazines, and research literature). The working poor and their commitment to work are often disregarded in discussions of inner-city poverty because society tends to be piqued by more lurid topics.

Men in this study hold the idea that working in the conventional sense is important to feelings of success. This pushes them to continue to press for work. No doubt there is middle-class bias in research related to social problems, and confusion about behavior in impoverished inner-city neighborhoods. Either, or both, may cause some researchers to believe that men who work for "poverty" wages remain inherently deficient and are not successful when objective criteria are applied. However, when men in this study were queried about their perceptions, it was unanimous that work and success are inextricably

programs; manhood training programs), distinctions must be drawn between the passive nature of role modelling and the more active engagement of mentoring. In some instances this may require adjustment to nomenclature. We must endeavor to understand how role models/mentors can aggressively shape cultural processes, attitudes, and values that can influence the perception and nature of work for African-American men. Working poor men must be supported in their quest to be role models. They must be assisted to play a facilitative role in getting other African-American men to discern the value of work and to reject those "opportunities" that result in violence and imprisonment. This study should prompt inquiry into how to improve the position of African-American men in the workforce so they will not be driven to economies that compromise their future employability and their freedom, and ultimately make them even more distrustful. Investigations into ecosystem distrust, as a major variable of interest in analyses of African-American male employment is justified in this regard. Concepts in the literature that convey lack of trust are relevant, but lack the cogent empirical base of "ecosystem trust/distrust" as exposited by Triandis, et. al., (1976). Most related concepts (e.g., black rage, institutional anti-ethos) have been global assessments of the African-American man's aggregate consciousness rather than variables in employment/labor force participation studies.

The extant scholarship on labor force participation in urban context has been remiss in exploring latent functions of work for African-American men. This area is one of many that needs attention. Another area is hopelessness, which is thought to be a feature of the impoverished environment. Hopelessness is commonly viewed from a medical model which labels as pathogenic behaviors that are related to hopelessness. The narrow medical approach, rather than social psychological assessment, leads to fragmented and misleading interpretations of the willingness and desire of many inner-city African-American men to shore up support and resources that allow them to manifest hope - and work. New perspectives on ways in which men overcome hopelessness and develop currencies of hope are needed. Once this happens, there can be a shift from the current focus on palliative coping behaviors, to processes that support readiness to overcome imposing environmental situations. Longitudinal qualitative research using larger samples

It is critical that the findings of "success" and overcoming the lack of objective opportunity in this research not be used to justify or equivocate the political inclination that the "undeserving poor" in this country are singularly to blame for their problems and must therefore help themselves. More importantly, these findings should not detract from the problems that are inherent to the environmental context of the inner-city. There are many measures that must be undertaken to ensure that African-American labor does not continue to be exploited and underpaid. Only then can the integrity of individuals and families be placed at the forefront of a national agenda. We must retreat from the temptation to devolve to debating the national agenda in retro-arenas (e.g., blaming the victim; social pathology; African-American male shiftlessness; personal irresponsibility). Only solid research can temper the emergent mean-spiritedness by giving voice to African-American men who work despite the lack of objective opportunity. When given the opportunity to speak for themselves, they say loudly and clearly that they are competent, able, responsible, and confident that their work contributes meaningfully to a society that has disenfranchised them.

## Research Objectives Revisited

**Objective #1**

To determine how environmental features operate in tandem with personal characteristics to determine labor force participation for inner-city males.

The inner-city environment offers several alternative strategies for generating income, many of which are linked to crime and violence. I found that participants disdain the underground economy and cultivate a moral and social obligation to work. They report high job search efficacy expectations that seem to combat structural conditions such as immobility, residential segregation, isolation, and area joblessness. They consciously manifest traits, behaviors and characteristics that are potent shapers of their labor force participation.

**Objective #2**

To determine the meaning of individual characteristics on the perception of opportunity for inner-city African-American males.

It appears that several individual characteristics, such as a rejection of the welfare ethos, a need for independence, Christianity, a working male in the home during formative years, and social and personal edification through work, allow the men in this study to see beyond the confines of environmental constraints. They look at the opportunity structure more subjectively rather than being bound by the objective nature of the labor market. They perceive opportunity in terms of their willingness to accept any type of job that leads to honest money. It was determined that men who are able to distance themselves from graphic neighborhood unemployment by working and/or leaving the neighborhood perceive the opportunity structure (i.e., prospects for work) in more favorable terms. They consciously manifest behaviors and traits (e.g., positive attitude, persistence, hope, confidence) that are linked to success in the job market. They have somewhat orderly work histories and relatively short periods of unemployment.

**Objective #3**

To explore the context of African-American men's lives to discover how this context impinges on beliefs about work and success and failure.

These men have endured many personal and economic setbacks from which they continue to have the will to recover. They have overcome the odds of failure by persistently seeking to work rather than opting for non-work. Their determination to seek work in light of racial discrimination, the lack of highly specialized skills needed for the market place, and ethnic/gender stereotyping allow them to feel successful.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

# INTERVIEW GUIDE

# INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following guide set the course for interviews with employed African-American inner-city men. It provided the foundation for discussing contextual processes of employment in neighborhood context, to include conceptualizations of success and failure, and the experience of work.

## BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. What is your major source of support? Have you had any job training?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you married?/ Do you live alone?
4. Where did you live most of the time when you were growing up?
5. Do you own or have access to a vehicle?
6. What is the highest grade you completed in school ?
7. Do you have a telephone in your home?
8. Do you attend church or any religious services?
9. Are you a member of any labor union or community organization?

## CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SUCCESS

1. What does success mean to you?
2. What must a man do to be successful in your neighborhood?
3. Are there any successful men in your neighborhood? What makes them successful?
4. Do you think you are successful?
5. Why or why not?
6. Were there many successful men when you were growing up?
7. Would it appeal to you to stay home if you were offered the same amount you earn?
8. How does having a job make you feel? How does not having a job make you feel?
9. Do you plan to get training for a new, different, or improved job?

## THE MEANING OF WORK

1. Can you tell me what work means to you?
2. What are some of the things that make work appealing/unappealing to you?
3. Do you recall how many jobs you have had since you left school?
4. What are some of the reasons you have left jobs in the past?
5. What has attracted you to jobs in the past?
6. What are some things you consider important to prepare a man for work?
7. Have you done any of those things?
8. If you could have any kind of job what would it be?
9. Do you think you might have any problems if you were to try to get another job?

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

1. Did you have role models as grew up? In what ways were they a role model?
2. Did you have opportunities outside your neighborhood when you were growing up?
3. Did you go out of your neighborhood much when you were growing up? (Now)
4. Do you believe there are many jobs in this neighborhood?
5. Do you think your neighborhood is a good place to live?
6. Did you face many obstacles when you were growing up?
7. Have you overcome most of the obstacles in your life?
8. Do you think there are more opportunities for success or failure in your neighborhood?
9. What appeals to you about your neighborhood? What doesn't appeal to you?

## FINDING A JOB

1. Can you give me an idea of how a man in your neighborhood might find a job?
2. What strategies work for you to find a job?
3. Can you tell me how you found the job you presently have?
4. Did you have an interview?
5. How did it go?
6. Can you remember any people who helped you get a job? How did they help you?
7. Is there any kind of job you wouldn't accept?

8. Are you aware of any job or skill training programs in your neighborhood?
9. Have you attended any job or skill training program during the last three years?

**JOB CONFIDENCE AND EXPECTATIONS**

1. Are you confident that you have the necessary skills to get a good job?
2. Are you sure an employer benefits from having you as an employee?
3. Do you have self-doubts about you ability to do a good job ?
   - a. What type of job would you most like to do?
   - b. Is there any kind of job that is unacceptable to you?
4. Do you often feel that your life is aimless?
5. Do you spend time thinking about opportunities that you have missed?
6. Do you spend your time thinking about what your future might be like?
7. Do you believe that the actions you take can control your future?
8. Do you always expect to be a success? Will hard work will get you what you want?
9. Are most of your male friends employed? (Male family members employed)?



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# APPENDIX B

# LETTER TO THE SPONSOR

## Letter to the Sponsor

Dear:

Thank you for talking with me recently and allowing me to share plans of my research project with you. I appreciate your willingness to assist me. I indicated then my interest in studying motivation to work for African-American inner-city men to fulfill my doctoral requirements at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I would want to discover the kinds of problems related to their neighborhood context that may influence decisions to work for men who remain poor. You were approached to participate in this research because of your direct and influential contact with the population of interest. Moreover, you expressed a voluntary willingness to share your perspective about inner-city African-American men and things that may shape their experience with work. The purpose of my study is to learn about the experience of work and processes associated with success and failure for African-American inner-city men who are poor. I hope to learn how different inner-city men decide whether or not they will work (even if they remain poor), their experiences with work, and what adds to or reduces their perception of success or failure.

I would like to interview a total of ten African-American men who were raised in the inner-city and continue to live there. I am interested in men who work, but earn wages/incomes that place them at or below the official poverty line. I am interested in men between the ages of 21 and 55, who are not known substance users, and who do not depend on the underground economy (e.g., hustling, drug dealing) for their livelihood. I would like your assistance in identifying five such men. They will participate in the study by being interviewed by me. All interviews will be face-to-face and will be tape recorded (unless a participant objects to recording). All recordings will be transcribed. I will interview each participant no more than three times, depending on what seems most useful, for about one hour each time. The participant will receive $10.00 at the end of each interview. I am the only one who will have access to the tapes or any notes from the study. I hope you will find such a study to be both interesting and advantageous as you and your staff grapple with some of the same issues I am considering for this study.

It is impossible to provide you with all of the details of the study objectives in this letter, although I would be pleased to discuss them with you again in person as a follow-up to our first meeting. I wish to assure you that I have no hidden agenda, such as evaluating your work or the work of your organization. I also want to assure you that any future publications that may result from this study will fully mask the identities of persons involved for the privacy and protection of everyone involved. As we discussed in our initial meeting, you can assist me by (1) identifying prospective research respondents; (2) providing interview space; (3) introducing me to prospective respondents, as needed, and (4) "running any interference" related to the nature of my "presence" in the community or at your facility. At my discretion, but certainly not without due regard to the personal (staff or client) requirements for privacy, I would like to schedule interviews with men over a six month period of time. I will not complicate or compromise your work. I am interested in listening to matters related to topics of relevance to my study.

At the beginning of the study, and later in the study, I may want to talk with you and your staff about some of my developing ideas. I may even want to interview you (conversations really) about your work in the neighborhood and your perception of some of the major issues that impinge on work in the inner-city. At the conclusion of the study, I would be prepared to report to all of the staff on the findings of this study that may be pertinent to your interests.

I will phone you in a few days to discuss the project with you further. If you have questions or concerns in the meantime, please call me at 632-6501. I look forward to working with you in this very important project.

Sincerely,

Glenna A. (Gail) Mosby

# APPENDIX C

# INFORMED CONSENT FORM - SPONSOR

## Informed Consent for Members of Sponsoring Organizations

Thank you for allowing me to share plans of my research project with you. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the subjective experience of work among inner-city African-American men who are often classified as underclass. By interviewing the men over a period of no more than six months, I hope to learn how urban men make decisions about participating in the labor force, the experiences they have with work, and what perceived social environmental and neighborhood effects contribute to or constrain work. The ultimate aim of the research is to better understand the social construction of work in neighborhood context and to understand the contextual processes associated with success and failure in the inner-city. Within the six months, I would also like to interview you once or twice, depending on what seems most reasonable in order to gain another perspective about the neighborhood and some of the issues men in this neighborhood face. Ordinarily the interviews last between one hour and two hours. I will tape record and transcribe all interviews. You were chosen to participate in this research because of your direct and influential contact with the population of interest in a counseling or administrative capacity, and because of your willingness to share your perspective about the sample and things that may shape their experience with work. Naturally, I hope that you will find such a study to be beneficial and meaningful as you and your staff deal with some of the issues in my study.

I have no hidden agenda, such as evaluating your organization. This study is being undertaken to fulfill my doctoral dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). You can be sure that any field notes or other material with your name, or other ways to directly identify you or any of the participants your organization may identify will be safeguarded. All material will be kept private in a locked file cabinet that only I will see. This material will be kept for one year after the completion of the study and then destroyed. Any future publication that may result from this study will fully mask the identities of persons and organizations, for privacy and protection. Participation is voluntary so there is no penalty if you choose not to participate in this

study. I do not foresee any risks or dangers if you participate in this study. If you decide to participate, if at any time you do not want to continue in the study for any reason, you may discontinue without any penalty whatsoever. You do not have to do or say anything that is uncomfortable for you in any way. You may ask questions during the research. At the end of the study, I can report findings to you that may be of interest. In this way, I hope my work will be of value, and will show my appreciation for your assistance. You may call me at 632-6501 for whatever reasons. You may also talk with my advisor at UTK, Dr. Greer Litton Fox, at 974-5316 if you have questions about the study, its objectives, your rights as a participant in the study, or if there is anything you want to know about the project. The address at which we can both be contacted is UTK College of Human Ecology, Child and Family, 116 Cumberland Avenue, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-1900. If you agree to participate in the manner described above, please sign this form. You will receive a copy for your files.

_____ _____

Signature Date

# APPENDIX D

## INFORMED CONSENT - SAMPLE

**Informed Consent Form for Research Sample**

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) has approved Ms. Glenna (Gail) Mosby to undertake a research project to study the experience of work for African-American inner-city men. You are being asked to participate in this study by being interviewed and answering questions, and by talking about your experience. You will receive ten dollars ($10.00) from Ms. Mosby at the end of each interview. Participation in the research may help you to see some of the issues related to your labor force participation. Also, your point of view about work may be valuable in understanding what is needed to have more long-term success recruiting and training inner-city African-American men for employment programs. Participating in the study will not affect your employment. Ms. Mosby is the only person who will know your answers to questions or other issues you may discuss. Any material that has your name or any other way to identify you will be destroyed after one year when the study is completed. Until that time, all material will be private and will be kept in a locked file cabinet box that only she will see. We believe no danger or harm will come to you by taking part in this study. As a matter of fact, many people like to participate in research projects. Participation is voluntary so there is no penalty whatsoever if you choose not to participate in this study. If you do participate, if at any time you do not want to continue in the study for any reason, you are free to stop being in the study. Nothing will happen to you if you decide to drop out of the study. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer or to provide any information that may be uncomfortable for you in any way.

If you agree to participate in the study, Ms. Mosby will meet with you no more than three times over the next six months months. She will talk with you for about an hour each time. During your conversations with her, she will tape record the things you say in order to accurately get all of the information. If at any time you object to information being tape recorded, recording will not continue. This study will be used to fulfill Ms. Mosby's doctoral dissertation at UTK and may be used for publication purposes. Any publication will not have your name or information that can specifically identify you. When the study is over, she would be happy to give you a summary of the findings at your request. If you agree to participate, please sign this form. You can call Ms. Mosby at (615) 632-6501, or you may call her advisor at

UTK, Dr. Greer Fox, at (615) 974-5316 if you have questions about this study, its objectives, your rights as a research participant, or if there is anything else you may want to know about the study. The address for Ms. Mosby and Dr. Fox is UTK College of Human Ecology, Child and Family Studies, 116 Cumberland Avenue, Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-1900. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

---------- ----------

Date Participant Signature

# APPENDIX E

# NEIGHBORHOOD DATA

# 1990/1994 DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT
## ZIP Code: 37914 KNOXVILLE
## KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE COUNTY, TENNESSEE

| | 1990 Census | 1994 Update |
|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 19867 | 20193 |
| Total Households | 7872 | 8010 |
| Median Age | 37.4 | 38.3 |
| Median Household Income | $ 21454 | $ 23738 |

### 1994 POPULATION BY AGE

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-4 | 6.2% |
| 5-14 | 12.4% |
| 15-24 | 12.8% |
| 25-44 | 28.5% |
| 45-64 | 22.2% |
| 65-74 | 10.0% |
| 75-84 | 6.2% |
| 85+ | 1.7% |
| | 100.0% |

### 1990 OCCUPATION (Employed Persons 16+)

| | |
|---|---|
| Mgr/Professional: | |
| Exec/Manager | 8.7% |
| Professional | 12.4% |
| Tech/Sales/Admin: | |
| Technical | 2.2% |
| Sales | 11.1% |
| Admin. Support | 14.4% |
| Service: | |
| Private HH | 0.8% |
| Protective | 1.4% |
| Other | 16.3% |
| Farming/Forestry | 2.0% |
| Craft and Repair | 10.2% |
| Operator/Inspector | 9.3% |
| Transport/Moving | 4.8% |
| Laborer | 6.4% |
| | 100.0% |

### 1994 POPULATION BY RACE

| | |
|---|---|
| White | 58.4% |
| Black | 40.9% |
| American Indian | 0.2% |
| Asian/Pacific | 0.3% |
| Other Races | 0.1% |
| | 100.0% |
| Hispanic Origin* | 0.4% |

### 1994 HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

| | |
|---|---|
| < $15,000 | 31.9% |
| $15,000-$24,999 | 19.8% |
| $25,000-$34,999 | 17.2% |
| $35,000-$49,999 | 15.2% |
| $50,000-$74,999 | 10.6% |
| 75,000-$99,999 | 2.7% |
| $100,000-$149,999 | 1.9% |
| $150,000+ | 0.6% |
| | 100.0% |

### 1990 HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE

| | |
|---|---|
| Family Households | 71.5% |
| Married Couple | 49.9% |
| Other Family | 21.6% |
| Male Householder | 3.4% |
| Female Householder | 18.2% |
| Nonfamily Households | 28.5% |
| 1 Person Households | 25.5% |
| 2+ Person Households | 2.9% |

### 1990 OCCUPANCY STATUS AND TENURE (Total Housing Units)

| | |
|---|---|
| Occupied | 91.3% |
| Owner | 64.6% |
| Renter | 26.7% |
| Vacant | 8.7% |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1990 Average home Value | $ 54268 |
| 1990 Average Rent | $ 242 |

### 1990 YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT (Occupied Housing Units)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1989 to March 1990 | 0.5% |
| 1985 to 1988 | 3.6% |
| 1980 to 1984 | 6.2% |
| 1970 to 1979 | 15.4% |
| 1960 to 1969 | 18.0% |
| 1950 to 1959 | 27.4% |
| 1940 to 1949 | 15.3% |
| 1939 or Earlier | 13.7% |
| | 100.0% |

* Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race.
Income amounts are expressed in current dollars for 1990 and 1994.

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1990/1994 DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT
ZIP Code: 37915 KNOXVILLE
KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE

| | 1990 Census | 1994 Update |
|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 6546 | 6747 |
| Total Households | 3055 | 3133 |
| Median Age | 30.1 | 30.4 |
| Median Household Income | $ 6811 | $ 10805 |

| 1994 POPULATION BY AGE | |
|---|---|
| 0-4 | 9.7% |
| 5-14 | 16.1% |
| 15-24 | 14.6% |
| 25-44 | 29.8% |
| 45-64 | 15.5% |
| 65-74 | 7.8% |
| 75-84 | 5.0% |
| 85+ | 1.7% |
| | 100.0% |

| 1994 HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME | |
|---|---|
| < $15,000 | 69.4% |
| $15,000-$24,999 | 16.2% |
| $25,000-$34,999 | 6.7% |
| $35,000-$49,999 | 4.8% |
| $50,000-$74,999 | 2.2% |
| 75,000-$99,999 | 0.6% |
| $100,000-$149,999 | 0.1% |
| $150,000+ | 0.0% |
| | 100.0% |

| 1990 OCCUPATION (Employed Persons 16+) | |
|---|---|
| Mgr/Professional: | |
| Exec/Manager | 6.5% |
| Professional | 7.6% |
| Tech/Sales/Admin: | |
| Technical | 3.3% |
| Sales | 10.9% |
| Admin. Support | 11.1% |
| Service: | |
| Private HH | 1.4% |
| Protective | 1.9% |
| Other | 32.4% |
| Farming/Forestry | 1.0% |
| Craft and Repair | 5.5% |
| Operator/Inspector | 9.9% |
| Transport/Moving | 4.5% |
| Laborer | 4.1% |
| | 100.0% |

| 1990 HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE | |
|---|---|
| Family Households | 51.6% |
| Married Couple | 17.2% |
| Other Family | 34.4% |
| Male Householder | 2.8% |
| Female Householder | 31.6% |
| Nonfamily Households | 48.4% |
| 1 Person Households | 44.1% |
| 2+ Person Households | 4.4% |

| 1990 OCCUPANCY STATUS AND TENURE (Total Housing Units) | |
|---|---|
| Occupied | 88.4% |
| Owner | 20.2% |
| Renter | 68.2% |
| Vacant | 11.6% |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1990 Average home Value | $ 41749 |
| 1990 Average Rent | $ 164 |

| 1994 POPULATION BY RACE | |
|---|---|
| White | 16.3% |
| Black | 82.9% |
| American Indian | 0.4% |
| Asian/Pacific | 0.2% |
| Other Races | 0.3% |
| | 100.0% |
| Hispanic Origin* | 0.6% |

| 1990 YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT (Occupied Housing Units) | |
|---|---|
| 1989 to March 1990 | 0.1% |
| 1985 to 1988 | 0.1% |
| 1980 to 1984 | 4.3% |
| 1970 to 1979 | 38.5% |
| 1960 to 1969 | 22.3% |
| 1950 to 1959 | 16.6% |
| 1940 to 1949 | 10.8% |
| 1939 or Earlier | 7.4% |
| | 100.0% |

* Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race.
Income amounts are expressed in current dollars for 1990 and 1994.

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1990/1994 DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT
ZIP Code: 37917 KNOXVILLE
KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE

| | 1990 Census | 1994 Update |
|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 25362 | 25602 |
| Total Households | 11505 | 11619 |
| Median Age | 38.0 | 38.5 |
| Median Household Income | $ 16739 | $ 18138 |

1994 POPULATION BY AGE

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-4 | 6.1% |
| 5-14 | 11.1% |
| 15-24 | 11.6% |
| 25-44 | 30.4% |
| 45-64 | 19.5% |
| 65-74 | 10.5% |
| 75-84 | 7.8% |
| 85+ | 2.9% |
| | 100.0% |

1994 HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME

| | |
|---|---|
| < $15,000 | 40.7% |
| $15,000-$24,999 | 21.8% |
| $25,000-$34,999 | 15.1% |
| $35,000-$49,999 | 13.9% |
| $50,000-$74,999 | 6.5% |
| 75,000-$99,999 | 1.3% |
| $100,000-$149,999 | 0.6% |
| $150,000+ | 0.2% |
| | 100.0% |

1990 OCCUPATION
(Employed Persons 16+)

| | |
|---|---|
| Mgr/Professional: | |
| Exec/Manager | 9.2% |
| Professional | 11.1% |
| Tech/Sales/Admin: | |
| Technical | 3.0% |
| Sales | 14.3% |
| Admin. Support | 14.0% |
| Service: | |
| Private HH | 0.7% |
| Protective | 1.5% |
| Other | 16.2% |
| Farming/Forestry | 0.7% |
| Craft and Repair | 10.1% |
| Operator/Inspector | 7.6% |
| Transport/Moving | 6.3% |
| Laborer | 5.4% |
| | 100.0% |

1990 HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE

| | |
|---|---|
| Family Households | 57.7% |
| Married Couple | 39.9% |
| Other Family | 17.8% |
| Male Householder | 2.9% |
| Female Householder | 14.9% |
| Nonfamily Households | 42.3% |
| 1 Person Households | 37.9% |
| 2+ Person Households | 4.4% |

1990 OCCUPANCY STATUS AND TENURE
(Total Housing Units)

| | |
|---|---|
| Occupied | 90.0% |
| Owner | 48.8% |
| Renter | 41.2% |
| Vacant | 10.0% |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1990 Average home Value | $ 42250 |
| 1990 Average Rent | $ 221 |

1994 POPULATION BY RACE

| | |
|---|---|
| White | 88.6% |
| Black | 10.6% |
| American Indian | 0.3% |
| Asian/Pacific | 0.4% |
| Other Races | 0.2% |
| | 100.0% |
| Hispanic Origin* | 0.7% |

1990 YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT
(Occupied Housing Units)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1989 to March 1990 | 0.5% |
| 1985 to 1988 | 0.8% |
| 1980 to 1984 | 4.4% |
| 1970 to 1979 | 10.0% |
| 1960 to 1969 | 13.8% |
| 1950 to 1959 | 18.6% |
| 1940 to 1949 | 19.6% |
| 1939 or Earlier | 32.3% |
| | 100.0% |

* Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race.
Income amounts are expressed in current dollars for 1990 and 1994.

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# 1990/1994 DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT
## ZIP Code: 37902 KNOXVILLE
## KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE COUNTY, TENNESSEE COUNTY, TENNESSEE

| | 1990 Census | 1994 Update |
|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 1457 | 1547 |
| Total Households | 712 | 734 |
| Median Age | 35.2 | 38.4 |
| Median Household Income | $ 6554 | $ 9604 |

| 1994 POPULATION BY AGE | |
|---|---|
| 0-4 | 1.3% |
| 5-14 | 1.7% |
| 15-24 | 8.4% |
| 25-44 | 50.1% |
| 45-64 | 19.7% |
| 65-74 | 8.6% |
| 75-84 | 7.9% |
| 85+ | 2.3% |
| | 100.0% |

| 1990 OCCUPATION (Employed Persons 16+) | |
|---|---|
| Mgr/Professional: | |
| Exec/Manager | 7.6% |
| Professional | 23.3% |
| Tech/Sales/Admin: | |
| Technical | 4.4% |
| Sales | 12.7% |
| Admin. Support | 13.4% |
| Service: | |
| Private HH | 1.3% |
| Protective | 1.1% |
| Other | 28.6% |
| Farming/Forestry | 0.0% |
| Craft and Repair | 6.4% |
| Operator/Inspector | 1.1% |
| Transport/Moving | 0.0% |
| Laborer | 0.0% |
| | 100.0% |

| 1994 POPULATION BY RACE | |
|---|---|
| White | 81.5% |
| Black | 16.1% |
| American Indian | 0.8% |
| Asian/Pacific | 0.9% |
| Other Races | 0.6% |
| | 100.0% |
| Hispanic Origin* | 1.2% |

| 1994 HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME | |
|---|---|
| < $15,000 | 78.1% |
| $15,000-$24,999 | 8.3% |
| $25,000-$34,999 | 5.3% |
| $35,000-$49,999 | 2.2% |
| $50,000-$74,999 | 3.5% |
| 75,000-$99,999 | 1.2% |
| $100,000-$149,999 | 0.8% |
| $150,000+ | 0.5% |
| | 100.0% |

| 1990 HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE | |
|---|---|
| Family Households | 8.8% |
| Married Couple | 6.3% |
| Other Family | 2.5% |
| Male Householder | 1.0% |
| Female Householder | 1.5% |
| Nonfamily Households | 91.2% |
| 1 Person Households | 79.9% |
| 2+ Person Households | 11.2% |

| 1990 OCCUPANCY STATUS AND TENURE (Total Housing Units) | |
|---|---|
| Occupied | 93.3% |
| Owner | 4.1% |
| Renter | 89.3% |
| Vacant | 6.7% |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1990 Average home Value | $ 121014 |
| 1990 Average Rent | $ 222 |

| 1990 YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT (Occupied Housing Units) | |
|---|---|
| 1989 to March 1990 | 0.0% |
| 1985 to 1988 | 0.0% |
| 1980 to 1984 | 14.8% |
| 1970 to 1979 | 29.7% |
| 1960 to 1969 | 8.3% |
| 1950 to 1959 | 0.0% |
| 1940 to 1949 | 5.5% |
| 1939 or Earlier | 41.8% |
| | 100.0% |

* Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race.
Income amounts are expressed in current dollars for 1990 and 1994.

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# APPENDIX F

# REPORT ON THE PILOT STUDY

# REPORT ON THE PILOT STUDY

The purpose of the pilot study was threefold. First, I wanted to improve my understanding of the phenomena and theoretical propositions. Second, while getting acclimated to the logistics of the field (Yin, 1989), I wanted to refine case study methodology before undertaking a larger scale study to examine contextual processes of success and failure for poor inner-city African-American men. Third, I wanted to clarify the substantive frame (i.e., the set of topics to explore). In this way, I could field test a draft of the proposed interview guide and suggest other questions and lines of inquiry prior to interviewing primary respondents (Weiss, 1994).

Face-to-face audiotaped interview data and verbal protocols were collected. This pilot entailed two one-hour interviews with two working poor men. Research participants were classified as working poor based on federal guidelines. The interview focus was to learn how a contextual system of operation produces beliefs about respondents' evaluations of success or failure, and the extent to which these evaluations are related to labor force participation. Questions were designed to elicit understanding of: (1) the experience of work for employed inner-city African-American men; (2) how environmental factors operate in tandem with personal characteristics to determine labor force participation for working poor inner-city African-American men and, (3) the meaning of individual characteristics on perceptions of opportunity and success for working poor inner-city men.

The analysis and report of the pilot are issue-focused and generalized to tell a coherent story. It also describes what has been learned from respondents about men in their situation. In this way, a contribution can be made to our theoretical understanding. I used four analytic techniques advocated by Weiss (1994) to render the data more manageable after transcription and to facilitate coherence. First, interview data were coded to link them to the concepts that relate to contextual processes of success and failure, and to give it more meaning. Second, data was topically sorted into excerpt files for manageability and easier retrieval. Third, local integration was used to summarize excerpt files and coding, and to denote what respondents said and how its meaning was interpreted. Fourth, inclusive integration was used to weave into the framework, isolated areas of analysis that were not a part of the local integration.

## Research Participants

Respondents were identified in a convenience sample method based on three criteria to select cases: (1) respondents must have been raised in and currently reside in the inner-city; (2) respondents must be at least twenty-one years of age but not older than fifty-five; and (3) respondents must not be known substance abusers or dependent on the underground economy for their livelihood. Interview data were collected in three different settings (e.g., a respondent's home/workplace; an office) during two weeks. One respondent was given "lunch money" (i.e., $10) since he met with me during his lunch hour for both interview sessions. He works for a janitorial service that is contracted to clean buildings in downtown Knoxville. The other respondent, whom I initially met at a local church, invited me to his home for the first interview and to his workplace for the second interview. He received a letter thanking him for painting perspective for me on several relevant issues.

## Findings of the Pilot and Discussion

This study begins to answer the question "Why will some men continue to work even if they remain poor?" In the functional domain of employment, these men have solid convictions about their competence, which is derived from their mastery experience in the labor market. Self-efficacy allows people to create new environments. For both respondents, a meaningful and enduring reward for their work was to change their environmental context. High self-efficacious people persist longer than those with low self-efficacy and recover more quickly from setbacks when they occur (Schwarzer, 1992). Persistence was evident in Respondent #1's tenacity to be a member of the workforce after a comparatively lengthy period of unemployment, and in the resilience of both respondents to rebound from devastating family circumstances, social isolation, and environments of hopelessness. Structural conditions such as immobility, residential homogeneity, low educational levels, and area joblessness influenced contextual processes such as survival strategies, the formation of formal and informal networks, and family life characteristics for these respondents. A tentative finding of the study was that self efficacy facilitates commitment to goals (in this case, working) in poor urban men who want to have more control over their environment and contextual processes that take place there. Moreover, success and getting, keeping, and holding a job were inextricably linked for the respondents in this pilot study.

A second finding was that individual characteristics influenced perceptions of success and opportunity for these working poor urban men. They felt successful for distancing themselves from graphic neighborhood unemployment, the acceptance of which for them, was analogous to failure. They consciously manifested traits, behaviors, and characteristics that are potent shapers of their labor force participation. There are differences in personal and social characteristics of workers actively engaged in the job search, and discouraged workers who abandon the job search. The latter tend to have significantly lower job search self-efficacy expectations, more disorderly work histories, a longer period of current unemployment, and higher reported levels of depression, social isolation, and psychological discouragement (Rife & Kilty, 1989). These respondents reported high job search efficacy expectations, orderly work histories, relatively short periods of unemployment, feelings of hope, and success in escaping the severest form of isolation - the projects. This evidence suggests that job search behavior linked to confidence is influenced by personal characteristics that one shores up to overcome rejection.

For these respondents several characteristics (e.g., a preference for work over welfare; a feeling of responsibility to themselves/others; self-motivation; participation in school-based programs; religiosity; a working male in the home during formative years, and social legitimization through work) let them see opportunity beyond the confines of the "brick city" (i.e., the housing project). The extent of this linkage and keener insight into the array of the most salient characteristics requires more examination. Because of the predominant use of a medical model, troublesome behaviors (e.g., drug use) related to hopelessness are generally labeled as pathogenic. While the spoiled identity that emerges from the medical model could more appropriately be labeled as a problem in living in a non-sustaining environment (Longres, 1990), the common academic (and lay) paradigm is that the poor live in a subculture marked by resignation, fatalism, and powerlessness. The operation of hope/hopelessness, as a condition of contextual processes must also be probed

A third finding was that these men cognitively realized that deficient skills keep them in poverty, although outside of the ghetto. Nevertheless, they had no immediate plans of improving their skills. Although both men expressed specific improvements, no tentative plans are underway to accomplish this. Because it is commonly thought that people with high self-efficacy choose to perform more challenging tasks (Schwarzer,

1992), this finding needs to be better reconciled to personal characteristics and other concepts under investigation. This should uncover many processes that may undermine the personal efficacy that many working poor men need in order to change their class status. In this regard, there is much to be learned about whether the appraisals of mainstream America prevent the working poor from aspiring to higher economic echelons, or whether they resign themselves to a comfortable ecological niche.

**Limitations & Follow-Up**

The findings of this study were interpreted with the knowledge that they are limited on three grounds. First, the study involved only two working poor men which vitiates any serious attempt to generalize findings to any other group of working poor inner-city men. Further the respondents were not randomly selected from the available population of working poor men. Second, no inter-rater reliabilities were used to eliminate any possible bias in coding the data. Third, the failure to include comparison cases (i.e., non-working poor inner-city men) does not allow differences in conceptualizations of success, and any relationship that such conceptualizations may hold to labor force participation, to be drawn. Though it was not the express intent to do so, failure to make comparisons between the two respondents is a also a limitation. Nevertheless, while causal attribution is impossible, findings from this study do identify processes involved in perceptions of success and failure and relate those processes to environmental context. The study also identified concepts and variables that can be studied through further research. Implicit in conceptualizations of labor force attachment, the working poor experience weak labor force attachment. The connection between weak labor force attachment and social isolation is definitionally, and therefore relationally rather clear-cut. The range of relationships between self-efficacy, hope, and weak labor force attachment remain unclear although findings from this study suggest a degree of interdependence between social isolation, hope, self-efficacy, perceptions of success, and employment. Moreover, the degree to which social isolation is the linchpin across relationships (as has been implied in the literature), is subject to insider inquiry and requires further contextual examination. The pilot was a foretaste of such an examination.

Low self-efficacy is conceptually (Gecas, 1982) and functionally related to powerlessness, yet self-efficacy has not been adequately studied to understand African-American male labor force behavior in relationship to other salient variables, like hope. The fear of being

ignored, demeaned, condescended to, or rejected by prospective employers, compounded by previous job search failures, "may result in an almost phobic refusal to engage in this unpredictable and painful process" (Myers, 1982, p. 136) and may undermine hope and efficacy. Follow-up research should consider why or how the living conditions of African-American urban men predispose them to labor market failure or success. We also need to consider how the lure of the underground economy, analgesic behaviors, and perceptions of opportunity relate to cultivating efficacy, hope, and mobility in the inner-city. The follow-up study will attempt to answer these important question using a larger sample of employed inner-city men. Respondent statements revealed that they considered themselves to be successful because they are motivated to work, although they know they are economically poor. Axiomatically, using the same criteria, will unemployed men judge themselves as failures or will they consider themselves successful because they survive without participating in the labor force? This question must also eventually be answered using comparative data from employed and unemployed men.

## SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

A large amount of data was gathered from each respondent in order to identify various processes involved in their decisions to be in the labor force. The data also allowed me to become familiar with their perceptions of success and failure. It was feasible to work with just two respondents for data collection because of the voluminous amount of data, analytic intricacy, and my novice status as a qualitative researcher. While it has been acknowledged that this limits the study, the findings from these two cases address ecosystemic issues related to success and employment, and perceptions of why similarly situated (i.e. poor, inner-city men) men may not work. For this and other reasons, I believe all of the study goals were met. First, I developed a keener understanding and appreciation of the meaning these respondents attached to their experiences with work by placing the "context" within an ecosystemic and social psychological framework. The contextual processes that contribute to perceptions of success and failure for these working poor inner-city men were viewed through convex lenses of social environment and participation in the labor force (i.e. micro and macro processes). There were powerfully similar perceptions in the influence that the parts of the ecosystem play in manifesting hope, building personal efficacy, and undergirding expectancies about success and work. For these working men, since escape from the ghetto and work were invariant, success was measured by having a job and letting that job be the conduit to

remove them from a threatening and non-sustaining environment. Their departure was an expression of confidence in their ability to erode the barriers to opportunity erected by social isolation. This could only be understood by having a theoretical framework that allowed me to relate cognitive processes and behavior to the social psychology of the inner-city. Second, I became quickly acquainted with the complexity and the difficulty of case study methodology. Asking intrusive open-ended questions in a non-threatening and sensitive manner is a skill that must be learned. I was not prepared for the awkwardness nor the pathos integral to this type of exchange. I was left with pregnant pauses on several occasions as I attempted to determine the most appropriate probe to refine the line of questioning and keep it "on track." I also contended with the dichotomy of two vastly different respondent personalities - one energized and spirited; the other subdued and taking cues from me. This divergence demonstrated to me that although respondents may share information in drastically different ways, they are candid and they want their story to be heard. I learned not to "react" when candor revealed something that was either embarrassing or uncomfortable for me. I also learned not to be swallowed up in a chasm when a respondent shared something (e.g., death of a sibling; drug addiction ) for which I had no personal referent for understanding. I became acutely aware of how environmental distractions (e.g., background noise from ringing phones, walkie talkies, etc.) can compromise the continuity of an interview, but it was only as I wrestled with transcription that I realized I should have foreseen these problems. I did not. The pilot experience prepared me to be very specific with sponsors about the preparation/conditions for the interview space they provide, and to be attendant to this when cases are identified by convenience. Third, generative questioning was driven by the theoretical framework(s) which supported many lines of inquiry that went beyond the obvious "study-specific" topics. Questions tapped relationships, resources, and norms across parts of the ecosystem. This type of questioning also lessened the likelihood that during analysis, I would have data that primarily remained at just a descriptive level. In this regard, as I began to understand how neighborhood milieu impinged on perceptions of opportunity and success, I fumbled my way into other topics that needed to be explored (topics that went beyond just what happened to them directly). I wanted to be able to theoretically determine what events, activities, dimensions, etc. to explore, and to attempt to connect that data to what I already knew about theory. As I asked questions, I tried to think analytically about how to ask the same question in a different way at some other point, for clarification and verification, and to generate new paths of inquiry.

# APPENDIX G

# PARTICIPANT PROFILES

# ANTOINE

Antoine is a 42 year old African-American man whose trim and well-toned physique is a walking, breathing testimony of his self-discipline. He is a former Marine who followed that military path in the footsteps of his older brother and uncle. The extensive travel and exposure that his military stint provided is obvious as he shares about world events and cross-cultural problems. He currently does itinerant janitorial work at night and outreach ministry to African-American men during the day. He is an ordained minister in the Church of God in Christ, having received his "calling" at the age of 22. He has been in Knoxville 15 years.

Antoine was raised in Jackson, Mississippi where he developed a love for music. At an early age he discovered that he had natural talent for the saxophone and the piano. His decision to use his musical abilities in his school band allowed him to travel extensively throughout his home state to compete in various competitions. His mother did domestic work for the "richest white man in town" and his grandmother worked in the same capacity for the District Attorney. He was able to have meaningful contact with many of the white children as he was growing up because of his mother and his grandmother's positions. Both of these women were highly respected in their community. His family started out as sharecroppers. Although Antoine has always lived in an urban area, he chopped cotton as he was growing up to earn extra money. He describes his family as very poor when he was a child. His mother had an eighth grade education, but an infinite wisdom and dignity. She instilled a quest for excellence in him. Antoine attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for three years and had to drop out when his money ran out. He also attended a small Bible College in Alabama for two years. He is still stunned by the problems and closed doors he encounters in the workplace because he does not have the degree. Antoine's father was in the home while he was growing up and passively participated in raising Antoine and his four brothers and three sisters, all of whom continue to live in Mississippi. His father, who was an alcoholic, always worked and provided for the family. His father died when Antoine was fifteen. His mother never remarried. His father's death increased the family's poverty threshold. Antoine began to play his music to earn money to help the family. When he graduated from high school, he opted for the military. He believed the American dream was to go to the military, come out, go to college, and get a good job. His dream has been challenged but he believes his life is worthwhile and meaningful. Antoine has been married for 20 years to a woman he met while they were both in college. They have a ten year old son on whom Antoine dotes. He helps him do the goal-setting that he never learned to do until he was in his 30's. Antoine's wife is a school teacher who is embarrassed by his lack of a "real" job. This disturbs Antoine but he believes the cycle of her contempt is about to be broken. He has accepted a job in sales which should allow him to contribute more to his family.

# CARLOS

Carlos is a 38 year old African-American man who is articulate, polite, and in possession of exceptional people skills. He has some excess girth around his midriff which makes him seem Santa-like with his red work jacket. He says the edge in his voice, which sometimes surfaces, comes from the harsh environment in which he grew up. All of our interviews took place at his work station as a cashier for a downtown parking service. He tends to rub his left leg while talking to ease a military related injury. He feels unappreciated and condescended to on his job by the white supervisors. He is bored by the lack of challenge in his present position.

Carlos was raised in a housing project in Nashville which he describes as very dangerous. He escaped that environment by going to the Army. He credits the Army with saving his life and paving the way for him to have an education. He received his GED in the Army and has always wanted to get his four year degree. He also values his military experience because it took him out of the throes of poverty and opened up worlds to him that he otherwise would never have known. His experiences in the military also helped him to gain some new perspectives on poverty and government assistance since he saw poor people in foreign countries forced to eke out an existence. He believes by and large that people who do not work are just lazy and should not receive government intervention. He considers a non-working man to be anathema to society. When he was growing up, his father worked in a factory but engaged in illegal activities on the side. Carlos was often entreated to help his father in his nightclub. He realized at an early age that if he stayed in that environment, he would perish.

His father left the home when Carlos was a teenager. The disappointment and the anger over the departure resounds in his voice. He has two younger brothers and a younger sister. He is angered by his brother's marriage to a white woman. For a long time, he blamed white people for his struggle and for his parents poverty and dismal living conditions. He feels tremendous remorse that he did not complete his degree before his mother's death two years ago. He would have been the first member of his immediate family to accomplish that feat. He moved to Knoxville nearly nine years ago to complete his college education. He completed an associate degree in biology from Alabama A&M University.

Carlos has never married. He lives in an apartment with his common law wife of seven years. She is the mother of his six year old son. He has a nineteen year old daughter who lives with her mother in Michigan. Fathering a son has prevented him from completing his education since he has to work two jobs to make ends meet. He also works as a counselor in a drug rehab program for adolescent boys. He attempts to instill in these young men a solid work ethic and the belief that education is the only door to unbridled opportunity.

# DANIEL

Daniel is a handsome thirty year old African-American man who appears to be only nineteen years old. He is reserved yet outgoing, taking the initiative to speak to anyone who is near. I met him in this manner. His dress was extremely neat and conservative during our interview sessions. His hair is neatly tapered with a conservative part on the left side. He has no facial fair on his dark brown skin, with the exception of a very faint mustache. Despite his clean cut appearance, he believes that as an African-American man, he has been stereotyped as a drug dealer because he wears nice tennis shoes and some modest jewelry. He also accepts that stereotypical assessments challenge opportunities available to African-American men. He was born and raised in New College Hills housing project. Although Knoxville College, an Historically Black College, was within walking distance of his home, he never considered that he could go to college because of his family's poverty. He lived with his mother and six siblings from age five until age twenty three. He has not seen nor talked with his father for twenty years. His participation in a school-based job training program, and working older brothers in the home, mitigated the dearth of working male role models in his neighborhood. His desire to work led him to establish friendships with other young men who were working. After having worked a series of odd jobs during and after high school, (some of which were arranged through Knoxville Community Development Corporation), he landed a steady job which he worked for nearly two years. All of his jobs have been in the service sector (e.g., food handler, custodian, yard worker, etc.), but mainly janitorial work, which he said he enjoys. Daniel had a lengthy unemployment (c. a year) when he was still living with his family. His interviews reveal that there were social psychological issues related to his joblessness. He has not been fired or laid off from a job over the past five years. He is unwavering in his belief that kind of work is better than idleness.

Daniel has never been married, lives alone, and has no children. His job with a janitorial service that cleans offices has lasted for three years. He has been in his present inner-city neighborhood in rental housing for two and a half years. It is a quiet neighborhood where people respect each other and mind their business, which is the extreme opposite of his experience in the housing project where he was raised. His full-time salary is less than $300 bi-weekly in take-home pay. He has no benefits (e.g., annual leave, sick leave, health insurance). He does not receive any type of public assistance. He has never owned a vehicle. He believes he is capable of taking care of a family at his present salary if he were to marry. In his thinking, income does not arbitrarily place a man in a particular socioeconomic class. Instead, it is the manner in which he uses his money. He would like to learn to type and apply those skills to a job field. He has lost touch with many of his old friends. Daniel's mother and siblings are dispersed throughout subsidized housing in Knoxville.

# GABBY

Gabby is a 30 year old African-American man who is very warm and accommodating. He is soft-spoken and uses language and mannerisms that make him seem old beyond his years. He was born in Knoxville but moved to Illinois with his family when he was very young. While he was growing up there, he played football and ran track and lived a rather sylvan life despite his poverty. The death of his father when he was 14 interrupted that. His mother and two sisters and one brother moved to a housing project where Gabby managed to avoid trouble. His mother died of complications related to diabetes when Gabby was 15, forcing him to return to Knoxville. He is presently working through a temporary service and manages to have some regularity in his work. The fact that he has a vehicle allows him to accept a wide range of job assignments.

Gabby now lives with his grandmother and two aunts in house in East Knoxville. His grandfather, who had a positive influence on his life, died three years ago. One of Gabby's younger brothers is a captain in the Marine Corps. Another younger brother has not worked for the past two years and shows no interest in working.

Gabby graduated from Rule High School but took no job related training while he was there. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia for one year through the generosity of a patron uncle. He decided not to return to school because he was "lovesick" and felt intimidated by the college environment. It is a decision he regrets and the most profound missed opportunity that he was able to recall.

Gabby would like to return to school and study to become an electrician. He readily admits that is a remote possibility because of his financial obligations, the principal of which is his seven children. His four sons and three daughter range in ages from 2 to 9 and are fathered by three different women. All but one of his children live in local housing projects which distresses him. He does not like the violence which is becoming a daily part of their lives.

Gabby expects to be offered a permanent position as a result of a temporary job he has been working. He anticipates that with the salary increase, he will be able to rent and renovate a home in his present neighborhood so he can fulfill the dream of having all seven of his children living with him.

# IVAN

Ivan is a wiry 58 year old African-American man who spent his early years in Memphis, Tennessee; Atlanta, Georgia, and Charlotte, North Carolina. He is a tall, lithe man who walks and talks slowly as though he wants to maintain a reserve of energy. He came to Knoxville with his family when he was 18 years old. He and his two sisters and one brother settled down on Knoxville's eastside. His earlier years were much like his initial years in Knoxville - living in a neighborhood where there was vertical integration. His father did a variety of odd jobs but always worked steadily and took care of his family.

Ivan's mother worked in a factory where they manufactured industrial garments. While Ivan is currently awaiting a transfer from the county system to go into a janitorial job, he does odds jobs. He identifies some jobs through temporary services, but word of mouth and the strength of his reputation seem to work better for him. He has found that the temporary services often make him wait long periods of time to receive payment for the work he has done. He is anxious to return to the routine and the certainty of a full-time, regular job. He presently lives in College Homes housing project with a woman who has been his companion for the past decade. He has been living in the housing projects with her for the past eight years and does not expect to leave anytime soon. He considers it a cost-effective place to live.

Ivan had always wanted to be a truck driver when he was a child. He lived that dream as a long distance truck driver whose eighteen wheeler crossed the southeast countless times delivering produce to large vendor markets. He remained on this job for 21 years. He was displaced from that job when the company went to contract labor. He was ready to abandon that job anyway because his age made it difficult for him to maintain the hectic pace. He held an assortment of jobs since that time, such as yard work, cleaning planes at the airport, and construction work until he landed a job in food services with the county.

Ivan has been working since he was ten years old. His first jobs were cutting grass so he could earn money to go to the movies and enjoy other social activities that his parents could not afford for him to do. Ivan dropped out of school in the tenth grade but does not feel that his lack of education has hurt his career or his job prospects to any appreciable degree. He was drafted and served a tour of duty in the Army but failed to get a GED while he was in the military. Ivan's nineteen year old son is in juvenile lock-up serving eighteen months for theft. He blames his son's juvenile delinquency on his frequent job-related absences. He says he realizes that a boy needs his father to be around - just like he had his father. Ivan and his wife divorced when his son was four years old. He has a thirty two year old daughter for whom he considers himself a role model.

# JOSHUA

Joshua is a 45 year old African-American man who grew up in Lonsdale, having lived both on the "hill" and in the projects for a brief period. This former Viet Nam army veteran still maintains a certain athletic bearing despite a back injury that has rendered him permanently disabled. He has not worked a full-time job since 1990 when he sustained his back injury while on the job. He receives a disability check each month which supplements the odd jobs that he regularly picks up around the neighborhood. He also is paid to drive a bus for a local ministry that provides services to the sick and the shut-in. In this capacity, he also transports community people to the grocery store and to places where they can receive various social services.

Joshua is an historian of sorts, being able to recall and topically analyze local and national events. He volunteered for the army when he was 18 in search of opportunity that he did not see in his community. He is very highly politicized and claims to be a former revolutionary who was connected to militant organizations such as the Blank Panthers. His rejection of the "system" was the result of a disconcerting tour of duty in Viet Nam, during which he felt that African-American men were belittled, used, and deceived. He earned his GED while he was in the military and attended Knoxville college for one year on the GI Bill after he completed his tour of duty. He has also attended a trade school on the GI Bill but did not graduate.

Joshua served three years of a twelve year prison sentence on a breaking and entering charge which was an attack against the system. While he was imprisoned, he felt hopeless and desperate. When he was finally released, his pent-up anger and his continuing disillusionment with the system led him to the underground economy for his livelihood. He rejected the work ethic that his father and grandfather had imparted to him in favor of the illicit work sphere. As a drug dealer, he was able to have money, respect, and leisure, all of which were important to him. He began to use drugs and became passive and sullen. As he looked at himself one day in the mirror with dirty clothes and matted hair, he realized he had to change his life. He credits his renewed commitment to the work ethic and community service to his Christian conversion.
Joshua has been married for eighteen years. He has a nineteen year old son who is in college, and a twelve year old daughter, both of whom live with him. He has three other children who live their mother in Virginia. He is grateful to his wife for her diligent efforts to secure his early release from prison. His wife is a teacher's assistant at a local Christian school. He belongs to several community organizations and has been instrumental in starting and preserving neighborhood watch groups and other community empowerment organizations.

# LORENZO

Lorenzo is a 38 year-old African-American male who is intense, introspective, and quite articulate. The deliberateness of his speech and his uncanny ability to construct compelling metaphors might lead the listener to believe his history is contrived. He is poised, freely punctuating his speech with laughter. He has a youthful exuberance that stands in stark contrast to his profound wisdom - the two converge to make him ageless. His ability to paint a picture with a paintbrush of words and lush imagery momentarily took me into a neighborhood and a set of accompanying circumstances that only one who has lived there can do. Lorenzo moved with his family at age five to the Lonsdale community in a low-income housing project. He also lived there during the earliest stages of his marriage. His father was in the home and working during Lorenzo's youth. Lorenzo married his high-school sweetheart after their graduation in 1976. He moved into his own home in East Knoxville with his wife and son at age nineteen. He is buying that home through a special program launched by the Knoxville Community Development Corporation. He and his wife have five children. His oldest daughter is a first year engineering student on full scholarship at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Lorenzo's work history spans twenty years and includes five steady jobs. He has been consistently employed since his high school graduation with only transitional periods of unemployment, the longest of which was eight months. He participated in a Summer Youth Employment program in his teen years. His first full-time job in the service sector came from contacts he made during his involvement in that program. His second job was one that his father had held and was forced to leave after a neighborhood altercation resulted in an assault charge and subsequent imprisonment. Lorenzo approached his father's employer to ask if he could assume his father's duties. Because his father had been a good worker there, the employer agreed to hire him. He stayed five years. He has been in his present custodial position at a local high school for ten years. He works full-time and receives food stamps. He belongs to several community-based organizations and holds leadership positions in many of them. He is an advocate for parental involvement in their children's education. Although he has no specialized training beyond high school, his goal is to attend divinity school within the next two years and work full-time in ministry. His wife has been a homemaker throughout their nineteen year marriage. They believe the contributions she makes to their children by remaining home, surpasses any income earning potential she might have in the open market. This joint decision has resulted in all of their children being academic achievers. Lorenzo accepts his poverty status with dignity. He assesses his real success as his commitment to work. He and three of his siblings help tenants in housing projects to find other housing. Two of his brothers were murdered in projects. He is compelled to help residents develop coping and conflict resolution skills that might avert that occurrence in their lives.

# NED

Ned is a 39 year old African-American man whose appearance challenges his assertion that he has not had many obstacles in his life. His 5'2" frames appears extremely frail and unable to support his booming voice and deep throaty laugh. His missing front teeth do not prevent him from smiling warmly. He is currently in his ninth year as a delivery man for Baptist Hospital. He does not have, nor has he ever had a savings account or a checking account.

Ned was born and raised in East Knoxville with his younger sister and brother. During his youth, many of the men in his neighborhood had stable jobs in order to have homes and take care of their children. He sadly recounts many of the changes that have overtaken his neighborhood - changes that tend to typify social dislocations in the inner-city. The sounds of violence permeate the formerly quiet neighborhood where neighbors once watched out for each other "like family." That family ethos has been suspended by a fear that grips the community.

Ned graduated from Austin East High School in 1974. While he was there, he learned the vocational trade of cabinet-making. He has never had a paid job that has allowed him to use that skill. He obtained his first job at the age of 16 and has had only a few interruptions in his work history since that time. He was receiving on the job training to be a printer's assistant, a job that he enjoyed, when he began to develop unexplained skin lesions. Doctors eventually discovered he was allergic to the chemicals used to clean the machine. He was forced to abandon that job to preserve his health. He found the job at Baptist Hospital two weeks later. He was hired for that job through a temporary service. He was hired permanently after two years. Since he does not own a car, he takes the bus to work which requires that he walk some distance to actually get to his job.

Ned's father worked two jobs to provide for his family and insisted that Ned work for whatever he wanted. His parents divorced when Ned was in his early twenties. His mother has not remarried and she and Ned live together. Ned has never married but is the father of four year old twin sons who live with their mother in Brownsville, Tennessee. He swells with pride as he talks about his children and admits that he spends most of his money on them so they can have all that they need. He has no immediate plans to marry the mother of his children. It is a priority that he visits them at least twice a month which places a strain on his meager salary. He would like to learn a new trade, perhaps welding, so he can earn more money. He has not taken any steps to investigate the possibility of enrolling in school. He is concerned about having to quit his job in order to go to school. He does not consider that to be a viable option at this time.

# RODNEY

Rodney is a 27 year old bi-racial man. He grew up with a lot of anger and bitterness related to the ridicule he experienced as a bi-racial child. He was called names and sometimes made to feel like he did not belong to either racial group. Although he once wanted to be white, he has accepted that this society will never let him choose. It will not even let him choose just to be himself, without a color designation. It has been ordained that he is an African-American man and he now accepts that with pride. He is strikingly handsome with jet black straight hair and a deep olive complexion. He is nearly six feet tall with strong arms and hands. His dark brown eyes reveal a sadness related to his ethnicity and his scarred past. Encounters with people who have assailed his parentage have resulted in multiple arrests for assault when he was younger. He continues to carry the "shame" and "unworthiness" of being from a mixed family. He becomes hurt and angry when people are insensitive to his needs as a bi-racial man, but he has learned to temper his responses to their insensitivity. He does not have the same carefree demeanor as his brother Ty. This may have to do with his having spent three years in jail on a drug related charge. He also carries the anguish of growing up without his father, who left the home when Rodney was just five years old. They talk periodically but do have a sustained relationship. Rodney is in the process of moving into his own apartment. It is located five miles from his mother, who continues to live in subsidized housing. He has a six year old daughter whom he eventually hopes to have live with him. She is currently living in a housing project with her mother.

Rodney graduated from an area high school that has since closed. He attended Knoxville College for one year studying music. Financial problems prevented him from completing his education. When the interviews began, Rodney was working two jobs both in the service sector. He has given one job up because a scheduling change conflicted with his second job, for which he earns a higher wage. He believes there is upward mobility in his restaurant job as a dishwasher. He does not receive any benefits on his present job. He is a loner who learned who his friends were during his stint in jail. He sold drugs to help his mother financially. Although he was working at the time, his wages were too low to allow him to provide assistance. He turned to the underground economy. The time he spent in confinement was very frightening and emotionally draining for him. Nonetheless, he sold drugs to provide for his daughter after he was released from jail. He renounced illegal activity as his daughter became more perceptive and after he "got saved" and joined the church. He never wants his daughter to find out about his past. He wants her to see him as a hardworking, successful man. He is sometimes excluded from consideration for some jobs because of his record and hired only probationally for others. He does not let this deter him. He believes his ability to turn his back on the more lucrative drug franchise is an indication of his commitment to work and success. He is looking for a second job will not consider public assistance of any sort. Although he is handicapped by not having a car, he continues the job search. He hopes to return to college next year and eventually marry.

# TERRELL

Terrell is a 36 year old African-American man who has been homeless for thirteen months. He has been in Knoxville seven months. He looks professorial with his wire rimmed glasses and his deliberate manner of speaking. His University of Michigan t-shirt looks like an academic statement on him while on another homeless man it would be just a covering. He was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio with six brothers and three sisters. His father was a factory worker and his mother operated a beauty salon in her home. He has lived in Chicago, Atlanta, Houston, and several other major metropolitan areas. Even before his homelessness, his life was peripatetic, which may account for his introspection. He was in the Army for four years and attended college when he completed his tour of duty. He married while in college and dropped out after two years. He had wanted to be a doctor but had his dream deferred by white teachers and counselors who made him doubt his abilities.

Faint scars that ripple down from his forehead to the left side of his face are constant reminders of the car accident that stilled opportunity and led to homelessness instead. While en route to Florida to report for a job in his field of respiratory therapy, he was blind-sided by a teenaged driver who had gotten his license that same morning. Surgery for the permanently separated shoulder he sustained was estimated to cost two thousand dollars. He was uninsured at the time - no auto or medical insurance. He was forced to undergo self-administered therapy. After six months of rehabilitation, he left his parents home in Nashville and set out for Atlanta, where he thought he would easily find a job. He was greeted by an oversaturated market and a dwindling of his meager resources. He travelled throughout Georgia looking for work and encountered racism in the hospitals where he sought employment. When he could not find work, he ended up homeless in Atlanta. After several months of living on the streets and in shelters, he was picked up to do migrant work in South Carolina and North Carolina. The conditions were deplorable in the worker camps and he felt enslaved. After three weeks, he and another worker stole a van from the camp to make a daring escape. They soon parted company -Terrell on foot, and his companion with the van. Terrell was able to get a ride in Kentucky with a man en route to a University of Tennessee football game. Although he is relieved to be in Knoxville, he is ashamed of what he did to survive on the street. He believes the two jobs he is working will prevent him from being that desperate again.

Terrell is working in a local restaurant and at a shelter. He hopes he will soon be able to save enough money to return to school or get recertified in his field. All of his credentials and identification were stolen from a shelter in Atlanta. He has not seen his nine year old son for nearly a year. He and his wife have been separated for two years. His ability to rise above the conditions of his homelessness allow him to view himself as successful.

# TY

Ty is a 22 year old bi-racial man who has endured a lot of emotional pain because of his mixed ancestry. He is the color of a settled cup of cappucino with light brown eyes that take in the world. He has an exuberance that conceals his childhood pain of being called names by the other children. He has shed his shyness after a recent dramatic weight loss. He has an infectious grin that makes him seem like the "boy next door." When he talks about his upbringing and the fears related to it, that image quickly fades and is replaced by the image of a man who has had social and economic blackness thrust upon him by this society. He describes himself as always having been more or less a quiet kid who disdains noise and violence.

Ty was born in Kentucky but moved to Knoxville while still a toddler with his parents and older brother, Rodney. The family moved into Western Heights, a predominantly white housing project. His father, an African-American man, left the family after being unable to secure stable employment. He has since remarried but Ty's mother, a white woman, has remained single. When he was younger, Ty spent a considerable amount of time with his grandparents, who lived in an economically disadvantaged area, but lived in a house with a yard. He enjoyed the companionship of the neighborhood children and the upbringing that his grandparents provided him. He graduated from high school, but feels that he was educationally short-changed since was steered toward a vocational track rather than the college-prep track he really wanted. He is now attempting to regroup from the shortsightedness of the teachers and counselors at his school. He got his first job in food services at a local college when he was thirteen, altering his birth certificate to be eligible for employment. He had jobs throughout high school. After graduation, unable to earn the kind of money he needed to help his girlfriend support her two children by another man, Ty began to sell drugs as a sideline to legitimate work. He was eventually busted and placed on probation. He sold drugs again for the same reason and was arrested a second time. He is now awaiting his court date. He had hoped to go into the military. That opportunity has been compromised by his legal problems. The loss of that opportunity is inconsequential compared to the potential loss of his freedom if he is sentenced to prison. Ty is not married. He lives in a federally subsidized apartment with his white girlfriend and her two children - the two children for whom his freedom hangs in the balance. He has experienced threats and acts of overt bigotry and racism in the nearly all-white environment where they live. He is enrolled in barber school but would eventually like to get involved in real estate. His lack of a vehicle dictates the jobs he can accept. He earns money by cutting hair and doing odd jobs in the downtown Knoxville area. He has sworn off illegal ways to earn money and is committed to being a success the "right way." He is hurt by the realization that he abandoned his family values to try to give to two children what he feels he never had - a father.

# WALTER

Walter is a 50 year old African-American man who was raised on old Clinch Street before it was torn down. Once the houses were razed, everyone was forced to relocate to government housing projects. Walter found himself in the Lonsdale projects. He comes from a family of four sisters and two brothers. His father completed the second grade but always had steady work. His mother did "day work" for white families but had the ambition to become a nurse. She managed to raise her family, work, and complete her nurse's training when she was in her late 40's. Walter's parents made sure that he and his siblings completed high school. His father died fifteen years ago and his mother lives in Pennsylvania. Walter's small 5'6" frame makes it almost impossible to believe that he holds the purple heart for his valor in Viet Nam. He is a neat and trim man with an obvious compassion and sensitivity for people. During his six years as an Airborne Ranger, he managed to log 84 jumps and earn several badges. He was also a missile crewman in Germany. He receives a retirement pension since he is a disabled veteran. He feels that he has all of the things he ever wanted in life.

Walter recalls that when he was a young man, he decided to learn as much as he could about different jobs so he would be prepared for the future. By trade he was a cook but he felt confident that he could do any kind of work. He insists that he is not really smart - he just had the determination to learn new things. He has held a factory job where he did not have the experience going in, but he caught on quickly during training. He has built caskets, worked in hotels, and completed a course in law enforcement. He currently shines shoes in downtown Knoxville and is proud of the fact that he has done that consistently for nearly 40 years. His father also shined shoes for a living and passed on the trade to Walter. Although he has held many other jobs throughout his work life, he has always shined shoes as a sideline. He has been shining shoes as his sole occupation for the past 15 years. He loves his work and all of the many interesting and important people he gets to meet and talk with, both of which make him feel successful. He earned extra money by shining soldiers shoes during his eight year military stint.

Walter had a heart attack five years ago which marked the only period in his life when he did not work for a few months. He continues to smoke cigarettes, but walks three miles to work several times a week to strengthen his heart. Other days he rides the bus or gets a ride since he does not have a car. He has a fifteen year old daughter, a thirty year old son, and a twenty five year old daughter. He is distressed that he recently had to move back into public housing with his daughter's mother when expenses increased at his home. He is concerned about the negative influence the environment will have on her at her impressionable age. He hopes his example as a hardworker will be the one she will follow.

# VITA

Glenna Adell Mosby was born in Winona, West Virginia on October 23, 1952. She attended elementary school in Institute, West Virginia. She graduated from Dunbar, High School in Dunbar, West Virginia in June, 1970. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and English from West Virginia State College in 1973. In August of that year, she entered the Peace Corps Intern Degree Program at Texas Southern University (TSU) in Houston, Texas. This international education initiative was a commitment from an urban university to address human concerns on the African continent. The 8,000 member Peace Corps contingent had less than 150 minority volunteers. Her participation in the American tradition of helping others through voluntary service was an opportunity to be a pioneer in minorities "selling" America abroad. During her two year tour of duty in Liberia, West Africa, she attended the University of Liberia and taught Language Arts and Social Studies at an Episcopal Mission school. She completed all requirements for the Master of Education degree from TSU in 1976. In addition to her international experience in Africa, she was also an educator in Europe during her three years as a civilian employee of the United States Army command in Italy.

She entered the doctoral program in the college of Human Ecology in 1989. During her studies there, she was selected as a Patricia Roberts Harris Fellow and also was awarded a Tennessee Higher Education Commission Fellowship. She was inducted into Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society in 1991. She received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in May, 1995.

Dr. Mosby is currently a Development Specialist on the Tennessee Valley Authority's Education, Training, and Diversity staff. She is a member of several national professional associations and organizations. She is also a board member and volunteer affiliated with local community based organizations.