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The Doctorate Program in Clinical Psychology

Illinois School of Professional Psychology
at National Louis University

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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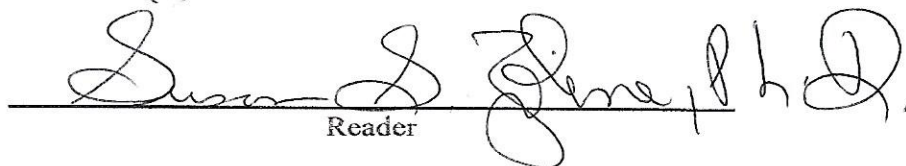This is to certify that the Clinical Research Project of

Kimberly Nelson-Arrington

has been approved by the CRP
Committee on

as satisfactory for the CRP requirement
for the Doctorate of Psychology degree
with a major in Clinical Psychology

Examining Committee:

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Committee Chair

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Reader

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Reader

Community Violence, Protective Factors, and Resilience:

Gender Differences in African American Youth

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Chair

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A Clinical Research Project submitted to the faculty of The Illinois School of Professional Psychology at National Louis University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology.

Chicago, Illinois
May, 2020

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to all who helped support me throughout the process of completing this project. Lord, thank you for continuously renewing my strength. Through you, all things are truly possible. To my husband, whose love, support, and patience helped see me through to the end. I am also very grateful to my committee. Drs. Wilson and Zoline, you know first-hand how our sudden and unexpected transition impacted students and faculty alike. Thank you for your continued encouragement, which truly helped me to remain focused on getting to this point. Dr. Helm-Lewis, thank you for your continued support and encouragement. I will never forget it.

Abstract

African American youth are exposed to community violence in varying degrees. Over the last few decades, much research has focused on the negative implications of such exposure. While it is helpful to explore the detrimental effects of community violence on this population, the factors that promote resilience, leading to favorable outcomes, should be explored with just as much fervency. The present study sought to explore the protective factors that contribute to resilience in African American youth exposed to community violence. While resilience is a multidimensional construct, this study focused on the participants' psychological outlook, namely their sense of hopefulness and future orientation. The specific protective factors examined were internal attributes, racial socialization/identity, and social support. This study highlights the moderating effect that these protective factors have in forming resilience. The study also sought to explore gender differences in resilience levels among African American youth. However, due to the participants' varying levels of exposure to community violence, which ultimately may also impact their resilience, I was not able to make a conclusive determination of whether one gender displays a higher level of resilience than the other.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Violence in African American Communities

African American youth are considerably more likely than youth of other races to be exposed to community violence (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009; McCart et al, 2007; Hong et al., 2014). Americans increasingly understand that community violence is a major public health problem (World Health Organization, 2002) that has adverse implications beyond inner cities. However, the majority of research on chronic community violence has focused on those most directly impacted: ethnic minority, impoverished, and crime-ridden communities. Research has found that growing up in violent communities can have different devastating impacts on adolescents (Wilson et al., 2009). Black adolescents and young adults are at higher risk for the most physically harmful forms of violence (e.g., homicides, fights with injuries, aggravated assaults) compared with Whites. In addition, Black adults reported exposure to a higher number of adverse childhood experiences than Whites (Sheats et al., 2018)

Exposure to violence affects the behavioral outcomes of individuals over the course of their lives (Bacchini et al., 2011), as well as psychosocial, academic, and positive developmental outcomes (Osofsky, 2003). Witnessing or experiencing traumatic events can arrest the psychological development of children, and impede healthy social development, making it difficult to trust others and form lasting relationships (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008). Studies have shown that violence exposure is typically conceptualized as either directly experienced or witnessed maltreatment occurring at the interpersonal (i.e., domestic violence) or community level (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2003). Many African American youth who grow up in inner-city neighborhoods are regularly exposed to or are victims of different types of community violence (Jain & Cohen, 2013), such as: interpersonal violence (i.e., domestic violence), gun violence,

drug solicitation/use, gang rivalry, unwanted sexual advances, and other random acts of violence.

Despite increased research on the effects of urban violence on African American youth, few investigators (Foster et al., 2004; McGee et al., 2001; Voisin et al., 2010) have explored the differences in how adolescent males and females are affected by high-stress and/or violent urban communities. While various studies (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2008; Copeland-Linder et al., 2010; D'Imperio et al., 2000; Jain & Cohen, 2013; Kaplan, 2005; Youngstrom et al., 2003) have investigated many factors that constitute resilience amongst youth who are exposed to community violence, research has not been found to show whether there are significant differences in the levels of resilience between young African American males and females. The purpose of the current work was to explore the overall differences in the impact of community violence on young African American males and females. This study also explored the distinctive protective factors that play a role in increasing the resilience of each group. The main purpose for such research is the hope that continued investigation in this area may promote further development of specific programs and resources targeted at each gender to increase overall resilience for African American youth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Defining Resilience

There has been ongoing debate within the extant literature on the definition, conceptualization, and measurement of resilience (American Psychological Association [APA] Task Force on Resilience and Strength in African American Children and Adolescents, 2008). According to Rutter (2006), resilience is understood as a general, rather than domain-specific, orientation, implying a relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of stress or adversity. Resilience is often defined as a person's ability to positively adapt or achieve success despite having faced situations— being abused or neglected, witnessing violence, or living in poverty— that could lead to negative outcomes such as delinquency (Kaplan, 2005). The one area of consensus is that resilience exists in the context of real or perceived adversity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Spencer et al., 2006). According to the APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in African American Children and Adolescents (2008), "Resilience, as currently understood, is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that incorporates the bidirectional interaction between individuals and their environments within contexts: family, peer, school/work, community, and society" (p. 2).

There has increasingly been an incorporation of the individual's feelings and perceptions of their experience, as well as an understanding of how multiple factors in the environment contribute to risks and protective factors. However, not systematically incorporated within the ecological framing of resilience is the explicit inclusion of factors that specifically encompass the racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences of African American youth (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in African American Children and Adolescents, 2008). Recent studies have examined how elements of psychological outlook, specifically hopefulness and future

orientation, relate to resilience in African American youth. For example, in her 2015 qualitative study, McClintock defined resilience based on various ways the participants demonstrated hope. Results revealed that participants used hope to: (a) facilitate academic and long-term goals; (b) formulate goals influenced by family role models as well as aspirations for an improved quality of life; (c) call upon multiple support systems (e.g., family, friends, teachers); and (d) use personal coping strategies (e.g., perseverance) to combat a variety of obstacles (e.g., racial discrimination, procrastination). Additionally, participants also offered ideas for other youth to reach their goals (McClintock, 2015). Reivich et al. (2013) underlined that resilience is linked to the propensity to think about what may happen in the future and the ability to construct the future. For the purpose of this study, resilience is defined by the participants' psychological outlook (i.e., level of hope; future orientation), as a result of their exposure to community violence.

Hopelessness Increases Risky Behavior

Hopelessness has been defined as the expectation that favorable outcomes for oneself are unlikely to occur, as well as negative expectations about one's future (Joiner & Wagner, 1995; Kerpelman et al., 2008; McLaughlin et al., 1996). Kagan et al. (2012) found that among young African American males, hopelessness was significantly related to increased sexual risk. In addition, a longitudinal study of 1,774 adolescents found that participants reporting greater hopelessness in Year 1 were more likely to identify with positive attitudes toward violence in Year 2 (Drummond et al., 2011). Wallace et al. (2017) proposed that feelings of hopelessness and low levels of self-efficacy indicate a particular psychological outlook that youth have about their current situation and future opportunities which may have relevance for substance use and sexual risk involvement. In a qualitative study conducted with African American adolescent

girls, White (2002) found that they expressed hopelessness due to their perception of having limited future opportunities. They also exhibited low self-efficacy through a perceived lack of control over factors in their current lives. In addition, the study described that these girls recognized that mainstream avenues to opportunity may not be available to them. As they no longer aspired to conventional avenues of success, they became involved in substance use and sexual risk taking because the consequences of engaging in those behaviors were less paramount.

Future Orientation

Future orientation refers to ideas, thoughts, and feelings individuals have about their future (Stoddard et al., 2011), and regards the ability to imagine multiple possible future scenarios (Atance & O'Neill, 2001). In her analysis on the importance of future orientation for adolescent development, Seginer (2008) postulated that "future orientation in times of threat and challenge is how resilient adolescents construct their future" (p. 272). Seginer stressed the relevance of future orientation to violence by referencing Kurt Lewin,

> who in 1941, during the darkest days of the Second World War, wrote an article on Time Perspective and Morale. His main thesis in that article was that individuals able to develop for themselves a "psychological future"—known today as future orientation— appraise adverse situations differently and more positively than do others and therefore cope better than those others with predicament and persecution. (p. 272)

Studies emphasize that future orientation, a hopeful and purposeful sense of the future, is related to positive development in adolescence (e.g., Crespo et al., 2013; Nurmi, 2004; Seginer, 2008). One study (Oyserman et al., 2006), involving 62 adolescents in a 9-week program aimed at developing their ability to imagine themselves as successful adults, observed that the

experimental group had higher levels of school bonding, more concern about academic achievement, better school attendance, and fewer problems at school than the control group. Worrel and Mello (2009) found that a positive vision about the future was positively correlated with academic engagement, optimism, and hope. Another line of research has observed negative relationships between future orientation and violent behavior and substance consumption. Robbins and Bryan (2004) found that young people who were positively future oriented had more awareness of risks associated with substance abuse and were less likely to use marijuana and alcohol. In a longitudinal study that followed a group of African American adolescents for 10 years, from high school to young adulthood, Stoddard et al. (2011) found that future orientation was related to a decrease in violent behavior over time.

Differential Effects of Community Violence Based on Gender

Aisenberg and Herrenkohl (2008) found that nationally representative estimates range from one third of girls and one half of boys witnessing community violence to 70% experiencing violent crime during adolescence. This exposure makes it necessary for them to negotiate and adapt to interpersonal violence as part of their overall development (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004). However, it has been found that the impact of community violence differs for boys and girls (Mitchell et al., 2009). There is also evidence that the behaviors associated with directly experienced and witnessed violence differ for boys compared to girls (Voisin et al., 2010).For example, among 9-year-old children whose parents were the victims of severe violence (e.g., shootings), boys showed more externalizing problems, and girls showed more internalizing problems (Dulmus & Hilarksi, 2006). Among early adolescents exposed to high levels of community violence, witnessing violence was more strongly associated with anxiety and depression for girls than for boys (Foster et al., 2004). Furthermore, boys' psychological

symptoms (i.e., anxiety, depression, anger) were more strongly associated with their directly experienced, as compared to witnessed, violence, whereas girls' posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms were significantly associated with both types of violence exposure.

A study of predominantly male adolescent samples (Kroneman et al., 2004) found that neighborhood adversity has been linked to both minor and serious forms of delinquency, to the presence of gangs, and to a broad range of criminal activities. A study on adverse childhood experiences (Saada Saar et al., 2015) among justice-involved youth found that 45% of girls had experienced five or more ACEs, which made their rate of complex trauma nearly twice as high as boys. It was also found that the rate of sexual abuse for girls who are involved in the juvenile justice system is 4 times higher than it is for boys. According to Tolin et al. (2006), girls are far more likely than boys to develop PTSD, depression, and other internalized behaviors from exposure to traumatic events.

Although there is substantial evidence that males are more likely than females to be exposed to violence in their communities (Begle et al., 2011; Buka et al., 2001; Stein et al., 2003), very few empirical studies have examined whether males and females react differently to the exposure. While there is a lack of empirical data, some theoretical perspectives suggest that gender differences exist in the effects of exposure to violence. Feminist criminologists have identified victimization as a particularly salient risk factor for female crime, with violent victimization often being the first step in females' pathways to delinquency and crime (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Fagan, 2001). A significant contribution of feminist theory has been the recognition that girls and women are victimized at high rates and are particularly likely to experience physical abuse and sexual assault perpetrated within their homes and at the hands of family members, friends, and intimate partners (Belknap & Holsinger,

2006; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Fagan, 2001). These experiences may

be more problematic for girls compared to boys, given that females tend to spend more time in

the home and are socialized to place more emphasis on family relationships (Chesney-Lind,

1997; Keenan & Shaw, 1997). Feminist theories have also linked females' victimization

experiences to later offending, as evidenced in studies of incarcerated female offenders, which

have shown that lifetime victimization is substantially higher among female offenders compared

to the general population of females and seemingly higher than that of incarcerated males

(e.g., Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Browne et al., 1999; Gilfus, 1992; Harlow, 1999).

      Much of the research that found high rates of female victimization noted that the violence

was usually in the home and/or at the hands of a close acquaintance. However, studies have

indicated that minority females are more likely to witness violent events while minority males

are more likely to be victimized by violence, both of which can impact mental health outcomes.

Further, exposure to crime and violence, as either a victim or a witness, is significantly related to

substance abuse, carrying guns, trouble in school, and PTSD symptomatology among both males

and females (Boyd et al., 2008; Cooley-Quille et al., 2001; Mazza, 1999; Schwab-Stone et al.,

1999). In her 2014 study, McGee found a

      greater influence of victimization on offenses, self-rejection, and avoidance among

      males, and a stronger influence of victimization on depression among females. In

      addition, direct victimization was the strongest indicator of problem behavior for females,

      while indirect victimization was the strongest indicator of problem behavior for males.

      Delinquent peer association as a measure of victimization for both groups was

      comparable. For males, the effects of victimization had a stronger influence on the

      development of externalizing problem behaviors such as delinquency, while females

were more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms indicative of PTSD resulting from violence exposure. (p. 83)

In terms of coping styles, research (Voisin et al., 2010) exploring African American adolescents living and coping with community violence found that boys report more confrontational coping styles than girls, who tend to utilize more avoidance approaches. While much attention has been given to the detrimental effects of community violence on both males and females, particularly amongst African American and other minority populations, few studies have thoroughly examined the differences in how both gender groups who are regularly exposed to violence successfully adapt and thrive over time in spite of adversities (Benard, 2004).

Gender Differences in Heritability of Resilience

Early studies (Rutter, 2003; Silberg et al., 2001) suggested that genetic factors are important for understanding individual differences in resilience. For example, two individuals who have experienced comparable events throughout most of their lives may respond very differently to the same stressful life event such as a divorce, loss of a job, or the death of a loved one. Those who successfully navigate these adversities and report little to no adverse mental health consequences are often characterized as resilient (Boardman et al., 2008). Few have examined the possibility that the genetic effects on resilience may be different based on gender. This is particularly relevant to the study of gene–environment interactions because sex may constrain the genetic expression of resiliency among women, and it may enable this potential among men (Shanahan & Hofer, 2005). In their review of gene–environment interaction studies, Shanahan and Hofer (2005) argued that environments can "control phenotypes despite genetic propensities to the contrary" but can also "help actualize genetic potential" (Shanahan & Hofer, 2005, p. 70). Because of the distinct environments in which men and women (on average) are

socialized, it has been argued that biological sex, as a proxy for these different environments, enables genetically-oriented resilience among men and restricts these same genetic tendencies among women. This understanding may explain why others have demonstrated that the heritability of depression as a function of prior stressors is roughly 30% among girls, but nonevident among adolescent boys (Silberg et al., 1999). Aspects of psychological functioning that are thought to underpin ability to effectively cope are often implicated in research on resilience to childhood adversity, and sex differences have been noted. Women have been shown to have lower self-confidence, lower self-esteem, and lower self-efficacy compared to men (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994; Kling et al., 1999; Lynn & Martin, 1997).

Several researchers have proposed that there are gender differences in the relationship between trait resilience and indicators of mental health, such as life-satisfaction, depression, and anxiety (e.g., Beutel et al., 2010; Bitsika et al., 2013; Haddadi & Besharat, 2010; Rossi et al., 2007). In a meta-analysis evaluating participants' age, gender, and experience of adversity as potential moderators in the association between trait resilience and mental health, Hu et al. (2015) regarded participants' age as a potential moderator because negative life events and the level of trait resilience are more likely to vary according to the age of the individual (Luthar & Brown, 2007). They found that differences between children/adolescents and adults have been found in the relationship between trait resilience and mental health, such as depression and life-satisfaction (Haddadi & Besharat, 2010). They also found that compared to men, women experience more life events and are more sensitive to them, which generally leads to pain perception (Ramírez-Maestre et al., 2004). However, their research also suggested that women might be better adapted to chronic pain, given the similar levels of depression and anxiety in men and women (Ramírez-Maestre et al., 2004).

The Role of Protective Factors

Protective factors are internal and external resources that promote resilience by reducing risk or by buffering the impact of stress on an individual's overall well-being (Copeland-Linder et al., 2010). Protective factors promote the likelihood of attaining positive outcomes and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences of risks like violence exposure (Jessor, 1998).

Internal Attributes

Internal personal attributes or individual characteristics, such as perceived competence and self-worth, have been shown to enhance an individual's appraisals of stressors, serving as a defense against stress as well as low self-esteem (D'Imperio et al., 2000). Evidence has shown that a positive sense of self may mitigate the impact of life stress on overall functioning, as well as decrease the chance of engaging in risky behavior (Youngstrom et al., 2003). Research (Adams et al., 2006; Bachman et al., 2011) has suggested that, in general, adolescent males tend to score higher on measures of self-esteem than adolescent females. However, in a study investigating adolescent self-esteem differences by ethnicity, gender, and age, there was no significant difference in self-esteem amongst African American adolescent male and females (Bachman et al., 2011). In fact, the study showed that, from the tested sample, African American girls tend to have slightly higher self-esteem than boys, during the eighth- and 12th-grade levels. However, the levels of self-esteem for both groups were the same during the 10th grade.

Racial Awareness/Identity Development

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical times, within which there is a struggle to develop a definitive identity. Individuals of all races face the struggle of resolving their identity crisis. However, James (2010) found that many African American youth have the additional task of learning to deal with racial prejudice and injustice. According to Arnett and Brody (2008), identity issues are more difficult for African American emerging adults than for emerging adults

in other American ethnic groups because they must overcome the negative assumptions that others have about them as young Black people. The formation of many aspects of identity may be an important coping and resilience process for African American youth. Positive gendered racial identities are essential to the personal and collective well-being of African American youth (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in African American Children and Adolescents, 2008). African American adolescents must develop a positive sense of self in a society that often devalues them through negative stereotypes, assumptions, and expectations of others (Cross, 1995). Negative racial identity in African Americans has been theoretically linked to low self-esteem, problems with psychological adjustment, low school achievement, school drop-out, teenage pregnancy, gang involvement, eating disorders, drug abuse, and involvement in crime (Cross, 1991). Identity for African Americans is not an individual or autonomous sense of functioning as is often reflected in European American culture, but rather includes the intersection of multiple identity factors, particularly race and gender. Positive identity is an extended sense of self embedded within the African American collective (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001), and this African American sense of self is a protective factor related to identity development.

Racial Socialization

A growing body of empirical work has begun to explore social support and racial socialization among African American youth, as they pertain to building resilience (e.g., Brown 2008; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007; Kerpelman et al., 2008; Paxton et al., 2004). Research has identified racial socialization as a contextual protective factor. Stevenson et al. (2002) defined racial socialization as a set of behaviors, communications, and interactions between parents and children that address how African Americans ought to feel about their cultural heritage and how they should respond to the racial hostility or confusion in American society. Socialization

influences children's racial identity and self-concept (Alejandro-Wright, 1999), beliefs about the way the world works, repertoire of strategies and skills for coping with and navigating racism, and inter/intraracial relationships and interactions (Coard & Sellers, 2005). Although the socialization messages of both mothers and fathers benefit the child, research (e.g., Thornton et al., 1990) has suggested that more optimal outcomes occur when both parents engage in the racial socialization process. African American children and adolescents who learn that others have negative perspectives of African Americans, but who have these messages mediated by parents, peers, and other important adults, are less likely to have negative outcomes and more likely to be resilient in adverse conditions.

Previous studies have suggested that racial socialization messages may have an important impact on the development and psychological well-being of African Americans (e.g., Belgrave et al., 2000; Caughy et al., 2002; Coard & Sellers, 2005; Frabutt et al., 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002). Various studies have examined the relationship of racial socialization to outcome variables (e.g., academic achievement, self-esteem, and psychosocial functioning; Hughes et al., 2006). In a review of ethnic-racial socialization research, Hughes et al. (2006) found that receiving racial socialization messages emphasizing racial pride and learning about one's heritage and culture resulted in positive academic outcomes (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Caughy et al., 2002), positive mental health outcomes (Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Stevenson et al., 1997), and positive self-esteem (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). One study (Brown et al., 2010) investigating the role of gender in the racial and ethnic socialization of African American adolescents suggested that caregivers engage in more socialization with female adolescents, and raise questions about how gender differences may be related to African American youth

development. This study explored how racial socialization, as a protective factor, may increase the overall resilience of African American adolescents.

Social Support

Social support is a protective factor, which encompasses both familial and extrafamilial support. There has been evidence for the protective effects of social support (Brown, 2008), especially regarding the role of parental support, which has been found to be particularly salient (Copeland-Linder et al., 2010). Youth who have parents who adequately monitor their actions and who are actively involved in their lives may feel their parents are invested and concerned, which in turn may lead to increased self-worth and self-regulation (Kliewer et al., 2006). Studies have also found that extrafamilial support, such as friends/peers, can also serve as a coping mechanism or protective factor. One study (Jones, 2007) labeled this type of support "Informal kinship," describing it as "people within a given society to whom one is not related by birth or marriage, but who share reciprocal social and economic relationships" (p. 130). Outside of the family, African Americans create bonds with individuals in the community and churches that also become integral components of their social support networks (Bagley & Carroll, 1998). In many African American communities, the churches are second only to the family as an important social institution (Taylor & Chatters, 1988). Historically, African American families have relied on their churches to contribute to the psychoeducational development of their children and provide them with additional support (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). A recent study (Cross et al., 2018) found that adolescent girls reported greater involvement in social networks than boys and tended to give and receive more emotional support than adolescent boys.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to illuminate the different ways that community violence impacts African American youth based on their gender. The present study was directed

at two aims. The first goal of the study was to examine whether males or females exhibit a higher level of resilience to guard against the impact of community violence. The second goal of the study was to examine the moderating roles of three protective factors (internal attributes, racial identity/socialization, social support) and their ability to mitigate the devastating effects of community violence on African American youth.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Participants

I recruited a sample of 10 African American, cisgender youth (five males and five females), ranging in ages from 18–24 years. Nine of the 10 participants were either raised in or currently reside in various neighborhoods throughout Chicago's South Side. The other participant was raised 10 miles outside the city. The Chicago Police Department (2018) has noted many of the neighborhoods in which the participants reside(d) as having high incidences of violent crimes. According to the CPD (2018), "violent crime is broken down into four major categories: murder, criminal sexual assault, aggravated assault/battery, and robbery" (p. 49).

For the purpose of this study, community violence may be defined as gang violence, domestic violence, robbery with or without a weapon, assault with or without weapon, sexual assault with or without weapon, shooting, stabbing, and murder. In addition to community violence, participants may have also been exposed to other stressful life events, which include poverty, drug solicitation, prostitution/sex trafficking, racial profiling, and encounters with law enforcement.

This study explored the subjective struggles and overall experiences of African American youth who have been exposed to various forms of community violence and other stressful life events. For the purpose of this study, the participants had either resided, or spent significant time in, an inner-city community for at least half of their lives, to determine the long-term impact of exposure to community violence. Each participant fell under at least one of the following categories of exposure to community violence: have been a victim of community violence, have been closely acquainted with someone who was a victim of community violence, or have witnessed community violence on at least one occasion. The participants' most recent exposure

to community violence must have occurred at least one year prior to the screening for the study. This time requirement served as an effort to prevent participants from becoming too distraught while describing incidents which may be too fresh. The 1-year time requirement also allowed me to observe long-term resilience. This study excluded individuals who have a significant psychiatric history (i.e., diagnosis, treatment, hospitalizations), as well as individuals who themselves have criminal histories (i.e., felony convictions, current gang involvement, etc.).

Procedures

Participants for this study were recruited from community churches throughout the city of Chicago. I also utilized Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media to recruit participants. Initial solicitation of participants through churches was conducted by contacting the church leader(s) via phone and email to introduce the study (See Appendix A). Once participation was agreed and consent given, following Institutional Review Board approval, an information flyer was sent via email (See Appendix B). Dissemination of the information was coordinated by the church leaders' normal communication efforts. Interested candidates were asked to contact me by email or phone (Google Voice), where they provided their names (or preferred pseudonyms), contact numbers, and best times to reach them.

I also utilized social media (snowball sampling) as a method of recruiting participants. I posted a message on my Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts (see Appendix C). Interested individuals were requested to click a link directing them to SurveyMonkey, where they were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). Candidates were also asked to leave their contact information, or they had the option to email me to leave their contact information.

Upon calling all candidates back, I explained the purpose of the study and screened the candidates for eligibility (See Appendix E). I completed the demographic questionnaire over the phone with the candidates who were recruited from churches. Once the candidates became eligible to proceed, an interview was scheduled at a confidential location agreed upon by both the participant and myself. Interested candidates who were out of town were given the option to conduct the interview via FaceTime or Skype. Each participant was also informed during the screening that participation would be strictly voluntary. They were notified that due to the nature of the study, they could experience significant feelings of distress, and that they could discontinue participation at any time during the interview. I explained that each participant would still receive a $20 gift card if they decided to discontinue participation.

Upon arriving at the meeting location, participants were asked to sign the Informed Consent, which also included a list of community support resources (See Appendix F), and Consent to Record Audio (See Appendix G) forms. All consent forms and community support resources were emailed to participants who used FaceTime. Participants were also informed that the interview would be audio-recorded, transcribed for analysis, de-identified, and destroyed at the end of the study.

Participants were instructed to keep a copy of the consent forms for their records. To protect confidentiality, participants were given a pseudonym, which was used throughout the interview process. After all consent forms were signed, a semistructured 45–60-min interview was conducted (See Appendix H). At the conclusion of the interview, I conducted a one-on-one debriefing (See Appendix I) with participants, focusing on participants' current emotional state and increasing participants' ability to manage anxiety and/or depression related to trauma. For

future references, I provided participants a list of community resources through which they could access support services (See Appendix J).

Measures

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

I developed this questionnaire (see Appendix D) to acquire information from the participants about general social and demographic information. Questions related to age, gender, ethnicity, household makeup were used. The information was used for inclusion/exclusion purposes and to examine the role that certain factors may play in relation to impact of community violence on participants, their protective factors, and resilience.

Interview Questions

Given the qualitative nature of this study, I formulated a semistructured interview (see Appendix H). The questions explored the participants' individual experiences with community, protective factors that contribute to resilience, and their psychological outlook (hopefulness and future orientation).

Data Analysis

To obtain qualitative data, a 45–60-min semistructured interview was conducted with eligible candidates who gave consent to participate in the study. I transcribed all recorded interviews, and Grounded theory's coding system was utilized in order to identify thematic content in each interview. Grounded theory refers to a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed toward theory development. The methodological strategies of grounded theory are aimed to construct middle-level theories directly from data analysis (Charmaz, 2003).

Following transcription, thematic categorization was used to analyze all data. Each transcript was carefully read twice. The transcript was read once to gain an overall sense of the participants' experiences. Then, the transcript was read a second time for the purpose of applying a coding system to determine abstract themes and patterns from the participants' experiences. Themes and patterns that were considered include: the types of violence and/or other stressful events to which participants are exposed; various protective factors and coping strategies utilized; states of hopefulness/hopelessness; plans for immediate and distant future; and gender difference in levels of resilience.

Ethical Safeguards

I took various steps to ensure and maintain ethical standards throughout the process of this research project. Both the chair and the committee readers reviewed and approved all materials utilized, and interviews were not conducted until IRB certification was obtained. I explained the purpose of the study to each participant. I also discussed the potential for emotional distress that could be felt while sharing their individual experiences with community violence. Further, I explained to the participants that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they had the option to discontinue participation at any time.

After a thorough explanation of the purpose and expectations, each participant provided consent to take part in the study. Participants were asked not to use any actual names when answering questions during the interview process. In addition, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, and no identifying information was included in transcripts to maintain the confidentiality of their identities. The participants were debriefed and were provided with therapy referral sources to ensure participant safety and manage potential interviewee distress.

The data and consent forms gathered from these interviews were kept in a private, secure, locked cabinet in my home for the duration of the study. The obtained information was only used for this study. The information will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed. This researcher's computer is password protected and the individual documents related to this project will be locked with an additional password. The storage of transcripts will be password protected on a personal laptop that is also password protected and used only by myself. Lastly, relevant standards of the APA Ethics Code (APA, 2017) regarding confidentiality, disclosure, and research with human participants were consulted in the design of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The participants were 10 African American, cisgender youth (five males and five females), ranging in the ages of 18–24 years: Five participants were 18, one participant was 20, one was 21, two were 22, and one participant was 24 years of age ($m = 19.9$ years). All participants were either raised in or frequently spent time in various neighborhoods which have been noted by the Chicago Police Department (2018) as having high incidences of violent crimes. All participants have resided in (or spent time in) violent communities for at least half of their lives, to determine the long-term impact of exposure to community violence and stressful life events. Each participant fell under at least one of the following categories of exposure to community violence: have been victims of community violence, have been closely acquainted with someone who was a victim of community-violence, or have witnessed community violence on at least one occasion.

The participants' most recent exposure to community violence occurred at least 1 year prior to the screening for the study. The purpose for this time requirement was an effort to prevent participants from becoming too distraught while describing incidents which may have been too fresh. The 1-year time requirement also allowed me to observe long-term resilience. Eight of the 10 participants were currently in college, pursuing bachelor's degrees at the time of the interview. Six attended school out of state, while two attended local universities. One participant had already attained a bachelor's degree from a local university, and one had earned a 2-year degree from a community college.

The participants freely answered all questions that I asked, as they all stated that they felt comfortable throughout the interview. Some participants provided more lengthy descriptions and details in their responses than others. The average time for the interviews was 39.6 min. Below is

a brief description of basic demographic nonidentifying information for each participant. In addition, the participants' levels of exposure to community violence (victim, witness, or close associate of a victim), protective factors, and levels of resilience (future orientation) will be described in this section.

Participant 1: "Devon"

Devon is an 18-year-old African American male. He is a freshman in college and attends school out of state. Devon was raised by his parents on the far South Side of Chicago. He lived there for his entire life until leaving for college. His parents and other family members grew up in the same area. He stated that he enjoyed growing up in his neighborhood, and that while he was aware of the violence in the area, he never felt unsafe because he knew everyone.

Impact of Community Violence

Devon shared that this feeling of safety changed 3 years ago. He recalled that his uncle was sitting in a neighborhood barbershop when two gunmen came in and started shooting up the shop. As a result, his uncle was shot in the neck and is currently paralyzed from the waist down. Devon stated that after this incident he has no longer felt safe in his own neighborhood, particularly because the identities of the gunmen were never discovered. Devon further described other factors that contribute to violence in his community, including gang and drug activity. He shared that multiple attempts had been made to sell him drugs and to recruit him into gangs while he was growing up, but he always refused. Devon admitted that at times it was difficult to refuse, and stated he had to be mentally tough to resist getting caught up in everything going on around him.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Devon views himself as an "extremely resilient, hard-working, and nice person." He feels that his best quality is that he is very generous and is willing to give of anything that he has.

Social Support

Devon feels that he has a good support system, on whom he can rely when he needs help. He stated that he has always been able to depend on both of his parents. He elaborated that they continue to motivate him while he is away at school, and help him to get through everything, from piled up assignments to his periodic feelings of loneliness. Devon commented that knowing that he has younger friends who depend on him and view him as a role model motivates him to work hard.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Devon indicated that he had been taught by both of his parents about Black history and culture. He continued that he learned at an early age how Black people are viewed in America and why it is so important for him to get a good education. Devon recalled that he once got a D on his report card while in middle school, which upset his father. He stated that his father told him that he had to take his education very seriously because he is a Black male. Devon admitted that he did not understand what his father meant at the time, but now that he is in college (attends a predominately White school), he fully understands why his parents stressed the importance of him getting a good education. When asked how he feels other races view Black people, he stated that he believes Black people are seen as inferior. He also shared that he feels like he must work twice as hard as other students because he is Black.

Resilience

In response to the question of what he thinks life will be like for him in the future, Devon responded that he believes life will get better for him in the future, as long as he continues to work hard and stays focused on his education. The goal(s) he plans to accomplish over the next year are to increase his grade point average (GPA) in school, as well as to attain an internship as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA). Additionally, the goals he plans to accomplish within the next 5–10 years include: becoming a Registered Nurse, investing in real estate, and investing in stocks and cryptocurrency to help plan for the future. Devon stated that he also would like to invest in Black-owned businesses as an way to give back to his community.

Participant 2: "Joe"

Joe is an 18-year-old African American male. He is a freshman in college and attends school out of state. Joe was raised in his community on the South Side of Chicago for 11 years. He is the oldest of three children and has a 17-year-old brother and a 13-year-old sister. Joe and his siblings were raised by his single mother. He stated that growing up in his neighborhood was "pretty good, for the most part," because his mother made sure that he and his siblings had plenty of structure. He explained that he was always involved in sports and other activities and was not allowed to hang out on their block and play with the neighborhood kids.

Impact of Community Violence

Joe recalled a time when he was 10 years old that he and his family witnessed and were nearly victims of community violence. He shared that one day while they were taking groceries into the house, they got caught in the middle of gunfire by two groups of people who were shooting from either end of the block (one group was on one end while the other group was on the opposite end of the block). He shared that the experience was extremely scary for him, especially because the people who were shooting at each other did not seem to care if other

people had been shot. Joe stated that another factor that made it difficult to grow up in his neighborhood was that he and his siblings attended a private school and had to travel far from home to get to school every day. However, he stated that in the end, he felt like it was worth it.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Joe describes himself as a leader and very independent. He stated that he has never been a follower and is good at making his own decisions. He feels that his peers view him the same way and, for that reason, tend to gravitate to him. He feels that his best quality is that he is not concerned about what is popular, but makes his decisions based on what he knows is the right thing to do.

Social Support

Joe indicated that his family is very close. Along with his mother and siblings, Joe stated that he also has the support of his aunt and grandmother. He considers his family his "village," and credits them for his success. He also stressed the importance of being supportive to his younger brother and sister because he recognizes that they look to him for help when they need it.

Racial Identity/Socialization

While discussing racial identity and socialization, Joe responded that his grandmother has had the greatest influence on how he views himself as a young Black man. He stated that she was raised in the South during the Jim Crow era and has shared with him vivid memories of what it was like to grow up during that time. He stated that she also talks to him about the many accomplishments of Black people, which he stated makes him feel good to be a Black man. In response to the question of how he thinks other races view African Americans Joe stated that he

feels it just depends on the environment and the individual person. Joe added that he believes racial prejudice stems from ignorance about other races.

Resilience

In response to what he thinks life will be like for him in the future, Joe stated that he is very hopeful that his life will get better because everything that he is doing is geared toward that outcome. He continued that he believes that as long as he works hard, something good will always come from it. Joe's goals for the next year were to get a summer job, which will enable him to move off campus with his friends during the next school year. When asked where he sees himself in the next 5–10 years, he stated that once he graduates from college, he plans to become a police officer for the Chicago Police Department.

Participant 3: "Mary"

Mary is a 20-year old African American female who lives with her mother and siblings on the South Side of Chicago. She is a junior at a local college and commutes to school every day. Mary stated that as a child, growing up in her neighborhood was nice. She continued that even though there was a lot of violence in her neighborhood, it did not really bother her much because she was accustomed to it.

Impact of Community Violence

Mary described an incident that changed her perspective of her neighborhood. Mary stated that 3 years ago, while she was outside with a group of her friends, they noticed a strange car circling around the block. After a few minutes, someone from the car began shooting at her and her friends. Although no one was shot, Mary described this as one of the scariest moments of her life. She stated that this was the first time she had ever been shot at, as well as the first time she had felt unsafe in her neighborhood. Mary shared that after this incident, it took her awhile before she was able to go outside again. She added that she has stopped just "hanging out"

outside with her friends, and that she spends most of her free time inside her home. Mary stated that when she does go outside, she is very watchful and aware of her surroundings. She continued that she always has to keep her eyes and ears open and that she no longer enjoys being around many people.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Mary describes herself as a very bright and determined person. She stated that she is an introvert and prefers to spend more time alone than with people. She added that she does not dislike people, but simply does not trust many people. She recognized that this aspect of her personality has changed, because when she was younger, she was more outgoing and always had a group of friends. Mary stated that she feels this change is partly attributed to the incident when she was almost shot. However, she stated that she also feels that she is just getting older and growing out of the need to have a group of friends.

Social Support

Mary indicated that she has a very close bond to her mother, siblings, and her grandmother. She stated that she feels she can go to them for anything. Mary also stated that her siblings and cousins often come to her when they need to talk.

Racial Identity/Socialization

While discussing her racial identity and socialization, Mary stated that her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother have been the major figures in her life who have taught her about Black history and culture. She stated that one thing that she recalls from these discussions is that the Black community used to be much more collective and family based. She was told that the people were much more willing to help each other.

Resilience

In response to whether she thinks her life will get better in the future, Mary responded that she is very hopeful about her future because she does believe her life will get better. She stated that she will be graduating with her bachelor's degree in Child Care and Development in 1 year. Mary stated that she plans to start a daycare center with her mother. She stated that she never saw herself working for anyone, but instead wanted to be her own boss. She also plans to buy rental properties, and to one day build her own home. Mary stated that one thing she is doing now to prepare for her future is building her credit score.

Participant 4: "Torrence"

Torrence is a 22-year-old African American male. He is a senior in college and attends school out of state. Torrence was raised in a community approximately 10 miles outside the city of Chicago and resided in the area until he went away to college. Torrence described his childhood as a good one. He stated that he was very much aware of there being violence and "different things going on" in his neighborhood, but that he made sure to stay away from people and situations that could lead to trouble. Torrence stated that because he was always involved in sports and other activities, he was rarely impacted by neighborhood violence.

Impact of Community Violence

However, Torrence recalled a particular incident that occurred about 6 years ago. He stated that as he was getting ready to go to bed, he heard four loud gunshots near his house, along with someone screaming. Torrence added that he had been aware that his neighbors across the street were throwing a party, so he figured that the gunshots and screaming came from this house. Torrence further recalled that after he verified that his parents and younger sister were okay, he looked outside and noticed a body lying in blood, in the middle of the street, and the people from the party running away from the house. Torrence stated that because of the stillness

of the body, he could tell that the person was deceased. He remembered feeling particularly

affected by this incident because even though he had always made every effort to avoid trouble

and violent situations, witnessing this situation while in the comfort of his own home caused him

to feel that his comfort zone was destroyed. He continued that he received the reality check that

violence was everywhere and would be difficult to evade. Nonetheless, Torrence stated that this

situation made him all the more cautious and that he went out of his way to avoid getting caught

up in the things going on around him.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Torrence describes himself as a very tough and independent person. He shared that

playing football for most of his life has made him disciplined. Torrence mostly credits his

football coaches and his paternal grandmother (deceased) for instilling in him good moral

values. He stated that he is also a people person and enjoys giving of helping and giving to

people who are less fortunate than himself. He stated that throughout High School, his

grandmother took him to food pantries to help pass out food to people who needed it. He stated

that this caused him to see the importance of giving back to his community. He stated that his

best qualities are his ability to relate to and understand other people and his listening skills.

Social Support

Regarding social support, Torrence stated that he is very close to his father. He believes

that because he is an athlete and his father always came to his games, there has always been the

opportunity for male bonding. However, he stated that he is able to go to both of his parents

when he is in need and feels comfortable talking to them both about anything. Torrence indicated

that he also is able to provide support when people come to him. He stated that he is usually the

go-to person for advice within his friend group. Additionally, as the captain of his football team, he feels that the role of a leader comes very naturally for him.

Racial Identity/Socialization

While discussing his racial identity and how he was racially socialized, Torrence stated that both of his grandmothers, his parents, and his maternal aunt have played significant roles in his life in teaching him about Black history and culture. He stated that his maternal grandmother "harps" on him the most about the importance of being educated as a Black man in America and encourages him to get his master's degree. However, he stated that he has a lot of people who emphasize the reality of being Black in America, and the steps he needs to take to be successful. Torrence stated that the teaching that he has received from his family resulted in him having a strong sense of pride and has motivated him to work hard to make his potential a reality. Torrence further explained that while he recognizes that other races may view Black people as being inferior, this has never caused him to feel that any other individual or group is superior to him. Torrence attends a predominately White school and stated that his friend group is racially mixed, and that they look up to him and treat him as a leader.

Resilience

In response to whether he feels life will get better for him, Torrence stated that he definitely feels that his life will get better. He continued that over the past 4 years of college he has been able to build resources and network with people who he feels will be instrumental in his success. Torrence stated that in the next year, his goal is to get more clarity and a better sense of direction for his life. He explained that he has an Exercise Science major, but is not sure what he would like to do with it yet. He stated that in the next 5–10 years, he sees himself being settled down and married. He stated that in 10 years, he plans to own his own home and to be

financially stable so that he is able to take care of his family. He also stated that he would like to be in a position that will enable him to give back to his community.

Participant 5: "Mia"

Mia is an 18-year-old African American female. She is a freshman in college and attends school out of state. She was raised on the South Side of Chicago with her mother and two older sisters. Mia stated that she was very much aware of how violent her neighborhood was, and for that reason, sheltered herself from the violence surrounding her. She recalled that growing up she avoided going outside very much unless it was beyond her immediate neighborhood. She stated that she would go straight to school and go home immediately afterwards. The only times she went outside (apart from going to school) was when she went somewhere with her mother.

Impact of Community Violence

Mia described an incident that occurred when she was 13 years old. She recalled that one day when she and her mother were out spending time together, they received a phone call from her older sister informing them that her (sister's) boyfriend had just been shot and killed. She further recalled that following this event and the funeral, she accompanied her sister to one of her boyfriend's hangout spots, where a number of his friends were gathered. Mia stated that she remembered feeling very uncomfortable and unsafe, but that she just wanted to comfort and support her sister. While they were on the front porch hanging out and reminiscing about their deceased friend, she recalled seeing a young man wearing all black approaching the house and pulling out a gun. Mia stated that the only thing she remembered after that was hearing someone telling her to get down, while simultaneously pushing her out of the way. Mia recalled hearing gunshots around her but did not see what was happening because she was laying down on the porch. Mia stated that after this incident she was more afraid to go outside than she had been previously and spent a significant amount of time inside her home, unless she was out of the

state. She added that it took her a very long time to process what happened and the fact that she had come so close to being shot and possibly killed. Mia shared that the other factor (besides the violence) that made it difficult to live in her neighborhood was that she often felt very alone. She stated that she no longer had anything in common with the friends with whom she once associated herself, because after the above-mentioned incidents, they began carrying weapons and engaging in the neighborhood activities.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Mia describes herself as having a duality in her personality. She stated that she can be very shy, but only with people that she does not know. She continued that once she is comfortable with people, she can be very talkative and straightforward. Mia feels that her best characteristic is her self-determination. She stated that once she sets a goal, she has the tenacity to accomplish it by any means necessary. Mia further described herself as very unique and that she loves who she is.

Social Support

Mia stated that her friend that she has had since her freshman year in high school is the one person that she knows is always there when she needs him. She continued that most people in her life tend to depend on her more than she depends on them. She continued that she constantly gives of herself but that she does not always get the reciprocity. When asked how she deals with that dynamic in her relationships, she stated that it can sometimes be very difficult because she loves being there for people. However, she is trying to get better at setting boundaries.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Mia stated that while growing up, she does not recall anyone really teaching her about African American history or culture, other than the basics that were taught in school during February (Black History Month). Mia stated that not having this knowledge of her history made it very difficult for her to have a true sense of her African American identity. Mia recalled being called names like "house Negro" because she was very light-skinned, with "good hair," and because she spent more time in the house than she did socializing with people in her neighborhood. She stated that because of this she feels like she never really found her place and still has difficulty feeling like she belongs in any group. Mia attends a predominately White school, which she stated adds to the difficulty of forming her identity as a young Black woman.

Resilience

When asked whether she feels her life will get better, Mia stated that she feels her life will get better. She stated that she is beginning to come out of her shell and talk to more people. She added that she is learning how to network with people that have a knowledge base that she herself does not possess (i.e., managing finances; wealth building). She stated that her goal for the next year is to decide on a major. She stated that her goal for the next 5–10 years is to just be happy in her own skin tone and body, and not feeling like she is "stuck between two races." Mia added that she does not have a specific idea of the field she would like to work in. However, she wants to work in an environment where she is happy to get up in the morning and go to work, and where she feels like she is helping people.

Participant #6: "Julian"

Julian is an 18-year-old African American male. He is a freshman in college and attends school out of state. Julian was raised on the South Side of Chicago with his mother and younger brother. He stated that there was always a lot going on in his neighborhood while growing up. He

recalled frequently hearing gunshots in his neighborhood. However, Julian described his childhood as very sheltered, so although he was aware that he lived in a dangerous neighborhood, he did not feel it personally impacted him until an experience that hit close to home.

Impact of Community Violence

Julian described an incident that occurred around 2 years ago on Christmas Eve. He stated that his mother had gone out to the store to get some food, but when she returned home, she was in complete shock. He recalled that it took her a long time to share what was wrong, but that she finally told him and his brother that she had just been robbed at gunpoint right outside of their home. Julian shared that this experience caused a lot of fear for him and for his mother. He stated that it made him feel unsafe in and around his own home, and that he did not like to go outside at night anymore. Julian added that his mother became even more protective than she had been before the incident. For example, she placed more restrictions on how frequently he could go out with his friends and how late he could stay out. He stated that she also became more cautious of her own surroundings when she would go out, particularly when she parks her car before coming into the house.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Julian described himself as a very humorous and eccentric person. He stated that he has never been the type of person to follow the same path that other people take or have taken. He added that he is very ambitious and considers himself to be very smart. He stated that most people likely see him the same way, and that he believes his family views him as a rebel because of his tendency to go against the grain. Julian stated that he feels his best quality is that he is open-minded and willing to try new things and to accept things that other people would reject.

Social Support

Julian expressed that he has always been very close to his mother and that she continues to support him in everything he does. He stated that while she gives him autonomy and allows him to be his own person, she still checks up on him regularly to make sure he is on the right track. Julian stated that he is also a source of support for his mother, as well as for his friends and peers. He stated that he is the guy that everyone comes to, either for advice or for help with assignments.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Julian stated that throughout his upbringing, his mother always emphasized the importance of knowing the history and culture of his race. He added that he believes this was of particular importance to his mother because since elementary school he attended predominantly White schools. Therefore, his mother wanted him to make sure that he was aware of his history. He recalled a seventh-grade school assignment in which he had to research a physician's contribution to the medical field and how it has changed lives. He stated that he was initially going to do the project on a White physician on which he had already done previous research. However, his mother told him about Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, an African American physician who was the first person to successfully complete an open heart surgery in America. He stated that she encouraged him to do more research on this prominent figure before he decided who he would write about for his class project. Julian stated that his mother's teaching him about his history and culture is what primarily established his healthy racial identity and good sense of himself as a person overall.

Resilience

When asked whether he believes his life will get better, Julian responded that he feels he was destined for success, and that his life is in an upward trend right now. He stated that his goal

for the next year is to maintain at least a 3.5 GPA. He added that he also plans to start preparing for the LSAT (Law School Admissions Test), because he plans to attend law school. In the next 5–10 years, Julian stated that he plans to either be in law school or theology school, or climbing the ropes of corporate America in a college setting.

Participant #7: "Charlene"

Charlene is an 18-year-old African American female. She is a freshman in college and attends school out of state. Charlene was raised on the South Side of Chicago, where she lived with her mother and older brother. She recalled that while growing up in her neighborhood, community violence was constantly on her radar because there was always something going on. She stated that if she did not hear the activity outside of her home, then she would see in the media that something occurred near her home. Charlene stated that on two different occasions her mother moved them to a different neighborhood (still on the South Side) because of the violence. She added that her mother also kept them involved in extracurricular activities, to avoid them getting caught up in the community violence.

Impact of Community Violence

Charlene reported that the community violence hit very close to home when she was around 7 years old. She shared that her older brother's best friend (age 14) was shot and killed after playing in a neighborhood basketball game with her brother. Charlene continued that 4 years ago, her brother's other best friend was shot and killed while standing on his porch. She stated that she felt devastated by both deaths because both of her brother's friends were very close to the family and she looked at them as if they were her own brothers. Charlene also stated that while growing up in the different neighborhoods on the South Side, she always felt afraid for her own brother's life and was very happy when he decided to attend college out of state. She

continued that the violence in her community was also a predominant factor in her choosing to attend a school out of state. Charlene added that she remains fearful about the violence in Chicago because her mother still lives in the same neighborhood, but neither she nor her brother is there with her. She stated that she is also afraid for her own life when she goes home, because Chicago is very unpredictable, and she feels that anything could happen at any given time. Charlene stated that another factor that made it difficult to live in her neighborhood was the fact that there were no good schools nearby, which meant that she and her brother had to commute to a different neighborhood (much farther from home) just to get a quality education.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Charlene described herself as having a very bubbly personality. She is a cheerleader and says that she is naturally very happy and spirited. She continued that she is a very hard worker because her mother raised her to believe that she must work for what she wants in life. She stated that when she does want something, she is not afraid to go after and get it. Charlene also stated that she feels very strong and confident in herself because she knows who she is and believes in who she is. She further described herself as very intelligent and takes pride in the fact that she attends what she describes as one of the best HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). Charlene stated that out of everything she has going for her, she feels her best attribute is that she is very kind to people. She believes that it is much easier to be kind to people than to be nasty or disrespectful. She added that people are more willing to do things for you when you have a warm regard for them and for yourself.

Social Support

Charlene stated that her mother is the one person who she feels she can depend on for anything. She stated that her mother has always worked very hard to provide for her the tools

that would help her to be successful in life. Regarding her being a source of support for others, Charlene stated that her friends and classmates often come to her for advice, as well as for help with assignments.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Charlene recalled that two of her teachers during grade school were emphatic about Black people knowing who they are and where they come from. She stated that these two teachers caused her to be more interested in her Black history and culture, which she stated has helped shape her overall identity and made her feel proud to be a Black woman. When asked how she feels other races view African Americans and how it makes her feel, Charlene stated that in general she believes other races view African American people as an inferior race. However, she stated that it feels much different being at an HBCU, where the majority of students are African American, and Caucasian and Asian people are the minority. She stated that in a sense it feels like the "roles" are reversed. Charlene added that while she is aware that African Americans are often viewed as being an inferior race, she knows that this perception is not true. She also added that it does not really bother her because she knows who she is.

Resilience

When asked whether she believes her life will get better, Charlene responded that she definitely believes it will get better. She added that knowing where she came from will help her to get where she wants to go. While she feels that her past may affect her in the future, she stated that it will not deter her from where she wants to go or who she aims to become. She stated that her past should be a motivator and not a hindrance. Charlene expressed that her goal for the next year is to work on starting her own cheer camp and competition. She stated that her goals for the next 5–10 years are to attend graduate school and a professional school of psychology. She stated that she is really interested in doing research on the effects of discrimination.

Participant #8: "Sherry"

Sherry is a 22-year-old African American female. She recently graduated from a private Catholic University in the city of Chicago. She was raised in an affluent neighborhood near downtown Chicago, where she currently lives with her parents. Sherry described her neighborhood as racist and stated that there are no other Black families that live near her. For these reasons, Sherry reported that she did not spend much time in her own community while growing up, but instead spent most of her time on the South and West Sides of the city, where she attended different dance camps. Sherry added that she felt very sheltered during her upbringing, which in many ways made her feel naïve to the struggles of Black people. She reported that both of her parents had been raised in different housing projects in the city, but that they never talked to her about their experiences growing up.

Impact of Community Violence

Sherry stated that she had never experienced community violence in her own neighborhood. However, she shared that her boyfriend had been the fatal victim of gun violence in his neighborhood 3 years ago. She later learned that one of his best friends was also shot and killed while visiting Chicago. Sherry raised the point that she was very naïve to the level of violence in certain parts of the city because she grew up in such a protected neighborhood, and her parents protected her from everything. She stated that becoming aware of the level of community violence that many of her friends regularly experience caused her to have a better understanding of why many were so excited to turn 18 years old. She indicated that many of her friends (male and female) did not have an expectation to live beyond their teenage years. She added that she still sometimes has difficulty believing that her boyfriend did not live to see 20 years old.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Sherry describes herself as a very competitive and determined person. She is quiet and introspective, but also very outgoing, depending on the situation. She also views herself as being smart and funny. She believes her best qualities are that she is a good listener and always tries to help people.

Social Support

Sherry reported that she tends to lean on her four best friends for support when she is going through difficult times. She stated that she can talk to them about anything, even when she knows she is wrong about something. She feels that she can trust them to be honest with her and not judge her. Sherry also feels that she is very supportive of the people in her life. She stated that people usually depend on her to help them through rough times, particularly when they need emotional support.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Sherry indicated that she did not hear very much about Black culture or Black history growing up, beyond the staple figures taught in school (i.e., Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks). She reported that when she was in high school, her friends were surprised that she had never even heard of classic Black films, such as Roots or The Wiz. It was during this time that she recognized how little she knew about her own culture. Sherry reported that during college that she began to explore and become more comfortable with herself as a Black woman. She shared that she began wearing her hair in natural styles and even helped her mother become more acclimated to wearing her hair naturally. Sherry stated that after graduating high school and starting college, she felt like a different person. She stated that even though she had a sheltered upbringing, she felt like she needed to speak up about all the violence her that affects many

Black communities. In college, Sherry reported that she was one of very few Black people and that she felt like she became the Black voice for everybody. She reported that at times she struggled with being viewed as the angry Black woman, but also knew that she could not remain silent.

Resilience

When asked whether she believes her life will get better, Sherry responded that she does mostly because she is very competitive and does not give herself a choice for her life to get worse. She continued that she has days where she is not sure how to deal with situations. However, she stated that she then reminds herself that whatever situation she is in, she knows that her life is comparatively better than someone else's, and if they can get through hard times, then she can also get through her difficulties. Sherry reported that things she would like to accomplish in the next year would be to begin dancing again and to learn another language. She stated that in 5–10 years she sees herself having finished her master's degree and in law school. She added that she has thought about becoming a chef. Sherry stated that whatever she decides to do with her life she just wants to be happy.

Participant #9: "Jelisa"

Jelisa is a 21-year-old African American female who was raised on the South Side of Chicago. She is a junior at an out-of-state university. She was raised with her parents and younger brother and has lived in the same house her whole life. Jelisa stated that as a young child, she spent much of her leisure time outside, either with her parents or playing with children in the neighborhood. However, Jelisa recalled that as she grew older, she began spending less of her time outside, due to the increased community violence she witnessed on nearly a daily basis. She stated that there was often riotous fighting at her school, which included students' family members coming up to the school to participate, and which rarely ended on the school grounds.

Jelisa added that there was usually fighting in her neighborhood at least once per week. She stated that the activity had become so normalized that the neighborhood residents came to expect it, and that some people viewed the fighting as entertainment. However, she stated that she never enjoyed seeing this activity, and that one of her reasons for going away to school was to get away from the violence in Chicago.

Impact of Community Violence

Jelisa described two incidents of violence that have affected her and her family. She recalled that when she was in grade school, one of her cousins was accidentally shot and killed by her older brother who was playing with his father's gun. Jelisa stated that she feels the neighborhood violence was one of the causes of her cousin's death. She stated that because there was so much crime and violence in the neighborhood, her uncle kept a gun in the home for protection.

Jelisa stated that within the same year of her cousin's death, one of her uncles (father's brother) was shot and killed during a fight. She continued that after her uncle's death, her father became emotionally distant and sometimes spoke callously to the family, which had a long-term effect on her relationship with him. Jelisa stated that both incidents caused her to realize how easily lives could be changed due to senseless violence. She stated that when she started college, she also took advantage of the counseling service that was offered on campus. She stated that doing so has helped promote inner healing from family relationship problems. She also stated that she has forgiven her father and that they are working on improving their relationship.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Jelisa describes herself as a nurturer, stating that she tends to show people the type of love that she has wanted to receive her whole life. She stated that she is a great listener and that

she is very patient with people. Jelisa stated that she is very introspective and analytical, and that she is usually able to see and understand various perspectives of most situations she has encountered. Jelisa stated that her greatest strengths are her resilience and endurance, which have helped her to overcome multiple challenges she has had to face.

Social Support

Jelisa reported that she has many close friends on whom she can always depend when she is going through difficult times. She stated that her issue with social support has always been that she is more comfortable giving than receiving it. Yet, she feels that her current group of friends has really helped her to get past her challenge with accepting the support she needs. She stated that even though she has multiple close friends, each relationship is genuine and unique. She stated that each friend feels like a different part of her.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Jelisa stated that while growing up, she was not taught very much about Black history and culture, outside of learning about a few figures that are taught during Black History month (MLK, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, etc.). However, she recalled that during high school, her mentor became the primary influence that caused her to embrace her identity as a Black woman. She stated that her desire to learn more about the true history of Black people was the catalyst to her attending an HBCU. She stated that she feels that Black people are often portrayed in the media and viewed by other races as animals. Jelisa stated that learning more about her history and culture helps her to discover more about herself as an individual and to love who she is.

Resilience

When asked whether she believes her life will get better, Jelisa responded that she knows her life will get better because even during the lowest periods of her life, she was always able to anticipate brighter days. She stated that the things she would like to accomplish in the next year

are going on a trip to South Africa, improving her physical health (diabetic), and just becoming stronger mentally. She stated that in 5–10 years, she sees herself opening her own not-for-profit organization to help women who have been victims of sex-trafficking, domestic violence, and other forms of trauma. Jelisa stated that her overall goal for herself is to simply be happy and at peace.

Participant #10: "Michael"

Michael is a 24-year-old African American male who was born and raised by his single mother on the South Side of Chicago. He is employed by an organization that showcases African American art, culture, and history. He shared that the neighborhood he lives in has a high percentage of crime and violence, due to nearby gangs in the area.

Impact of Community Violence

Michael described an incident in which he was the victim of violence during his junior year in high school. He stated that the incident started with a group of five or six male schoolmates questioning him about the sexual orientation of one of his close friends. Michael continued that because he wanted to respect his friend's privacy, he refused to answer any of the questions. This resulted in the group of boys assaulting him, leaving him badly bruised and requiring several stitches over one of his eyes. Michael stated that during this experience, he was mostly in a state of shock and disbelief. He continued that while he did the best that he could to defend himself, at some point he froze and temporarily dissociated from himself, and recalled thinking, "This cannot be happening to me right now."

Michael shared that while his physical injuries were minor, his mental and emotional scars were more significant. Michael stated that after the incident, he recalled being very aware of all his thoughts and a penetrating feeling of wanting to hide. He stated that he began distancing himself from both friends and family and went through a period where he was very

embarrassed and angry. Michael shared that he was angry at people because he was aware that many stood by and watched the incident, but no one helped him. However, he stated that he was mostly angry at himself because he did not do more to defend himself. Michael stated that when he looks back at the incident now, he understands that he really could not have defended himself, given the number of people who attacked him. He further explained that his thinking stemmed from his upbringing and being socialized to believe that he should be able to stand up for himself.

Michael stated that after about 2 years, he was able to move past what happened to him and no longer feels defeated by the situation. Yet, he added that he was left with a more heightened awareness of his surroundings and feeling that anything could happen at any given time.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

Michael described himself as a torchbearer. He stated that he believes part of his purpose in life is to pick up where many great figures before him left off, in the movement towards racial justice and equality. Michael continued that he is very consistent and nurturing, and someone who gives his all to people and causes for which he is passionate. He stated that his best characteristic is his selflessness, which he described as an ability to see the greater good in situations, as they pertain to others.

Social Support

Michael shared that he often finds himself in the role of being the person that everyone else comes to for support. Yet, he stated that the one person he knows he can always count on is his mother. Michael added that because his mother gave birth to him when she was almost 16

years old, in many ways he feels that they grew up together. He shared that they have always

been very close and that he feels able to go to her about almost anything.

Racial Identity/Socialization

Michael shared that during his upbringing, he was indirectly exposed to Black culture

through the various musical artists his mother and grandmother listened to. However, he stated

that he does not recall ever receiving in-depth teaching about African American history or

culture. He shared that he recalled feeling within his family a sense of pride to be Black. At the

same time, he stated that no one ever talked to him about what it means to be Black, which made

him feel incomplete in many ways. Michael continued that this lack of teaching, particularly

during his teenage years, left him with a yearning and sense of heaviness. He stated that he felt

he did not know enough about his own people, or himself, which pushed him to do his own

research. Michael stated that in his research and personal experiences, he has learned that racism

comes in many different forms. He also stated that he believes that some people of other races

continue to view Black people as subhuman. He explained that if a group of people, who are

only human themselves, view people from another race as inferior to them, then they see that

"inferior" race as subhuman.

Resilience

When asked whether Michael believes his life will get better, he stated that at times he

does not. He added that when he was younger, he had dreams of doing great things. However, he

feels that the older he gets, the lower he aims. Michael added that he often becomes complacent

because he recognizes how difficult it would be to make his dreams a reality. He stated that in

this way he feels he has become a product of his environment. He stated that if he continues to

allow his dreams to "lay by the side of the river," and he continues to just float along, then

nothing in his life will change for the better. He stated that his greatest obstacle is feeling that he

does not have a solid foundation from which to begin, or access to what he needs to accomplish his goals.

Michael stated that what he needs to accomplish in the next year is to become more connected to himself, and to take steps to becoming more complete within himself. In the next 5–10 years, Michael plans to go back to school. He then plans to create his own center (similar to his current place of employment) where people can go to enjoy learning more about African American history and culture.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The following is an evaluation of the themes that emerged in this study using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003) to analyze the interview data. In exploring participants' experiences of community violence (and their reactions to it), two themes that surfaced were some of the participants' altered sense of safety, and the use of education, not only as a means to success, but also to escape community violence. The use of specific protective factors (internal attributes, social support, and racial socialization) and how they help to promote resilience is also further discussed in this section. Finally, in regards to resilience, this section also analyzes the factors that contribute to the participants' sense of hopefulness (or hopelessness), and future orientation.

Impact of Community Violence

While participants had varying levels of exposure to community violence—victim, witness, or close acquaintance with a victim of community violence—most participants were impacted and responded to their experiences in similar ways. Nine of the participants grew up in a community where violence was prevalent. Five of these nine participants stated that even though they were aware of the violence around them, they were either sheltered from it, or felt safe in their communities before their personal experiences with violence.

- Devon: "It was, it was cool, really. I knew everybody. It was pretty much safe for me because my parents and my uncle…I didn't have any problems."

- Joe: "Well, for me, it was pretty good because my mom, she's pretty big on, like, being structured…we weren't like outside on the block playing with, like, the other kids."

- Mary: "It was nice, but it was a lot of violence. I enjoyed it. But I guess it's like, because I grew up there, I didn't mind it…it was like it was kind of natural to me.

- Torrence: "Um, growing up, it was, everything was pretty smooth. Like, my family was, like, we were pretty well off. I wasn't very involved with the community, like I played sports all my life.

- Julian: "I was sheltered from things. I'd cop rides from my mom everywhere…she sheltered me."

These same participants stated that after their experience of community violence, they no longer felt safe in the communities they had grown up in and had a heightened awareness of the violence around them.

- Devon: "I felt like it wasn't safe in the neighborhood that I grew up in…it affected me because every time I came around in the neighborhood, just to go see my grand-mom or something I would just be extremely aware, more aware than I was previously, when it happened.

- Joe: "Honestly it was just, like, really scary. And like, the fact that like, they don't really care, like, they see they see that people were outside.

- Mary: "It was scary. It was my first time being shot at. I was terrified…It took me a minute to come back out. I stay indoors way more than outside. After that I watched my surroundings a lot more. I don't trust being around a lot of people. I am, like, real panicky. So, I just don't go anywhere. Like, I have to always have my eyes and ears open."

- Torrence: "It just really tough because I was in a comfort of my own home…like my comfort zone was destroyed. So that was just kind of a reality check.

- Julian: "I mean, it was just like a scary situation…it was a lot of fear going on. Like you don't want to walk in the house at night anymore. I didn't feel safe."

Barnard-Wills et al. (2012) reported that feeling exposed, and therefore vulnerable, provokes one's sense of danger, awakening environmental awareness and individual responsibility for one's own safety.

Education as a Means to Success and Escape

The theme of taking measures to ensure one's safety was further highlighted in the role of education. The most common theme among the participants in this study was that they all have some form of higher education. College is viewed by some individuals as a path to success. Many seek higher education in order to improve career opportunities and gain economic prosperity and social mobility (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). In addition, for some youth, the adverse experiences within their communities motivate them to seek a life away from violence by pursuing higher education and career choices. Eight of the 10 participants in this study are currently enrolled in a 4-year university, seven of which are out of state. "Devon" stated that his uncle (who was shot in a barbershop) encouraged him to go away to school to get out of the neighborhood. "Charlene" and "Jelisa" both shared that the violence in their communities was their primary motivation for going to school out of state.

Protective Factors

Internal Attributes

At the foundation of all human behavior is the self—people's sense of personal identity and of who they are as individuals (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014). Self-esteem, which is considered an influential factor in physical/mental health and health-related behavior, could be seen as part of the individual domain within the resilience framework (Currie et al., 2004). The results of this study reveal that most of the participants have moderate to high perceptions of themselves. Participants were asked two questions related to their self-perception: "How would you describe

yourself?" and "What are your best qualities?" When asked how they would describe themselves, all 10 participants gave multiple characteristics, including: hard-working, nice, bright, funny, tough, independent, moral, leader, determined, ambitious, strong, and confident. I found it noteworthy that, with the exception of two individuals, all of the participants used only positive characteristics to describe themselves. According to Jhangiani and Tarry (2014), because it is so important to be seen as competent and productive members of society, people naturally attempt to present themselves to others in a positive light. Schlenker (2003) stated that individuals attempt to convince others that they are good and worthy people by appearing attractive, strong, intelligent, and likable, and by saying positive things to others. The tendency to present a positive self-image to others, with the goal of increasing one's social status, is known as self-presentation, and it is a basic and natural part of everyday life.

Regarding the impact of self-esteem on resilience, several studies have indicated a correlation between these two variables. Oshio et al. (2003) examined the relationship of resilience to self-esteem in adolescents with negative experiences and concluded that adolescents who have high resilience scores tend to maintain high levels of self-esteem even when they experience painful negative events. Moksnes, Eilertsen, and Lazarewicz (2016) studied a cross-sectional sample of Norwegian adolescents ($N = 1239$) by means of the Resilience Scale for Adolescents and of the Rosenberg Scale for Self-Esteem. The findings show that resilience is an important resource associated with stress in adolescents, especially in girls. Similarly, Scoloveno (2016) reported that self-esteem, as well as social responsiveness, is considered a protective mechanism of one's own value which allows the individual to successfully face challenges and adversities. It is not clear how these two variables are related or if there is a causal relationship. Future researchers are encouraged to look more closely at the relationship between resilience and

self-esteem to determine how the two variables may impact one another, specifically within adolescence.

In the present study, both male and female participants used descriptions that alluded to their internal drive towards success (i.e., determined, hard-working, resilient, ambitious, etc). In general, there was not a significant difference between the terms the male and female participants used to describe themselves, though it should be noted that statistical analyses were not conducted. It should also be noted that more males than females defined their best quality in relation to being other-centered. "Devon" described his best feature as his generosity, stating, "I'll share anything I have…I'll share my very last with my family." "Torrence" stated that his best quality is his ability to relate to and understand people. Furthermore, "Michael" stated that his best characteristic was his selflessness, and his ability to see the greater good in situations as they pertain to others. More female than male participants described their best qualities in relation to their drive or tenacity. "Mary" felt that her best quality was her determination. Similarly, "Mia" defined her best characteristic as self-determination, stating, "When I set a goal, I plan to accomplish it by any means necessary." "Sherry" also stated that she is competitive and determined, and that her best qualities are her resilience and endurance.

Participants were also asked how they felt other people viewed them. Not only did all the participants have positive internal attributes, most of them also believe they are seen in the same light by family and peers. The concept of the "looking-glass self" states that part of how people see themselves comes from their perception of how others see them (Cooley, 1902). Current studies have supported the notion of the looking-glass self, namely that individuals often form their self-concepts based on the views that others have of them (Beer et al., 2013). This may be particularly so with members of the same families and culture. Perkins et al. (2014), for example,

found that, in the United States, how members of ethnic minority groups believed that other members of the same culture perceived them significantly correlated with their self-esteem scores. In contrast, their perceived appraisal of European Americans toward them was only weakly related to their self-esteem. The impact of the appraisal of other ethnic groups on the participants in this study is further discussed later in the *Racial Identity/Socialization* subsection.

Racial Identity/Racial Socialization

Various studies have linked African American youths' high self-esteem and positive racial identity with their academic success, behavioral adjustment, and positive emotional functioning (Smith et al., 2009). Given the race-related disparities for health and well-being found in people of color in the United States, it is particularly critical to understand the protective function of self-esteem and positive racial identity among these youth (Davis et al., 2017).

A growing body of evidence has indicated that racial socialization is a relevant and frequent parenting strategy for African American parents (Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). Racial socialization has been defined as any conversations about race to children. This strategy includes messages about race and culture, and how to function as an individual of that race and cope with possible discrimination (Hughes & Chen, 1999). Cultural pride reinforcement, which is similar to racial pride (Lesane-Brown et al., 2006) and cultural socialization (Hughes et al., 2006), involves messages that promote African American pride and passing on knowledge of African American culture. It has been noted as an important process in ethnic minority families due to its impact on positive youth development, racial identity, and mental health (Davis et al., 2017).

Participants were asked whether their parents (or anyone else) talked to them about African American history or culture while they were growing up. The second part of the question

pertained to how their racial socialization made them feel as African American young adults. Most of the participants indicated that they had received some form of racial socialization while growing up. Participants who received direct racial socialization while growing up confidently spoke of their strong sense of pride and racial identification. In describing the cultural teaching received from his parents, "Devon'" stated, "It makes me feel powerful. I feel like no one can get in my way but me. I think that no one can stop me with whatever I want to do in life." Meanwhile, participants who had very little or indirect racial socialization reported having less comfort with their racial identities. "Mia" shared that she did not receive any racial socialization while growing up. She stated that not having knowledge of her history makes it difficult to have a true sense of her identity. "Mia" also alluded to not being happy in her own skin. She added that she attends a predominantly White college, which increases her discomfort with her racial identity.

In addition to contending with significant economic and contextual risk factors, African American youth also contend with negative social regard. Research has demonstrated that negative attitudes towards African Americans persist (Gibbons et al., 2004) and that African American youth are aware of these attitudes (Brody et al., 2006). According to social identity and reflected appraisal theories, if society views a group negatively, then members of the group tend to view themselves negatively (Tajifel & Turner, 2004). However, a positive racial identity may allow individuals to be less concerned about the perceptions of others (Mandara et al., 2009).

The participants in this study were asked how they feel other races view African Americans, and how this perception impacts them. Most responded that they believe other races view African Americans as inferior to them. However, the participants who received racial

socialization indicated that the negative perceptions from members of other races do not cause them to view themselves through the same lenses. One participant stated, "I don't really feel affected by it…I just know that there are things I have to do to just make sure I am the best that I can be. I don't really focus on anybody else." Both male and female participants indicated that racial socialization (either receiving it or not) greatly impacts the formation of their racial identities.

Social Support

Studies have shown that resilience is not a stable trait but fluctuates over time, suggesting that it is subject to developmental or environmental changes, and not personal attributes alone (Klika & Herrenkohl, 2013). Myriad psychological and biological factors have been associated with resilience in the individual (Charney, 2004; Southwick et al., 2005; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Psychological correlates include, but are not limited to: optimism and positive emotions; attention to health and fitness; cognitive flexibility and the capacity to adapt to a host of different challenges; an active problem-oriented style of coping and perseverance; and strong willpower, courage, a well-developed moral code of behavior, altruism, and dedication to a meaningful purpose or cause.

In terms of biological systems, the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) system are extensively involved in resilience to stress. The development of these systems is highly dependent on social systems, particularly attachment figures (Loman et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2011). As such, sturdy role models and a history of loving caregivers predict individual resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Human responses to adversity also take place in the context of available resources, specific cultures and religions, organizations, and communities and societies, each of which may be more or less resilient in their own right, and more or less capable of supporting and enhancing resilience in the

individual. The support that individuals receive from family, friends, colleagues, organizations, and community has a profound impact on their psychological health, physical health, and ability to deal with adversities and challenges.

Like resilience, social support is a complex construct with many definitions (Southwick et al., 2016). Eisenberger (2013) defined social support as "having or perceiving to have close others who can provide help or care, particularly during times of stress" (p. 547). Multiple facets of social support which, while overlapping to some extent, reflect unique aspects of this construct. These facets include: structural social support (i.e., the size and extent of the individual's social network, frequency of social interactions); functional social support (i.e., the perception that social interactions have been beneficial in terms of meeting emotional or instrumental needs); emotional social support (i.e., behavior that fosters feelings of comfort leading the person to believe that they are loved, respected, and/or cared for by others); instrumental/material social support (i.e., goods and services that help solve practical problems); and informational/cognitive social support (i.e., provision of advice or guidance intended to help individuals cope with current difficulties). These facets of social support can be facilitated and maintained by different systems, including family, community, and state, national, and international systems. Notably, while social support is a key correlate of psychological resilience, it is not universally helpful, as its effectiveness may vary by the type of support provided and the extent to which it matches an individual's needs, which may change over time. It should be noted that the optimal source of social support may depend on the developmental stage of the person who is receiving the support. For example, parental support seems to be more valuable in early adolescence than it is in late adolescence (Stice et al., 2004). Moreover, the type of social support seems to be important in conferring resilience to stress (Ozbay et al., 2007).

The participants of this study were asked questions about the social support they receive. The questions were general in nature, and not specific to any facet of support (i.e., "Do you have anyone you can depend on for help when you need it?" "What is your relationship to him/her?"). All 10 participants stated they have at least one person in their lives that they can depend on for support when needed. When comparing (by gender) the sources and types of support received, all five males in the study responded that either one, or both, parents (and other close family members) are their primary source for social support. "Devon" stated:

> I go to both of my parents. Every time I call them…I get depressed sometimes in college. I'm all alone. All my family's back home in Chicago. I'll call them anytime, and they'll just kind of motivate me and push me through whatever I'm going through. It can be something so small, a lot of assignments piled up, and I'm just trying to figure out how to do everything, and I just call my parents and they help me push through.

The other male participants also indicated that the types of support received by parents/family cover multiple facets. Torrence stated, "I can depend on my father for anything. I can talk to my mother and father about any topic, but I'm just closer to my father because of the male bonding. Anything I need and he's there."

The female participants also indicated that they received social support, although most of these participants stated that their friends, rather than family, were their primary source. "Mia" stated that the one person she is able to rely on is a longtime male friend she has known since high school. Meanwhile, "Sherry" and "Jelisa" both stated that their friend groups in college are who they rely on when going through difficult times. The other female participants, "Charlene" and "Mary" stated that they are very close with their mothers (and other family members), and thus tend to rely on them for support. The findings in this study (i.e., males relying more on

parent/family than females) were surprising, given the outcomes of previous studies related to gender differences in family support. Earlier research has shown that with respect to gender, women are more likely than men to exchange emotional support with family members than men (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Wan & Antonnuci, 2016). In addition, demonstrated gendered differences in social networks indicate that women have more extensive social ties than men, are socialized at an early age to fulfill gender-specific functional roles (e.g., caregiving and household work), and are more involved in emotional work (e.g., kin-keeping) within their families (Lytton & Romney, 1991). However, it should be noted that the present study involved qualitative research and therefore differences between male and female participants in this small sample were not subject to statistical analyses.

Resilience

The current study defined resilience as a psychological outlook, based on hopefulness and future orientation. Research has shown that a positive outlook toward the future can protect youth from the risks conferred by adversity. Developmental systems perspectives suggest that future orientation, when considered across time, will exhibit dynamic trajectories with levels changing in response to the varying balance of risks and resources in youths' environments (Oshri et al., 2018). Future orientation provides the basis for goal setting and making tangible plans for the future during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Nurmi, 1989). Its growth and development are impacted by the realistic evaluations youth make about their ability to reach future goals. In this way, a hopeful sense of the future can facilitate positive development and successful transition into adulthood (Hill, 2015). However, when environmental factors such as violence and poverty induce hopelessness and defeat before hope, optimism, and possibility take root, an individual's ability to develop a positive future orientation is limited or inhibited (Hinton-Nelson et al., 1996).

Future orientation is as much about what adolescents envision for their future as it is about the behaviors they engage in and avoid, to make that future possible. If youth do not have positive expectations for the future and do not see current behaviors as linked to future goals, they may not be concerned about partaking in violent behavior and abandoning their future. Conversely, if youth envision a positive future for themselves, it is likely that they will engage in fewer health-compromising behaviors to help ensure that they will reach their aspirations (Janosz et al., 2008). To explore the sense of hopefulness/hopelessness and future orientation of the participants in this study, I asked three questions: (a) "Do you feel that your life will get better? Why or why not?"; (b) "What are some things you would like to accomplish within the next year?"; and (3) "Where do you see yourself in the next 5–10 years?"

Nine of the 10 participants responded that they believe their lives would get better. Some attributed this hopefulness to internal attributes (i.e., hardworking, competitive, positive thinking), while others felt that external factors, such as networking, would help ensure their success. I felt that an important feature of the participants' future orientation was their ability to express clear, concrete, and attainable goals. Most participants conveyed tangible goals such as: raising their GPA, graduating college, attending graduate or professional school, or becoming a registered nurse, or police officer. Meanwhile, one participant, "Mia," stated that her short-term goal was to decide on a major. Her long-term goal was stated as follows:

> [To] be happy in my skin tone and in my body. That way, I don't want to feel like on the fence between two different races or how I identify myself. Um, I want to be working in an environment where I'm happy to get up in the morning and go to work, or I'm doing something that's helping people in getting them farther along than where I was…

While this participant stated she is hopeful that her life will get better, her goals were somewhat vague and indicated that she may be unhappy with who she is.

"Michael" was the only participant who explicitly stated that he did not think his life would get better. His reasons for feeling this way were based on various factors. He stated that if he continues to do nothing to fulfill his dreams, he anticipates that his life will just remain as it is and not change at all. "Michael" added:

> I know people think that, like, you can overcome anything, but in a lot of ways, a lot of us are products of our environments. I think I am a result of everything I've lived and seen, and like, just trying to detach from all of that…and having literally nothing as a foundation like, no kind of access to anything to reach these goals and dreams, makes it hard.

Based on the responses to my questions related to resilience, there was not a significant difference in the male and female participants' sense of hopefulness and future orientation. In general, when considering gender differences in resilience levels in African American youth, several factors should be recognized. Cole and Omari (2003) reported findings that upward social mobility carries extra burdens for Black women as they experience discrimination and social rejection at a higher rate when in contact with Whites. Also, the barriers experienced by youth have a large impact on families, and if women or girls take on a care-taking role within their families, as they often do, they may have a differential reaction from men. Another important consideration, especially concerning social rejection and discrimination that may result in higher incidence in girls than boys, could be the exclusion of girls from sports or other gender-segregated extracurricular activities that may buffer the formation of Black identity and social acceptance for males.

Chapter 6: Limitations and Conclusion

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, the sample size of this study is very small, limiting the generalization of the findings. Second, this study focused on specific protective factors that lead to resilience in African American youth exposed to community violence. As such, it is important to point out that some of the participants' current experiences are different than those of others, many of which are a stark contrast to their experiences growing up in violent communities. This, in and of itself, may lead to their future orientation and overall sense of hopefulness. Seven of the 10 participants are currently away at school, five of whom attend predominantly White colleges. In addition, another participant, though she spent much of her time in dangerous communities, currently resides in an affluent neighborhood in the city.

At the time this research was conducted, only two participants still resided in or near the communities within which they grew up. In other words, within the same sample, some participants are still exposed to community violence, while some are not. It is possible that the participants who no longer live in their communities are far removed, mentally and emotionally, from their experiences of community violence. This factor alone, can cause them to see their past exposure to violence through a different lens than if they were still regularly being exposed to violence. This factor can also have a significant impact on their abilities to see and plan for their futures. Meanwhile, the participants who still reside in their communities may be impacted by the violence to which they are still exposed. While these ideas are purely speculation at this point, it would be a good area to explore for future research. A related, but separate area for future research could be to specifically explore the impact of being Black on a predominately White campus, versus attending an HBCU.

The fact that all of the participants in this study are either in college or have graduated from college is yet another limitation. The sample does not reflect the diversity of the community which was the focus of this study. Furthermore, it does not capture the experiences of African American youth who do not achieve a higher education. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the experiences of African American youth who do not attend college, including those who are/are not in the workforce.

Another limitation is that, while I sought to explore gender differences in resilience within the sample, it proved to be difficult to form a true comparison of the participants' resilience levels. As previously mentioned, this is partly due to the sample size. However, other factors may also impede the ability to compare resilience between the two groups (males and females). At first glance, it appears that the females in this study are more resilient than their male counterparts, given their responses to the questions related to resilience. However, I realized that other factors must be explored to make a conclusive determination. I looked at a broad range of exposure to community violence, consisting of participants being either a victim, witness, or a close acquaintance of a victim. With a broad range of exposure to violence, one could also assume that there might be a broad range of impact (mild, moderate, severe).

Various studies have shown evidence of differential effects of community violence on gender (Saadatmand et al., 2017). Previous research has indicated that behavioral outcomes for gender were primarily determined by level of exposure. For instance, Foster et al. (2004) demonstrated that gender differences in PTSD exist among inner-city African American youth who are exposed to community violence. They found a stronger positive association of anxiety and depression symptoms with the extent of community violence exposure among girls than boys. Furthermore, while girls did not appear to differ in their responses to witnessing violence

versus being a victim, boys appeared to be more distressed by being a victim of violence than by witnessing violence. This is important to consider when examining resilience, as it may be significantly impacted by the degree to which an individual is affected.

The participants of this study may have been impacted by their experiences in varying degrees, which makes it difficult to compare their resilience levels based on their exposure to violence. Lastly, resilience is a multidimensional construct, and in the present study, I focused on two components: hopefulness and future orientation. Although these aspects are strong indicators of resilience, I recognize that other components may also inform resilience in African American youth. Future research is recommended to further discern the qualities that define resilience in African American youth.

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Appendix A

Email to Solicit Participation in Study

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Kimberly Nelson-Arrington. I am a student at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, at Argosy University. To complete my Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology, I will be conducting a clinical research project focusing on the impact of community violence on African-American youth. The study will explore the differential effects of community violence on African American youth, based on gender. It will also explore the protective factors that contribute to resilience within this population. I am reaching out to you at this time to request permission to recruit participants from your program. I will be recruiting 10 -12 males and females between the ages of 18-24. If given permission, I will begin a screening process to determine the eligibility of interested candidates. Please feel free to contact me by email or phone to go over specific details of the study. You can reach me at (708)252-3185. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you,

Kimberly Nelson-Arrington
Doctoral Student Clinical Psychology
National Louis University
122 S Michigan Ave,
Chicago, IL. 6060

Appendix B

Flyer

PARTICIPATION NEEDED!

I am a doctoral student at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, at Argosy University, Chicago. I am currently recruiting participants for my clinical research project, focusing on the impact of community violence on African American youth. The study will explore the differential effects of community violence on African American youth, based on gender. It will also explore the protective factors that may contribute to resilience within this population.
I am recruiting participants based on the following criteria:

- African American male or female between the ages of 18-24.

- U.S. citizen

- Has resided in the inner city of Chicago for at least half your life

All participants will receive a $20. If you are interested, please contact
Kimberly at (708) 252-3185, or email: ksnelsonarrington@my.nl.edu for more information.

Thank you!

Appendix C

Recruitment Information to be Placed on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn

Brief Description of the study and inclusion criteria for personal contacts and participants:

Hello,
My name is Kimberly Nelson-Arrington. I am a doctoral candidate at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, at National Louis University, Chicago. I am recruiting participants for my clinical research project focusing on the impact of community violence on African American youth. The study will explore the differential effects of community violence on African American youth, based on gender. It will also explore the protective factors that may contribute to resilience within this population.
I am recruiting participants based on the following criteria:

- African American male or female between the ages of 18-24.
- Is a U.S. citizen
- Has resided in the inner city of Chicago for at least half your life

Participants will be interviewed between 45 minutes to 90 minutes in the fall of 2018 and Spring 2019.
If you decide to participate, please follow the link to Survey Monkey for more information and a place to confidentially provide your contact information, or email me at ksnelsonarrington@my.nl.edu for further details, and/or provide your contact information and I will contact you. If you are a close friend or relative, you are not eligible for this study.
Thank you,
Kimberly S. Nelson-Arrington

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS: Please answer each question as accurately as possible by circling the correct answer or filling in the space provided.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your ethnic/race? _____

3. What is your gender? Female Male

4. How long have you lived in Chicago? _____

5. What is your current zip code? _____ **How long have you lived**

there? _____

6. Please choose one of the following that best describes your social class.

Lower_____Working_____ Middle_____ Upper middle_____ Upper_____

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed? _____

8. Describe your employment status: _____

9. What is your marital status? _____

10. How many people live in your home? _____

Thank you for completing this personal profile. Please leave the best contact number or email to reach you. Phone_____Email_____.

Appendix E

Screening for Eligible Participants

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, the principal investigator will reach out to prospective participants by phone to introduce the study and to conduct screening. The principal investigator will use the following script to introduce the study:

"Hello, my name is Kimberly. I am a doctoral student at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology. To complete my degree, I will be conducting a study that focuses on the experiences of African American youth who have endured long-term exposure to community violence and other life stressors. The purpose of this study is to explore the different protective factors that help increase coping strategies and resilience in African American youth. The study will also be used to determine if there are gender differences levels of resilience in African American youth. To determine whether or not you are eligible to participate in this study, I will need to ask you a few questions. Whether you are eligible or not, I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I sincerely appreciate your interest in helping me with this project."

Screening Questions:

1. *Are you an African American youth between the ages of 18-24?*
2. *Do you identify as male or female?*
3. *How long have you lived in your neighborhood?*
4. *Have you ever been a victim or witness to a violent incident in your community; known or been friends with someone who has been a victim of a violent incident in your community?*
5. *Do you have a prior history of participation in an inpatient or intensive outpatient program?*

Appendix F

Informed Consent

Purpose: I understand that I have been invited to participate in a research study being conducted for a clinical research project as part of the academic requirements for completion of a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, at Argosy University, Chicago. The purpose of this study is to explore the protective factors that promote resilience among African American youth, and whether or not there is a difference in resilience levels between young African American males and females. It is hoped that the results of this research will be used to promote awareness of the factors that increase levels of resilience in African American youth who are regularly exposed to community violence. There is no deception in the study. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions they will be asked. This study will involve about 10 participants who meet the study criteria.

Participation Requirements: I understand that in order to participate in this study, I must be proficient in English and between the ages of 18-24 years old. I must also not have a prior history of participation in an inpatient or intensive outpatient program. If I agree to participation in this study I will be asked to will be asked to take part in an interview in which I will be asked to answer questions related to my exposure to community violence, different protective factors, and characteristics of resilience. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. The face-to-face interview will take place in a location agreed upon by the Principal investigator and myself. If I am not able to meet face-to-face the interview will be conducted via Skype. The interview will be audio recorded for accurate transcribing, but recordings of the interview will be deleted as soon as the interviews are transcribed.

Confidentiality: All identifying information will remain confidential, and a pseudonym will be used in any reference my identity in the printed materials associated with this study. The records of this study will be kept private. No words linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. I have the right to get a general summary of the results of this research at the conclusion of the study if I would like to have them. All data and tapes related to this study will be kept in a locked and secure space in the researcher's home and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. Tape recordings of the interview will be deleted as soon as the interviews are transcribed.

Potential Risk/Discomfort: Although there are no known risks in this study, some of the information is personal in nature, such as how I have been exposed to community violence and how I feel as a result. This may result in emotional distress. Resources regarding professional help will be provided at the end of the interview for use in the event that I become unduly stressed during or after the completion of the study. In addition, if in the course of the interview, any information is disclosed pertaining to abuse and/or neglect or risk of harm to myself or others, the researcher will consult with her research chair to determine the proper course of action, which may involve reporting this information to the proper authorities.

Right to Withdraw: I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, including during or after the study, and all materials related to my participation will be destroyed.

Compensation: I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I also understand that I will receive a $20 gift card as an incentive, whether or not I complete the interview.

Institutional Review Board: This research study has been reviewed and certified by the Institutional Review Board at National Louis University, Chicago. For research related problems or questions regarding participants' rights, you may contact the Institutional Review Board through the IRB Chair, Leah Horvath, Ph.D. at Argosy University, Chicago, 122 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603.

For other research-related questions or concerns, I may contact the investigator of this study, Kimberly Nelson-Arrington, at National Louis University Chicago, 122 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago IL 60603, by email at ksnelson@stu.argosy.edu or by phone at (708)252-3185.

SIGNATURES

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Name of Participant (printed)_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Kimberly Nelson-Arrington
Primary Researcher
National Louis University, Chicago
122 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603 ksnelsonarrington@my.nl.edu
(708) 252-3185

Dr. Torrey Wilson
Research Supervisor
(312) 777-7616

Appendix G

Consent to Audio Recording/Transcription

This study involves the audio or video recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio or audio recording or the transcript. Only the research team will be able to listen (view) to the recordings.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio or video tape me as part of this research. I also understand that this consent for recording is effective until the following date: _____. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature: _____Date: _____

Appendix H

Semistructured Interview

Potential questions about community violence and other stressors:

1. How long have you lived in your neighborhood?
2. What is it like living in your neighborhood?
3. Describe a time that you have been a victim or witness of violence in your neighborhood (or nearby neighborhood).
4. What was that experience like for you?
5. Are there other factors make it difficult to live in your neighborhood? If so, what are they?

Potential questions about protective factors (Internal attributes, social support, racial identity/socialization,):

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. How do you think others would describe you?
3. What do you feel are your best characteristics?
4. Do you have anyone that you can depend on for help when you need it? What is your relationship to him/her?
5. Are there people who depend on you for help?
6. Growing up did your parents (or anyone else) talk to you about African American history/culture?
7. How does that knowledge (or lack of knowledge) make you feel as an African American male/female?
8. How do you think other races view African Americans in the US? How does that make you feel?

Potential questions about resilience (based on hopefulness/hopelessness and future orientation)

1. Do you feel that your life will get better? Why or why not?
2. What are some things you would like to accomplish within the next year?
3. Where do you see yourself in the next 5-10 years?

Appendix I

Debriefing Script

Thank you so much for your time and participation in this study. Do you have any questions or concerns about what we talked about? Because of the nature of some of the questions I asked you, I realize that you may experience some distress. Here is a list of resources if you would like to talk about it. Also, if you would like to have the results of the study after it is completed, please contact me via email, and I will send you an overall summary of the study's findings. I would also like to let you know that none of your identifying information will be included in the findings of the study. Thank you again for taking the time to contribute to project!

Appendix J

Counseling/Support Referral List for Participants

Please contact the following numbers in case of emergency and if you would like more information about potential mental health resources:

1. For immediate emergencies and crises call 911.

2. National Suicide Prevention Hotline - 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255)

3. CARES line (Talk with a mental health professional) – 1-800-345-9049

4. Consumer and Family care line – 1-866-359-7953

5. National Institute of Mental Health – 1-866-615-6464

Local Illinois Mental Health Providers (Culturally specific services)

1. EMAGES, Inc – 1-773-224-7386

2. Evans and Evans Counseling Services – 1-312-641-2819

Websites:

1. Illinois Mental Health Collaborative -

   http://www.illinoismentalhealthcollaborative.com/consumers/consumer_contacts.htm

2. National Institute of Mental Health - https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-

   help/index.shtml

3. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists