

# Research Report (A Synthesis):

## *Men of Vision Program at Dollarway High School*

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### **ReCapturing the Vision**

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## **Abstract**

Concern is growing regarding the plight of urban males and how to arrest the negative trends threatening their promise. In an effort to understand the strategies that will enable urban males to bridge the gap between themselves and their more successful counterparts, the researcher found that resiliency emerged as a key change agent. In the literature review, the researcher explored the development of school-based strategies to increase internal resilience and coping skills. Her purpose was to understand effective resilience-promoting strategies that have helped redeem urban males from a litany of negative outcomes.

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of an asset-based intervention, the Men of Vision program, aimed at helping adolescent African American males develop the interpersonal skills and traits that support resiliency and the formation of a positive identity. The researcher compared the results of two groups of students. Those in the treatment group participated in the asset-building program, and those in the control group participated in standard curriculum. The data from the control group were used to establish a benchmark for changes occurring during treatment. All students completed four pre- and postsurveys. Using the survey results, the researcher measured students' developmental assets, self-esteem, and resiliency.

Results indicated that the intervention program significantly increased the resiliency and self-esteem scores of the students in the treatment group with no corresponding increase in internal asset scores. This finding indicated that students who have lived their entire lives making decisions based on the limitations of their current environment first need to build a foundation of self-esteem before going through the process of acquiring knowledge of the behaviors that promote the formation of a positive identity. The results also indicated that self-esteem and resiliency are highly correlated and that resiliency may improve even when internal assets do not.

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## **Introduction**

### *Nature of the Problem*

Increasingly, concern has been growing regarding the plight of urban males and how to arrest the negative trends that have threatened their promise. In an effort to understand the strategies that may enable urban males to bridge the gap between themselves and their more successful counterparts, the researcher found that resiliency emerged as a key change agent. This study was undertaken in an effort to understand effective strategies to help redeem urban males from a litany of negative outcomes.

Adolescence is a crucial stage of identity formation. African American adolescents, particularly males, face a myriad of issues that complicate their ability to lead full and productive lives. Swanson (2003) asserted that the onset of puberty for African American males is further complicated and obscured by their difficulties in grasping their social role amidst the complexities of hypermasculinity and stereotypic views of them. As a result, many adolescent African American males fail to reach important interpersonal and character-based milestones, which are associated with a transition into adulthood and are characterized by developing a positive identity and resilience to counter setbacks (Hendel, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of an asset-based intervention titled the Men of Vision that fosters resiliency. The program is aimed at helping adolescent African American males develop interpersonal and character-based milestones needed to form and maintain a positive identity.

### *Background and Significance of the Problem*

According to White and Rayle (2007), adolescent African American males have been described as an endangered species, one of the most "vulnerable and victimized groups in contemporary American society" (p. 181). African American and Latino males have been found to have extremely high rates of academic failure, teen pregnancy, incarceration, and human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (Swanson, 2003). Over the past 20 years they have also suffered increased rates of suicide and homicide. Arrington (2003) reported that, for those who are 15-20 years of age, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans and the second leading cause of death for Hispanics.

Young African American males from urban communities are faced with the overwhelming tasks of coping with the stresses associated with adolescent development and

with struggling with the challenges of chronic social demands of economic deprivation and disadvantage (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). Zimmerman et al. (1999) noted that, as a part of their everyday lives, African American males face "institutionalized racism, unemployment, poor educational outcomes, violence and high death rates" (p. 734). The three researchers also found that constant interaction of these issues may "exacerbate feelings of helplessness" (p. 734), as young males realize that they cannot change these undesirable situations. When youths experience these desperate feelings of helplessness, they report increased feelings of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. These issues, according to Swanson (2003), complicate their ability to form positive identities and may promote a false image of manhood and masculinity.

Many adolescent African American males fail to develop important interpersonal and character-based milestones associated with a successful transition into adulthood. These points of development are characterized by positive self-identity and resilience to counter setbacks (Hendel, 2006). Developing resiliency helps adolescent males of color to understand the competencies, strengths, and assets that enable them to overcome the obstacles they face. In the pursuit of helping these youths, the researcher had to understand the definition of resiliency. Over the years several notable definitions have emerged. For example, Werner and Smith (1982) described the term *resiliency* as a "successful adaptation following exposure to stressful life events" (p. 23). Other researchers have associated resiliency with a reduction in negative and undesirable behavior and an exhibition of healthy or productive behavior, even under difficult circumstances (Bernard, 1991; Seligman, 1995; Zimrin, 1986). However, Garmezy (1991) provided the most widely accepted definition: the ability to "bounce back, rebound, or recover from life's adversities" (p. 461).

This study examined African American males between the ages of 14 and 18 in marginalized urban communities located in the Southeast. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of an asset-based intervention aimed at helping adolescent African American males develop the interpersonal skills and traits that support resiliency. These interpersonal skills and traits are known as internal assets and have been defined by the Search Institute (2008b) as traits that represent the competencies and values of the individual and that "have tremendous power to protect youth from many different harmful or unhealthy choices" (Protecting Youth from High-Risk Behaviors section, ¶ 1).

Internal assets include but are not limited to integrity, honesty, responsibility, planning and decision making, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution. Although the Search Institute (2008a) also identifies external assets that help youth develop resiliency, for the purpose of the present study, the researcher focused only on internal assets because these are variables that may be developed, whereas external assets are not readily changed.

For the social intervention examined in this study, the researcher aimed to increase the internal assets in order to promote the resiliency of African American males in an urban high school. By increasing these assets, these participants would develop a higher level of coping skills to deal with various risk factors and, thus, would become successful individuals. The Men of Vision program is the asset-based intervention that was used in the present study (see Appendix A). Men of Vision is a supportive and educational, culturally tailored life-skills program that the researcher designed to provide participants with foundational principles to help them develop the interpersonal skills and traits that support resiliency. Focusing on life skills and character education, certified high school teachers who received program training presented the curriculum to participants.

An increasing number of studies have been shedding light on the development of school-based strategies to increase students' internal resilience and coping skills (Roeschlein, 2002; Sagor, 1992). The present study should help to expand the body of research in that area. Although the program was geared to all ethnicities, only African American males participated in this study because, according to McCarthy (2003), they have the most need of these services.

### *Organizational Profile*

The target population for this study was African American males, ages 14 to 18. The site selected for this study was a high school where, according to the principal, 86% of the students received free or reduced-price lunches. The school serves students in Grades 9 through 12.

According to state reports for 2007-2008, the total enrollment of the school was 594 students and the majority of students (98%) were African American. The principal related that the school had high levels of on- and off-campus truancy. In 2007-2008, the state used the benchmark exam to test students in Grades 3 through 8 and Grade 11 in literacy. In 2008, 20% of students at the school, as compared to 51% of students statewide, were at or above proficient in literacy. The ratio of students to FTE teacher was 15:1.

## **Methodology**

### *Description of Research Design*

Increasingly, concern has been growing with regard to the plight of urban males and how to arrest the negative trends that have threatened their promise. In an effort to understand the strategies that enable urban males to bridge the gap between themselves and their more successful counterparts, the researcher found that resiliency was a key change agent. An increasing number of studies have been shedding light on the development of school-based strategies to increase internal resilience and coping skills (Roeschlein, 2002; Sagor, 1992). The present study was undertaken in an effort to understand effective strategies to help redeem African American males in an urban high school from a litany of negative outcomes. McCarthy (2003) noted that African American males are in the most need for these services.

This research had a causal-comparative experimental design and addressed two research questions:

1. Did resiliency increase when African American males participated in activities that developed internal assets?
2. Did the development of internal assets promote positive identity formation of African American males?

Subjects' individual histories, maturation cycles, and regression potential might all be cited as explanations for changes occurring during treatment. These threats might be minimized through use of a control group. A control group would reduce these threats as long the demographics were comparable to that of the treatment group and pre- and posttests were administered at the same intervals and within the same time frame (Posavac & Carey, 2003).

The research design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to study independent variables that could not be manipulated while conducting assessments that provided an in-depth understanding of the lasting effects of the treatment on participants and their future success. The independent variable for this study was the treatment, the Men of Vision program. The dependent variable was the development of resiliency and internal assets in African American males in the treatment group.

### *Demographics of the High School*

The target population included African American males, ages 14 to 18, who were in the

developmental stages of identity formation. A total of 168 youths were recruited from a public high school to participate in the research study.

The high school is located in a school district that services students in a single county that is 70% urban and 30% rural. As of July 2007, the county population was 78,986. Racially, the population was 48% White and 49.6% Black. The median resident age was 35.1 years, compared to the statewide median age of 36.0 years. In 2008, the average cost of living index in the county was 78.7 and in the U.S. was 100. The estimated median household income in 2007 was \$36,725, compared to the state average of \$38,134. Educationally, 74% of people, age 25 or older, have a high school diploma, and 15% of people, age 25 or older, have a bachelor's degree or higher. All together, 96% of residents speak English at home, 1.8% speak Spanish, 1.15% speak Indo-European languages, and .5% speak Asian, Pacific, and other languages. The exact breakdown of how well English is spoken is shown in Appendix B.

The largest city in the county had a population of 107,341 in 2000 that dropped to 101,484 in 2007. The city has had the fastest declining state MSA from 2000-2007. The per capita income was \$14,637. The median income of a household in the city was \$27,247, and the median income of a family was \$34,362. The median income of males was \$30,766 and of females was \$21,009. About 20.6% of families and 25.5% of the population were below the [poverty line](#), including 37% of those under age 18. The two largest age groups were those under 18 years old at 27.4% and those from 25 to 44 years old at 26.9%.

The subject high school serves students in Grades 9 through 12. According to the principal, the total enrollment for the school was 594 students. The majority of the students (98%) were African American.

The state reported that, for 2007-2008, 93% of the students in the subject school district and 86% of the students enrolled at the subject high school were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The principal reported high levels of on- and off-campus truancy. In the same school year, the state used its benchmark exam in literacy to test students in Grades 3 through 8 and Grade 11. In 2008, 20% of students at the high school as compared to 51% statewide were at or above proficient in literacy. The ratio of students per FTE teacher was 15:1.

### *Instruments*

Four instruments were used to gather data. They included Developmental Assets Profile,



Resiliency Scale, Self-Esteem Scale, and Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond (see Appendix C).

*Developmental Assets Profile.* The Developmental Assets Profile was selected to measure the presence of developmental assets in all participants (Search Institute, 2005). Developed by staff at the Search Institute, the Developmental Assets Profile uses 58 items to measure young people's strengths across the eight asset categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. The categories are used to broadly organize the institute's model of 40 developmental assets. The Developmental Assets Profile measures both external and internal assets.

For the purposes of this research study, the focus was only on developing the 20 internal assets because these may be built and developed, whereas external assets are not readily manipulated. Four internal assets are measured by the Developmental Assets Profile:

1. Commitment to learning: achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, reading for pleasure.
2. Positive values: caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, restraint.
3. Social competencies: planning and decision making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, peaceful conflict resolution.
4. Positive identity: personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future.

The four internal asset categories of the Developmental Assets Profile provide considerable overlap with the asset constructs in the treatment program. The seven constructs include vision, wisdom, responsibility, integrity, self-control, strength and endurance, and love and commitment.

The Developmental Assets Profile takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Reliability and validity studies of the Developmental Assets Profile are ongoing. Internal item consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha where the mean alpha was .72 and a composite Spearman-Brown coefficient of .837 (Brady, 2006). Research has shown that these findings meet acceptable criteria for test reliability and internal consistency (Hood & Johnson, 2002).

*Resiliency Scale.* Wagnild and Young's (1987) Resiliency Scale was used to measure participants' resiliency scores before and after treatment. The Resiliency Scale is one of the most popular instruments available to measure resiliency. This instrument has 25 items and a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Total scale scores range from 25 to 175. Scores greater than 145 indicate moderately high to high levels of resilience; scores from 126 to 145 indicate moderately low to low levels of resilience; and scores of 125 and below indicate low resilience (Wagnild, 2009).

The Resilience Scale was derived from a qualitative study of 24 women who had experienced a recent loss. From this research, Wagnild and Young (1987) identified five characteristics of resilience:

1. Self-reliance: belief in oneself and knowing and relying on personal strengths.
2. Meaning: realization that life has a purpose.
3. Equanimity: balanced perspective of life and experiences.
4. Perseverance: the act of persistence despite adversity or discouragement.
5. Existential aloneness: realization that each person is unique and that, although some experiences can be shared, others must be faced alone.

In 1993, the Resilience Scale was tested with a random sample of 782 completed surveys. The internal consistency of the 25-item scale was strong ( $r$  at .91). The reliability of the instrument has been tested across a variety of sample populations. The alpha coefficient ranged from .85 to .94. Overall the alpha coefficient exceeded .80.

The Resiliency Scale only takes 5 to 7 minutes to complete. Factor analysis indicated that the Resiliency Scale has two major factors--acceptance of life and personal competence--both of which concur with the definition of resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Personal competence indicates self-reliance, independence, determination, mastery, and resourcefulness. Acceptance of self and life represents adaptability, balance, flexibility, and a balanced perspective on life (Wagnild, 2009). Using these scales (a) assisted the researcher in gathering information on the impact of the Men of Vision intervention on developing, increasing, and improving participants' resiliency scores and (b) allowed the researcher to measure correlations between the presence and absence of developmental assets and resiliency.

*Self-Esteem Scale.* The researcher employed the Self-Esteem Scale. It has a Likert-type rating

scale to assess subjects' self-esteem before and after treatment. The data helped the researcher to determine whether the Men of Vision intervention made a difference in participants' total self-esteem score. Created by the Educational Media Corporation, the 24-item survey has four significant areas to help students assess how they see themselves in relation to their friends, classmates, home environment, and school situation (Lee & Purvino, 1993). In the school relationship assessment, emphasis is placed on how students see themselves in relation to their teachers. A total score is determined by adding the value for all 24 items. The range of this total score is from 24 to 96; a low score ranges from 24 to 47, a moderate score ranges from 48 to 72, and a high score ranges from 73 to 96.

*Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey.* Broward County Public School's Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond--Student Survey Form A was selected to assess the presence of eight character traits that were identified by staff at Broward County Public Schools as requisite to positive identity development. The facilitators of the Broward County's Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond project (2006-2010) developed and integrated character education curriculum into reading, language arts, social studies, and science content areas to transform school culture (School Board of Broward County, 2006). Two of the eight character traits targeted for development, self-control and responsibility, are identical to modules in the Men of Vision intervention. The researcher determined that data from this survey might be interpolated to track changes in participants' self-esteem and responsibility scores as a result of their participation in the Men of Vision program.

### *Procedures*

*Subject eligibility, selection, and recruitment.* Approval for the study was secured from the participating agencies. After the required permissions were secured, the researcher provided the principal of the school with four eligibility criteria for the participants: (a) male, (b) African American, (c) ages 14-18 years, and (d) eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In order to ensure the privacy of the students, the principal consulted school registration records on the researcher's behalf to identify the names and addresses of all students at the school who met the eligibility criteria. The principal then divided the eligible students into two groups, those who

were minors and those who were legally classified as adults, in order to facilitate the consent process.

Consent forms were obtained from 168 participants. Of this total, 15 students refused to participate, bringing the total number of students in the sample population down to 153. The researcher designated the control and treatment groups by using the scientific process of random sampling.

However, after collecting the consent forms, the researcher was informed by school administrators that many of the high school seniors in the sample population would graduate before the treatment program was completed. This posed a problem because those randomly assigned to the treatment group had to complete the 18 hours of the treatment for the researcher to assess the program's effectiveness appropriately. To accommodate those students who were unable to complete the treatment, the researcher doubled the number of students in the treatment group. This resulted in 102 students being assigned to the treatment group and 51 students to the control group.

*Teacher training.* During the period when consent forms were being collected, the researcher conducted an 8-hour, teacher training session at the high school for the certified teacher who was responsible for administering the Men of Vision curriculum. To provide the teacher with a thorough understanding of the goals and objectives of the Men of Vision program, the researcher incorporated PowerPoint slides, a video, a teacher training manual, and a copy of the curriculum. The goal of the one-on-one, multimedia, training session was to thoroughly prepare the teacher to administer the Men of Vision curriculum. Training also would ensure that all participants received the same treatment by the teacher who followed the script and that the data collected were sufficiently reliable to be analyzed by the researcher.

Four teachers from the school participated in the Men of Vision training session. All teachers were male and worked in the school's athletic department as coaches and physical education teachers. Only one of the four teachers was actually responsible for delivering the Men of Vision curriculum in class. The rest of the teachers requested to be trained in order to be able to support the lead teacher in team-taught classroom sessions.

*Data collection.* After students were assigned to treatment and control groups, the researcher

hosted a pretreatment testing session for participants. The pretreatment testing session was held during regular school hours in the school library. Students missed 60 minutes of instructional time to complete the four pretreatment surveys. Both the control group and the treatment group attended the pretreatment testing session together. The principal assisted the researcher in informing participants about their attendance at the pretreatment testing session and securing the space.

At this session, students the Self-Esteem Survey, the Developmental Assets Profile, Broward County's Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond--Student Survey Form A, and Wagnild and Young's Resiliency Scale.

Treatment group participants began the Men of Vision program on the following day. The program was administered as an elective course assigned under Physical Education and Health. This ensured that treatment group participants did not miss any instructional time as a result of attending the Men of Vision class sessions. Control group participants continued with their regular class schedule for the duration of the study.

### *Description of the Program*

*Length of program.* The researcher was present to assist the teacher in implementing the first class session of the Men of Vision program. The curriculum was administered in 1-hour sessions, which took place 5 days a week over a course of 3 weeks and 3 days in the 4th week, for a total of 18 hours. The curriculum was administered in the participants' classroom and delivered by a certified male teacher. This delivery method helped to decrease researcher bias and to control internal validity.

*Teacher-led sessions.* The teacher led five sessions per day to groups of 15-20 students per session. The lesson plan for each session followed the order of chapters at a pace of approximately two chapters per week. An interactive DVD component helped students visualize the program's scenario-based instruction.

Each session was designed to facilitate dialogue and to produce an inclusive environment that fostered self-reflection and ownership. Significant input from the program participants was required and the teacher was responsible for ensuring that respect for the

opinions of all participants was accomplished through nonjudgmental listening, honoring their experiences, and creating an atmosphere of acceptance. The researcher was present to assist the teacher with the initial sessions. Five ground rules were established during the first session:

1. Everyone must agree to a code of confidentiality and abstain from repeating anything that is discussed during the sessions.
2. Everyone must participate in discussions and complete the readings.
3. Everyone must listen and must not talk over another.
4. Everyone must abstain from laughing at, teasing, or criticizing one another.
5. Everyone must be honest.

Over the course of the 18 sessions, participants had the opportunity to engage in role-play exercises, to complete a career aptitude test, to make a presentation in front of the class about their goals, to learn about abstinence and healthy relationships, and to work together in teams. To ensure the fidelity of the treatment program, the teacher was required to provide the researcher with weekly attendance and progress and pacing reports.

*Development of the program.* The researcher developed the Men of Vision curriculum after researching programs already in existence that purposefully aimed to increase resiliency and coping skills among youths through the fostering of developmental assets using positive youth development. Her purpose was not to simply import the models but to evaluate them to find components and themes that would be suitable in the context of young African American males. Using the research information for the programs already in existence and guided by the Search Institute's (2008a) cutting-edge research on the role of developmental assets in positive youth development, the researcher devised a list of program components that were perceived to have a positive impact on adolescent African American males. The Search Institute identified 40 developmental assets that are prerequisites to positive youth development and grouped them into two major types: external assets and internal assets. External assets are positive developmental experiences that surround children with support, empowerment, and opportunity for constructive use of time. External assets are provided by many different formal and informal systems in a community. Internal assets are a young person's own commitments, values, and competencies.

When developing the Men of Vision program, the researcher decided to focus only on

developing internal assets because these may be built and developed, whereas external assets are not readily manipulated. A central hypothesis of the study was that the Men of Vision program may instill all of the internal assets that have been identified by the Search Institute (2008a) as prerequisites to healthy development trajectories.

The Men of Vision program has a textbook that focuses on seven attributes that are perceived to help adolescent African American males improve their resiliency and coping skills. Each of these attributes was identified by the Search Institute (2008a) as an internal asset that helps youths achieve positive development trajectories. Each chapter in the text deals with one of the attributes in detail and includes vision, wisdom, responsibility, integrity, self-control, strength and endurance, and love and commitment. An accompanying DVD charts the path to manhood of five different personas: Corporate Tony, Blue Collar Joe, Slick Will, Urban Mike, and Clean-Cut Clyde. Students were encouraged to identify who they were most like and to learn how to make choices through scenario-based instruction and guided discussion. These activities assisted them in deploying each of the attributes they were acquiring in pursuit of a positive man identity.

The topics of Chapters 1 and 3 of the textbook are vision and responsibility, respectively. The teacher sought to nurture a commitment to learning and to provide the motivation to fuel students through hard work that would be required in order to successfully complete the Men of Vision program. In these chapters, students spent time mapping out a plan for their future and researched the educational steps that are required to get them where they ultimately desired to be. These chapters developed these internal assets of commitment to learning: achievement, motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, and reading for pleasure.

The topics of Chapters 2 and 3 of the textbook are wisdom and integrity, respectively. The teacher instilled positive morals and values that assisted students in constructing the parameters that would guide their decision making. These chapters developed these internal assets of positive values: caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint.

The topics of Chapters 5 and 7 of the textbook are self-control as well as love and commitment. The teacher helped students develop life skills such as conflict resolution, communication skills, and strategies to retard and resist peer pressure. These chapters developed

these internal assets of social competencies: planning and decision making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Self-esteem is the cornerstone of Men of Vision. The topics of Chapters 1 and 6 in the textbook are vision as well as strength and endurance. The teacher facilitated many empowering activities that helped students develop a strong sense of identity and self-worth. These chapters developed these internal assets of positive identity: self-esteem, personal power, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future.

The teacher and participants discussed subtopics related to the desired attribute targeted for development. These lessons included scenarios that captured likely real-life conflict and issues followed by questions involving critical thinking that pushed students to process the information and developmental tools they were receiving and to apply them to their lives. Based on student responses, the teacher assessed students' comprehension, ability, and willingness to integrate the lessons into their behaviors and ways of thinking. Along with the textbook, the teacher used a DVD that enacts some of the scenarios from the book to reinforce learning and to provide a visual aid that fosters class discussion.

As a whole, the Men of Vision curriculum enabled the teacher to teach African American males to celebrate their uniqueness and to gain positive identity and purpose in life. Most importantly, the Men of Vision curriculum bolstered students' ability to bounce back from challenges. It emboldened them to stand in the face of adversity and to succeed despite their external limitations.



## Results

### *Introduction*

The central hypothesis of the study was that students in the treatment group would significantly increase (a) their total resiliency score, as measured by the 25-item Resiliency Scale; (b) total self-esteem score, as measured by the Self-Esteem Scale; (c) their self-esteem and responsibility subscores, as measured by the Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey; and (d) their internal asset scores, as measured by the Developmental Assets Profile. The researcher assumed that, from pre- to postintervention, the scores of the treatment group would indicate greater gains than those of the control group. All students in the treatment group received intensive character education training in a school setting. Students in the control group received their regular classroom lessons.

Assessments were completed prior to beginning the curriculum and 3 weeks later at the conclusion of the curriculum. According to the literature, a statistically significant net increase in internal assets would indicate that the students would be on track for positive identity formation. A second objective of the study was to determine whether a change in internal assets would correlate with changes in resiliency.

Informed consent was obtained for 153 students. A total of 102 students were nonrandomly selected to participate in the curriculum of the Men of Vision, as the treatment group, and 51 students were nonrandomly selected to participate in the standard curriculum, as the control group. As expected, no significant differences were found in any of the pretest scores between the treatment and control groups (see Appendix D); however, a trend of higher pretest scores on the Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey was found for the treatment group.

Students in the control group were significantly older: They were on average 17 years old and in 10th grade, whereas those in the treatment group were on average 15.7 years old and in 9th grade ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In addition to retention problems of the older students due to graduation, many students in the control group were disappointed in not being assigned to the treatment group and failed to participate in filling out either the pre- or postsurveys. The rate of students who completed the presurveys and also the postsurveys was excellent: 72% for the Resiliency Scale, 90% for the Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey, and 94% for both the Developmental Assets Profile and the Self-Esteem Scale.

### *Pretest Results*

*Resiliency Scale.* The control group had 51 students and the treatment group had 101 students who completed the Resiliency Scale pretest. The mean resiliency scores were 128 with *SD* 20 for students in the control group and 133 with *SD* 20 for those in the treatment group ( $p = .7$ ), indicating that students entered the program with moderately low to low resiliency scores (see Appendix E).

*Self-Esteem Scale.* The control group had 48 students and the treatment group had 97 students who completed the self-esteem pretest. The mean self-esteem scores were 81 with a standard deviation of 12 for students in the in the control group and 80 with a standard deviation of 10 and for students in the treatment group ( $p = .62$ ), indicating that students entered the program with high self-esteem (see Appendix F).

*Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond.* The control group had 50 students and the treatment group had 101 students who completed the Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond pretest (see Appendix G). The mean scores were 1.99 with a standard deviation of .5 for students in the control group and 2.17 with a standard deviation of .4 for students in the treatment group ( $p = .08$ ).

*Developmental Assets Profile.* The control group had 50 students and the treatment group had 94 students who completed the pretest. The mean internal asset scores were 21.4 with a standard deviation of 4.2 for students in the control group and 21.1 with a standard deviation of 4.3 for students in the treatment group ( $p = .65$ ). These findings indicated that students entered the program with good internal assets (see Appendix H).

### *Posttest Results*

*Self-Esteem Scale.* The cornerstone of the intervention program was building self-esteem. The Self-Esteem Scale was administered to determine whether the intervention program was successful in building this foundational element of positive identity. Students in the control

group had a median net decrease in self-esteem of 6.5 and students in the treatment group had a median net increase of 1.5. The magnitude of the difference in improvement, 8, was statistically significant ( $p = .003$ ). Each of the four components of self-esteem--classmate perception, personal self-concept, home self-concept, and school self-concept--was significantly improved as a result of the Men of Vision curriculum (see Appendix F).

*Resiliency Scale.* In addition to self-esteem, the character trait of resiliency was assessed. Students in the control group had a median net decrease in resiliency of 16.5 and students in the treatment group had a median net increase of 13. The magnitude of the difference in improvement, 29.5, was statistically significant ( $p < .0001$ ). Each of the five components of resiliency--self-reliance, meaning, equanimity, perseverance, and existential aloneness--was significantly improved as a result of the Men of Vision curriculum (see Appendix E).

*Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey.* The Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey was used to assess the eight pillars of character as described by Broward County Public Schools. Students in the control group had a median net increase in overall character of .14 and students in the treatment group had a median net increase of .22. The magnitude of the difference in improvement, .07, was statistically significant ( $p < .02$ ). The difference was attributed to only two of the eight components of character, citizenship and tolerance. Two components, kindness and self-control, indicated trends of improvement. The remaining four components of cooperation, responsibility, respect, and honesty were not affected by the curriculum (see Appendix G).

*Developmental Assets Profile.* The final assessment used was the Developmental Assets Profile. The curriculum was not aimed to improve external assets because these variables are not readily changed. Thus, the internal asset score was of interest rather than the total score, as it was more sensitive in detecting a student's core assets. Students in the control group had a median net decrease in internal assets of 2.5 and students in the treatment group had a median net decrease of .5. The magnitude of the difference in improvement, 2, was not statistically significant ( $p = .32$ ). No difference was found in internal assets of the two groups; in fact, both the treatment and control groups showed a slight decrease in internal assets. None of the four components of

internal assets-- commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity--were significantly improved by the Men of Vision curriculum (see Appendix H).

### *Summary*

Although internal assets as measured by the Developmental Assets Profile did not demonstrate that students were affected as a result of the Men of Vision curriculum, the measure of internal assets as they correlated to the other character traits of resiliency and self-esteem were of interest. The researcher found a significant correlation between change in internal assets and change in self-esteem within both the treatment and control groups. The correlation was stronger in the control group ( $p = .64$ ), as compared to the treatment group ( $p = .37$ ), reflecting that the treatment program significantly affected self-esteem, but did not significantly affect internal assets. Similarly, the significant correlation between internal assets and resiliency evident in the control group ( $p = .38$ ) was not evident in the treatment group ( $p = .10$ ). This finding indicated that, although resiliency scores for the treatment group did show a significant increase, they did not increase as a corollary of increasing internal asset scores (see Appendix I).

## Findings

### *Synthesis*

The research resulted in a number of findings. The researcher interpreted and dealt with the implications of the findings in order to respond to the two research questions.

*Research Question 1.* The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of an asset-based intervention, the Men of Vision program, which was designed to increase resiliency and foster positive identity formation. The first research question asked, Is there increase in resiliency and when African American males participate in activities that develop internal assets? The response was a qualified yes. The researcher assumed that students in the treatment group, as compared to those in the control group, would build significantly more internal assets over the course of the intervention. By doing so they would increase their resiliency scores. Results showed that each of the five components of resiliency--self-reliance, meaning, equanimity, perseverance, and existential aloneness--was significantly improved in the treatment group (see Appendix E). Students in the control group had a median net decrease in resiliency of 16.5 and students in the treatment group had a median net increase of 13. The magnitude of the difference in improvement was 29.5.

Despite a significant increase in their resiliency scores, students in the treatment group did not show a corresponding increase in their internal asset scores. At the end of the intervention program, no difference in internal assets was found between the two groups; in fact, both the treatment and control groups showed a slight decrease in the internal asset scores. None of the treatment group's scores for the four components of internal assets on the Developmental Assets Profile--commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity--were significantly improved (see Appendix H). The researcher concluded that students who have lived their entire lives making decisions and choices based on the limitations of their environment first needed to acquire knowledge about the constructs of positive character and identity before that knowledge could be applied to their lives. Internal assets represent the commitment, values, and competencies of the individual; therefore, internal assets are not intrinsic but, rather, are demonstrated in the application of knowledge acquired about the constructs of positive character and identity.

The study was limited to 18 sessions in which seven constructs were taught. The researcher concluded that internal assets require a long-term intervention to be adequately

ingrained in participants' lives. This conclusion was consistent with that of Benson et al. (2006) who observed that developmental strengths have a continuing influence over time and that the most effective evaluations of asset-building programs have to adopt a longitudinal view. The researcher hypothesized that the study might have produced a correlation between the instruction of the seven modules in Men of Vision and an increase in internal assets if ample time had been used to deliver the material.

Participants in the treatment group did not acquire internal assets, as measured by the Developmental Assets Profile, as a result of the Men of Vision curriculum; however, the measure of internal assets as they correlated to the other character traits of resiliency and self-esteem was of interest. A significant correlation was found between change in internal assets and change in self-esteem within both the treatment and control groups. The correlation was stronger in the control group than in the treatment group, reflecting that the treatment program had a significant impact on self-esteem, but did not have a significant impact on internal assets. Similarly, the significant correlation between internal assets and resiliency evident in the control group was not evident in the treatment group. This finding indicated that, although resiliency scores for the treatment group did show a significant increase, they did not increase as a corollary of increasing internal asset scores.

This finding was consistent with observations (a) that risk and protective factors have a cumulative effect and (b) that no perfect formula exists for the ratio of risk factors to protective factors that would guarantee resiliency (Leffert et al., 1998; Masten, 2001; Oman et al., 2002; Reininger et al., 2003; Scales, 1999; Scales et al., 2000). Therefore, the researcher concluded that participation in an asset-based intervention program did improve the resiliency, but not internal assets, of African American males in urban communities. This finding was probably due to the short timeline for program implementation. The results also indicated the capacity of youths to develop resiliency even in the absence of internal assets.

*Research Question 2.* The researcher anticipated that building internal assets in the treatment group would help foster positive identity formation in students. The second research question asked, Will the development of internal assets promote positive identity formation of African American males? The response was inconclusive. Positive identity formation is a complex construct that is not easily quantifiable, but persons developing positive identity are thought to have certain attributes, namely ego strength, rational ability, and positive self-concept

(Erikson, 1959; Scott, 1998). Dent and Cameron (2003) demonstrated that an absence of positive identity is synonymous with a lack of resilience.

Results showed that, as a result of the Men of Vision curriculum, students did not improve their internal asset scores, but they did significantly increase their resiliency scores. If observations that resiliency is a corollary of the formation of positive identity is true (Dent & Cameron, 2003), then the treatment group's increase in resiliency scores indicated that the Men of Vision program did foster positive identity formation, but not as a result of building internal assets. This finding caused the researcher to consider what--if not internal assets as defined by the Developmental Assets Profile--might be credited for students' increase in resiliency which, in turn, indicated the fostering of positive identity.

The results of the Self-Esteem Scale provided a clue. Students in the control group had a median net decrease in self-esteem of 1.5 as compared to a net decrease of 6.5 in the treatment group. The magnitude of the difference in improvement, 8, was statistically significant. Each of the four components of self-esteem--classmate perception, personal self-concept, home self-concept, and school self-concept--was significantly improved as a result of the Men of Vision curriculum (see Appendix F). This finding indicated that self-esteem was the principal element that might be credited with improving students' resiliency scores and helping them to foster the formation of a positive identity.

The Character Across the Curriculum and Beyond survey was used to assess the eight pillars of character as described by Broward County Public Schools. Students in the control group had a median net increase in overall character of .14 and students in the treatment group had a median net increase of .22. The magnitude of the difference in improvement, .07, was statistically significant. The difference was attributed to only two of the eight components of character, citizenship and tolerance. Two other components, kindness and self-control, indicated trends of improvement. The remaining four components of cooperation, responsibility, respect, and honesty were not affected by the curriculum (see Appendix G).

Hall (2007) observed that peer groups may be extremely beneficial in developing resiliency in adolescent males of color. Throughout the Men of Vision program, the theme of brotherhood was emphasized. Students memorized the words of brotherhood chant, which included the lines, "I got your back brother." They graduated from the Men of Vision program in a ring ceremony. These activities helped promote an atmosphere of inclusion, which might

explain why the treatment group's tolerance and citizenship subscales showed significant improvement and kindness and self-control subscales demonstrated trends of improvement.

### *Implications for Practice*

The students at the school resided in a small city. Demographic information on the city reflected a distinguishing characteristic of urban life, even though the population density did not exceed 1,000 persons per square mile, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2002b) and Willcox (1926). However, no real consensus has been reached for the definition of the terms *urban* and *rural* (Fischer, 1975; Whitaker, 1983; Wirth, 1938). Part of the difficulty in describing an urban area has to do with the varying complexions of what it is to be urban. The idea that the urban and rural dichotomy is not sophisticated enough to describe the intermediary experiences of youths in more nuanced urban environments has important implications for this study. The treatment program was designed to build internal assets for male youths in traditionally urban areas. Thus, many of the program's areas of intense focus--building self-esteem, instilling values, and teaching responsibility--were superfluous for the sample population that was already equipped with a high concentration of these traits and competencies. The male students at the school lacked external resources such as money to buy food and clothes and to gain access to opportunities and experiences. Thus, the area of greatest need for them appeared to be improving their external assets.

A number of practitioners have observed that building assets for successful living may have a greater impact than interventions designed to build assets for the purpose of risk avoidance (Botvin, Shinke, Epstein, Diaz, & Botvin, 1995; Epstein, Griffin, & Botvin, 2002). Therefore, program components that focus on building external assets such as mentors, access to social services, and opportunities to participate in school and community events may promote the program's long-term effectiveness.

Moreover, sufficient time should be allotted to allow each of the program components to be developed fully. Although the Men of Vision program may be adapted to fit any timeframe, a semester or yearlong program would allow sufficient time for participants to work through all of the lessons and implement all of the program's wraparound services. The Developmental Assets Profile is not optimally designed to measure the effectiveness of asset-building programs with a shorter duration than 90 days. This factor might explain why no increase was found in internal



asset scores.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The results of this study are generalizable for African American males in urban high schools. The program may not be appropriate for all ethnicities. Further research should be conducted to include participants of other ethnicities and to analyze their responses to the treatment. Facilitators of effective asset-building strategies that focus on male youths in urban areas need to take into account that at-risk youths are exposed to a constellation of risk factors and of assets that the term *urban* does not wholly capture. Further research should be conducted on the effectiveness of nominally urban interventions in nontraditional urban settings. A longitudinal research design should be used to provide a more accurate assessment of the long-term effectiveness of a treatment program on the development of internal assets. Leffert et al. (1998) found that peer influence and restraint were the strongest predictors of overall risk behaviors. This finding indicated that a targeted examination of the role of peer counseling and program components may be warranted, especially one that emphasizes restraint and refusal skills in preventing the negative outcomes of violence, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and academic failure.

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