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**ROUTES TO RESILIENCE:
Mechanisms of Healthy Development in Minority Adolescents
from High-Risk Urban Neighborhoods**

By

LeConté Jeanine Dill

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Public Health
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Emily Ozer, Chair
Professor Ralph Catalano
Professor Nikki Jones
Professor Malo Hutson

Spring 2011

Routes to Resilience:
Mechanisms of Healthy Development in Minority Adolescents from High-Risk Urban Neighborhoods

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by LeConté Jeanine Dill

Abstract

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from High-Risk Urban Neighborhoods

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LeConté Jeanine Dill

Doctor of Public Health

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Emily Ozer, Chair

This study examines how minority adolescents actively work to stay safe and to improve their life chances within urban neighborhoods marked by high rates of crime, violence, and physical disorder. Often, these youth are seen as resilient by others; however, the work that goes into building resilience is often overlooked. This study provides a deeper understanding of the ongoing processes of resilience that occur over the course of adolescence. Ethnographic approaches and participatory narrative analyses reveal that urban minority adolescents make strategic choices about where they will spend their time and the relationships they invest in, and they develop an internal set of beliefs about faith. Building on empirical studies examining adolescents' resilience in their family and school settings, these results detail how youth strategically avoid unsafe spaces and people and seek out safe spaces and people within their neighborhoods. Once young people find a safe space, such as a neighborhood youth center, they seek out adult mentors there who will help them access educational and professional opportunities. The relationships that develop in safe spaces help to provide social mobility for the youth. Despite these efforts, youth are routinely exposed to violence, stress, and trauma. In these situations, youth harness spiritual beliefs and practices that shore them up when all else fails. These strategies work together to magnify the effect of resilience in the lives of urban minority adolescents. This study's findings have implications for research and practice related to the mechanisms of positive youth development. Youth's own narratives of resilience add rich detail to this work. Further interdisciplinary inquiry into the external and internal factors at play in the processes of resilience can reinforce the linkages between youth development, neighborhood ecology, and public health.

Dedication

To

the African girl in the bush,
the African girl on the ship,
the Negro slave girl on the plantation,
the Colored sharecropping girl on the farm, and
the Black girl in the hood

who weren't allowed to have a quality education,
but dreamed of this day

Birthright: A Kwansaba¹

Dreams Deferred have been referred to me.
Dragged the rugged cross land: Lone Stars
left the forest and little rocks behind.
Headed South along Central. Passed on soft
covers, dog-eared. Mad Doggin' 20/20—you saw
house under red line. Cross colors: Black
ink on white paper. Shout from margins!

¹ The kwansaba is a poetic form of praise that was created by Eugene B. Redmond, the poet laureate of East St. Louis, Illinois. It consists of 49 words—seven lines of seven words each, each word containing no more than seven letters. The name derives from the African-American holiday *Kwanzaa* and the Swahili term *Nguzo Saba*, which is used to categorize the seven principles of this holiday. As the number seven is significant to the holiday, this consideration is literally built into the poetic form.

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“I pray you, then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there.”—W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

“I am writing to find solutions and pass them on. I am writing to find a language and pass it on. I am writing, writing, writing, for my life.”—Pearl Cleage, *Mad at Miles*

Introduction

The signs “Speed Bumps Ahead” repeatedly dot the landscape of Oakland, California. In fact, Oakland became known as the “speed hump capital” of the United States when the city installed over 1,600 speed bumps or humps in the 1990s (Sebastian, 2004). These speed bumps are meant to decrease casualties, increase safety, and “calm” traffic. The street signs signaling the speed bumps denote a potential threat needing to be thwarted. In reality, these speed bumps can cause nuisances, such as loud noises, wear and tear on vehicles, and altered routes of travel. There are other signs and symbols in Oakland neighborhoods. On one hand—“Beer, Wine, and Groceries,” “For Sale,” and the boarded-up doors and windows of many businesses. On another hand—“Jesus Saves,” “We Hella Love Oakland,” and murals proclaiming community building and peace promotion. How does one navigate such a contradictory landscape—promising danger *and* protection, despair *and* hope—on a daily basis?

Looking Under The Hood

This dissertation is concerned with understanding the various mechanisms, pathways, and everyday routines that facilitate young people of color² in *getting by* and *getting ahead* in urban neighborhoods that are deemed “high risk.” This study explains how “resilience”—the dynamic process of positive adaptation despite adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)—operates for urban minority adolescents as both a *process* of healthy development and a health *outcome*.

Resilience is a two-dimensional construct that includes exposure to *risk factors* and manifestation of *positive adjustment* (Luthar et al., 2000). This notion acknowledges the presence of risks with which people must contend. For young people of color growing up in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods, these risks are significant and often ongoing throughout adolescence. Research focusing on urban poverty and social disorganization theories (Massey & Denton, 1993; R. J. Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; W. J. Wilson, 1987) argue that the policies and practices of residential segregation, urban renewal, deindustrialization, and gentrification going on in the U.S. over the past 70 years have resulted in the concentration of poverty, disproportionately high levels of violence, and chronic disease morbidity co-occurring

² Throughout this manuscript, I use the terms “young people of color,” “youth of color,” and “minority adolescents” interchangeably. Adolescence researchers, youth development providers, advocates, and funders choose among these various terms, and at times, use them interchangeably, as well. The term “people of color” in the United States’ lexicon was majorly influenced by such critical theorists as Frantz Fanon in the 1970s, with wider usage by the 1990s (Safire, 1988; Sen, 2007). Some people prefer this term, rather than “minority,” which can connote inferiority or subordination. Usage of any of these terms is also deeply influenced by geographic location, generational status, organizational affiliation, and political frames.

in urban neighborhoods (Elliott et al., 2006; Fullilove, 2004; S. Ginwright & Akom, 2007; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; Massey & Denton, 1993; Rankin & Quane, 2002; R. J. Sampson et al., 1997; S. Wilson, Hutson, & Mujahid, 2008; W. J. Wilson, 1987). In fact, poverty has been identified as one of the most significant *risk factors* for impaired psychological and social development among youth (R. L. Jarrett, 1997; Luthar, 1991; Werner, 1990). However, poverty does not *determine* poor negative social outcomes (Elliott et al., 2006). Such a preoccupation with risk variables fails to inform us of the processes in which young people are engaged in order to negotiate risky situations. We know much less about why some young people, in the face of adversity, develop into well-functioning and relatively healthy adults.

Adolescent Resilience

This question has been explored to some degree by developmental psychologists. Beginning in the late 1950s, developmental psychologists began to focus on prospective and longitudinal designs in order to investigate why “at-risk” youth become healthy, competent adults. This strand of research began to gain popularity by the 1970s, and has helped to frame more strengths-based approaches to adolescent development since then. The pioneering work of Werner (Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1977), Rutter (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987), and Garmezy (Garmezy, 1991; Garmezy, 1995) helped to launch the study of resilience. Werner and her colleagues (Werner & Smith, 1977; Werner, 1993) conducted a longitudinal study, which extended over 30 years, of a cohort of children born in Kauai in 1955. One-third of this cohort (n = 201) were deemed “high risk” because they were exposed to perinatal stress and chronic poverty, and lived in family environments plagued with instability, discord, and parental psychopathology. Nevertheless, one third of these high-risk youth (n = 72) grew up into competent, confident, and caring adults. Werner’s research illuminated how a chain of protective factors over time afforded vulnerable children escape from adversity and contributed to their positive outcomes. These “resilient” youth had positive self-concept and sense of control over their lives and a high future orientation. They were also able to develop close relationships with at least one adult caregiver and also develop supportive networks outside of their immediate families. The early work of Rutter (Rutter et al., 1979) followed 125 children of mentally-ill patients who, over a 10-year period, seemed to develop without mental illness or maladaptive behavior. Rutter felt that it was important to investigate the developmental and situational mechanisms involved in protecting people from hazardous contexts. Rutter suggested that resilience developed out of an individual’s self-efficacy, self-esteem, adaptability, and problem-solving skills (Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987). Through an assessment of approximately 200 children and their families in *Project Competence*, Garmezy and colleagues (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegan, 1984) found that many disadvantaged children did not display disruptive behavior. The research study examined how some children were able to “beat the odds” (Garmezy et al., 1984). Garmezy asserted that protective factors moderated vulnerabilities so that adaptation was positive (A. S. Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

The work that followed sought to investigate multiple adverse conditions, such as parental mental illness, maltreatment, chronic illness, catastrophic life events, socioeconomic disadvantage, and community violence, in search of the protective forces that supported successful development (Luthar, 1999; A. S. Masten & Coatsworth, 1995; O’Dougherty-Wright, Masten, Northwood, & Hubbard, 1997; Wells & Schwebel, 1987). This new line of research revealed that resilience is not a personality trait; research soon shifted from focusing on

individual protective *factors* to protective *processes* (Luthar et al., 2000). This line of research acknowledges that both risk *and* protective factors sit within the individual, as well as within family and peer networks, and within the broader school and community environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Luthar et al., 2000; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). Although there is diversity in the operationalization and measurement of resilience in the research literature, the vast array of research all tap into the same construct. The themes that recur across studies include the importance of close relations with supportive adults, effective schooling, and connections with competent, prosocial peers in the wider community (Benard, 1991; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Recognizing that risk factors and protective factors are both longitudinal and have cumulative impacts, adversity can then be seen as intervenable (Rutter, 1987). Youth maintaining resilient trajectories are not immune or invulnerable to stressors; however, they have developed the ability to cope, thrive, or persist in the face of such adversities, with the support of internal assets and external resources (Benard, 2004; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; A. S. Masten et al., 1990; A. S. Masten et al., 1999).

While resilience research shows promise for being interdisciplinary and assets-based, there are several limitations of this area of study. Several resilience studies have been criticized for 1) focusing too much attention on the individual- and family-levels of influence, and not giving enough attention to the community- and political-level contexts, 2) not attending to youth's agency and their active participation in the self-actualization process, and 3) only considering nationally representative or White middle-class samples (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).

Spencer's research (M. B. Spencer, 1995) was a seminal contribution to the field by developing a conceptual framework for resilience—A Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)—among African-American youth. Spencer asserts that across the lifecourse, individuals are engaged in processes of appraising risks that are linked to socio-cultural contexts and normative developmental tasks (M. B. Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). Other research focusing on African-American youth that followed highlighted supportive adults (R. L. Jarrett, 1995) and families (R. L. Jarrett, 1997) as protective factors, and identified the salience of developing positive racial identity for successful adaptation among Black youth (Barrow, Armstrong, Vargo, & Boothroyd, 2007; Nicolas et al., 2008). Very few studies look at adolescent resilience among other racial and ethnic groups; however, a recent study by Shetgiri et al. (Shetgiri et al., 2009) engages in qualitative and participatory methods to investigate resilience among Latino youth. Among this sample, having a good education, setting goals, and having high expectations set by family members were found to be facilitators of positive adaptation, whereas peers and community violence were found to be barriers to positive adaptation (Shetgiri et al., 2009). Table 1.1 lists the various external assets that sit within youth's family, peer, school, and neighborhood contexts, as well as youth's internal assets that sit within the individual, as detailed in the vast research literature on resilience. As noted above, these assets work together to magnify the effect of resilience in adolescents.

Table 1.1

External Assets <i>in Family, Peer, School, and Neighborhood Contexts</i>
Caring Relationships
High Expectations
Meaningful Opportunities
Internal Assets
Self-Esteem
Self-Efficacy
Problem-Solving
Future Orientation
Positive Racial Identity

Insightful, nuanced discussions into resilience research have been generated using qualitative methods (R. L. Jarrett, 1997). Such methods are well suited to the investigation of the various *processes* relevant to the lived experiences of research participants and can illuminate contextual phenomena, particularly among marginalized populations (Ungar, 2003). Resilience is not just a set of characteristics or qualities, but the process developed over time.

Routes to Resilience

This dissertation contributes to recent qualitative examinations of resilience that examine how the process is developed. These studies have revealed that resilience operates in multiple contexts. This dissertation complements these previous studies by providing an in-depth examination of the mechanisms and realms of resilience among African-American and Latino adolescents residing in urban neighborhoods. Over the last two decades, urban sociology and urban health literature have focused primarily on experiences of violence, substance abuse, academic underachievement, and family instability. These are important themes, but they provide a narrow definition of the life experiences of young people. I examine, through the use of qualitative and participatory methods, the complex individual-, interpersonal-, and community-level mechanisms that young people of color use on a daily basis to promote their successful development. Specifically, I address the following research questions:

How do youth from high-risk neighborhoods manage to adapt positively?

What interactional and relational mechanisms facilitate adolescent resilience in distressed urban neighborhoods?

How do youth use these mechanisms during the course of adolescence?

What do these interactional and relational mechanisms provide to urban minority adolescents?

Organization of the Dissertation

This research has yielded three dissertation products in the form of three publishable articles. The first article examines perceptions of neighborhood violence and risk-avoidance strategies among urban minority adolescents. The second article examines a youth-serving organization as a provider of networked-based social capital for supporting urban minority adolescents in imagining, choosing, and achieving positive behaviors and outcomes. Finally, the third article examines spirituality among urban minority adolescents as a coping mechanism for individual- and neighborhood-level stressors. Overall, I posit that young people of color who live, study, work, and socialize in a disadvantaged urban neighborhood *can* achieve healthy cognitive, emotional, and social development. The youth in this study did this by 1) strategically avoiding problematic people or places, 2) seeking mentors that help them achieve their goals, and 3) developing a commitment to faith that helped them cope when all other strategies became limited. Each of these strategies magnifies a resilience effect for young people of color growing up in high-risk urban neighborhoods.

“I’m Not Just Runnin’ the Streets”: Exposure to Neighborhood Violence and Risk-Avoidance Strategies among Urban Minority Adolescents

(targeted for *Youth & Society*)

Abstract

This article examines the experiences of 25 minority adolescents living in East Oakland, California. Using qualitative and participatory methods, this study samples youth attending the same youth-serving organization in East Oakland, but with varying levels of education, income, and motivation for involvement in the organization. The findings offer a frame of “risk-avoidance strategies” for the active ways in which youth manage violence in their neighborhoods on a daily basis. These findings lift up youth as experts of their own neighborhoods. The implications of these findings for public health promotion and youth development practice and policy are discussed.

Keywords: *neighborhood violence; risk avoidance; narrative*

Introduction

In an ongoing examination of the protective mechanisms at work in adolescents’ healthy development, a focus on violence was not the original intent of this research study. I was conscious of my biases to not want to make “urban” a proxy for solely negative behaviors and outcomes. Nevertheless, when I first visited my research site, I was struck by an altered street sign outside of the organization’s building that said “No Killing Anytime” (Figure 2.1)—a play on the typical “No Parking Anytime” street sign. The organization that served as my research site did not put up the sign, but they did not rush to have it removed either. They are well-aware of their precarious location in a part of the city that residents, the police, and media sources call “the killing zone” (C. Jones, 2006) or the “killer corridor” (Moody, 2008). My subsequent interviews with minority adolescents living in this neighborhood and actively participating in activities at the organization quickly substantiated that the pervasive and regular nature of neighborhood violence could not be overlooked in my research. Youth can be witnesses, victims, or perpetrators of violence in many settings or realms, including in their families, homes, dating relationships, peer relationships, and schools. The focus of this study is how young people experience and manage violence in their residential and social *neighborhoods* and as they travel in these neighborhoods.

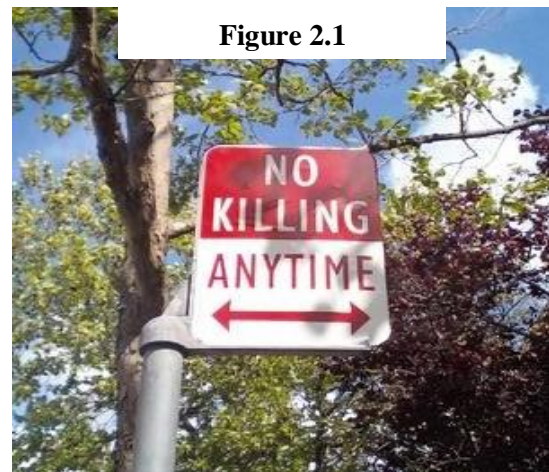


Figure 2.1

Urban Neighborhoods as “Disadvantaged”

There is a renewed interest among public health researchers concerning the influence of neighborhood contexts on health behaviors and outcomes (Acevedo-Garcia, Lochner, Osypuk, & Subramanian, 2003; Diez Roux, 2001; D. R. Williams & Collins, 2001). Social scientists have

wrestled with the impacts of neighborhood *disadvantage* for a while. Shaw and McKay (Shaw & McKay, 1942) argued that the multiple ecological indicators of poverty, unemployment, cultural heterogeneity, and population turnover tend to cluster spatially. Wilson (W. J. Wilson, 1987) posited that the geographic concentration of African-American and low-income residents in inner-city communities is attributable to the macro-economic changes in the post-World War II era, including deindustrialization and industrial restructuring, male joblessness, proliferation of female-headed households, and the out-migration of affluent African-Americans to suburbs. Logan and Molotch (Logan & Molotch, 1987) and others point to the federal housing policies and local housing practices that have disrupted the social fabric in these disadvantaged neighborhoods (Chaskin, 1997; Fullilove, 2004; Kennedy & Leonard, 2001; J. M. Thomas, 1994). Massey and Denton (Massey & Denton, 1993) argued that the more racially and economically segregated the neighborhood is, the less it is able to absorb economic shocks. These researchers have framed such ecological indicators in urban neighborhoods as risk factors for deleterious outcomes.

Urban Violence as a Public Health Problem

One such deleterious outcome—violence—historically has been viewed as a criminal justice problem, but has been recognized as a “public health epidemic” since 1985 (Koop, 1985; Mercy, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome, & Roper, 1993; Rosenberg, O’Carroll, & Powell, 1992; Winett, 1998). Violence is both pervasive and costly, causing injury, death, loss of productivity, disruption in social services, healthcare expenditures, and a decrease in neighborhood property values (Mercy et al., 1993; K. Williams, Rivera, Neighbours, & Reznik, 2007).

Young people are disproportionately the victims and perpetrators of violence (K. Williams et al., 2007). Youth violence peaked in 1993, with the growing use of firearms to settle conflicts (Kellermann, Fuqua-Whitley, Rivara, & Mercy, 1998; *Youth violence: A report of the surgeon general.*). In 2010, homicide was the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24 years old (*Youth violence prevention.*). Among this age group, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans and the second leading cause of death for Latinos (*Youth violence prevention.*). Homicide rates among African-American males of this age group (60.7 per 100,000) exceed those of Latino males (20.6 per 100,000), and White males (3.5 per 100,000) (*Youth violence prevention.*).

Review of Minority Adolescent’s Management of Urban Violence

As previously mentioned, neighborhood violence is pervasive—all places are potential sites for danger or conflict. Youth’s exposure to violence has mental and physical health implications (Harding, 2008; Osofsky, 1999; Prothrow-Stith, 1991). Exposure to youth violence and possibilities for intervention have been examined at the home-, school-, and community-level (Aisenberg, Ayón, & Orozco-Figueroa, 2008; Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004; Ozer & Weinstein, 2004). Youth in high-risk neighborhoods have been found to begin coping with neighborhood violence at a very young age (Brady, Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2008; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Shahinfar, Fox, & Leavitt, 2000). Sociologists, psychologists, and criminologists have been more adept at explaining the complex strategies that young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods enlist as a response to this exposure to violence.

I have reviewed the published empirical literature that explicitly addresses how urban violence is *managed* in minority adolescent populations. The studies summarized in Table 2.1

seek to inform future research and interventions focused on responding to urban youth violence. With a majority of them being qualitative studies, they provide us with more information for *how* youth respond to urban violence.

Cobbina et al.’s (Cobbin, Miller, & Brunson, 2008) ethnographic study of violence management practices among youth frames such routines as “risk-avoidance strategies.” These strategies acknowledge youth’s ecological proximity to violence (R. J. Sampson & Lauritsen, 1990) and their cultural adaptations to urban inequalities (Anderson, 1999). The youth in Cobbina’s study view their immediate neighborhood as safe, and they spend most of their time close to their homes. This study reveals a gendered organization of urban neighborhood life—some of the risk-management strategies employed by young men, such as traveling in groups, create perceptions of danger for young women, who tend to withdraw from public life. Also using an ethnographic research design, Jones (N. Jones, 2009) explores the “situated survival strategies” that young women in urban neighborhoods exercise around a concern for personal safety. These strategies become patterns, routines, and rituals in which young women engage in order to manage threats. Specifically, these strategies fall into two main categories: *situational avoidance* which comprises young women’s avoidance of settings and situations that pose a threat, and *relational isolation* which entails young women’s isolation from friendships in which loyalty ties might necessitate violent encounters in defense of one another’s safety.

Cahill’s (Cahill, 2000) concept of “street literacy” is framed around young people’s strategies for negotiating their environments. The practices of street literacy acknowledge experiential knowledge. The young people in this study recommend “minding your business” in order to stay safe in urban neighborhoods (Cahill, 2000). Sharkey’s (Sharkey, 2006) quantitative study similarly highlights youth’s “street efficacy”—their perceived ability to avoid violent confrontations—as they navigate through their “imposed environments” to seek out safe “selected environments” and safer peer groups. Irwin (Irwin, 2004) finds similar violence management strategies as she looks at a range of neighborhood contexts, from “resource-rich” ones to “resource-poor” ones. Like the youth in the other studies, these youth also avoid people that they feel put them in threatening situations, and they seek out friendships that they think will protect them.

Two studies in this group employed participatory research methods to elicit youth’s perceptions of their neighborhood contexts, as well as their strategies for negotiating conflict. Acknowledging the contradictions that exist in residing in urban neighborhoods, participatory action research (PAR) methods in McIntyre’s (McIntyre, 2000) study empowered the youth as “agents of inquiry” and the chief experts in how to navigate within a “toxic” environment. Through community-based participatory research (CBPR), Teitelman et al. (Teitelman et al., 2010) found that navigating through safe and unsafe spaces is a constant and conscious effort. While youth in this study avoid parties, which they feel are unsafe, they seek out after-school programs as positive resources within their neighborhoods (Teitelman et al., 2010).

Table 2.1

Author(s)	Year	Study Design	n	Participants	Location	Findings
Cobbina et al.	2008	Ethnography	72	12-19 year old African-American youth	St. Louis, MO	“Risk-avoidance strategies” among youth are often gendered
Jones	2010	Ethnography	24	12-2 year old African-American youth	Philadelphia, PA	Black inner-city girls enlist in “situated survival strategies” to negotiate

						conflict and navigate through their neighborhoods, at times this means being known as an able fighter or otherwise exerting considerable energy toward these processes of negotiation
Cahill	2000	Ethnography	28	12-15 year old working class, African-American and Latino public school students	New York, NY	Environmental negotiations are daily processes, particularly in gentrifying, inner-city neighborhoods
Sharkey	2006	Longitudinal Cohort Study	2,337	9-, 12-, and 15-year olds	Chicago, IL	Youth enlist their “street efficacy” to navigate through “selected” neighborhoods
Irwin	2004	Ethnography	43	10-20 year olds	Denver, CO	A range of violence management strategies exist for youth, depending on whether or not they live in resource-rich or resource-poor neighborhoods
McIntyre	2000	Participatory Action Research	24	11-13 year old African-American, Caribbean-American, and Latino students	Bridgeport, CT	Explores the contradictions and violence negotiation practices of living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, using creative and participatory methods
Teitelman et al.	2010	Community-Based Participatory Research	18	10-16 year olds	Philadelphia, PA	Youth used individual and neighborhood resources to navigate through their neighborhoods safely

Collectively, the studies summarized in Table 2.1 suggest that instead of using an umbrella term of “violence prevention,” youth-informed strategies of “risk-avoidance” illuminate new directions for public health and youth development policy and practice. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for research on youth violence to inform public health prevention and intervention programs in *school-based* settings. In my study, I interviewed youth from a community-based organization to offer youth-informed perspectives of neighborhood-focused violence management strategies.

Study Context: Oakland, California

Oakland, California has more than 50 neighborhoods, some officially named on city maps and others known among local residents. The common major neighborhood divisions are West Oakland—the area between the San Francisco Bay and Downtown Oakland; Downtown Oakland; North Oakland—the neighborhoods between the cities of Emeryville and Berkeley; Lake Merritt—a large tidal lagoon just east of Downtown Oakland; East Oakland—the flatland and lower hillside neighborhoods stretching from just east of Lake Merritt to the San Leandro city border; and the Oakland Hills. The map in Figure 2.2 shows how a local artist has illustrated the different geographic boundaries in Oakland (*Oakland districts maps*.2011). A broad geographic, and oftentimes economic and racial distinction is made between “the flats” and “the hills” in the East Bay region of California. The “flatlands” or “flats” are typically working-class communities of color, while the “hills” are typically upper-class neighborhoods. These geographic boundaries also carry symbolic codes and prejudices—“the hills” get coded as safe while “the flats” get coded as dangerous (Tilton, 2010).

These codes get perpetuated in public and private dialogue, and “the flats,” “the ghetto,” “the inner city,” and “the hood” become what Kelley (Kelley, 1997) refers to as “the Achilles’ heel in American society”—the dumping ground for poor values or economic failure. Ginwright (S. Ginwright, 2009) refers to the “perfect storm” that transformed the nature of the political and institutional infrastructure in Oakland in the 1970s-1990s as the “urban trifecta,” including the demise of the Black Panther Party, the exodus of blue collar jobs, and the spread of crack cocaine. Oakland’s unemployment levels currently remain significantly higher than the Alameda County and California statewide averages (Witt et al., 2005). A large proportion of those who commit and are the victims of homicide in Oakland are unemployed (J. M. Wilson & Riley, 2004). Oakland has a quarter of Alameda County’s population, but accounts for 60 percent of its reported violent crimes (*Violent crimes in alameda county: A fact sheet*2010). The *Oakland Tribune* reported in 2010 that more than 1,000 people have been killed in Oakland in the past nine years, which closely parallels the number of American lives lost in the war in Afghanistan during the same timespan (Johnson, 2010). Over 33 percent of homicide victims in Oakland are between the ages of 15 and 24 (Beyers, Jain, & Mena, 2006). Sixty-one percent of the homicides in Oakland occur in East Oakland, as highlighted in areas 2, 3, and 4 in Figure 2.3 and City Council Districts 6 and 7 in Figure 2.4 (Spiker, Garvey, Arnold, & Williams, 2009). East Oakland garnered national attention in 2009 when four police officers were slain in this neighborhood, contributing to East Oakland’s violent and negative reputation (Dolan, 2009). These stark statistics affirm that residents in East Oakland regularly contend with economic, environmental, educational, and health inequities.

Figure 2.2

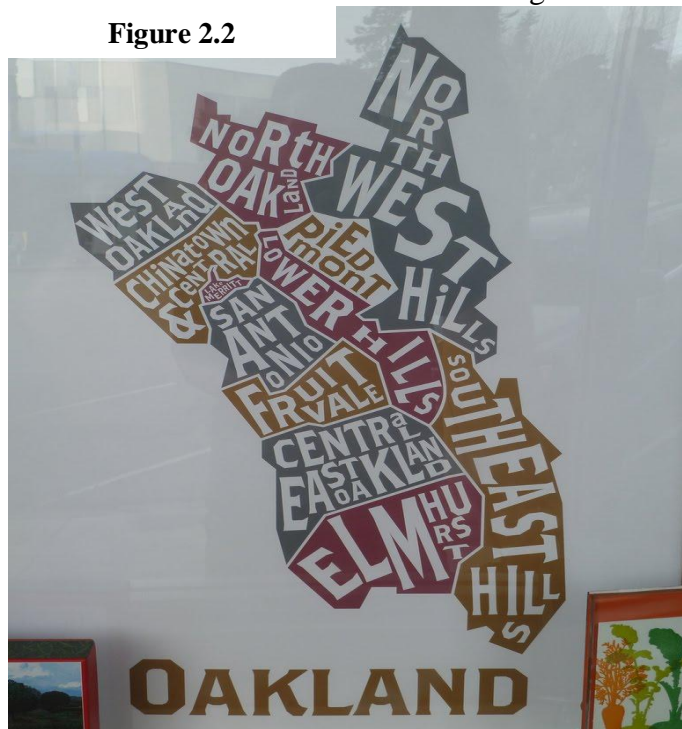
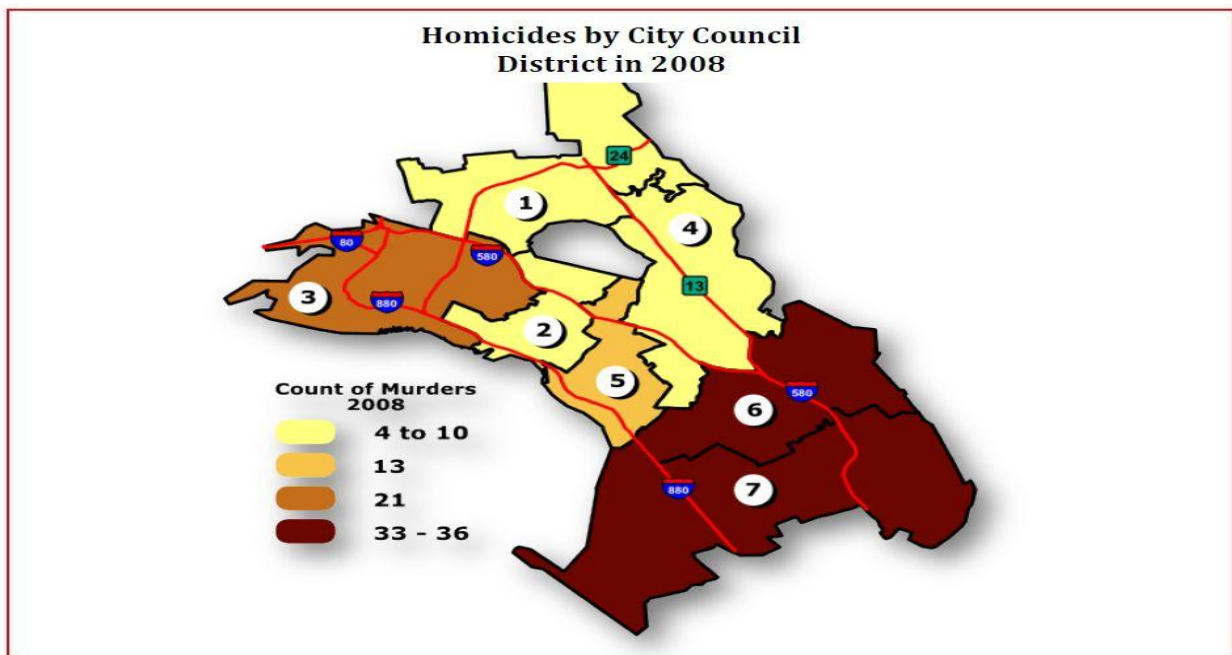


Figure 2.3:



Figure 2.4:



One youth-serving organization—the East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC)—is located in the Elmhurst District, as noted previously, referred to as “the killer corridor” because of the high rates of violent crime and homicides in this neighborhood (Moody,

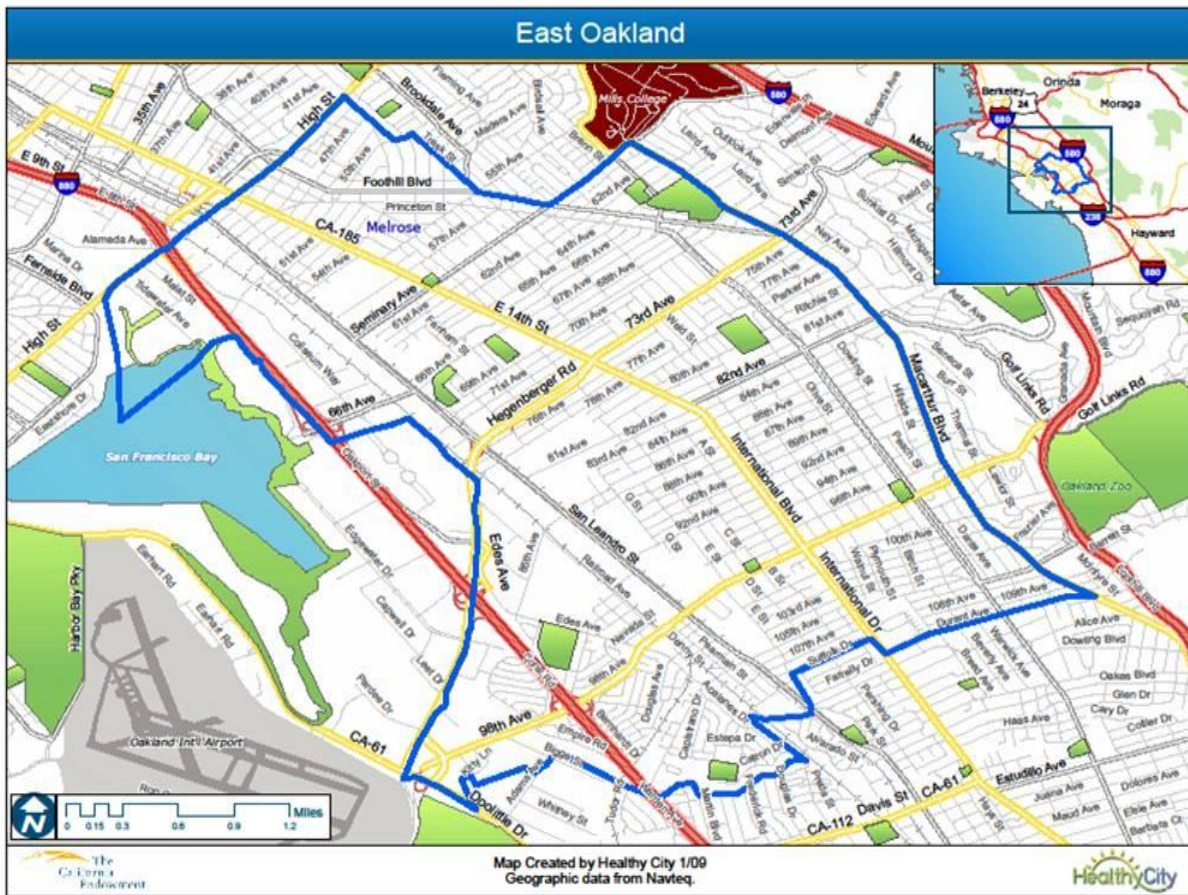
2008). EOYDC has been committed to attending to the emotional, physical, intellectual, and economic well-being of the community for nearly 33 years. EOYDC's mission is to equip East Oakland's youth with the skills, training, and values necessary to become dynamic leaders and responsible citizens. EOYDC's free, comprehensive core programming emphasizes artistic expression, job training, physical activity, and education. For five days a weeks, 50 weeks each year, EOYDC offers positive and safe experiences for East Oakland's youth through a dedicated staff and various program offerings.

Method

In an ongoing examination of the social realms of resilience among minority adolescents in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods, I began to consider the following questions: How do young people navigate their residential and social neighborhoods?; and What do these strategies provide for young people?

To respond to these guiding research questions, I conducted field research at EOYDC over a 15-month period. I conducted key informant interviews with staff, participant observation at EOYDC, neighborhood observations in the East Oakland communities where the youth work and live, and semi-structured interviews with 25 youth during this time. EOYDC is an ideal site to study how urban youth violence is managed for a number of reasons. East Oakland has the greatest number and concentration of youth in the city (*Oakland maps: Interpretation of trends and gaps for the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth*.2005). Additionally, East Oakland has a long history of urbanization and disinvestment (Rhombert, 2004; Self, 2003). Also, the energy related to recent local place-based initiatives made locating my research in this community highly desirable. In May 2004, the Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) partnered with the City of Oakland and several local institutions, community-based organizations, and grassroots groups to launch a *Community Capacity-Building Initiative* (CCB) in the Sobrante Park neighborhood of East Oakland. The CCB has an explicit goal of increasing the political, social, and economic power of a low-income neighborhood in Alameda County (*City-County Neighborhood Initiative*.2004). In 2010, The California Endowment (TCE) embarked on a 10-year, statewide initiative, called *Building Healthy Communities*, with the goal of supporting the development of communities where youth and families are healthy, safe, and able to contribute to the prosperity of the state (*East Oakland Building Healthy Communities*.2011). East Oakland is one of 14 communities identified by the foundation as partners in order to reach this goal, forming the *East Oakland Building Healthy Communities* initiative (*East Oakland Building Healthy Communities*.2011). Per TCE and EOBHC, "East Oakland" is bounded by MacArthur Boulevard to the North, High Street to the West, the 880 Freeway to the South, and Durant Avenue to the East (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5:



Gaining Access to EOYDC

My entrée to EOYDC was facilitated by the organization’s Executive Director, Regina Jackson. Ms. Jackson, has been affiliated with the organization for the last 27 years, and has served in her current role for the past 17 years. When I emailed Ms. Jackson to explain my research proposal and process, she responded promptly and suggested that we meet in person. During our first in-person meeting at EOYDC, Ms. Jackson immediately saw a natural link for my project and EOYDC based on my research aims and their commitment toward individual and community transformation. By the end of the meeting, she encouraged me to call her “Ms. Regina” like the staff and youth at EOYDC do. She felt that it would be important for me to conduct interviews with her staff and do participant observation at EOYDC to situate myself in various “birds’ nests” there. I engaged in this type of formative research for almost a year before recruiting interview respondents. I was able to gain trust and credibility with Ms. Regina and the EOYDC staff, and additionally, the staff was able to confirm or refute initial hunches that I had about neighborhood phenomena going on in East Oakland.

Additionally, for two months in the summer, I conducted participant observation of the organization’s youth members as they participated in the youth-led Summer Cultural Enrichment Program (SCEP). In SCEP, approximately 40 older teens (“Youth Leaders”) develop and implement a comprehensive summer program for approximately 140 younger children (“Youth Participants”). I was soon able to meet several of the Youth Leaders and gain clues about their

behaviors, interests, and perceptions. During the first week of SCEP, Ms. Regina introduced me to Kenya³—a SCEP Youth Leader and a Gates Millennium Scholar, headed to college in the Fall. Kenya was the lead instructor for SCEP’s *Life Skills* class and was passionate about planning an Anti-Violence March for EOYDC. “I’m sick of it...we’ve lost too many,” Kenya blurted out in frustration. The “it” that Kenya was referring to was neighborhood violence in Oakland, which very recently had claimed the lives of several young people closely linked to EOYDC. The most recent shooting occurred the week prior, and claimed the life of a 17-year-old young man who frequently played basketball in the EOYDC gym. He was gunned down during an argument at a bus stop near the Eastmont Town Center in East Oakland (Lee, 2010). This young man’s death was the 40th homicide in Oakland in 2010. The following week, I joined Kenya, Ms. Regina and the SCEP and EOYDC family in the Anti-Violence March down one of the main thoroughfares in East Oakland—International Boulevard (Figure 2.6). The Youth Leaders and Youth Participants chanted “Stop the killin’, so we can be chillin’!” and “Silence the Violence!”

Figure 2.6:



It was moving to witness and participate in this action, but it was also emotionally jarring to hear Youth Leaders’ numerous stories about losing friends and schoolmates to neighborhood violence, and how they struggled to cope with these losses. One Youth Leader had lost six friends in East Oakland from neighborhood violence during one academic semester. “How am I supposed to concentrate on finals,” he asked from his college dorm 3,000 miles away during a call to Ms. Regina for emotional support. As I became a familiar face around EOYDC, the youth felt comfortable sharing these and other stories with me.

Participants

After building these key relationships, recruitment for interviews happened easily and quickly. The youth members of EOYDC’s various programs were eager to sign-up for interview times in order to share their stories. I was able to recruit 25 youth between the ages 12 and 20

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout for youth’s names.

year of age for my study (Table 2.2). In addition to youth leaders from SCEP, other respondents included employees or participants in the homework tutorial center, the computer lab, the Pathways to College program, the GED prep program, the *Something to Talk About* young women’s group, and the physical development programs.

Table 2.2: *Demographic Information about Respondents*

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	School Enrollment
Aisha	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Dana	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Naima	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Tommy	Male	12	African American	Public MS
Javier	Male	13	Latino	Public MS
Aja	Female	16	African American	Public HS
Angela	Female	16	Latina	Charter HS
Chastity	Female	16	African American	Catholic High School
Jamila	Female	16	African American	Charter HS
Marisa	Female	16	Latina	Charter HS
Rashad	Male	16	African American	Catholic High School
LaShay	Female	17	African American	Public HS
Douglas	Male	18	African American	Public HS
Joshua	Male	18	African American	Not currently enrolled
Kai	Female	18	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Micah	Female	18	African American	Community College
Tanisha	Female	18	African American	Public HS
Daniela	Female	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Darius	Male	19	African American	Community College
José	Male	19	Latino	4-year College
Kareem	Male	19	African American	4-year College
Keith	Male	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Marco	Male	19	Latino	Community College
Tamika	Female	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Gina	Female	20	African American	4-year College

Data Collection

I conducted individual, one-hour, semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents (See Appendix A). During these interviews, I asked respondents about their personal goals, their involvement in EOYDC, their experiences of living in East Oakland, their perceptions of neighborhood change, and their relationships with and leveragability of networks in East Oakland.

Analysis

Interviews were taped and later transcribed. Analysis was guided by an ethnographic approach (Creswell, 1998; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Interview text was read first to identify emergent themes. Fourteen of the interview respondents elected to form a “research collective” (Cahill, 2004) which we called “MiC”—My Identity is Community. Ten of these youth participated in MiC on a consistent basis—seven African-American females, two Latino males, and one African-American male. The research collective met with me as a group to review the emergent themes. In this way, the youth were able to provide “member checks” of the data, themes, and preliminary analysis as a way of increasing validity (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007).

The research collective was also introduced to demographic data on East Oakland and began to compare their interview themes with the quantitative data collected by outside agencies. From this demographic data, they felt that most of the information presented was pejorative and that it also was not telling them anything new or interesting about their neighborhoods. Consequently, the young people and I engaged in a multi-stage process of *narrative analysis*. Narrative analysis is an emerging method in the public health, urban planning, and youth development fields (Furman et al., 2007; Poindexter, 2002; J. M. Thomas, 2004). An overview of the participatory stages of the analysis is detailed in Table 2.3. Through this process, the youth were able to present the data from their own interviews and the observations of EOYDC in the form of “poetic knowledge.” Césaire (Césaire, 1945) said that “poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge,” of which he asserted that poetry would create the kind of knowledge needed to transform oppressive conditions (Césaire, 1996). Regarding the efforts enacted towards liberation from oppressive conditions, Kelley (Kelley, 2002) says:

We must remember that the conditions and the very existence of social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way. It is *that* imagination, that effort to see the future in the present, that I shall call “poetry” or “poetic knowledge.”

Poetry is a particular type of narrative that is also seen as a tool of qualitative research that can be used to investigate human phenomena (Furman, 2006; Mahiri, 2004). I facilitated a series of poetry workshops with the youth, in which I introduced them to poetic techniques, poetic forms, and works from writers of color. First, I presented “research poems” (Furman, 2006; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Furman et al., 2007) to the group, which utilize the respondents’ exact words from the interview data in compressed or “poetic” form, using line and stanza breaks. The research poems do not alter the text of the respondent, but simply compresses the original text from the interview transcripts, using line and stanza breaks (Langer & Furman, 2004). The condensed nature of research poetry allows themes in the data to become more obvious for the reader, much like the method of data reduction (Furman et al., 2006). Next, I facilitated the co-creation of “interpretive poems” (Langer & Furman, 2004) with the group, which reveal our attempts as co-researchers to capture the essence of the lived experiences as expressed in the interview data in poetic form. We got in the practice of writing poetry and further explored the relationships between identity development, emotional attachment to their neighborhoods, and their experiences with violence. Morrill et al. (Morrill, Yalda, Adelman, Musheno, & Bejarano, 2000) found that when youth were asked to write narratives about their experiences with violence, the writing process and products allowed the youth to have a sense of agency related to the situations and express their ideas about neighborhood violence in their own voices. Although poetry is personal, the form of a poem is a pattern that is well-known to both storytellers and readers or listeners, allowing the audience to make sense of the story being told

(Finley, 2003). Such a process provides implications for representations of the nuances of people’s lived experiences (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1993). The presentation of poems-as-data can allow a diverse set of audience members to engage with the research.

Table 2.3: Overview of Research Process

Date	Content Focus	Participants	Products Developed
December 2009	Relationship Building	Ms. Regina and LeConté	Fieldnotes
February 2010	APHA Annual Meeting Abstract Submission Capacity Building	LeConté and Ms. Regina	Abstract
March 2010	Key Informant Interviews Relationship Building	EOYDC Staff and LeConté	Fieldnotes
June-July 2010	Participant Observation Relationship Building	SCEP Youth Leaders, SCEP Youth Participants, EOYDC Staff	Fieldnotes
September-October 2010	Data Collection	25 youth ages 12-20	Field Notes Transcripts “Research Poems”
October 2010	Neighborhood Observations	LeConté	Fieldnotes Photos
October-November 2010	Narrative Analysis and Narrative Inquiry Exposure to poetry writing techniques and a breadth of work by writers of color	14 of Interview Respondents	“Interpretive Poems” Draft Poetry Book
November 2010	APHA Annual Meeting Capacity Building Visibility Networking	LeConté and Ms. Regina	1 Poster presentation 1 Roundtable presentation
January-March 2011	Editing of Poetry Chapbook	6 youth from research collective sub-sample	Edited Poetry Book
February 2011	APHA Annual Meeting Abstract Submission Capacity Building	LeConté and Ms. Regina	Abstract
March 2011	Planning of book release	4 youth from research collective sub-sample	
April 2011	Book release	All	Final Poetry Book

In addition to the participatory narrative analysis process, in continuing with traditional ethnographic methods, I re-read interview text to develop detailed codes and sub-codes; the Dedoose program was used to aid in this process. Analytic memos were developed that addressed the themes, analytic points, and interpretation of the analytic points.

The excerpts below from interviews, as well as from the “research” and “interpretive” poems, illustrate key thematic points that emerged during analysis. First, these excerpts highlight how youth perceive the neighborhood spaces that they must navigate. Then, these excerpts illustrate the risk-avoidance strategies that young people enlist to navigate through East Oakland safely. Ultimately, these excerpts reveal the active efforts that youth in East Oakland undertake to manage or minimize their risks in their neighborhoods.

Results

Identification of Unsafe Spaces

Youth use their “street literacy” (Cahill, 2000) to read the safety of streets and neighborhoods in Oakland, and their “street efficacy” (Sharkey, 2006) to navigate through Oakland safely. Informed by the youth’s excerpts and poems, I will walk us through Oakland in an eastward direction.

In spite of the pervasiveness of violence and unsafe spaces in East Oakland, many of the youth in East Oakland perceive or experience “West Oakland” as being far more unsafe. In an interpretive poem, LaShay, a 17-year-old African-American female, shares:

West Oakland (The Bottoms) at night

West Oakland,
The Bottoms,
 night time,
the scariest place I’ve experienced yet,
gun shots,
 fights,
 violence,
 drama,
 screaming,
My first time here with my boyfriend was
a scary experience,
I can remember rushing to get to his
house and away from all of the
scariness and violence.
Part of me felt safe because I was not
alone but a part of me was scared
for both of us,
scared for our lives.

Most of the violence in Oakland is concentrated in West and East Oakland (*Violent crimes in alameda county: A fact sheet* 2010). When prompted to write about an unsafe space, LaShay recounts a time when she was visiting her boyfriend in “The Bottoms” neighborhood in West Oakland. “The Bottoms” or “The Lower Bottoms” got its nickname when the Cypress Freeway was built as part of urban renewal efforts, slicing West Oakland in two (Douglas, 2004). This neighborhood struggles with issues of crime, gang activity, environmental toxins, and emerging gentrification (Stuhldreher, 2007). As an East Oakland native, LaShay suggests that she cannot use her “street efficacy” (Sharkey, 2006) in a different neighborhood. She fears for her safety in another part of the city. An analysis for why LaShay might feel a sense of protection inside of her boyfriend’s house will be discussed in the next subsection.

Eighteen-year-old Micah, an African-American female, identifies the “drama” happening in East Oakland from High Street eastward, similar to TCE’s demarcation of “East Oakland” in Figure 2.5. She shares:

Most of the drama happens from High [Street] on [east]. The 20s and 30s are more peaceful—closer to Downtown and the Lake [Merritt]. High is close to the high school—Fremont—there’s a lot of drama there.

Micah identifies Fremont High School as a geographic concentration of a lot of the “drama” in East Oakland. She contrasts this “drama” with the more peaceful areas from 20th

Avenue eastward to 39th Avenue. However, 13-year-old Javier, a Latino male, experiences this same area as unsafe. He comments:

What they be callin' the "Murder Dubs" but it's still the 20s and 30s. I don't wanna go there and be wearin' like a gang color and they're gonna mistake me.

The contradictions of how two youth perceive or experience safety and violence in the "20s and 30s," seems to fall along ethnic, gender, and perhaps age lines. According to homicide investigators in Oakland, the Latino gangs in East and West Oakland are much more formal and place a greater value on "pride," "colors," and "turf" than the Black gangs there (J. M. Wilson & Riley, 2004). Consequently, an African-American female deems the "20s and 30s" as safe and peaceful, yet a Latino male fears being mistaken for a gang member within this same space, and therefore his movement throughout this space is more restricted.

Some youth identify specific businesses and spaces within neighborhoods that attract violence. When asked to describe his neighborhood, 18-year-old Joshua, an African-American male, shares:

J: Quiet and peaceful...until you walk down the street.

LD: Down to another block or until you go outside?

J: Naw, just down the street to 76th. Because it's just a liquor store over there. They be wilin' out over there, but they all cool though.

Joshua feels that the liquor store in his neighborhood on 76th avenue attracts a group of people who are unsafe and who "be wilin' out" or acting *wild*. By sharing that "they are cool though," he suggests that he has either developed some sort of rapport with these people or developed a practice of navigating near the liquor store in a safe manner.

In addition to identifying unsafe spaces, some youth or their families move to areas within East Oakland that they deem as safer. Daniela, an 18-year-old African-American female, and her family moved in an attempt to get her "Granny" out of an unsafe area. She comments:

And we had to move my Granny up there [High Street and MacArthur Boulevard] because we were staying on 81st and Rudsdale—that's where I'm from—and it got hectic over there. Like, just a lot of stuff happening so we moved her to High Street and um, yeah. We had been everywhere in Oakland, and basically, it's the same old thing anywhere you go. New faces, but the same thing repeats itself over and over, and all you can do to prevent that is to keep yourself as far away as possible.

Daniela and her family moved to a "hectic" neighborhood in "Deep East Oakland" (70th Avenue and on, eastward) to a less hectic neighborhood further west. This type of within-city spatial mobility is different from the out-migration practices from urban neighborhoods to suburban ones that some researchers document (Chaskin, 1997; Fullilove, 2004; S. Ginwright & Akom, 2007; Sides, 2003). Daniela and her family reduce their exposure to violence by moving within East Oakland.

Further eastward, José, a 19-year-old, Latino male, identifies 105th Avenue as an unsafe space where a lot of violent activity occurs. He shares:

A not-safe spot would be standing, driving in a car, walking, all down 105th. There's been drive-bys, there've been assaults, aggravated assaults, all that down that street, car theft, burglary, killings, all kinds of crime down 105th.

José identifies the multiple and varied types of violence that occurs on 105th Avenue. 105th borders a more isolated part of East Oakland, demarcated by the remaining industries in the area, railroad tracks, and the Sobrante Park neighborhoods that has contended with high rates of violence. José deems the whole space as unsafe.

“I Always Stay Inside”: Self-Isolation

Many of the youth commented about “staying inside” or “staying at home” in order to be safe. They encounter a lot of violence as they navigate through the various neighborhoods in East Oakland, but their own houses, and at times, their friends’ houses, feel like safe spaces. The following excerpt is from Keith, a 19-year-old, African-American male, who talks about staying inside his house in his particular neighborhood:

I stay in the house. I don’t go outside especially where I’m at...they call it the 6-9 Village. 6-5 is beefin’ with 6-9. Come on now! They come through shootin’.

In this particular excerpt, Keith talks about life in *The Village* public housing complex, where he lives with his grandmother. The Village received national notoriety as being the residence of infamous 1980s drug kingpin Felix Mitchell. The Village has two sides—one on 65th Avenue (6-5 *Vill* or *Lockwood Gardens*) and one on 69th Avenue (6-9 *Vill* or *San Antonio Village*)—the latter of which has been recently remodeled as part of public housing redevelopment efforts. Although these two complexes are in close proximity to one another, there is “beef” or turf wars between the two sides. In the context of communities with high rates of violence, researchers have found that a safer home environment contributes to better functioning among children (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004; Richters & Martinez, 1993). Likewise, Keith spends most of his free time inside his house and with his grandmother in order to avoid the drive-by shootings that go on right in front of his doorstep.

Chastity, a 16-year-old African-American female, similarly feels that her house is a safe space within her East Oakland neighborhood, but unlike Keith, she also feels safe in her immediate neighborhood. She remarks:

I’d say the safe space would be my house, and the guy—the one who goes to my school—his house, and the next door neighbor’s house. So everybody who lives in that little congregation part that’s right there. And all the people that talk to the kids like, “Watch yourself,” like that. I would go to all those people’s houses like that, just in case something’s going on and my parents weren’t around or I didn’t have the keys to my house.

When asked about safe spaces in her neighborhood, Chastity references her own house and those of her neighbors. This speaks to a sense of neighborliness, which is often not considered in recent media and research reports about Oakland. She also mentions that the adults on her block look out for the younger kids—in the sense of care, concern, support, and a sort of informal social control. Chastity feels comfortable enough with these neighbors that she can go to them for safety or support if she needed it.

“You Never Know What’s Gonna Happen”: Avoidance of Parties

Going to parties might seem like typical rites of passage for teens; however, for many youth in East Oakland, parties have been perceived or actually experienced as unsafe, and tend to be avoided at all cost. This conscious and active strategy is akin to Jones’ (N. Jones, 2009) description of “situational avoidance” strategies that youth adopt in order to negotiate safety in their neighborhoods. Sixteen-year-old Jamila, an African-American female describes why she no longer goes to parties:

I don’t even go to parties no more. Because it’s crazy. I just avoid a lot of things. I think about the outcome before I do it. Like they would shoot it up, they just shoot it up. Like they just fight you for no reason. Like people would come here looking for fights.

People come there—like older people who come there be thinkin’, ‘oh all these young people wanna come out here and have a party? Wanna have fun? Oh, let me just shoot the party up.’ Like I know people who think like that, like they just come to...and I’m not gonna go when I know people think like that. It’s like you can’t even go to a party anymore. It’s like you go, and there’s either a fight or somebody gets shot. For my 16th birthday I was trying to have a party, but I didn’t even do it.

According to Jamila, fighting and shooting are inevitable at parties. When she attended parties in the past, shootings and fights often occurred there. She also suggests that she knows of people who have actually come to parties with the intention of shooting up the parties. Instead, Jamila elects to not go to parties. She did not have a party to ring in her “Sweet Sixteen,” but in her opinion, committed to staying safe.

Similarly, Tanisha, an 18-year-old African-American female discusses the pervasiveness of violence at parties:

Being in Oakland, you never know what’s gonna happen. Like you’re going to a party, you’re having fun and then someone gets into a fight. You’re outside, you’re walking, and then someone shoots someone. You know, it’s always some sudden something so you can’t have fun. It’s just always something that comes out of that—having fun.

That’s why I don’t even go out anymore.

Although Tanisha feels that you “never know what’s gonna happen” at parties, this expert suggests that she knows exactly what might happen—fighting and shooting. She sees “having fun” as resulting in often dangerous consequences, and instead concedes to just not go to parties, like Jamila.

“I’m Not Just Runnin the Streets”: Keeping Busy and Occupied

The youth expressed the need to keep busy, through involvement in activities that are productive and positive, as a strategy to stay safe. It appears that too much idle time may lead to temptation and risky behaviors, and a busier schedule—through school and activities at EOYDC—is the safer alternative. In the following research poem, 12-year-old Naima talks about her involvement with EOYDC:

And Here
there’s like
Somewhere
You can come
and be surrounded by
Good People
and not like
always
Violence

With the various programming and employment opportunities at EOYDC, youth participants are kept occupied. Youth see their involvement in EOYDC as a positive alternative to being bored, and they see EOYDC as a safe space in a neighborhood which they otherwise experience as unsafe. In this way, EOYDC—the physical building, and the people, relationships, and activities therein—serves as an intervention for neighborhood violence.

Youth also keep busy by going to school, including the time it takes to travel to the school campus and the various school-related activities in which they are involved. Nineteen-

year-old Darius talks about how he “stayed away from” the dangers of his neighborhoods by going to school:

I don't know if I stayed safe, I just know I stayed away from it for a while, as long as I could. You know with school for me 8[am] to 3[pm]...football practice for me after school til like 6[pm], and then riding BART or getting a ride from somebody. So, I stayed away from it for like five days. I stayed away from it, but I was still in it, you know what I'm sayin'. Like I still knew what was going on, but I just felt like for me, like okay 'if I go to St. Mary's [High School], I can stay away from it, but if I go to Oakland High, like I'm still around it.' And I'm not saying people who go to Oakland High can't beat it, I'm just sayin that sometimes it's just good to get away from it, like there's other options.

Darius keeps busy through a full day attending a parochial school in a neighboring city and through participating in sports. He contrasts this with still being “in it” if he went to his neighborhood public school, and is thankful for the time to “get away.” Similarly, LaShay also stays safe by going to school. She shares:

I actually stay safe by going to school, staying in school, coming to work, basically having a full schedule, to where I'm not just runnin' the streets. If you're out just runnin' the streets then yeah, you're trying to look for trouble. You see, they're people just looking for someone. They do hit and runs. They go 'just shoot that person,' and you're in the gang. So if you're in the streets, then you're looking for trouble. But if you're actually doing something with yourself, even if you gotta be in the house cleaning up, you don't need to be just sitting in the street. Why are you in the streets at midnight? You're looking for something.

LaShay sees going to school and working at EOYDC as the safer and more productive alternative to “runnin the streets.” She actually views those who are idle or who spend their time “runnin the streets” as looking for trouble in which to engage.

Hanging Out with Positive Friends

Young people in violent neighborhoods might feel the tug of “loyalty links” (N. Jones, 2009) that their friendships require, which might put them in danger of defending themselves and their friends if a conflict arises. Daniela reflects on a time when she was involved in more negative activities and consequently had to relationally isolate herself instead:

And being in Oakland, woo it does that to you. Because of the environment that you're around. Because of the people you surround yourself with. You got the proper females and males, and then you got the ghetto females and males. And I surrounded myself with the negative. I was raised in the hood, basically. But as the negative things were coming my way, I still had positive and I was coming out here [EOYDC] doing what I had to do, but still going out there with a better point of view of certain things that I was doing that wasn't right.

Much like the readily-identified fighters and the more reluctant fighters in Jones' study, Daniela makes the distinction between the “proper” young women and men and the “ghetto” young women and men that she encounters in East Oakland. She suggests that her involvement in activities at EOYDC caused her to be more self-reflective of the types of people with whom she surrounded herself. Young people come to EOYDC because of different reasons and for different purposes. Daniela was first introduced to EOYDC as an option of a community service site per the terms of her probation. As a volunteer, she became introduced to the young women's

group, G.E.D. program, and other programmatic offerings at EOYDC. She also gained exposure to more “positive” peers and role models at EOYDC that caused her to re-evaluate her more “negative” relationships that she had prior to her arrest.

Nineteen-year-old Kareem, an African-American male, was involved in a gang previously. He found out about EOYDC from his high school counselor. The sense of responsibility and accountability that he encountered at EOYDC allowed him to see himself as a leader in a new light. The opportunities to mentor younger children and earn an income keep him involved with EOYDC. He shares:

My father always told me, and numerous people always told me, ‘Hang around people that do what you like to do.’ And that’s the hardest thing to find. That might sound selfish, but it’s beneficial. I learned that the hard way. Man, I learned that the very, very hard way.

Kareem describes “the hard way” as consequences of and relationships in the gang. Like Daniela, he is exposed to more positive peers through his involvement with EOYDC.

Although 16-year-old Aja, an African-American female, is not involved in a gang, she has friends who are. In the following interpretive poem, she shares how she experiences these relationships:

My unsafe place
is a gang
I stay away
because my personality won’t let me go
I stay away
because I have seen too many people that are gone now because of this place
People I have sat in class with
spoken & held conversations
People that I have breathed the same air with.

My unsafe place
is a gang
I stay away
from this place
because my best friend has called me too many times
Crying, telling me that another person is shot and
Gone
Gone
because they were at
this unsafe place.

Aja has to cope with losing friends and classmates to neighborhood violence. She is learning to navigate safety and emotional coping was by relationally isolating herself.

Other youth in my study employ a risk-avoidance strategy of associating themselves with friends in their neighborhoods whom they deem as positive. This is in contrast, but related to, the “relational isolation” that Jones (N. Jones, 2009) describes. Instead, these youth actively surround themselves with neighborhood friends who put them in safe, productive, and positive situations. When asked how he stays safe in his neighborhood, José shares:

Like the friends that I hang out with on a day-to-day basis, they don’t bang, they’re not affiliated, they’re just regular people.

Several of the youth commented on the active steps that they take to associate with positive people, particularly regarding their peer groups. In this excerpt, José consciously does not hang out with people that are in gangs. Instead, he describes his friends as “just regular.” Similarly, Douglas, an 18-year-old African-American male surrounds himself with positive peers. He remarks:

I feel like I stay safe by the friends I’m around. My friends who don’t get involved in that, just like how I don’t...Not being out late as much, because not too much good stuff goes on at nighttime. And just keeping my nose clean, just staying away from that type of stuff because it doesn’t lead to anything good. Like, it’s not putting no money in my pocket, it’s not giving me a diploma, it’s not getting me a job, so why be around it?

In addition to not staying out late at night, and not getting involved in unproductive or illegal activities, Douglas associates with friends who also are not “involved.”

Discussion

My hope for Oakland is just to...just to...to go home and actually lay your head on your pillow, to know that you’re safe. Instead of just being like, ‘okay I’m in this neighborhood, okay I’m laying down, but I hear all of these gun shots. Okay, should I be panicky? Should I be worried about what if one of these bullets is gonna come through my window, come through my wall?’ No. That’s one of my hopes—that we can actually go home and just lay down without none of this shooting—bang-bangs, pow-pows.

—Daniela, nineteen

Neighborhood violence impacts the lives of young people living in urban neighborhoods across the country on an everyday basis, including the flatlands of Oakland, California. As Daniela shares in the excerpt above, youth grow up in East Oakland hearing gunshots—the “bang-bangs, pow-pows”—as part of their daily routine, just like waking up and going to sleep. The ethnographic nature of my study allowed me to not only document that neighborhood violence is pervasive, but to examine how young people in East Oakland make sense of and actively cope with such violence. The participatory narrative analysis process and the poems that it produced allowed for the youth to use their own words to express their feelings, often contradictory, about living in violent neighborhoods.

The threat of neighborhood violence, actual violent acts, and the consequences of violent acts preoccupy youth’s thoughts, interpersonal relationships, and the routes and modes that they use to move around in their neighborhoods. Youth in my study actively work to avoid places and situations which they think might put them in imminent danger of encountering violent activity. They do this using five common strategies. First, they use their own personal experiences or stories shared from family, peers, or the news to identify blocks, streets, or whole neighborhoods that they deem are unsafe due to physical fighting, gang activity, and/or gun violence. Second, they isolate themselves inside their homes and limit their time outside. Third, they avoid going to parties. Fourth, they involve themselves in activities that keep their schedules full, usually through school, sports, jobs, or activities at EOYDC. Finally, they actively seek out friendships that they deem as “positive.” They begin to evaluate their friendships by the level of safety such relationships afford. They isolate themselves from friends involved in fighting or gang activity, and actively seek out friends who are involved in more positive activities like the EOYDC.

These risk-avoidance strategies do not prevent the violence in these youth's neighborhoods or their exposure to neighborhood violence. They do, however, suggest ways that young people are actively working to manage or minimize their risks. Youth development and public health practitioners committed to attending to young people in such spatial and social contexts can build on the youth-informed strategies and participatory methods offered in this paper to continue to improve violence prevention policies and programs. Such findings show the promise of programs and organizations that promote positive youth development and put youth in contact with supportive adults and pro-social peers in safe spaces.

Youth actively and strategically navigate through their neighborhoods in their daily rounds and in search of safe spaces. The ways that youth continue to navigate resources within one particular safe neighborhood space—the East Oakland Youth Development Center—will be explored in the next paper.

**“The Hook-Up”:
How Youth-Serving Organizations Facilitate
Network-Based Social Capital for Urban Minority Adolescents**
(targeted for the *Journal of Community Psychology*)

Abstract

Youth-serving organizations based in urban neighborhoods can facilitate a type of social capital for its youth participants based on accessing and leveraging networks which can support positive youth development. This article explores the process of how this network-based social capital is developed and what this provides for youth. Ethnographic research, including qualitative interviews, was conducted with adolescents at a youth-serving organization based in East Oakland, California over a 15-month period. Four key findings emerged from this research. First, the organization provides a wealth of opportunities in which youth there can be engaged. Second, relationships from supportive adult staff at the organization put youth in contact with caring, trusted adults, not in their families, whom they can look to as role models. Third, these adult staff activate social leverage to garner the youth various academic and professional opportunities. Finally, through the organization, its staff, activities, and opportunities, youth are able to envision a positive future for themselves.

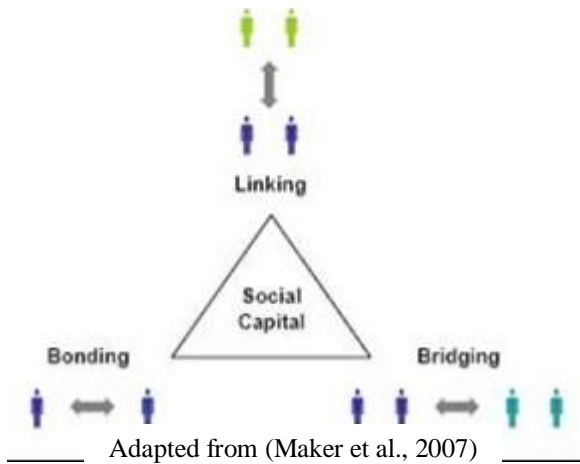
The Concept of Social Capital

Social capital is a community-level measure that involves interpersonal mechanisms that comprise resources for individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Briggs, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The notion of social capital is an old concept in the sociological literature, but public health interest in the concept has surged in the past 15 years (R. M. Carpiano, 2006; Moore, Shiell, Hawe, & Haines, 2005). Most of the extant public health literature on social capital relies on Robert Putnam’s conceptualization of social organization—norms, networks, trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement—that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (R. M. Carpiano, 2006; Putnam, 2000). This conceptualization has allowed social epidemiologists to examine the ecological-level measures of social capital. This conceptualization also appeals to public health’s community advocacy leanings (Moore et al., 2005; Portes, 1998). The presence of social capital has been found to buffer the negative effects of poverty on health (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000; R. M. Carpiano, 2006).

Other researchers have critiqued public health’s use of Putnam’s social capital model (R. M. Carpiano, 2006; James, Schulz, & van Olphen, 2001; Moore et al., 2005). They argue that this use of the concept is more consistent with the notion of *social cohesion*. Carpiano encourages public health professionals to use Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social capital, which conceptualizes social capital as “the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships” (Bourdieu, 1986). This notion of social capital acknowledges that people’s resources are embedded in networks and considers how people access these networked resources (R. M. Carpiano, 2006). Literature in urban sociology provides extensive evidence of the process of this network-based social capital (Domínguez & Watkins, 2003; Small, 2004; Small, 2009). This conceptualization highlights the role of inequality by acknowledging that people’s social networks differ; therefore, they have unequal access to network-based resources, based on race, class, gender, age, and geography (R.

M. Carpiano, 2006; Gatrell, Popay, & Thomas, 2004; Veenstra et al., 2005). Such network-

Figure 3.1: *Dimensions of Social Capital*



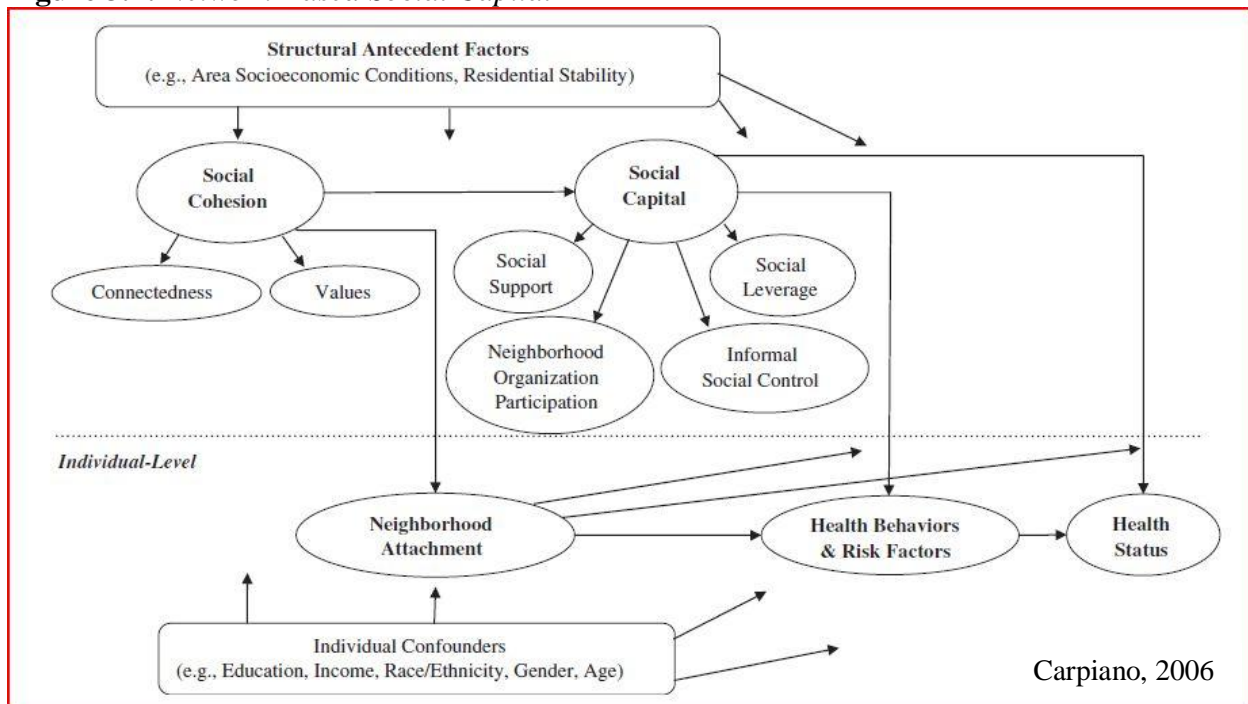
based social capital may include resources between residents or within institutional networks in the neighborhood that may be used by residents for individual or collective action (R. M. Carpiano, 2008; Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002; R. J. Sampson, Morenoff, & Felton Earls, 1999). This conceptualization also recognizes that other resources may be accessed and leveraged, even in the absence of economic capital (R. M. Carpiano, 2007).

Network-based social capital identifies institutions as fostering *bonding*, *bridging*, or *linking* social capital (Figure 3.1) (N. Lin, 1999a; N. Lin, 1999b). The social capital dimensions of bonding, bridging, and linking become important when we consider how

residents are able to access and leverage longstanding or new forms of capital in their changing neighborhoods (Altschuler, Somkin, & Adler, 2004; Domínguez & Watkins, 2003; Kawachi, 2006; Kim, Subramanian, & Kawachi, 2006; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Bonding social capital involves relationships between similar groups, for example people from the same ethnic or socio-economic background (Kim et al., 2006; Warren, 2001). Bridging social capital evokes Putnam's notion and involves relationship-building with people from dissimilar backgrounds (Kim et al., 2006). Granovetter (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter, 1982) posited that "weak-tie" relations—those that are more casual and informal—actually give people better access to opportunities, acting as bridges to new information, while "strong ties"—those that are more emotionally intense, frequent, and direct—may restrict the flow of this new information. Linking social capital is a new concept that gets at the phenomenon of leveraging networks and capital, and building relationships with people and institutions across levels of hierarchy and power (Kim et al., 2006; Warren, 2001).

For individual action, two forms of social capital are emphasized in the social science literature—*social support* and *social leverage* (Figure 3.2) (R. M. Carpiano, 2006; R. J. Sampson & Graif, 2009). Social support refers to capital that individuals can draw upon to "get by" or to cope with daily problems (Briggs, 1998; Stack, 1974). Social leverage refers to social capital that helps residents "get ahead" and affords them access to information, such as referrals to jobs, and advance their social mobility (Briggs, 1998; Small, Jacobs, & Massengill, 2008). For collective action, two forms of social capital are emphasized in the literature—*informal social control* and *neighborhood organization participation* (Figure 3.2). Informal social control refers to residents' ability to collectively maintain order and keep the neighborhood safe from criminal and delinquent activity (R. J. Sampson, 2001). Neighborhood organization participation refers to residents' formally organized collective activity, such as neighborhood block clubs, for addressing neighborhood issues (Saegert & Winkel, 1998).

Figure 3.2: Network-Based Social Capital



Review of the Facilitation of Social Capital among Adolescents

Much of the research on social capital has relied on adult-reported information, and has not considered youth's personal networks, nor their relationships to their built and social environments (Briggs, 1998; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). I have reviewed the published empirical literature that explicitly addresses how social capital operates in adolescent populations. Table 3.1 summarizes the characteristics and key findings of studies dealing with the facilitation of social capital among adolescents.

Most of the youth studies scholars look to James Coleman's conceptualization of social capital which situates youth within the systems in which they are most frequently embedded—families and schools. Coleman (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990) highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships between youth and their families and teachers (V. M. Morrow, 2000; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). However, the processes of how community-level concepts like social capital operate through interpersonal networks to impact adolescent well-being has been studied more in Canada, Europe, and Australia, more so than in the U.S. (Olsson et al., 2003; Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007). Researchers outside of the U.S. are primarily interested in how social capital is generated among young people in socially-disadvantaged communities (Holland, 2008; V. M. Morrow, 2000; V. Morrow, 1999; V. Morrow, 2001; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Using multiple methods, Holland (Holland, 2008) examined whether or not social capital has been broken down or lost, an argument favored by Putnam. On the contrary, she found that among youth, siblings and friends are an important source of social capital, and that young people are able to access their parents' social networks. Morrow (V. M. Morrow, 2000; V. M. Morrow, 2003) investigated *place attachment* as a component of social capital. Using ethnographic methods, she was able to find contradictions in ways youth use public space in their neighborhoods. Parks and malls, typically seen as youth-friendly spaces, are highly contested spaces for low-income and minority youth growing up in Southeast England, leaving them

feeling unsafe and unwelcomed there (V. M. Morrow, 2000; V. M. Morrow, 2003). Tolonen (Tolonen, 2005) noted that parents' occupations and neighborhoods influenced youth's future decisions about careers and where they would live. Raffo and Reeves' (Raffo & Reeves, 2000) phenomenological study explores youth's social relationships and sense of belonging to systems of social capital and sources of agency and empowerment for them. Finally, Weller (Weller, 2006) enlisted multiple methods to examine the construct of *civic engagement*, which often composes part of adult-centered conceptualizations of social capital, and makes this construct salient for young people. Although they are not of voting age, youth in the U.K. use advocacy strategies to demand youth-friendly spaces in their own neighborhoods.

Researchers in the U.S. have acknowledged that we understand very little about what constitutes social capital among minority adolescents in urban American neighborhoods (S. A. Ginwright, 2007). Nevertheless, several researchers have begun to look at the individuals in family (Coleman, 1988), school (R. L. Jarrett, 1995), and community settings (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003), as well as the organizations and institutions (S. A. Ginwright, 2007) that show potential in developing and sustaining social capital for minority urban adolescents. Furstenberg and Hughes (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995) found that youth are able to find their way out of disadvantage through the activation of social capital, primarily through their families' networks. McMahon (McMahon, Felix, & Nagarajan, 2010) noted that family members and teachers provide various forms of social support, including emotional support, tangible support, and informational support. Using data for the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), Swaroop (Swaroop, Cagney, & Pannor Silver, 2007) found that for youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods, family is the main source of social support for boys and friends are the main sources of social support for girls. Schaefer-McDaniel (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2006) used ethnographic methods to illustrate youth's development of social capital through bonds at their schools more so than in their neighborhoods, when they feel spatially restricted in their neighborhoods, due to perceived or actual safety threats. Several researchers explored the nuances inherent in the role of adult mentors in developing youth's social capital. Kahne (Kahne & Bailey, 1999) found that trust in adult-youth relationships facilitates the development of social networks and the adherence to social norms. Jarrett's ethnography (R. L. Jarrett, 1995) examined the stages of adult-youth relationship development and found that adults provide access to information and advice for youth. Stanton-Salazar (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003) highlighted the importance of recruiting and supporting adult mentors. Briggs (Briggs, 1998) found that having at least one employed adult in a youth's social network improved their perceived social leverage. Of this group of U.S.-based empirical studies, Ginwright (S. A. Ginwright, 2007) is the only author who explicitly looked at the role of a community-based organization in facilitating social capital among youth. He highlights the instrumental role that adults at the organization play in the youth's lives, particularly as they seek to develop a positive self-concept and positive racial identity.

Table 3.1: *Empirical Evidence for the Facilitation Social Capital among Adolescents*

Author(s)	Year	Study Design	n	Participants	Location	Construct(s)	Findings
Holland	2008	Multi-methods: Cross-sectional, Non-experimental and Ethnography	150	16-30 year olds	London, Northern Ireland, the Caribbean	Social Norms Social Networks Social Support	Siblings and friends as a valuable source of social capital;

							youth are able to tap into parents' social networks
Morrow	2000	Ethnography	99	12-15 year olds from 2 secondary schools; ~30% minority; ~35% low-income	2 wards in Southeast England	Trust Reciprocity Civic Engagement Community Identity Social Networks	Age must be taken into consideration regarding youth's use of public space; How youth use and experience public space impacts their community identity and overall well-being
Morrow	2003	Ethnography	101	12-15 year olds from 2 secondary schools; ~30% minority; ~35% low-income	2 wards in Southeast England	Social Networks Norms Reciprocity and Trust Community Identity/Sense of Belonging Civic Engagement	Youth do not have clean, safe, welcoming places to play; Youth feel distrusted by adults in public; For girls, safety is an issue, with sexual assault a perceived threat
Tolonen	2005	Case Study	4	Working-class 20-year-olds	Finland	Social Networks Social Support Place Attachment	Parents and place attachment are important components of social capital
Raffo & Reeves	2003	Phenomenology	31	Young people, ages 15-24; 74% White, 19% Black, 7% Asian	Manchester, England	Trust Social Networks	Individuals have choice and agency in their daily actions, which develop and are developed by their social relations; Belonging to a strong and fluid system of social capital can be empowering to those living in high-risk

							environments
Weller	2006	Multi-methods: Cross-sectional, Non- experimental and Ethnography	600	13-16 year olds in total; 20 13-14 year olds involved in multi- wave, multi- method project	United Kingdom	Civic Engagement Social Networks	Teens may reframe “civic engagement” as they use social capital to advocate for youth-centered spaces and political agency, even outside of mainstream democratic structures
Furstenberg & Hughes	1995	Longitudinal, Non- experimental	252	Children of teenage mothers; mostly African American; mostly low- income	Baltimore, MD	Parents’ social investment in children Families’ links to the community	Measures of social capital are related to markers of socioeconomic success in early adulthood; Social capital subsumes a number of discrete dimensions
McMahon	2010	Longitudinal, Non- experimental	133	African- American 6 th -8 th grade low- income public school students	Chicago, IL	Social Networks Social Support	Mothers and sisters most frequently offer various forms of social support; Grandmothers offer emotional support; Teachers offer informational support
Swaroop	2007	Longitudinal, Non- experimental	1,443	11-17 year olds	Chicago, IL	Social Support (family-level and friend- level)	Neighborhood disadvantage is associated with increased family support for boys, but has no significant relationship for girls; Neighborhood disadvantage is associated with decreased

							friend support for girls, but has no significant relationship for boys
Schaefer-McDaniel	2006	Ethnography	10	Low-income African-American and Latino youth	New York, NY	Social Networks Sociability Trust and Reciprocity Sense of Belonging/ Place Attachment	Spatially-restricted youth build more supportive bonds in their schools rather than in their neighborhoods
Kahne	1999	Case Study	92	Latino youth and African-American youth	Chicago, IL	Trust Social Networks Social Norms	Different forms of social capital facilitate youth development; For low-income youth, social trust significantly expands the value of social networks and adherence to social norms
Jarrett et al.	2005	Ethnography	34	Youth at 3 organized youth programs for high-school aged youth	A small, rural Midwestern town, and a large Midwestern city	Social Networks Social Support	Youth-Adult relationships develop in stages; Youth-Adult relationships provide youth with access to information, advice, and support
Stanton-Salazar	2003	Ethnography	51	Low-income Latino youth	San Diego, CA	Social Networks Social Support	Networks are formed from individual, not group, access; Mentors and “institutional agents” need to be recruited and supported culturally, financially, and politically
Briggs	1998	Cross-sectional, Quasi-experimental	132	African-American and Latino	Yonkers, NY	Social Support Social Leverage	Having at least one employed adult in

				youth living in public housing complexes			youth's social network increases perceived social leverage
Ginwright	2007	Ethnography	15	African-American youth	Oakland, CA	Racial Identity Political Consciousness Social Leverage	Community-based organizations facilitate "critical" social capital for youth through sustained relationships with adults who help them develop positive self-concept

The studies summarized in Table 3.1 seek to inform future research and interventions focused on fostering healthy youth development, particularly for at-risk adolescent populations. Collectively, they argue that when thinking about the ability for adolescent populations to make sense of their changing neighborhoods and resources for social support, it is important to consider the mechanisms available to them to access institutional networks in order to achieve social mobility and buffer the systemic factors that have historically excluded them (Akom, 2006; Deutsch, 2008; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). The quantitative studies provide measures of social capital, particularly in family and school contexts. The qualitative studies elucidate the role of places and spaces in the development of social capital for adolescents. Additionally, the qualitative studies describe how youth-adult relationships are developed and nurtured and how this sustained social capital for adolescents. My study specifically examines the process of *how* social capital operates for young people of color, outside of their family and school networks, in urban American neighborhoods.

Social Capital in East Oakland

In the East Oakland community of Oakland, California, local institutions have historically played important roles in the economic and social health of Oakland's residents. The presence of the General Motors Chevrolet automobile factory in East Oakland, which opened in 1916, the Fageol Motor Company, Durant Motors, and the Chrysler plant helped to establish this neighborhood as the "Detroit of the West" (Chrysler plant.1929) and an "industrial garden" (Self, 2003)—economically, residentially, and socially viable in the regional economy. With the assistance of post-World War II Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans, White residents moved to suburbs south of Oakland, such as San Leandro and beyond. East Oakland, previously off limits to African Americans due to racial restrictive covenants, became accessible to Blacks by the 1960s (Cielo, 2005; Self, 2003). East Oakland was especially sought out as a homestead by Black residents who had been displaced from West Oakland due to urban renewal projects there, such as three interstate highways (Nimitz, MacArthur, and Grove-Shafter), the Main Post Office, and the West Oakland BART Station (Cielo, 2005; Self, 2003). However, the boom in

the national economy, local jobs, and housing opportunities soon became a bust, with Oakland losing 10,000 manufacturing jobs between 1961 and 1966, including the out-migration of the General Motors Chevrolet plant from East Oakland to the suburb of Fremont (Self, 2003). Additionally, many national manufacturers with facilities based in East Oakland began to close up shop in the 1960s, including Caterpillar, Clorox, Del Monte, General Electric, Gerber, Granny Goose, Mothers Cookies, Safeway, and Sunshine Biscuits (*Good jobs, safe streets: How economic recovery can lead to safe streets in oakland*2009; *East Oakland Building Healthy Communities*.2011; Payton, 2010). This directly contributed to the erosion of the indigenous organizational base and loss of low-skill, high-wage jobs in East Oakland (Rhombert, 2004; Wacquant, 1998).

This industrial disinvestment in East Oakland was soon followed by commercial disinvestment. The Eastmont Mall, which opened in 1970 at the site of the old General Motors plant and with great fanfare as one of the nation's first urban malls (Eastmont mall's effort to provide for east bay residents.1973; Berkley, 1970), began to lose anchor department stores such as JC Penney's and Mervyn's by the 1990s, and the occupancy of its other stores plunged to 30 percent (Cielo, 2005). The new owners courted social service agencies and community-oriented organizations to become tenants, such as offices of the Alameda County Public Health Department, various Alameda County Social Service Agencies, a branch of the Oakland Public Library, an Oakland Police Department substation, a Head Start preschool, and several non-profit organizations, and changed the name of the "mall" to the Eastmont Town Center (Cielo, 2005). This commercial restructuring also led to an exodus of financial capital across East Oakland, making it extremely difficult for small, Black-owned stores and shops that previously served urban residents there to survive and weakening what had generally been a strong neighborhood-based economy (Chaskin, 1997; Lemke-Santangelo, 1996; W. J. Wilson, 1987).

Ginwright refers to this "perfect storm" that transformed the nature of the political and institutional infrastructure in Oakland from the 1970s through the 1990s as the "urban trifecta," including the demise of the Black Panther Party, the exodus of blue collar jobs, and the spread of crack cocaine (S. Ginwright, 2009). Oakland's unemployment levels currently remain significantly higher than the Alameda County and California statewide averages (Witt et al., 2005). Residents in East Oakland regularly contend with economic, environmental, educational, and health inequities.

Creating Network-Based Social Capital in East Oakland: The East Oakland Youth Development Center

The growing base of youth development and health services agencies, faith-based institutions, and violence prevention efforts in East Oakland offer sources of potential resources to leverage social capital, particularly for adolescent populations in this community (*East Oakland Building Healthy Communities*.2011; S. Ginwright, 2009). Through the relationships and activities within these settings, youth can develop institutional networks that help them to negotiate macro social structures, such as societal laws, customs, resources, and values (Deutsch, 2008). These institutions provide safe spaces for youth to hangout, activities for meaningful participation, and adult role models to look upon for social support.

One institution in particular—The East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC)—has served youth in this community since 1978. Founded by Robert Shetterly, former Chairman of the Board and CEO of the Clorox Company, EOYDC has been committed to attending to the emotional, physical, intellectual, and economic well-being of the community for nearly 33 years.

Famous athletes and entertainers who grew up in East Oakland came to know EOYDC as their “home away from home,” including NBA stars Gary Payton, Brian Shaw, Jason Kidd, and Leon Powe, R&B stars D’Wayne Wiggins and Keyshia Cole, and comedian Mark Curry. EOYDC’s mission is to equip East Oakland’s youth with the skills, training, and values necessary to become dynamic leaders and responsible citizens. EOYDC is located in the Elmhurst District of East Oakland, in what is known locally as “the killer corridor” because of the high rates of violent crime and homicides in this neighborhood (Moody, 2008). Nevertheless, for five days a weeks, 50 weeks each year, EOYDC offers positive and safe experiences for East Oakland’s youth through a dedicated staff and various program offerings. EOYDC’s free, comprehensive core programming emphasizes artistic expression, job training, physical activity, and education. The Art Department features classes and activities related to painting, culinary arts, music, sculpture, drawing, dance, and photography. Project J.O.Y. (Job Opportunities for Youth) offers educational counseling, computer literacy, homework assistance, GED preparation, college tours, and job placement services. The Physical Development Department sponsors a variety of recreational activities, including basketball, track and field, hiking, baseball, volleyball, and martial arts. EOYDC programs serve more than 2,000 youth and young adults each year (*East Oakland Youth Development Center*.2010).

Method

In an ongoing examination of the facilitation of social capital among urban minority adolescents, I began to consider the following questions: How does facilitation of social capital operate for urban minority adolescents?; and What does social capital provide to urban minority adolescents?

To respond to these guiding research questions, I conducted field research at EOYDC over a 15-month period. I conducted key informant interviews with staff, participant observation at EOYDC, neighborhood observations in the East Oakland communities where the youth work and live, and semi-structured interviews with 25 youth during this time. EOYDC is an ideal site to study how social capital is developed and sustained for a number of reasons. In addition to East Oakland’s history of urbanization and disinvestment, the energy related to recent place-based approaches of the Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) and The California Endowment (TCE) made locating my research in this community highly desirable. In May 2004, ACPHD partnered with the City of Oakland and several local institutions, community-based organizations, and grassroots groups to launch a *Community Capacity-Building Initiative* (CCB) in the Sobrante Park neighborhood of East Oakland. The CCB has an explicit goal of increasing the political, social, and economic power of a low-income neighborhood in Alameda County (*City-County Neighborhood Initiative*.2004). Additionally, the CCB employs a social capital frame overall and a youth development focus specifically (*City-County Neighborhood Initiative*.2004). In 2010, TCE embarked on a 10-year, statewide initiative—*Building Healthy Communities*—with the goal of supporting the development of communities where youth and families are healthy, safe, and able to contribute to the prosperity of the state of California (*East Oakland Building Healthy Communities*.2011). East Oakland is one of 14 communities identified by the foundation as partners in order to reach this goal. East Oakland also has the greatest number and concentration of youth in the city (*Oakland maps: Interpretation of trends and gaps for the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth*.2005). I sought to understand how social capital is conceptualized, developed, accessed and leveraged by

adolescents in East Oakland, and how this impacts their health and social behaviors and outcomes.

Gaining Access to EOYDC

My entrée to EOYDC was facilitated by the organization’s Executive Director, Regina Jackson. Ms. Jackson, has been affiliated with the organization for the last 27 years, and has served in her current role for the past 17 years. When I emailed Ms. Jackson to explain my research proposal and process, she responded promptly and suggested that we meet in person. During our first in-person meeting at EOYDC, Ms. Jackson immediately saw a natural link for my project and EOYDC based on my research aims and their commitment toward individual and community transformation. By the end of the meeting, she encouraged me to call her “Ms. Regina” like the staff and youth at EOYDC do. She felt that it would be important for me to conduct interviews with her staff and do participant observation at EOYDC to situate myself in various “birds’ nests” there. I engaged in this type of formative research for almost a year before recruiting interview respondents. I was able to gain trust and credibility with Ms. Regina and the EOYDC staff, and additionally, the staff was able to confirm or refute initial hunches that I had about neighborhood phenomena going on in East Oakland. Additionally, for two months in the summer, I conducted participant observation of the organization’s youth members as they participated in the youth-led Summer Cultural Enrichment Program (SCEP). I was able to meet EOYDC’s “youth leaders” and gain clues about their behaviors, interests, and perceptions. I soon became a familiar face at EOYDC and accessed spaces in and around the organization with ease.

Participants

After building these key relationships, recruitment happened easily and quickly. The youth members of EOYDC’s various programs were eager to sign-up for interview times in order to share their stories. I was able to recruit 25 youth between the ages 12 and 20 year of age for my study (Table 3.2). In addition to youth leaders from SCEP, other respondents included employees or participants in the homework tutorial center, the computer lab, the Pathways to College program, the GED prep program, the *Something to Talk About* young women’s group, and the physical development programs. Youth who signed up for interviews were more likely to say good things about EOYDC. Their responses help us to understand how EOYDC works for those youth for whom it works best.

Table 3.2: Demographic Information about Respondents

Name ⁴	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	School Enrollment
Aisha	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Dana	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Naima	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Tommy	Male	12	African American	Public MS
Javier	Male	13	Latino	Public MS
Aja	Female	16	African American	Public HS
Angela	Female	16	Latina	Charter HS

⁴ Pseudonyms are used throughout for youth’s names.

Chastity	Female	16	African American	Catholic High School
Jamila	Female	16	African American	Charter HS
Marisa	Female	16	Latina	Charter HS
Rashad	Male	16	African American	Catholic High School
LaShay	Female	17	African American	Public HS
Douglas	Male	18	African American	Public HS
Joshua	Male	18	African American	Not currently enrolled
Kai	Female	18	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Micah	Female	18	African American	Community College
Tanisha	Female	18	African American	Public HS
Daniela	Female	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Darius	Male	19	African American	Community College
José	Male	19	Latino	4-year College
Kareem	Male	19	African American	4-year College
Keith	Male	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Marco	Male	19	Latino	Community College
Tamika	Female	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Gina	Female	20	African American	4-year College

Data Collection

I conducted individual, one-hour, semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents (See Appendix A). During these interviews, I asked respondents about their personal goals, their involvement in EOYDC, their experiences of living in East Oakland, their perceptions of neighborhood change, and their relationships with and leveragability of networks in East Oakland.

Analysis

Interviews were taped and transcribed. Analysis was guided by an ethnographic approach (Creswell, 1998; Emerson et al., 1995). Interview text was read first to identify emergent themes. I then re-read interview text to develop detailed codes and sub-codes in two stages, in a process similar to that detailed by Harding (Harding, 2010). The Dedoose program was used to aid in this process. The first stage of codes included those developed a priori from existing theory and prior research. The second stage of codes included those emerging from preliminary findings and detailed in analytic memos. These analytic memos addressed the themes, analytic points, and interpretation of the analytic points of the research data and were developed throughout the entire process.

In this paper, I use excerpts from interviews to illustrate key thematic points that emerged during analysis. First, these excerpts illustrate how youth access the activities and personal resources at EOYDC. Next, these excerpts highlight how these activities and personal relationships are used to leverage social capital in the lives of the young people. Ultimately, these excerpts reveal the active work that youth engage in, with the support of adult role models to envision positive futures for themselves and set out upon a positive trajectory to do so.

Results

Meaningful Opportunities for Youth Participants

Meaningful participation—the involvement of youth in relevant, engaging, and interesting opportunities—is found to support healthy adolescent development (Benard, 1991; Benard, 2004). At EOYDC, youth are able to participate in a wide array of activities, particularly during after-school hours, from the art room, to the gym, to the computer lab, to the homework center. Youth have a choice of the types of activities in which they can be involved. Youth reported high levels of appreciation for the range of opportunities at EOYDC. For example, when asked about the activities she participated in, 12-year-old Naima, an African-American female, remarks:

I'm in all of them. The book club, I'm in this one program, after-school program, cooking class, music class, art class, gym, dance, everything.

Similarly, Javier, a 13-year-old Latino male, shares:

I'll be in cooking class. If I'm not there I'll be at music, sometimes art. Most of the time gym... and sometimes computer.

Daniela, a 19-year old African-American female, shares:

It's basically a center. Letting all the kids come and have basketball, have homework, just have something so that they won't be on the streets all the time.

Ms. Regina shares that she and her staff are able to write a “recipe” for the youth participants through the activities at EOYDC. Noting the diversity of the types of youth that EOYDC serves, staff tailor the activities to meet the needs of each youth and provide a form of programmatic intervention for the youth. EOYDC seems to work the best for youth who are involved in multiple activities.

Such a wealth of activities at EOYDC is in stark contrast to the opportunities in their own neighborhoods, which have unsafe or a lack of activities. As a result of the commercial disinvestment in Oakland, typical youth recreational spaces, such as malls, roller skating rinks, and bowling alleys, have closed down and do not currently exist in Oakland.

EOYDC provides a “youthtopia” for adolescents like Naima, Javier, and Daniela. Akom (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008) talks about the importance of “youthtopias”—youth-centered, safe spaces—particularly in the lives of low-income, youth of color. EOYDC is an example of a “youthtopia” because it offers a physical space for young people to stay safe and occupied, it frames and supports youth as *leaders*, and it has an explicit commitment to the well-being of youth of color.

Social Support from Adult Role Models

The staff at EOYDC serve as teachers, mentors, supervisors, and counselors for the youth participants. Ms. LaShieka is the first face that youth see when they walk in the door. Oftentimes, youth meet Ms. Jackie at an outreach event or job training workshop. Ms. Anana encourages youth and adults who were often told that school was not for them. When youth come to the gym to “hoop,” they run into Rico. Ms. Regina holds down the fort, with Alma as her right hand. Brother Elisha and Tré watch the youth as they exit the building at night to catch the bus home. Soon, youth come to know the staff on a deeper, more personal level. Most, if not all, of the staff are referred to by “Ms.” or “Sister,” or “Mr.” or Brother,” and their first name suggesting respect, as well as camaraderie. There is very low turn-over at EOYDC, making it unique compared to other non-profit organizations. The “newest” staff member has been at the organization for over five years, with Ms. Regina, Coach Taylor, the track and field coach, and

Mr. Dwight, the computer instructor, being the “oldest” staff members in terms of tenure, being there for nearly 17 years. Ms. Regina knows the names and faces of all of the EOYDC youth, and she and the EOYDC staff have connections within the broader East Oakland and Bay Area communities, contributing to their abilities to connect to the needs of the EOYDC youth.

The staff at EOYDC take on various roles in the lives of the young people there in order to meet their diverse needs, including parent, mentor, teacher, or boss (Walker, 2010). Adult staff in organized youth programs are credited with providing information, assistance, exposure, support, and encouragement to youth participants (R. L. Jarrett, 1995; R. L. Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). In this way, the staff at EOYDC contribute to *bonding* social capital (Kim et al., 2006) for the youth participants there. When asked about whom he looks up to as role models, 19-year-old José, a Latino male, responds:

Another role model I look up to is Ms. Regina and lots of the senior staff here at EOYDC, because I see they’re always open to help everybody. ‘No’ is most likely not an answer to them. They’re a big influence to what I do and what I wanna do.

José sees Ms. Regina and the EOYDC staff as dependable and as role models. They form a social support system for him. Additionally, he has also been inspired by them emotionally and professionally in pursuit of his own personal and professional goals.

Like José, Tanisha, an 18-year-old African-American female, worked at EOYDC first as a Youth Leader in SCEP, and now works in the afterschool programs. She offers her feelings about Ms. Regina:

The work [at EOYDC] is wonderful because obviously, she [Ms. Regina] loves us, but just because she loves us, she doesn’t cut us any slack. And that’s what we need, we don’t need people to be like, ‘oh it’s okay,’ because then it’ll never get done. She’s one of the people that taught me to strive for my goals and get them done.

Tanisha values that Ms. Regina pushes her and her peers at EOYDC. She credits her goal-attainment to Ms. Regina.

The demographics in East Oakland have shifted substantially in the past decade, reflecting similar shifts across the Bay Area region, with the proportion of African Americans in the population decreasing, and the proportion of Latinos and Asians increasing (J. Williams, Spiker, Budi, & Skahen, 2010). EOYDC’s staff and programming have begun to reflect this diversity. Nineteen-year-old Marco, a Latino youth, reflects on the importance of EOYDC’s diverse staff:

I mean now I look at like all the staff becuz you know they’re all doing their thing, being positive adults...But another person I look up to is Alma becuz she was like the only Latina working at the time. She’s like the only person I could chop it up with, too.

Stanton-Salazar speaks to the empowering influence that role models have in the lives of Latino youth, especially in transmitting institutional knowledge and resources (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). Particularly in distressed communities, non-familial informal mentors, like Alma, are critical in the lives of young people of color.

“The Hook-up”: Activation of Social Leverage for Youth

EOYDC provides the youth participants with social leverage—information pertaining to educational and employment opportunities—that can improve their social mobility (Briggs, 1998; R. M. Carpiano, 2006; Domínguez & Watkins, 2003).

Nineteen-year-old Kareem, an African-American male, remarks:

[The] Pathway to College Program helped me, and Ms. Regina, she just has a lot of networks with different scholarship organizations that are looking for youth leaders or just people that have leadership experience.

This excerpt highlights a particular EOYDC program—Pathway to College—as well as Ms. Regina as connecting Kareem with a college scholarship. Pathway to College guides youth at EOYDC through the college application process, including SAT preparation, personal statement review, college tours, and scholarship assistance. The Pathway to College program has a 96 percent graduation rate (*East Oakland Youth Development Center*.2010). This excerpt also alludes to other opportunities afforded by EOYDC's and Ms. Regina's networks, with particular attention towards leadership development opportunities.

In addition to leveraging educational resources as part of EOYDC's social capital, EOYDC allows youth to access employment opportunities there. Youth employment is an important protective factor (Resnick, 2000). Most of the youth who come to EOYDC that are of legal working-age are not just participants in programming there, but are employed in various capacities, including as tutors, recreation aides, and program assistants. Project J.O.Y. at EOYDC was created at the organization's inception to respond to the high unemployment rate in East Oakland. "We do application sessions, we bring employers on site. We take them on field trips. We do mock interviews," said Ms. Regina in a recent interview with a correspondent from ABC (*Going Home: Tackling Chronic Unemployment in Oakland, Calif.*2010). Each year, Project J.O.Y. places 300 young adults in jobs. Youth usually obtain their first job through social and informational networks which are more accessible and effective than familial networks for employment resources, particularly for youth of color (*East Oakland Building Healthy Communities*.2011; V. M. Morrow, 2001; Quigley & O'Regan, 1991).

Youth who come to EOYDC have financial responsibilities in their families, and their employment through EOYDC helps them contribute to their and their families' expenses. African-American girls, in particular, are often called on to contribute to emotional and financial labor of the home (Kelley, 1997). The networks provided by EOYDC help 17-year-old LaShay to fulfill this obligation:

Being here has allowed me to become more independent because I had a job. And from getting a job, I became more independent, because my parent who I am living with, my mother, expected me to use that money for my expenses, things that I would like. So basically I have to use my money to pay for phone bills, shoes, clothes...basically the things that I need.

EOYDC provides youth like LaShay with employment opportunities that are safe, legal, and help them make positive contributions to their families and community.

Fulfilling these obligations can also increase youth's self-esteem and serve as a deterrent to the underground economy and illegal or unsafe activities (R. J. Sampson, 2003). For example, Daniela shares how having a job makes her feel:

It's like I actually worked for this! I did. [I can tell my] momma, 'look at that!' I got my own bank account and all that stuff. It's more exciting if you have a job and you have your checks coming in and you can put your money away for college or just to put it away. Instead of just sittin' here outside on the block being like 'it's hot man, ain't nothin' to do man.'

Youth at EOYDC soon realize that accessing educational and employment opportunities enable them to leverage these resources for long-term success. Eighteen-year-old Joshua, an African-American male, shares:

Ms. Regina, she'll hook you up with anything. And if you don't have a resume, you can come here and volunteer here and get your resume built up, so I think that's a good start, and EOYDC has a lot to offer.

The "hook-ups" that Ms. Regina and EOYDC provide help the youth participants access invaluable knowledge, jobs, and connections within the community (R. L. Jarrett, 1995; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). The "hook-ups" comprise the social leverage construct of social capital which enables youth to use their resources to "get ahead" (Briggs, 1998; Small et al., 2008).

"Little Signs": EOYDC and the Development of Future Orientation

In addition to providing social support and social leverage, EOYDC also helps youth to develop positive future orientations. *Future orientation* refers to one's expectations and the degree to which one thinks about the future, including education, career, and family (Seginer, 2008; Worrell & Hale, 2001; Wyman, Cowen, Work, & Kerley, 1993). Wyman et al. (Wyman et al., 1993) found that future orientation was related to resilience in youth. This line of research is also related to notions of desirable futures (Foster & Spencer, 2011) and hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; McLaughlin et al., 1994). Kareem shares how he has been able to develop future orientation at EOYDC:

And it's just crazy how EOYDC really made me feel like I could be a teacher, I could be a motivational speaker, I could be...man, there's so much you can do with kids! And just from working with EOYDC, I decided to switch from Business Management to Human Development, and Human Development relates to Sociology, I can branch on to that. There's just so much, I'm like, 'wow!' EOYDC gives you little signs that you need in life. You know, just working with kids, you learn how to be more tolerant, patient... and nice. It's just crazy how everything fits together when you work with EOYDC.

This excerpt is important because it shows how a college-aged youth has not only changed his major to something that he is passionate about, but also has realized direct connections between his work at EOYDC, his new major, and a future career. Kareem appears shocked, but grateful for this realization and for his involvement with EOYDC.

Although not in college like Kareem, Tanisha is also able to articulate how EOYDC has helped her develop future orientation:

This is my senior year, I'm graduating. I'm going to Merritt for nursing...I also wanna be an RN, so I'm trying to get through to 2 years. It's my goal. And once I achieve that goal, I'll do the extra two years to being an RN. But I'm pretty good at achieving my goals. I set standards and I strive to them. Especially with Ms. Regina being like on my back, you cannot not get something done.

Tanisha already has a detailed plan for her educational and career paths, and she feels encouraged and supported by Ms. Regina in pursuing these goals. Ms. Regina is not only a role model and boss for the youth, but she also provides the "little signs," big "hook ups," accountability for youth at EOYDC in reaching their goals.

Conclusion

Youth involved in EOYDC are not passive participants, but are active agents in seeking out activities and relationships for their own positive development. These youth-led strategies interact with adult-led strategies at EOYDC in four ways. First, the youth become involved in safe, positive, and productive activities at EOYDC, which eventually leads to the adult staff

affording them leadership roles and employment opportunities at the Center. Second, the youth seek these adult staff members out as positive adult role models and mentors in their lives. Third, in their role as mentors, these adult staff members provide the youth with “the hook-up”—educational and professional support at EOYDC and educational and professional opportunities that extend outside of the Center. Finally, youth use the individual, interpersonal, and professional skills developed through their relationships with the adult staff in their transition from adolescence to early adulthood. Within a structurally deprived neighborhood context, the youth in my study are able to achieve social mobility through the actualization of academic, employment, and career opportunities derived through their involvement with EOYDC.

Institutional presence, as well as support and effectiveness from institutions have been found to contribute to successful adolescent development in disadvantaged contexts (Elliott et al., 2006). As “social capital” continues to become integrated in the public health lexicon, it is important to consider how the people, networks, and resources embedded within institutions are actively used by and for individuals. These findings inform future research and practice by providing youth- and community institution-based strategies for building youth’s social capital. The adult staff at EOYDC and the youth there actively work together to build mentoring relationships that, in turn, build the youth’s social capital and increase their social mobility. These youth are a testament to the promise of growing organic leaders within even the most distressed communities.

There remain some under-examined elements of network-based social capital in the lives of young people. For example, little is known about how network-based social capital become deactivated or fails to be fully activated. For example, through my participant observation at EOYDC, I briefly met some youth or overheard stories about other youth for whom EOYDC did not “work.” Some of the youth who walk into the doors of EOYDC live their lives in perpetual crisis. Ms. Regina describes this as “one foot in [EOYDC] and one foot on a banana peel.” These youth are deeply entrenched in precarious home and neighborhood contexts, including domestic abuse, malnutrition, substance abuse, unstable living arrangements, and incarceration. Future research in this area should extend a focus on the youth who 1) cannot stay engaged in youth-serving organizations and those who 2) cannot get engaged. The first group is those young people who have been involved in programming at youth-serving organizations, but who have challenges or barriers to staying engaged over time. In the context of EOYDC, these youth are not “lost” to the Center, they are “still fam,” according to Ms. Regina. The “strong ties” (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter, 1982) of EOYDC are flexible, like a bungee cord. “EOYDC is always there...they can always come back,” Ms. Regina emphasizes. In this way, EOYDC acts as a safety net for youth. The second group is those young people who only come to youth-serving organizations sporadically or for one activity instead of engaging in the whole package of programmatic offerings. In the context of EOYDC, the Center’s basketball court is a draw to mostly African-American transitional-aged (19-24 year-olds) male youth. The basketball court operates as 1) an entrée into the rest of EOYDC, 2) a hideout for youth who previously were more engaged in the rest of the programming, or 3) a place to be only peripherally engaged with the Center. EOYDC has “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter, 1982) with these youth, who never get magnetized to the rest of EOYDC’s programming. For some of the youth in this group, the “street” (Anderson, 1999) has a stronger tie in their lives. Further research focused on disengaged or non-engaged youth at youth-serving organizations is critical to inform how such organizations communicate with and “write recipes” for even the most marginalized young people.

Overall, EOYDC is a major resource in young people's lives. Nevertheless, neighborhood-, interpersonal-, and individual-level stressors create ongoing trauma in the lives of urban youth. The ways that youth make sense of traumatic events through personal and cultural spiritual beliefs and practices will be explored in the next paper.

**“Wearing My Spiritual Jacket”:
The Role of Spirituality as a Coping Mechanism
among Urban Minority Adolescents**
(targeted for *New Directions for Youth Development*)

Abstract

Using qualitative interview data and poetry generated from participatory narrative analysis, the role of spirituality as a coping mechanism in the lives of urban minority adolescents is explored. African-American and Latino youth described the multifaceted dimensions of their spirituality, including an unwavering faith in a higher power, the importance of giving back to their communities, and the role of prayer. Such findings offer counterstories to the normative discourse of urban-dwelling adolescents.

Introduction

Religious and spiritual issues have been found to be important to adolescent populations (Cotton, Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006; Donahue & Benson, 1995). *Religiosity* and *spirituality*, often used interchangeably, are overlapping, but distinct concepts. Religiosity is defined as “the formal, institutional and outward expression of the sacred” (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). This can include a belief in God, attendance at religious services, and frequency of prayer and meditation (Cotton et al., 2006). Spirituality can be conceptualized as “the internal, personal, and emotional expression of the sacred” (Cotton et al., 2006; George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000), and can be measured by spiritual well-being, peace and comfort derived from faith, spiritual connectedness, or religious or spiritual coping (Cotton et al., 2006). Scholars have shown a preference for using *spirituality* as a research construct because of its usefulness with both religious and non-religious populations (Utsey et al., 2007). This paper examines *spirituality* among urban minority adolescents as a coping mechanism for individual- and neighborhood-level stressors.

Spiritual Coping

Spirituality is not unique to African Americans, but it tends to find greater expression in this population (Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994). The acknowledgement of one’s spiritual self has served as the very foundation of African-American life (Dantley, 2003). Du Bois (Du Bois, W. E. B., 1903) suggested that Black people’s beings were tied to their souls and spirits. African-American religiosity and spirituality has been historically grounded in the quest for liberation from oppression (Cone, 1970; Frame & Williams, 1996). Accounts of African Americans before and after the Civil War describe secret prayer meetings or “hush hollows” (F. Jones, 1989), in which traditional African religious practices were integrated into Christian practices (Humphrey, Hughes, & Holmes, 2008). Since slavery, through the Jim Crow era, and afterwards, African Americans have drawn parallels between their social conditions and those of subjugated people in the Bible (Dantley, 2003; Milner, 2006; Morris, 2004). In African-American Christian and Muslim traditions, God, Christ, and Allah are seen as literal and symbolic victors of the oppressed (Cone, 1970; Long, 1997; Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Thurman, 1949).

There is growing interest in the benefits of spirituality on health and well-being. Spirituality has been studied in relation to coping with deleterious social and health

circumstances (Krause, 1998; Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002; Oman & Reed, 1998). *Spiritual coping* refers to a reliance on spiritual beliefs and teachings in times of hardship and in managing life events (Cotton et al., 2006; Pendleton, Cavalli, Pargament, & Nasr, 2002; Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Spirituality has traditionally been a coping resource for African Americans, who are more likely than Whites to report their use of spiritual coping in response to dealing with racism, chronic poverty, neighborhood disadvantage, health issues, and caregiving burdens (Chatters, Taylor, Jackson, & Lincoln, 2008; Dilworth-Anderson, Williams, & Gibson, 2002; Dunn & Horgas, 2000; Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Krause, 1998; M. B. Spencer, Fegley, & Harpalani, 2003). During these stressful times, African Americans report praying and other spiritual coping behaviors, such as leaning on God for support, strength, and guidance (Chatters et al., 2008). Boland (Boland, 2000) suggests that spirituality allows individuals to access internal resources to cope with adversity, facilitate resilience, and promote positive health outcomes. However, the exact mechanisms by which this influence occurs are not adequately understood.

Spiritual Coping among Adolescents

Early psychological theorists, including Hall and Erikson, identified religion as a central force in childhood and adolescence; however, empirical research has generally ignored the powerful role of religion and spirituality in child and adolescent development (Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Wulff, 1991; Youniss, 1992). Researchers who *have* examined the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of young people have found that religion and spirituality promote personal well-being and mitigate risky behaviors and negative outcomes among adolescents (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Pearce & Thornton, 2007).

Only a few of these researchers look at these phenomena among African-American or Latino adolescents. Their research notes a salience of religion among African-American, and perhaps Latino and other minority youth (Regnerus, 2003; Smith, 2003). Nonetheless, most of these studies focus on *religiosity* rather than *spirituality*. With a focus on spirituality, Jagers and Mock (Jagers & Mock, 1993) found that a spiritual orientation was associated with fewer reported acts of delinquency, and with an increased focus on such prosocial values as cooperation, empathy, and justice among a sample of sixth-grade, urban-residing African-American youth. For Latino populations, religion, particularly Catholicism, has historically played a role in the lives of families (Bach-y-Rita, 1982; Treviño, 2006). Latino families have been found to have an unquestionable belief in an authoritarian and just God (Ramirez & Castafieda, 1974). In their research on conceptualizing “mestizo spirituality” among Mexican Americans, Cervantes and Ramírez (Cervantes & Ramirez, 1992) found that Mexican-American youth relied on their belief in a higher good and a sense of spirituality to adapt and survive stressful situations. In work with incarcerated youth of color, Gardner (Gardner, 2010) found that “faith talk”—oral narratives related to faith—allowed marginalized youth institutionally-sanctioned and culturally-familiar ways to re-narrate themselves and to imagine a positive future outlook. Through faith talk, the young people in this study were empowered to express a belief in their potential to engage in positive behaviors and change their lives. My research specifically addresses the paucity of in-depth research on the conceptions and role of spirituality in the lives of African-American *and* Latino adolescents.

Study Context

In an ongoing examination of the mechanisms of resilience among minority adolescents in high-risk urban neighborhoods, I conducted field research at the East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC) over a 15-month period. EOYDC has been committed to attending to the emotional, physical, intellectual, and economic well-being of the community for nearly 33 years. EOYDC's mission is to equip East Oakland's youth with the skills, training, and values necessary to become dynamic leaders and responsible citizens. EOYDC's free, comprehensive core programming emphasizes artistic expression, job training, physical activity, and education. For five days a weeks, 50 weeks each year, EOYDC offers positive and safe experiences for East Oakland's youth through a dedicated staff and various program offerings.

Traveling through East Oakland, California, one readily notices the vast amount of freestanding and storefront churches in this community. Sociologists have acknowledged churches as the geographic and/or social anchor of Black communities for over a century (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Du Bois, W. E. B., 1899; Frazier, 1963; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Recent scholars have sought to examine the dense religious ecologies in deteriorating urban neighborhoods (Kinney & Winter, 2006; McRoberts, 2003; Roozen, McKinney, & Carroll, 1984). Regarding Oakland, Ginwright (S. Ginwright, 2009) remarked that churches are the "last bastion" of Black political power there. There are approximately 150 churches in East Oakland alone, two of the largest being Allen Temple Baptist Church, which owns an entire city block, a school, a senior housing complex, and a community center, and Acts Full Gospel Church of God in Christ, which boast over 8,000 members, 2,000 of whom attend regularly each week (S. Ginwright, 2009).

The importance and role of spirituality was not hypothesized in advance of my research, but instead emerged out of the participant observation, neighborhood observations, and initial youth interviews that I conducted in East Oakland and at EOYDC. In a neighborhood that is plagued with poverty, violence, and health inequities, the theme of spirituality emerged as important "counterstories" to urban minority adolescents' normative coping strategies. Counter-storytelling is more prevalent in critical race theory (CRT) and education research (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Delgado and Stefancic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) define counter-storytelling as a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority." Counterstories highlight youth's lived realities and can give voice to marginalized groups (Fernández, 2002; Norton, 2006).

Methods

Gaining Access to EOYDC

My entrée to EOYDC was facilitated by the organization's Executive Director, Regina Jackson. Ms. Jackson, has been affiliated with the organization for the last 27 years, and has served in her current role for the past 17 years. When I emailed Ms. Jackson to explain my research proposal and process, she responded promptly and suggested that we meet in person. During our first in-person meeting at EOYDC, Ms. Jackson immediately saw a natural link for my project and EOYDC based on my research aims and their commitment toward individual and community transformation. She felt that it would be important for me to conduct interviews with her staff and do participant observation at EOYDC to situate myself in various "birds' nests" there. I engaged in this type of formative research for almost a year before recruiting interview respondents. I was able to gain trust and credibility with Ms. Jackson and the EOYDC staff, and additionally, the staff was able to confirm or refute initial hunches that I had about neighborhood

phenomena going on in East Oakland. Additionally, for two months in the summer, I conducted participant observation of the organization’s youth members as they participated in the youth-led Summer Cultural Enrichment Program (SCEP). I was able to meet EOYDC’s “youth leaders” and gain clues about their behaviors, interests, and perceptions. I soon became a familiar face at EOYDC and accessed spaces in and around the organization with ease.

Participants

After building these key relationships, recruitment happened easily and quickly. The youth members of EOYDC’s various programs were eager to sign-up for interview times in order to share their stories. I was able to recruit 25 youth between the ages 12 and 20 year of age for my study (Table 4.1). In addition to youth leaders from SCEP, other respondents included employees or participants in the homework tutorial center, the computer lab, the Pathways to College program, the GED prep program, the *Something to Talk About* young women’s group, and the physical development programs.

Table 4.1: *Demographic Information about Respondents*

Name ⁵	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	School Enrollment
Aisha	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Dana	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Naima	Female	12	African American	Public MS
Tommy	Male	12	African American	Public MS
Javier	Male	13	Latino	Public MS
Aja	Female	16	African American	Public HS
Angela	Female	16	Latina	Charter HS
Chastity	Female	16	African American	Catholic High School
Jamila	Female	16	African American	Charter HS
Marisa	Female	16	Latina	Charter HS
Rashad	Male	16	African American	Catholic High School
LaShay	Female	17	African American	Public HS
Douglas	Male	18	African American	Public HS
Joshua	Male	18	African American	Not currently enrolled
Kai	Female	18	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Micah	Female	18	African American	Community College
Tanisha	Female	18	African American	Public HS
Daniela	Female	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Darius	Male	19	African American	Community College
José	Male	19	Latino	4-year College
Kareem	Male	19	African American	4-year College
Keith	Male	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program

⁵ Pseudonyms are used throughout for youth’s names.

Marco	Male	19	Latino	Community College
Tamika	Female	19	African American	EOYDC GED Program
Gina	Female	20	African American	4-year College

Data Collection

I conducted individual, one-hour, semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents (See Appendix A). During these interviews, I asked respondents about their personal goals, their involvement in EOYDC, their experiences of living in East Oakland, their perceptions of neighborhood change, and their relationships with and leveragability of networks in East Oakland.

Analysis

Interviews were taped and transcribed. Analysis was guided by an ethnographic approach (Creswell, 1998; Emerson et al., 1995). Interview text was read first to identify emergent themes. Fourteen of the interview respondents elected to form a “research collective” (Cahill, 2004) which we called “MiC”—My Identity is Community. Ten of these youth participated in MiC on a consistent basis. The research collective met with me as a group to review the data and relevant themes. In this way, the youth were able to provide “member checks” of the data, themes, and analysis as a way of increasing validity (Furman et al., 2007).

The research collective was also introduced to demographic data on East Oakland and began to compare their interview themes with the quantitative data collected by outside agencies. From this demographic data, they felt that most of the information presented was pejorative and that it also was not telling them anything new or interesting about their neighborhoods. They were eager to present the data from their own interviews and the observations of EOYDC in the form of “poetic knowledge.” Césaire (Césaire, 1945) said that “poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge,” of which he asserted that poetry would create the kind of knowledge needed to transform oppressive conditions (Césaire, 1996). Regarding the efforts enacted towards liberation from oppressive conditions, Kelley (Kelley, 2002) says:

We must remember that the conditions and the very existence of social movements enable participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need not always be this way. It is *that* imagination, that effort to see the future in the present, that I shall call “poetry” or “poetic knowledge.”

Consequently, the young people and I engaged in a multi-stage process of *narrative analysis*, an emerging method in the public health, urban planning, and youth development fields (Furman et al., 2007; Poindexter, 2002; J. M. Thomas, 2004). An overview of the participatory stages of the analysis is detailed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Overview of Research Process

Date	Content Focus	Participants	Products Developed
December 2009	Relationship Building	Ms. Jackson and LeConté	Fieldnotes
February 2010	APHA Annual Meeting Abstract Submission Capacity Building	LeConté and Ms. Jackson	Abstract
March 2010	Key Informant Interviews Relationship Building	EOYDC Staff and LeConté	Fieldnotes
June-July 2010	Participant Observation	SCEP Youth Leaders, SCEP	Fieldnotes

	Relationship Building	Youth Participants, EOYDC Staff	
September-October 2010	Data Collection	25 youth ages 12-20	Field Notes Transcripts “Research Poems”
October 2010	Neighborhood Observations	LeConté	Fieldnotes Photos
October-November 2010	Narrative Analysis and Narrative Inquiry Exposure to poetry writing techniques and a breadth of work by writers of color	14 of Interview Respondents	“Interpretive Poems” Draft Poetry Book
November 2010	APHA Annual Meeting Capacity Building Visibility Networking	LeConté and Ms. Jackson	1 Poster presentation 1 Roundtable presentation
January-March 2011	Editing of Poetry Chapbook	6 youth from research collective sub-sample	Edited Poetry Book
February 2011	APHA Annual Meeting Abstract Submission Capacity Building	LeConté and Ms. Jackson	Abstract
March 2011	Planning of book release	4 youth from research collective sub-sample	
April 2011	Book release	All	Final Poetry Book

Poetry is a particular type of narrative that is also seen as a tool of qualitative research that can be used to investigate human phenomena (Furman, 2006; Mahiri, 2004). I facilitated a series of poetry workshops with the youth, in which I introduced them to poetic techniques, poetic forms, and works from writers of color. The works of well-known and lesser-known writers helped the youth to engage in a deeper discussion of the themes (Jocson 2). Next, I presented “research poems” (Furman et al., 2006; Furman, 2006; Furman et al., 2007) to the group, which utilize the respondents’ exact words from the interview data in compressed or “poetic” form, using line and stanza breaks. The research poems do not alter the text of the respondent, but simply compresses the original text from the interview transcripts, using line and stanza breaks (Langer & Furman, 2004). The condensed nature of research poetry allows themes in the data to become more obvious for the reader, much like the method of data reduction (Furman et al., 2006). Next, I facilitated the co-creation of “interpretive poems” (Langer & Furman, 2004) with the group, which reveal our attempts as co-researchers to capture the essence of the lived experiences as expressed in the interview data in poetic form. We got in the practice of writing poetry and further explored the relationships between identity development and emotional attachment to neighborhoods. Although poetry is personal, the form of a poem is a pattern that is well-known to both storytellers and readers or listeners, allowing the audience to make sense of the story being told (Finley, 2003). Such a process provides implications for representations of the nuances of people’s lived experiences (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1993). The presentation of poems-as-data can allow a diverse set of audience members to engage with the research.

In addition to the participatory narrative analysis process, in continuing with traditional ethnographic methods, I re-read interview text to develop detailed codes and sub-codes in two stages, in a process similar to that detailed by Harding (Harding, 2010). The Dedoose program was used to aid in this process. The first stage of codes included those developed a priori from

existing theory and prior research. The second stage of codes included those emerging from preliminary findings and detailed in analytic memos. These analytic memos addressed the themes, analytic points, and interpretation of the analytic points of the research data and were developed throughout the entire process.

In this paper, I use excerpts from interviews, as well as from the “research” and “interpretive” poems, to illustrate key thematic points that emerged during analysis. First, these excerpts highlight the salience of spirituality in the lives of young people of color. Next, these excerpts illustrate the various spiritual coping strategies that youth use on a daily basis. Ultimately, these excerpts reveal the internal processes and personal beliefs that young people of color living in urban neighborhoods rely on in the face of external stressors and trauma in their lives.

Results

“I Just Ask God for Another Day”: The Importance and Purpose of Prayer

“I always pray. I pray about everything,” was 18-year-old Tanisha’s response when asked how she dealt with the stress of her uncle’s murder, her step-father’s shooting, and her family moving abruptly as a result to a part of town that they deemed as safer. Frequent prayer among minority adolescents challenges the dominant discourse of “normative” behavior of young people of color in urban neighborhoods, particularly East Oakland. For the youth and staff at EOYDC, praying seems both frequent and salient. During SCEP, the youth planned an Anti-Violence March in response to the spike in homicides in Oakland during the Summer of 2010, and the March concluded with a “prayer circle.” Ms. Jackson encouraged the group of youth leaders, SCEP participants, EOYDC staff, and Oakland Firefighters escorting the March to form a circle and lean on the power of prayer. Then, a middle-school-aged youth led the group in a prayer reflecting on the neighborhood violence and petitioning God for safe passage.

Mattis and Jagers (Mattis & Jagers, 2001) emphasize that through prayer, individuals frequently ask for God’s intercession into family affairs, friendships, relationships with peers, and all aspects of community life. Related to community life, when asked how he stays safe, Joshua, an 18-year-old African-American male, shares:

J: By praying every time I step out the door, wearing my spiritual jacket.

LD: Do you go to church?

J: Nope.

LD: So you were talking about your “spiritual jacket,” did you grow up very spiritual or did you find your spirituality recently?

J: It was very recently, like last year recently—in January. I didn’t believe in God or the Devil or any of that stuff, but God showed me the way, and I’m just going through phases now. [I’m] in the process of learning.

LD: Like are you reading the Bible? The Qur’an?

J: Oh the Bible, yeah! I always read my Bible.

LD: Because you were talking about how you were learning a lot...

J: Oh experiences. Just going through experiences and stuff, just going through life but praying, ya know. And hopefully I’ll find me a good church out here in Oakland somewhere.

Joshua mentions actually adorning a metaphorical “spiritual jacket” as part of his daily routine. A recent high school graduate, Joshua seems to rely on praying as he transitions to adulthood.

He, like many of the youth in my sample, frames his prayers around issues of neighborhood safety. The following interpretive poems illuminate this trend. Kareem writes:

God protect my community from Satan's company
The violence should be replaced with rejoice

Gina, a 20-year-old, African-American female, writes:

Dear Father,
I pray that you watch over our community,
I pray that you strengthen our minds to
Know what's right, to know what's wrong
I pray that you mend broken homes,
I pray that you cease the violence and drug use
Help us rebuild our city
In your name I pray
Amen!

In research with elementary and middle school-aged youth, Elkind (Elkind, 1978) and Mattis (Mattis, 2000) found that pre-adolescent youth describe prayer, not just as a ritual, but as direct communication and a conversation with God. Langston Hughes once said, "Some poems, like many of the great verses in the Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power" (*Letters from mississippi: Reports from civil rights volunteers and freedom school poetry of the 1964 freedom summer*2002). Unlike the interview responses, in which the youth make reference to a higher power, in the poems above, the youth explicitly and directly address God, asking for His protection and for safety in their neighborhoods.

Youth in East Oakland are exposed to a lot of community violence. Although they take active steps to avoid these risks, they still see violence as pervasive. The following excerpt is from Daniela, a 19-year-old, African-American female who shares how she navigates her violence-ridden neighborhood:

Everywhere you go, throughout, from the 100s down to the Dubs, which is the 20s, it's nothin' but hectic, which all depends on the neighborhood you're in. And the reason why I say that I'm safe is because I always walk with God. I always have him by my side, and I pray—ask him to keep me safe and everything.

In this excerpt, Daniela talks about violence throughout all of East Oakland ("from the Dubs to the Hunnids"), but she relies on her faith and on actively praying to stay safe.

Nineteen-year-old Darius, an African-American male, has had personal encounters with violence. He shares:

Almost getting shot a couple of times, it's not like I don't care about life, it's just like I'm not gonna walk around scared, feel me. It's like, I just pray, and I just ask God for another day just like anybody else would. And I just keep going on with life.

Darius does not change his daily routine because of the violence in his community, and he feels that he cannot be preoccupied. Instead, he relies on his prayers to keep him safe.

In addition to making specific prayers for safety in their neighborhood, youth in my sample shared an overall sentiment that God protects them and keeps them safe. When asked how she stays safe, Tanisha remarks:

I don't know. I think I just have God with me. Because it's nothing that I do that everyone else isn't doing. There's nothing I've done that everyone else hasn't done. I really think I just have God with me.

Although as noted earlier that Tanisha specifically enlisted the ritual of praying for particular family situations related to violent incidents, when reflecting on how she stays safe overall, she refers to a more intangible sense of protection. She does not feel that she engages in a particular strategy, but just feels “covered.” The sense of “covering” is not discussed widely in the empirical literature, but is discussed in spiritual texts and interpersonal anecdotes. In spite of dangerous situations, people rely on their spirituality to an unshakable faith in God’s protection. According to Deuteronomy 33:12 (King James Version), “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall *cover* him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.” Such “covering” and a relationship with God helps Tanisha and several of the other youth at EOYDC to feel safe in their neighborhood.

“Leave It in God’s Hands”: Dealing with Illness and Death

The interview respondents juggle many roles and responsibilities including being students, employees at EOYDC, mentors to younger participants at EOYDC, active emotional and financial contributors to their families, all while developing as adolescents. Throughout this busy time in their lives, they have often been confronted with the realities of illness and death in their families. As they shared the stories with me of tough times in their lives and how they dealt with them, several of the youth referred to coping strategies related to spirituality. José, a 19-year-old, Latino male shares:

I think the hardest thing I’ve ever gone through was when my mom got really sick, and I learned how to be appreciative, how to appreciate life, and how to thank God for every day that I wake up.

Through dealing with his mother’s illness, José reflected on his own livelihood. He is thankful to “God” for his own life, which he appreciated more after seeing his mother become ill. Thankfulness or gratitude is a highly sought out temperament among many different religious faiths (Carman & Streng, 1989). Gratitude has been found to strengthen a sense of spirituality (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Fortunately, José’s mother is doing fine now.

Eighteen-year-old Douglas, an African-American male, commented that his high school years have been unfortunately marked by the death of several family members. He shares:

Going into high school, I lost a lot of loved ones and, you know, it somewhat distracted me from my school work, and my grades were dropping and I didn’t want to go to school. I lost uncles, my grandmother on my father’s side. And I didn’t want to talk to anybody. I didn’t want to talk. I’d just be really quiet. If I did go to school, I wouldn’t talk in class. I didn’t want to participate. I just wasn’t in a good mood to do anything. And the way I conquered that—I just looked at it as my loved ones, they were in a better place, and it was their time to go, and I just had to leave it in God’s hands. And I couldn’t beat myself up about it any longer, because it was just hurting myself, because I knew that my uncles and grandma wouldn’t want me to be jeopardizing myself in school. So I just had to look at it from another perspective.

Douglas shares that during this difficult time, he lost interest in school and seemed withdrawn in general. When reflecting on how he coped with this loss and his subsequent withdrawal, he refers to leaving it “in God’s hands.” Through this coping strategy, Douglas is able to release his worry onto God’s care. The process of leaving it “in God’s hands” or “turning it over to the Lord” allows people to be “God-reliant” (Samuel-Hodge et al., 2000), not just self-reliant, in terms of emotional support, particularly when dealing with illness or death (Hamilton, Powe,

Pollard, Lee, & Felton, 2007). When Douglas left it “in God’s hands,” he felt that he was better equipped to have a more positive outlook on the situations, which he believes his family members would have wanted him to do.

Civic Engagement as part of Faith

Cultivating internal assets has been found to be integral to positive youth development (Roth & Brooks-gunn, 2003; Scales, Benson, & Leffert, 2000). Contribution to self, family, community, and civil society in both an ideological and active way is said to promote positive adolescent developmental outcomes (Lerner, 2004). The youth respondents in my study articulate their civic engagement as a direct extension of their faith. The following excerpt is from Kareem, a 19-year old African-American male:

As a part of my faith, *zakat* is just a form of donation. Like, throughout the whole year you just donate two and a half [percent] of your earnings. And like, I had done this before, but I never understood the significance of it. Like, if anybody can donate a small percentage to their community or to a child that needs it, then that’s cool, ya know. That’s selfless love.

Kareem practices Islam, and in this faith, it is every believers ritualistic duty to owe to Allah *zakat*, or alms (*Zakat*). In Islam, *zakat* is as important as prayer. The Qur’an demands that each person give a certain amount of material wealth to support the poor, indigent, sick, and suffering (Qur’an 9:60). Likewise, Kareem sees the practice of giving to his community financially, as a part of practicing his faith. In addition to financial giving, he sees this as contributing in a broader way to the community’s well-being.

Another youth, 19-year-old Keith, refers to Christian faith in regard to the role of civic engagement in his life. When asked how he stays safe in his public housing complex that is plagued with violence and how he negotiates respect there, he shares:

K: I do what I have to do so I can get out of that situation because I don’t wanna be living there forever. I wanna move up and then do what I gotta do. I’mma try to stay focused on what I gotta do—survive, live, and just do what I gotta do. Pray, stay blessed, and do what I gotta do. Get to where I wanna be, and then give it all away. Get all that money and then I gotta give it all away! I have to.

LD: To other communities and families? To kids?

K: I’m just gonna build a lot of churches. Do I want to? To be honest, no. I’m not gonna lie, but I have to.

LD: Why do you feel you have to?

K: It’s not that I feel. It’s like Jesus said ‘give away everything that you cherish and you’ll have your treasures in Heaven.’ There’s this verse that says ‘it’s easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to go to Heaven.’ I don’t like heat. So I’mma give away everything. I’mma get it, I’mma enjoy it for a little bit, then I’m just gonna give it away. I’mma be a preacher, so I can get good upstairs. I’ll be good. That’s my plan.

Keith remarks that though he desires to be socially mobile, he wants to give back to his community. He feels that this is his moral and spiritual obligation. He references two different quotes from the Book of Matthew related to “riches” that exist in Heaven, and are promised to active believers, to justify why he can and should give away his money here on Earth to members in his community (Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 19:24).

Both Kareem and Keith comment on the importance of financial giving as part of their faith, which also contributes to the overall well-being of their neighborhoods. “Church work” such as feeding the poor, visiting the sick, and engaging in acts of giving and sharing in general, have historically provided African Americans with opportunities to promote community well-being (Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Ward, 1995). According to James 2:17, “even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Likewise, youth rely on their spirituality to inform the ways in which they serve their communities.

Discussion and Implications

Although there has been momentum in the theoretical literature regarding religiosity, this paper contributes to the empirical literature on the role of spirituality, specifically in the lives of youth of color. Spirituality, whether externally or internally expressed, is salient in the lives of young people. Particularly for young people of color living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, spirituality serves as an internal coping mechanism when external supports fail. Youth in my study rely on spirituality in three ways. First, they pray frequently. Second, they are “God-reliant” (Samuel-Hodge et al., 2000)—turning some emotional worries to an external or “higher” source other than themselves. Third, they actively work in their communities and see such work as part of their spiritual faith. These three strategies serve as “counterstories” to the “normative” behaviors of urban youth of color. These are stories of salvation amidst urban distress, where youth seek sanctuary within their own beliefs and practices. My ethnographic and participatory narrative analysis approach highlights youth’s internal processes, which are often overlooked in quantitative assessments.

These findings are salient in that they come from youth recruited from a non-religious institution and can speak to professionals who work with and on the behalf of young people in different sectors. Although educational institutions and non-profit organizations emphasize secular language and practice, spirituality is closely intertwined with culture for youth of color, in both subtle and more explicit ways. Attention to youth’s “faith talk” and their spiritual beliefs and practices is critical for youth-centered, culturally-competent practice. Educators, social workers, and policymakers are all realizing the importance of fostering adolescent resilience. Being in tune with and supporting youth’s spiritual development is one way to do so. Having a better understanding of the spiritual beliefs and practices of young people, particularly young people of color, will help bolster youth development programming and policymaking.

Conclusion

“At-Risk”

If all you think of me is ill-fated—
shooting baskets, rolling caskets, dropping
schoolbooks, then who waits for me, breath bated?
Hold hope, with its limbs out, daydreams swopping.
Drive me to the page’s edge, no footprints
There’s no mail delivered, there’s no address
I run up and down the block, get shin splints
Looking for a place to rest, break, recess
Tattoo my name on the corner of my wrist
Stake claim, mark territory as my own
On my forearm, the ones who’ve gone I list
Tennis shoes on power lines tossed and thrown
I am the gum underneath your shoe sole
Forgotten, but still stuck, no peace, no hole.

I wrote the poem above soon after completing the interviews with the EOYDC youth. It is a Shakespearean (or English) sonnet, which consists of 14 lines, written in iambic pentameter, conforming to a strict thematic organization, and in which the last two lines—rhyming couplets—are supposed to form some sort of amplification or conclusion of the previous 12 lines. In the poem above, the narrator takes on the persona of a youth from an inner-city neighborhood like East Oakland—someone encountering stressors in their neighborhood, but more importantly, someone being stigmatized for being from a disadvantaged neighborhood. The sonnet, as a literary form, came to be popularized as being associated with “high” culture (Smethurst, 1999). As African Americans began to engage with the sonnet during the Harlem Renaissance and later during the Black Arts Movement, they used the form as a site of reconciliation for their sense of “double consciousness” (Du Bois, W. E. B., 1903) of being Black in America (Francini, 2003). In the constraints of the form, they were able to explore liberating thoughts through testimonials of their everyday lived experiences. Therefore, they were able to wrestle with this syncretism of African heritage in the Western world, of slavery and freedom, of innocence and knowledge, of violence and safety, and of sorrow and hopefulness. When the sonnet was first conceived in the 13th Century, it was not the “highest” literary form at the time, and it served as an invitation by the poet to converse with a broad audience (Francini, 2003). So, too, my sonnet above seeks to engage an interdisciplinary group of stakeholders in conversation with young people from marginalized communities regarding possibilities for and mechanisms of successful adolescent development. The youth in my study affirmed theories about adolescent resilience—they are in the process of adapting positively while in the midst of multiple types and levels of adversity. In the face of all odds, whether because of them or despite them, these youth actively commit to and are supported in striving from day to day. Ultimately, they remain hopeful about their own futures and about the future of their neighborhoods.

Summary of the Three Papers

This dissertation explores the mechanisms, contexts, and benefits of adolescent resilience among urban minority populations. The youth in this study work hard to avoid potential threats of danger and violence. Most common strategies are avoiding unsafe places and people and actively seeking out safe places and people in their lives. In my first paper, I argue that “risk-avoidance strategies” are more youth-informed frames to examine urban youth’s exposure to neighborhood violence and possibilities for intervention. Again, by relying on qualitative and participatory methods of inquiry and analysis, I explore the nuanced ways in which youth deal with violent landscapes. With an emerging focus on place-based programming and policymaking, such youth-informed strategies can greatly inform violence prevention and intervention efforts aimed at the populations who navigate both unsafe and safe spaces in their daily rounds.

Urban youth in this study actively seek out safe spaces, mentors, and role models. This is why they go to EOYDC. For my second paper, I examine my research site as a source of the facilitation of network-based social capital for its youth participants. The services, relationships, and opportunities that this community-based, youth-serving organization provides are highlighted. Additionally, the process of how network-based social capital is developed and its benefits in the lives of young people in neighborhood-based contexts are explored.

Spirituality is salient among minority adolescent populations. For young people in this study, spirituality acts as a “protective factor” or “asset” that allows them to construct a “counterstory” to maladaptive coping behaviors and adverse outcomes and a way to engage young people across service sectors. The previous paper demonstrates how youth actively work to build social capital, which youth see as central to social mobility. Youth who want to succeed despite challenging circumstances seek out positive mentors and role models. As the first paper illustrates, youth also actively work to avoid the dangers of the street. Despite these efforts, youth are often still exposed to danger and violence. One way that youth make sense of this violence is through the development of “counterstories” and “faith talk.” The importance of spirituality as a coping mechanism is revealed in youth’s excerpts and poems. Youth conceptualize spirituality as a practice and a resource that they come to rely on in order to *get by* and *get ahead*. This sense of spirituality helps them on a daily basis by providing a “covering” or a “spiritual jacket” for them—a sense of protection as they move through their neighborhoods, a source of comfort when dealing with illness and death, and an affirmation of the positive role of service work for improving their lives and the well-being of their community.

Directions for Future Research, Policy, and Practice

There are several implications of this dissertation research for public health research, policy, and practice. First, building on the innovative participatory narrative analytical method of using *research poetry* and *interpretive poetry* in this study, the effectiveness of other emerging participatory arts-based approaches as public health research methods, particularly for marginalized populations, can be explored. For example, community-engaged researchers have revealed that photovoice (Cannuscio et al., 2009; C. Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Wang & Burris, 1997), videovoice (C. Catalani, 2009; Chávez et al., 2004), photo-mapping (Dennis, Gaulocher, Carpiano, & Brown, 2009), lyrical analysis (Jocson, 2006; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Travis & Deepak, 2010), and theater arts (Boal, 1979; Kerr, 1989; Sullivan et al., 2008; *Hybrid performance experiment*.) show promise as tools for engagement, inquiry, and analysis. In 2006, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation launched the web-based *Qualitative Research Guideline Project* to aid healthcare researchers who wish to engage in qualitative methods (Cohen &

Crabtree, 2006). “Narrative Analysis” is highlighted and detailed in this guide as a common analytic approach (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The Center for Public Health Initiatives at the University of Pennsylvania launched a *Creative Action: The Arts in Public Health* initiative during the 2009-2010 academic year where artists, community programs, and creative research projects that use the arts and media to address public health concerns were highlighted through the year-long lecture series (*Creative action: The arts in public health*). Also, CES4Health.info is a web-based mechanism for peer-review, publishing, and disseminating products of health-related community-engaged scholarship that are in forms other than journal articles (*CES4Health.info*). This promotion of community-engaged scholarship and acceptance of various formats is encouraging for the publication and dissemination of participatory arts-based research projects. The momentum from philanthropic, academic, and publishing arenas for participatory methods and products show promise for speaking to broader audiences and for production across a wide range of media.

Second, the results from this qualitative study can inform quantitative studies on urban resilience. There is a high demand for mixed methods research among scholars, funders, and policymakers. Mixed methods research presumes that utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a more thoughtful consideration of the phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Mixed methods have often been found to be more persuasive to policymakers, as well (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2004). Locally, the East Oakland Building Healthy Communities (EOBHC) initiative has recently announced a small pilot project in which an interdisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners will develop an *Urban Hope Scale* by adapting Snyder’s (Snyder et al., 1991) *Children’s Hope Scale* for youth in Oakland in school- and community-based settings (Davis, 2010). This local project, but also other placed-based initiatives across the country, can be informed by such qualitative findings as elucidated in this dissertation. For example, an Instrument-Development Model of a sequential exploratory mixed methods design can be used, in which the qualitative findings related to risk-avoidance, network-based capital, spirituality can inform the development of items and scales for an *Urban Adolescent Resilience* survey instrument, which would then be implemented and validated quantitatively (Figure 5.1) (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Figure 5.1:



Third, as I have established a process of dynamic resilience among urban adolescents and have highlighted the positive outcomes of cognitive, emotional, and social resilience, this

research begs the question of what are the mental and physical health implications of resilience among this population. For example, as “John Henryism” (James, 1994) and “Sojourner Syndrome” (Mullings, 2000) have been found to moderate cardiovascular and reproductive health outcomes, respectively, among African-American adults, it would be fruitful to evaluate or adapt these frameworks for high-effort coping among urban youth of color along mental and physical health domains.

Finally, the process and products of this dissertation reveal implications of engaging in a research partnership with a community-based organization. The partnership had multi-directional benefits for me as a researcher, for the youth respondents-turned-researchers, and for the EOYDC staff. Once, I established rapport with Ms. Regina and her staff, I was welcomed in the EOYDC “family.” This helped to ease recruitment efforts, and also aided me in establishing credibility with the youth and with other community agencies. Additionally, I was afforded with interview space and with frequent access to the staff and youth at EOYDC for “member checking” of my findings. The youth were afforded an opportunity to share their feelings and experiences and were acknowledged as “experts.” Additionally, they had the opportunity to re-engage with the data with a research lens toward inquiry and analysis. Lastly, they were enabled to become published writers and editors with the poetry book that was a by-product of the poetry workshops. The EOYDC staff, and Ms. Regina in particular, was able to engage in an equitable way with a university partner. Consequently, she was afforded access to university-level resources, such as publications, data, lectures, and conferences, all in the effort of building her and EOYDC’s capacity around youth development research and practice. These findings seek to inform other community-engaged research partnerships, particularly among university entities and community-based organizations. Additionally, this partnership reveals the multi-faceted role of a youth-serving organization. In this frame, EOYDC becomes a “campus,” an “anchor organization” (McDonald, Geigel, & Pinguel, 2011), or a “hub” and like a school or a church, asserts its “institutional presence” (Elliott et al., 2006) in East Oakland and is able to meet the complex needs of its youth population among spiritual, emotional, economic, educational, and physical development domains. Future research could investigate *how* an anchor organization interacts with the various partners and systems in the neighborhood to support positive youth development.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said “But peace is not merely the absence of this tension, but the presence of justice” (King, 1956). The tensions prevalent in disadvantaged and destabilized neighborhoods are well-documented. Let us focus our energy, time, and resources on pursuing justice in even the most-tense environments.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Self

1. Tell me about yourself. Describe yourself to me.
2. How did you get involved with EOYDC? What does EOYDC mean to you?
3. What does it mean for you to be a “Youth Leader” at EOYDC?
4. What is the hardest thing that you have been through? What did you learn from this experience?
5. Give me five words that describe who or what you think you may be in the future?
 - Is there any particular person or organization/activity/group that has influenced you to want to be these things? Tell me more about this person/organization?
6. What are your goals for the future?
 - *Probe about educational and vocational goals.*
 - Are any of these goals supported by other people or activities in your neighborhood? How or how not?
 - Do you have role models that you look up to for any of these goals? Tell me more about these role models?

Neighborhood

7. Do you live in East Oakland? Where do you live?
8. What do you think about the “boundaries of East Oakland?” (*show map*)
9. Tell me about your neighborhood. How big is it? (*draw boundaries on map*) What do you call your neighborhood? Describe it as you would to a person who has never been there before.
10. What do you like about your neighborhood?
11. What do you dislike about your neighborhood?
12. Has anyone thought something about you or judged you based on the neighborhood you live in? How did this make you feel? Do you feel proud to be from your neighborhood? Why or why not?
13. Give me five words that describe your neighborhood/city.

People, Places, and Resources in the Neighborhood

14. Tell me more about the people in your neighborhood.
 - *Probe for relationships with peers and adults in their neighborhood.*

15. Who are the people in your neighborhood who really care about you, who talk with you about your problems, or who help you when you are having a hard time? How do they help you?
16. How do you get what you want or what you need in your neighborhood?
 - *Probe for answers about food, money, clothes, etc.*
17. Where do most of your friends live? Has this changed since you were 10 years old? 5 years old?
 - *For those who have friends who have moved, probe to find out if they stay in touch and where they hang out.*
18. Are you like most of the people your age in your neighborhood? Why or why not?
19. Tell me more about the places in your neighborhood.
 - What businesses/organizations in your neighborhood are important to you?
 - Where in your neighborhood do you wish there were more places to hang out, shop, eat, etc.? (*locate on map*)
20. How do you have fun in your neighborhood? Where do you go/what do you do?
21. Where are the conflicts/negative activities in your neighborhood? Are their particular intersections where these conflicts/negative activities occur? (*locate on map*). How are conflicts resolved in your neighborhood?
22. How do you stay safe in your neighborhood? Where do you go/what do you do?
23. Where do you go/what do you do to be healthy in your neighborhood?
24. Describe a typical weekday for you. Where do you go? How do you get there? Who do you interact with?
25. Describe a typical weekend for you. Where do you go? How do you get there? Who do you interact with?

Neighborhood Change

26. How has your the neighborhood changed since you were 10 years old? 5 years old? How does this make you feel?
 - *Probe about neighbors or business/organizations moving out and moving in.*
 - *Probe for sense of belonging or not, as well as racial/ethnic and socioeconomic shifts, and access to businesses/organizations.*

Wrap-Up

27. Any final comments?