

POOR URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS:
THE INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON BLACK AMERICAN MEN

By

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ABSTRACT

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Research is often conducted that reports the effects of poor urban life and the various experiences one has in these economically deprived communities. Illegal activities, drugs, gambling, prostitution, inadequate teachers, and the lack of resources are normative for poor urban environments (Kiser, 2007; Murry et al., 2011). However, the stories of Black men who live in these environments are often untold and their perceptions and how those perceived stressors affect them are unknown.

This exploratory study examines the lives of Black men growing up in the city of Detroit to better understand who they are and the stressors they were exposed to in the home, school and communities they lived in. Furthermore, the study will consider previous research that identifies urban stressors and how often these men are exposed to those stressors while ranking them, in a qualitative photo analysis, to give a better understanding of what is most stressful to them and the reasons why.

For the male participants the study found that the stressors mentioned in urban research are normative in the lives of those who live there yet there are different ways of interpreting those “stressors.” When examining which stressors or themes were most relevant, for the Black males, the chaos or disorganization in the home, school, and community was easily identified and received higher points of exposure.

This work of art is dedicated to my parents, grandparents, the Griffin's and to the Thomas' (Mary & Isom Thomas), for which without the Thomas' life would have been much more difficult. I can't thank you enough for the encouragement and sacrifice.
To my siblings for which my work and passion for youth was birthed. I love you!
And to my friends, all of whom I love and appreciate.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Children living in urban/inner-city neighborhoods face various dangers and stressors that exist in their homes, schools, and local communities (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). These neighborhoods expose children to illegal activities at alarming rates including, but not limited to, prostitution, drugs, gambling, gang activity, and random acts of violence. These neighborhood stressors may also include over-exposure to the misuse of weapons (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005; Kiser, 2007). These aforementioned exposures, result in a disproportionate number of children developing behavioral, physical, and emotional challenges, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, which may interrupt the ability to think clearly and effectively solve problems (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Youngstrom, Weist, & Albus, 2003).

Not only are the behavioral, physical, and emotional well-being of a child threatened, but the physiological reactions to the stressors to which children are exposed lend themselves to several health complications in adulthood as well. Prior life stress is strongly associated with cardiovascular disease, sudden cardiac death, seriousness of chronic illness, and birth complications. Prior stress, as well as perceived stress, alter immune functions, affect mood, and cognitive processing (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Kiser, 2007; Lupien, King, Meaney & McEwen, 2001; Youngstrom, Weist, & Albus, 2003).

Lupien et al. (2001) defined stress as previous or actual exposure to life events requiring the individual to make some adaptation. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) summarized the outcomes contributing to the realities and stressors of living in poor or low-socioeconomic status

(SES) neighborhoods. Exposure to stressors in low SES physical and social environments influence a person's developmental outcomes and make them more vulnerable to interpersonal aggression, violence, and health behaviors including cigarette smoking and lack of physical activity (Lupien et al., 2001). Additionally, stress can come from urban/inner-city homes, schools, and neighborhood facilities that are often overly crowded, poorly maintained, and have inadequate heating or cooling (Kiser, 2007). Children and adolescents from urban/inner-city neighborhoods are asked to compete for the same opportunities as children who live in more advantaged neighborhoods without the adverse neighborhood conditions that affect physical, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Clearly, where children live matters and the quality of their home, school, and local community can directly or indirectly affect their developmental well-being (Murry, Burkel, Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Linder, & Nation, 2011).

Girls and boys from urban/inner-city environments are exposed to higher levels of neighborhood stressors that can have significant effects on their wellbeing. Exposure to violence for urban/inner-city youth is high compared to children who live in advantaged areas. Similarly, the impact on gender outcomes has been noted in previous research (Beyers, Bates, Pettit & Dodge, 2003; Windle, 1992; Youngstrom et al. 2003). Youngstrom et al. (2003) reported that sixth graders in their study described having had their lives threatened (31% of boys and 14% of girls) and seeing someone shot (42% of the participating boys and 30% of the girls). The same study revealed that the majority of the respondents heard gun shots and/or witnessed someone being beaten or arrested sometime in their lives. Not only is gender pivotal but the ethnic group(s) studied and represented in low SES neighborhoods matter. Families that live in inner-city neighborhoods and are exposed to a variety of stressful living conditions are most frequently identified as Black American. Furthermore, reports show urban/inner-city environments

influence boys differently than girls from the same environment (Beyers et al. 2003; Windle, 1992; Youngstrom et al. 2003).

Adolescent boys are at greater risk for low attendance, low achievement in school, and high aggression (Beyers, Bates, Pettit & Dodge, 2003). The relationship between adolescents and their parents is pivotal. Communication between Black American parents and their adolescent children is significant especially for Black boys. Several researchers have concluded that poor outcomes for communication relate to delinquency and depression for adolescent Black males but not girls (Taylor, Rodriguez, Seaton, & Dominquez, 2005; Windle, 1992).

If society expects urban/inner-city youth, especially youth of color, to practice acceptable behavior, maintain acceptable performance in academics and remain emotionally stable, then scholars and practitioners must be aware of mechanisms that are most pivotal to their outcomes. Awareness of these risk factors may enable youth development professionals to influence the trajectory for youth who experience high levels of mental dysfunction, unemployment, academic challenges (i.e. school dropout), involvement in illegal activities, incarceration, and other at-risk activities.

This study examined the lives of college-age Black American men who grew-up in urban/inner-city neighborhoods. The purposes of the study were four-fold: 1) to better understand the individual experiences for these men in their homes, schools, and communities, 2) to identify stressors associated with their homes, schools, and communities, 3) to determine with the use of photos which experiences were most stressful, and 4) to identify themes of resilience or protective factors. This study also aimed to increase understanding about the relationship between these individuals and their environments, and to identify solutions to improve their conditions through changes targeted at the micro-level and macro-level. My personal goal with

this paper is to encourage readers to review urban/inner-city stressors in an effort to convince policymakers and others to recognize the value of these young men as individuals. Making a list of stressors inner-city individuals encounter is admirable while knowing how stressors affect the development of individuals can help determine appropriate interventions which are more important (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Being born into low-SES urban/inner-city neighborhoods increases the risks for birth defects, cognitive deficits, behavioral, emotional, and academic failure (e.g., school dropout and under education), under or unemployment and an increased likelihood of this cycle being repeated in subsequent generations (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Crosnoe et al., 2002; Zaff & Smerdon, 2009).

This study explored the lives of Black men who grew up in Detroit, Michigan. The study explored three main questions:

- (1) Do the experiences of these Black men and what they were exposed to confirm current research?
- (2) What are the top perceived stressors, depicted through photo analysis, in the home, school, and community context and participants' thoughts of Detroit and a future family?
- (3) What, if any, themes of resilience occur in the life on these young men?

Theoretical Framework

There are many variables that influence child and adolescent development. Research illustrates that there is no single risk or protective factor responsible for negative or positive outcomes; it is an accumulation of factors (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Therefore, a human ecological approach is best suited for exploring the factors influencing the lives of children as well as the relationships among family members, peers, the neighborhood, and the local community (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Granger, 2002).

Research has described interactions that exist through bidirectional relationships between adolescents, their families, and the neighborhoods where they live and play. The human ecological approach involves individuals and families in relation to the totality of their environment. This study focused on the experiences of Black college-aged men who grew up in urban/inner-city, low-income environments. The aim was to better understand how perceived stressors collectively influenced their development through an examination of micro, meso, and exo-system levels.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

While one in four children, within the United States, lives below the poverty level, 75% of these children live in urban neighborhoods (Kiser, 2007). This body of literature supports the view that low SES urban/inner-city neighborhoods create a dynamic that, unlike advantaged neighborhoods, is correlated with negative outcomes related to health, behavior, emotional wellbeing, and academic performance (Beyers et al. 2003; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005). First, I summarize how living in urban/inner-city neighborhoods exposes one to increased stressors that adversely influence mental or physical health; then I identify two developmental outcomes associated with poor emotional health or behavior that is inconsistent with societal norms. Next, stressors are detailed that youth in urban/inner-city neighborhoods encounter in their homes, schools, and communities that affect growth, development, and adjustment (Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Socioeconomic Factors and Health

Socioeconomic factors influence children's health and wellbeing. One factor is living in low SES neighborhoods. Research has demonstrated that low-SES neighborhoods are related to poorer health for adults and children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Lupien et al., 2001). As a result, people from low SES neighborhoods are usually exposed to high rates of instability and change, producing even higher levels of individual distress (Lupien et al., 2001). Individuals from low SES neighborhoods have high rates of exposure to stressful life events that correlate with disease risks, mortality rates and crime rates (Allgood W.C., 2006; Anderson, Sabatelli, & Koustic, 2007).

The effects of living in low SES environments impacts children in utero (Allgood, 2006; Lupien et al. 2001; Zaff & Smerdon, 2009). These children are more likely to be born prematurely and with various birth defects (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Infants living in economically distressed neighborhoods are likely to experience poor natal care, maternal substance abuse, and poor nutrition. Research has documented that children who lived in poverty for the first three years of their lives compared to children who did not live in economically distressed neighborhoods showed delayed growth rates, had more health problems, and demonstrated more behavioral challenges (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Anxiety-induced stress has been associated with low performance on complex tasks and the inability to use semantic cues in recall (Lupien et al., 2001). Children from low SES environments are at higher risk for exposure to lead paints which have been linked to high rates of anemia and ear infections; and learning, emotional, and behavioral disorders (Allgood, 2006; Lupien et al. 2001). Conversely, individuals living in high SES communities experience better physical and mental health compared to those who live in low SES neighborhoods (Lupien et al. 2001).

Behavioral and Emotional Outcomes

Neighborhood resources impact behavioral and emotional wellbeing. Outward or external (acting out and aggressive) and inward or internal (depressive and withdrawn) behaviors have the strongest effect on child and adolescent mental health; the behavioral and emotional effects have different consequences (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Zaff & Smerdon, 2009).

Between 70% and 100% of children living in poor inner city communities have been exposed to some form of trauma yet fewer than 20% develop psychiatric disorders (Kiser, Medoff & Black,

2010). Traumas are defined as stressors causing threats to life or to the physical integrity of the child, causing feelings of helplessness (Kiser, 2007).

As neighborhood contact increases, the threats to life also increase by approximately 75% between infancy and early childhood (Hart, Atkins, & Matsuba, 2008). As infants grow they are exposed to more environmental stressors that include increased participation in day care, school, and church attendance; visiting other people; and engagement in sports, music, dance or other recreational activities. While most children are exposed to stressful life events at some time in their childhood, youth and adolescents from low SES neighborhoods experience higher risk of stress and trauma. This exposure to stress and trauma has been linked to mental and physical health problems (Edin & Kissane, 2010). Children living in economically distressed neighborhoods are at increased risk of being victims of child abuse, peer aggression, and community violence compared to children who live in high SES neighborhoods (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). As a young child, the home is the most influential environment and the risks in low-SES homes are impactful due to the amount of time spent in the home. Conversely, the older the child becomes, the less time he or she spends at home. Exposures to other people, places, and things are broadened.

Inner-city Homes

Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) observed that the physical home environment of children in low SES communities is related to a child's health and wellbeing. The home environments in which these children live are usually dilapidated, have inadequate heating, unprotected stairwells, cracked floors, open heating appliances, overcrowding, and lead paint, (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002), which impact children's health, intellectual, and social wellbeing (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

The lack of neighborhood resources has also been reported to influence the mental health of families (Clark, Barrett, & Kolvin, 2000; Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002). These researchers note that the parenting is positively influenced by access to community resources. The lack of access to community resources in low SES neighborhoods negatively affects the quality of parent-child interactions (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Parents who experienced stress due to unstable unemployment have reported low self-esteem. Parents with low self-esteem have also reported high expressions of anger, depression, and lack of self-control (Beyers et al. 2003; Petterson & Albers, 2001). The distress among poor parents has also been correlated with low warmth and responsiveness, negative control strategies, and an inability to monitor children appropriately (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Research has documented additional negative impacts for children growing up in low SES households. For example, Edin and Kissane (2010) reported that children who were treated harshly by their parents at age three demonstrated decreased cognitive abilities and increased externalizing problems including aggression or depression during their adolescence. Another study found that adolescents growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods reported higher levels of depression. These respondents also reported strained parent-child relationships (Murry, Berkel, Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Linder, & Nation, 2002) because of restrictive parenting practices, resulting in tighter bonds and more reliance upon peers than parents. Low SES families experience events that are uncontrollable, threatening. Additionally, they are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards and violence resulting in family dissolution and household moves (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Inner-city Schools

Neighborhood SES is positively associated with adolescent's achievement and negatively associated with educational risks (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). It is important to note that neighborhood SES has been shown to have stronger effects on adolescent male academic achievement than for females. Moreover, Black American (34%) and Latino (31%) youth are at increased odds of living in low resourced neighborhoods (Murry et al. 2011).

Compared to children from high SES backgrounds, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to graduate from high school and attend college (Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002). SES remains one of the most consistent predictors for school attendance and early high school dropout (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

The quality of the home environment negatively correlates with adolescent problems in school (Bradley & Corwyn 2002). Moreover, children from low SES environments do not have equal access to materials that stimulate cognitive functioning. Therefore, learning material and the exposure to socially and culturally diverse opportunities increase social exchanges and allow for more productive children and a lessening of negative adolescent behaviors like aggression, and difficulty in academia.

Inner-city Communities

Urban/inner-city communities are considered unsafe and insecure, characterized by multiple stressors with limited resources that counter the pressures associated with living in these communities (Anderson, Sabatelli, & Koustic, 2007; Zaff & Smerdon, 2009). Community exposures begin when children start preschool. Oftentimes in urban/inner-city communities, preschool facilities often lack resources to stimulate children positively. Child and adolescent development may be influenced by the availability of institutional resources in the community

including learning, recreational, and social activities involving child care, medical facilities and other free and affordable resources. The presence of libraries, family resource centers, and museums are beneficial resources that parents can take advantage of that have positive implications for a child's well-being especially in the areas of learning stimulation and school readiness. Unfortunately, resources in many low-income neighborhoods are scarce.

Lastly, a major community resource is the availability of employment for youth. Employment can provide access to resources otherwise unavailable, as well as decrease behavioral problems and substance abuse. Also, be mindful that a lack of opportunities due to unemployment has a huge influence on a child's and adolescent's ideas for education, work ethic and his/her future (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Moreover, children who are exposed to stressful life events due to neighborhood stressors are at increased risks of developing mental disorders as well as health complications in adulthood.

These stressors hinder youth in areas of academics, which result in a number of barriers, creating perpetual cycles of defeat for these youth and generations to come. Therefore it is important to answer the following research questions to determine: 1) if the experiences and exposure to stressors are the same as current research suggests; 2) what the perceived stressors are and why participants think they exist as well as their thoughts of their future in Detroit with families; and 3) what, in the midst of their environments, protected them from becoming another negative statistic.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Research Approach

This study explores the lived experiences of college-age Black American men who grew up in urban/inner-city neighborhoods that further describe the perceived neighborhood stressors within these environments. The study included three distinct phases: identifying and defining home, school, and neighborhood stressors from black and white photos, ranking these stressors from most-to-least stressful, and explained how these pictures depicted their lived realities. An aim of this study was to better understand how the represented stressors contributed to risk or protective factors in their lives.

The first phase of this study explored neighborhood stressors for five Black American undergraduate participants who were raised in urban/inner-cities. Information for this phase was collected in a semi-structured, face-to-face interview. Participants responded to questions about their experiences in their home, schools and local community.

The second phase of the study randomly assigned the same five participants to one of two different photo critique trials. Each of the five participants, individually, viewed 130 photos (all retrieved from Google Images) of urban/inner-city stressors. Half of the participants saw the photos with brief descriptions of the context, whereas there were no defining words in the second trial photos were identified based on literature that described stressors in urban/inner-city environments (e.g., gang violence, prostitution, increased noise levels). From the 130 photos, each participant selected a total of 45 photos - 15 photos that depicted each of three ecosystem categories: household, school and neighborhood/community. Next, each participant rank-ordered

the photos from most-to-least stressful. Participants then reported on their exposure to each stressor (e.g., all the time, frequently, infrequently, or never) and discussed reasons for their selection of the most stressful photo in each category. Participants also reported whether the perceived stressor most affected the individual, family, or both. Lastly, participants identified which stress most affected an individual's developmental well-being. Concluding the photo sort of each individual participant, the top 15 photos in each ecosystem category were calculated, presenting an overall top 45 photos in the collection.

Participant Selection

Ten male, Black American, Michigan State University (MSU) undergraduate students were recruited through various university sponsored programs (e.g., Advantage and Black Caucus). Each organization was asked to allow me 5-minutes to introduce myself and to give an overview of my thesis. At the start of these sessions, I asked attendees to share ideas of differences between urban and suburban communities. I then summarized my thesis project explaining that my interest was on developing a better understanding on how urban neighborhood impact the well-being of Black American men. I further explained that a goal of my thesis was to better understand the lived experiences of men who grew within urban/inner-city neighborhoods and to explore their exposure to various issues (i.e., violence, vacant homes, prostitution, and no heat in school during the winter). At the conclusion of my presentation I passed out contact cards and asked interested individuals to fill them out if they were interested and willing to participate in this study.

Each person that expressed an interest in participating was contacted via e-mail or by phone to further explore their willingness to participate. Upon consent, the investigator: 1) introduced the purpose and background of the study, 2) explained the potential contributions

their participation could make in terms of benefits to others living in urban/inner-city environments, 3) described what participation in the study involved (e.g., length of interview, types of questions to be asked, recording of the interview), 4) notified them of their rights as participants, and 5) explained the process of ensuring confidentiality. If they provided verbal consent to participate, an interview was scheduled for phases one and two of the study.

Researcher Reflections

I view the lives of urban communities and their residents' through a social justice lens. I believe these residents are often forgotten and experience a disproportionate number of challenges that negatively affects their psychological and physiologically wellbeing. Therefore, I seek to do what I can to examine how to create an equitable experience for all, especially those living in poor urban neighborhoods. This lens comes from my past, growing up in Detroit, where I had many experiences that were both positive and negative. I have seen things that I believe are disproportionately experienced in poor environments, like unrest in the home due to the lack of financial security, instability in households and in schools. My view of society as a Black male growing up in the inner-city and comparing resources in my neighborhood to neighborhoods with predominately White neighborhoods bring up issues of race. Race is very pivotal in my view of society and how I believe society views me and other Black American males.

I was born in Detroit, Michigan on October 1, 1983 to parents who were young and in love. My passion for Detroit and the people who live there and in similar cities is one of the lenses through which I view my inquiry into how youth, particularly young men of color, experience life. I experienced many stressors while growing up and often wondered how much of who I am is due to my childhood and the environment where I spent most of my time.

Since Detroit is my place of birth it represents a lens through which I view my position in life. Before my first birthday, my parents' relationship ended and my mother and I moved with my maternal grandparents to Atlanta, Georgia. As I reflect on my earliest memories, I recall having experiences in both Atlanta and Detroit. My mom and I moved back to Detroit, to the inner-city, when I was approximately four years of age. Later my mom married and the relationship was a tumultuous one filled with domestic abuse and instability. The violence was overwhelming and as I would often look outside my second floor bedroom window to dream and have a mental escape, but many times the view outside was no different. My neighbors were often fist fighting and pulling out knives on one another. This view became normative; I believe a particular neighbor was an alcoholic. However, I was a child and wanted to go outside to play, but because of the neighbors who often fought in the middle of the street, as well as my mom's and stepdad's concern of the neighbor next door who sold drugs and had constant traffic in and out of his home, I could not.

My attitude about drugs was always negative and sad because I knew the negative impact it had on families; my mother had a drug habit that often resulted in me being left home alone to take care of my siblings while my stepdad was away for days at a time. When I was not left home alone I often frequented "dope houses" with my mom. As my mom's drug addiction grew worse, life became more unstable. I moved from family member to family member, and for a time was separated from my siblings. Partly due to the separation between my siblings and me, I often wondered about child development, especially in the midst of environmental influences.

Those environmental influences include school. From early childhood, I was taught that education is to be taken seriously and without it you do not become successful. However, I struggled in school and never understood how anything I was learning would ever help me with

my challenges. It did not help that my peers were often getting into fights and always disrupting class. Teachers often seemed overwhelmed, no one at home paid attention to me, and when I got frustrated with school-work I would just get yelled at instead of helped. In class we were always asked to share books because either we did not have enough or there were pages missing. This is a manifestation of why there is an academic achievement gap between minority students and Whites. Therefore, allowing the participants in this research study to talk about their school experiences having grown up in urban environments was important for me to capture.

If you weren't distracted by the fights inside the school, the loud music being played by cars that drove by was a constant distraction. The fear of what would happen when you left school and had to walk home past abandoned buildings, homeless people, prostitutes, and visit stores with people behind bullet proof glass, who did not look like me nor my peers framed the questions and photo depictions of my thesis. The interview questions were formed to probe the lived experiences of other Black men from Detroit. Moreover, life was not always horrible and I did not become a negative statistic. Therefore, uncovering protective factors that may have been in place in the lives of these men was informative. Conversely, choosing college-age men from poor urban environments gave opportunity for men to reflect on their experiences from an introspective lens.

I permanently moved to Atlanta with my maternal grandparents after I graduated from the fifth grade. My grandparents would always take me with them on different road trips every summer and were always encouraging. I believe stability helped make a significant difference in my life. However, during this time I would see children whose parents were on drugs, like mine, but they seemed not to care about their lives and were often disrespectful. What made the behaviors of some youth from the same environments distinct from mine?

As I got older I realized that not only were their differences in behavior of people with similar experiences but there were people, mostly Whites, whose experiences were quite contrary to mine. I felt somehow betrayed as it seemed that White people's lives were so much better than mine; I felt like life was unfair for some people because they may be able to obtain things that I could not and their future, as a result would be more promising. It was not my fault that I was a Black kid who grew up in the 'hood of Detroit with the exposures I did. I began to think about how people often blamed Black youth from Detroit and felt like these individuals should not be blamed for their own circumstances or always punished for certain behaviors.

I always wanted to be of help to people because I felt like often times I was alone in a world that did not accept me. Furthermore, I wanted to be that person to others that could be counted on. Consequently, I became interested in learning what makes people develop, either negatively or positively. I always had uncles in and out of jail, often heard my parents and others talk about friends who had gotten killed, and lastly, they would talk about the "white man." Although the "white man" could never be identified, I believed that color did matter and whether it was the "white man" or some other man, Black Americans were always thought American society matters to how I was viewed and how hard I must work to be noticed, positively.

My story is not unique and Black men from Detroit and inner-city communities across America are often given a bad reputation and too often become beneficiaries to a perpetual cycle of defeat. What do I mean by this? I mean that the experiences that occur in Detroit seem to be cyclical. Therefore, I decided to focus my research on college age Black men from poor-urban neighborhoods not only because I identify with their experiences, but also because I often wonder how I was affected by them. The way I see the world, my introverted ways, lack of trust, and a defensive stand I take anytime I hear phrases like "equal playing field," "stop complaining

and choices you made,” “pick yourself up by your bootstrap,” “I don’t see color,” and “race does not matter,” to name a few.

We as Black men continue to be blamed for our actions when rarely do we hear the stories from the perspective of those who have lived certain lives. In developing my thesis I felt it was time for people to listen. People can disagree with my interpretations of my experiences. However, my experiences cannot be disputed. Therefore, I knew that if I expected these young men to be vulnerable about their experiences, I had to share with them that I was from Detroit and grew up in a similar environment to theirs. After establishing rapport with study participants they were more comfortable in sharing, as they would ask me if I knew where a place was located or end their sentences with “you know how it is.”

Unfortunately, I did know how it was. Whether it was a lack of support at home or school, I knew how it was. The insight that these young men had about living in Detroit was more than insightful. I learned that, regardless of their upbringing, they would not have changed anything about their experiences because they believed they learned some invaluable truths about who they are and the value of a difficult situation growing up. Moreover, they knew that their experiences were different from majority Whites, but they were not one’s who complained to the point of complacency; they acknowledged the unfair treatment from the government and others and continued to strive toward success.

Lastly, this research allowed me to further understand the importance of urban research and also how much more research on the topic is needed. I was encouraged by these young men but yet saddened because they faced challenges that no one seems to care about. Observers just assume when young Blacks struggle or make “bad” decisions they are thugs or menaces to society. After speaking with these young men, I should have bluntly asked them what they

thought of the negative stereotypes of Detroit and Black men. Why they believe these stereotypes are perpetuated? And, what needs to happen in order to eradicate them?

Data Collection

Phase 1

Semi-structured open-ended interviews. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured, open-ended protocol. The areas of inquiry explored within the interview protocol included: 1) a discussion of their life living in their respective neighborhoods and 2) a general understanding of their experience in the home, school, and local community. Interviews took approximately two hours and were digitally recorded. Each participant was required to consent to the digital recording.

Interviews were conducted on a one-one basis in an environment free from distractions in a campus office. The structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was intended to illicit a discussion of experiences participants believed exemplified life stresses that impacted their development – positively or negatively.

Phase 2

Photo Critique. As a way to facilitate phase two, I gathered 130 Google Images that represented stressors identified in the literature, my personal experiences, and experiences of professors and peers. The photos (Appendix F) may not be an exhaustive list of environmental stressors, but they were selected as approximations of what previous research has identified as an urban stressor impacting the development and health of residents. Multiple examples of each stressor were included, thus creating a situation where participants could help to identify the most significant stressors in their lived experiences. The ultimate goal of phase two was to

reduce the number of photos from 130 to 45 – fifteen photos from each participant that best depicted household, school, and neighborhood stressors.

Part 2.A: Five participants from the interview phase also participated, after their individual interviews, in the individual photo sorting phase. The main goal was to narrow the photos from 130 to 45. Each participant would individually be selected to one of two trials. Trial one included participants to view photos with brief descriptions of the perceived stressor, whereas the other trial involved participants sorting the photos without captions of perceived stressors. Both trials sorted through the initial 130 photos. Each photo had a number (1-130) as an identifier placed at the bottom of the photo (see Appendix F).

Part A₁: Participants in both groups were asked to separate these photos into three piles they believed best represented stressors experienced most in a home, school, or community context.

Part A₂: Participants were asked to examine each pile separately and asked if there were any stressors that might have been overlooked representing each of these areas of urban/inner-city stressors (Pile one represented home stressors, pile two, school stressors, and pile three, community stressors).

Part A₃: Participants were asked to identify their top 15 perceived stressors identified in the photos in each ecosystem category and mark the photos identification number from what they believed was the most stressful to least stressful stressor influencing developmental outcomes for youth and adolescents in an urban/inner-city context.

Part A₄: Participants were then asked to identify who they believed was most affected by the perceived stressor (i.e., family, individual, or both) next to the photo identification number identified in the previous section.

Part A₅: Participants marked whether they believed the perceived stressor was mental, emotional, physical, or social. They were allowed to make only one selection according to what they perceived would be most stressful.

Part A₆: Participants were asked to explain the reasons for the “most stressful” photo for household, school, and neighborhood. Participants were given Form A to identify which photos they had placed in the three separate piles. See Main Participant Form A: Preliminary Photo Critique, Appendix B.

Part A₇: At the completion of Phase 2 following the five participants selection of their top 15 most stressful photos from each category (totaling 45 photos selected per participant), I calculated which photos among the participants would best represent the top 15 overall perceived stressors in the home, school, and community. The photos I calculated as the top 15 stressors per category (totaling 45 photos total) were photos used during the focus group that allowed them to complete their photo critiques. See Appendix E: Top 15 Photos per Category, for how I selected the top 15 perceived overall stressors.

Phase 3

Focus Group Photo Critique: Five individuals, also from the inner-city of Detroit, who had not previously been involved in the study were recruited to participate in phase 3 of this study. These participants were involved in a focus group discussion where they discussed the most frequently identified photos that depicted stress as rated by participants in phase 2 of this study.

Part B₁) Participants viewed each pile, together, separately; a pile representing perceived stressors in urban/inner-city homes, schools, and local communities.

Part B₂) Participants ranked each photo pile of perceived stressors from most stressful to least stressful.

Part B₃) Participants ranked how often, if at all, they have been exposed to the perceived stressors, (e.g. all the time=1 (Daily), frequently=2 (A few times per month), infrequently=3 (A few times per year), or never=0).

Part B₄) Participants marked either an **I** for **I**ndividual, **F** for **F**amily, or **B** for **B**oth according to who they perceived would be most affected by the stressor in the photo,

Part B₅) Participants marked according to the four areas of stress either an **M** for **M**ental, **E** for **E**motional, **P** for **P**hysical or **S** for **S**ocial, according to how they believed the stressor is most influential on ones' development; not the type of stress they believe was depicted in the photo (i.e., A photo that depicts a dilapidated building is a physical structure. However, the way the physical dilapidation of the building affects the individual's development may not be physical. See Form B, Appendix C.

Analytical Framework

Interview Analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. While audio recording I made sure to have a separate sheet or file open for any thoughts that came to my mind that might or might not be related to the specific analysis but yet related to the research. I believe that this is very important as I began the coding process. It was important that I not dismiss any factors or ideas that may have contributed to the research analyses. I started line by line coding any theme of stress or experience. I found that it was easiest to do this for each participant by the different levels of the environment.

Broadly, this study proposed to use within-case study analysis to understand each individual's perceptions of the neighborhoods in which they spent most of their lives prior to their coming to MSU as well as cross-case analysis to identify the possible patterns of themes across the experiences of participants. Throughout both the coding and analysis process, detailed notes were taken to describe emotions and other non-verbal cues.

Within-case analysis. Within-case analysis was used in an effort to examine the individual lived experiences of participants as these pertain to understanding the neighborhood stressors. I attempted to code inquiries based on home, school, and local community stressors individually.

Cross-case analysis. Inductive content analysis was used where pre-existing frameworks were bracketed so that findings were extracted from only the data to discover patterns and themes across cases. The process involved transcribing the interviews and then open-coding all of the transcripts to then identify patterns and themes across cases that pertained to the focus of each research question. Patterns and themes developed as the data were coded and therefore, over time as coding proceeded, initial coding schemas were revised as the coding continued across transcripts. An analysis codebook logged the codes identified, the definition associated with each item and the decision criteria used for each decision along the analysis. A full set of codes were then applied to all of the transcripts. Next steps involved creating categories called second-order themes which integrate meaning across codes.

Photo Analysis

Main Participants & Focus Groups

The goal of the photo critique section was to better understand the experiences Black American men were exposed to in an urban/inner-city context. The photo analysis in this section,

Phase 1, helped one to understand which stressors were most frequently experienced in their home, school, or local community context and how they identified the effects of these stressors. Participants categorized the photos into three categories. I then calculated the photos that the main participants selected based on which photo ID numbers appeared most. I recorded how many times that number appeared across participants, if it appeared among the selections made by that participant at all. In order to analyze the main participant identified as being most affected by the perceived stressors, I recorded how many times each participant recorded an I for Individual, F for Family, or B for both for each individual photo. The same procedure was followed to determine how participants identified stressors depicted in each photo. Lastly, I recorded how many times each participant recorded either an M for Mental, E for Emotional, P for Physical, or S for Social.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: CASE STUDIES OF FIVE URBAN/INNER-CITY BLACK MALES

The objective of this research was to understand, the lived experiences of young Black males who have grown up in poor urban environments of Detroit, Michigan. These lived experiences were analyzed by interviews that asked questions related to home, school and community exposures while identifying stressors associated with ecosystem categories. Also, stressors depicted through photos helped to better understand the individual experiences for these men. In this chapter, findings from the individual open-ended structured interviews with five Black males are presented.

During each interview session, participants shared their lived experiences related to (1) their earliest memories of growing up in the home with an emphasis on parental context and immediate home environment; (2) a descriptive representation of their childhood home and the surrounding neighborhood; (3) their school experiences including, but not limited to, learning environment, character development/peer influences (Social development), and exposures; (4) the local community which focuses on the environment outside of their immediate street. This included neighborhood resources like grocery stores, access to libraries and other community resources, visual esthetics and levels of safety and chaos or disorganization; and (5) interviewer's personal reflections.

The audiotape of each participant's interview was transcribed and then coded to identify emerging themes. Significant themes were then recorded in one of the following six narrative categories under four major contexts of home, school, community, and personal self-reflections:

1. Participant profile: Earliest memories growing up in Detroit; family context, schools attended and community overview.

HOME

2. Disorganized Home and Social Development (Role Models, Peers, teacher, and other)

SCHOOL

3. Disorganized School, Learning Environments (in and outside of the school buildings); Social Development (Role Models, Peers, teacher, and other); and Economic Deprivation (Resources/cultural and academic exposures)

COMMUNITY

4. Disorganized Community and Economic Deprivation (Community resources)

INTERVIEWEE'S FINAL THOUGHTS

5. Interviewee's final thoughts provide a candid perspective from the voice of the interviewee's personal opinions of growing up in Detroit. Additionally, among other topics, they share what they believe the challenges are in Detroit and if they were to have children, if they would want their children to grow-up in the same neighborhoods in which they did.

First Case Study, David

Participant Profile

David is the youngest of two but grew up with other children around him. David recalls his earliest memories growing up with his little sister, mom, his mom's best friend and her two children. David grew up without his father present in the home. David recalls being around four years old when his dad left. The departing of his father left him, his mom and little sister struggling to take care of the necessities of life. They had to move in with his mom's best friend.

“We grew up on the impoverished side,” David said growing up in a home on the west side of Detroit, 7 Mile and Grand River area. The home had three bedrooms. David remembers sleeping in the attic, which was upstairs and the others slept downstairs.

After a few months of living with his mom’s best friend, David, his mom and sister moved into their own place which was an apartment with two rooms. David and his sister shared a room while David’s mom had her own room. David recalls the environment not being that great but enjoyable because there were children in the area that he and his sister could play with. Unfortunately, David and his family found themselves having to move again because of plumbing issues. They moved to 6 Mile and Chatham and later to Outer Drive and Schafer during his ninth grade year of high school. David assessed these environments as noisy and impoverished. He was not allowed to stay outside after dark and during the day, when he did go outside, he could not go past the corner.

David was not able to do most things in the neighborhood he lived in. His mom was often very restrictive with the things David and his sister were allowed to do. David was not always passive about being restricted and as a result got into many disagreements with his mom. He also felt that his mom should have trusted his judgment on certain issues.

Because of his mother’s work schedule, David was able to do what he wanted to do. In retrospect, he confessed that this involved decisions that were not always in his best interest. He often hung out with the “wrong crowd”, involving himself in activities to “fit in” with other peers. Some of the activities he described were running errands for gang members, killing animals, and doing whatever he was told to do. David believes that never having a real father and always being around women drew him to being around these young men so he could fit in and find an identity.

David's identity was always something that he struggled with as he went throughout life and started school. David never attended preschool but recalls having attended Children's Learning Institute for kindergarten, Horton Elementary for first grade, Thomas E. Holton second through fifth, Old Redford Academy for sixth grade, Cherry Hill School of Performing Arts from seventh through ninth grade and Oak Park High School for the remainder of high school.

The experiences David had, during his academic career, were both positive and negative. He described his early years of school being disrupted by fights, poor teachers, and realizing that he did not always have the material/possessions that other kids had. In contrast, his junior high school experience was different. David shared that Cherry Hill School of Performing Arts exposed him to experiences outside of Detroit including trips out of the state and a sense of self-worth. Finally, he described his high school experience as good and bad but experiences that he's grateful for.

Home

Disorganized Home

Each neighborhood is unique in its own right and the perspective that one has about his or her environment may vary. I asked David to paint a picture for me of his neighborhood as if he were to be standing on his porch. The first observation that David made is that his house may have been the only house on the block that actually had a porch intact. On both sides of David's home were abandoned couches, refrigerators, and ovens. In addition to the visual chaos, David and his family were often faced with threats to their safety within their home.

"I remember once while I was sleeping someone had a brick and smashed in through the window. David and his family did not often feel safe in their home, especially after

the brick smashing through his window and someone trying to break into their home twice. Most homes within his neighborhood were described as having bars on their windows, but the homes that he lived in did not.

Social Development

David recalls his values being learned from his involvement of those who lived the street life. David said his friends consisted of drug dealers and those who were in gangs. "We ourselves even thought about making our own gang up with me and my friends." When David was a little boy he hung around gang members and considered himself a little soldier. "We were cool." Because David was looking to fit in he said that he was willing to do anything and felt like he would literally follow his friend to hell and back because he felt as if his friends gave him a sense of belonging. "I felt so obligated."

David said that he lived two separate lives; one for his mom and one for his friends. However, he believes his mom was very strict and tried to prevent him from getting involved in the wrong crowd but because of her work schedule he knew that his mom could not monitor his every action so he would get involved in certain activities that she was unaware of. Unfortunately, it was not always with his friends that he engaged in negative behaviors but sometimes the parents of his friends.

"My friend, her and her mom would just like have smoking sessions when they smoking weed on the porch, just passing it to the kids and stuff like that. That was like 13/14. The first time they gave me something to drink I was like 12/13. It was a Corona. The first time I smoked was 14/15 but everyone was smoking way before I started like 12/13. Yeah parents were smoking with their kids. By the time 16 came I saw my friend's mom come outside the house and ask her son who was my age to go over and get her a dime bag"

School

Disorganized School

One of the wildest events David recalls happened at Cherry Hill; a parking lot brawl between students from Cherry Hill and The Academy of Inkster. This was a literal parking lot brawl where Academy of Inkster students would make their way over to Cherry Hill to fight whomever they saw. During those parking lot brawls, David witnessed someone's eyes get popped out of their socket, and someone else get hit by a combination lock in the temple of the head.

Cherry Hill closed down the year David graduated. The different activities that David recalls happening at Cherry Hill included security guards having sex with students, teachers, and students' moms. Additionally, students were hiding in the bathrooms during class time. Oak Park was not as bad as Cherry Hill, David says. However, he says that at Cherry Hill there were gangs or at least wanna-be gangs. "I knew a bunch of gangs and drug dealers" David says "and they were about their business."

"Cherry Hill allowed me to get further out of the streets, showed me different places... Showed us different stuff, gave me skills, gave me things that I could learn how to deal with, it gave me acting to that I could use as an outlet, especially after football."

Cherry Hill, in many, ways would be considered an environment that was chaotic and/or disorganized however David is grateful for the different opportunities Cherry Hill exposed him to because in the environments he grew up, where resources were often limited, David started to gain a sense of belonging.

Learning Environment

David's memories of school started in kindergarten because he did not attend preschool. In kindergarten, David recalls there being a lot of fights going on in the other classrooms. When I asked David how he knew this he informed me that the walls in the school were very thin and you could hear everything that was going on in the other nearby classes. David attended Thomas E. Holton Elementary School and he does not recall it being that bad besides a few leaky ceilings. Old Redford Academy always had missing or leaky ceilings no matter if it was summer, winter, or fall. The ceiling tiles were leaking and then falling on the floor. Students did not make it any better because David recalls it always being nasty in the bathrooms with pee all over the place as well as feces all on the toilets. It was nasty with many roaches and centipedes walking around.

After a little more reflection, David realizes that not everything about Old Redford was negative. Old Redford had done something that no other school had yet to do and that was to expand David's thinking. David said it was at Old Redford Academy he gained an interest in other countries and places outside of Detroit and had the opportunity to study French and German.

"I was so filtered in the streets that I thought that was just it", David said.

Following Old Redford Academy, David attended Cherry Hill. He described his teachers as not always positive. Teachers would not teach but place lessons on PowerPoint and just sit there, turn on their music, rock back and forth, ask if students were finished with the notes, rock back and forth, ask the students if they had any questions, and continue rocking back and forth. The teachers would give a test afterwards but anyone paying attention would pass the test

because all you had to do was memorize the answers. “I did well in school because I got used to memorizing things.”

However, not every learning environment was like Old Redford’s or Cherry Hill. Oak Park had Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Oak Park also had a lot of activities that students could get involved in. David mentioned taking advantage of various clubs, started acting, helped to restart Student Government, and found value in volunteering around the city of Detroit.

Social Development

David describes his environment as being one where you could not be yourself because there were certain ways of acting that was not appropriate for growing up in Detroit. Being soft in his neighborhood was not acceptable behavior. “They were not having that soft shit,” David said. Therefore, because David had a persona to uphold, he recalls getting into a lot of fights out in the streets, mainly to impress his friends. David says if it was not for his ‘homie’ and his ‘homie’ (friend) spending time with him and schooling him to the streets, he believed he would be dead.

After spending time with his main ‘homie,’ David said he learned how to better use his size and would always wear the intimidation face which he found made people not want to mess with him. This is not who David really was but felt he had to become to avoid getting hurt. David characterizes himself as an emotional kid who would always wear his heart on his sleeve but had to stop because he did not believe that was accepted among his peers therefore, he learned how to hold everything in so that people would not continue “messaging” with him.

Economic Deprivation

There were times that David felt like an outcast because he did not have certain things. David points out that Old Redford Academy required students to wear a uniform including black socks. David pointed out that this may not seem like a big deal to others but “when your mom is living from paycheck to paycheck socks may be easy to find, but black ones were difficult.” David often found himself feeling embarrassed by his socks and when they had free dress day he was not able to wear nice things. He wore a pair of his old jeans that he had for two or more years and would wear a hoodie to cover up any shirt that he may have worn the days/weeks before.

As mentioned earlier, following Old Redford Academy, David attended Cherry Hill. Attending Cherry Hill had its own struggles. Due to difficulty with transportation it would take David two hours to get to school from his home. David says that he was not allowed to get on the bus because his mom may have started making a little more money. “It was one of those grey areas,” David said, where his mom was not making a lot of money but probably too much for certain forms of assistance.

“8th grade year we got into a slump because we were paying off a lot of things, loans and all this other stuff. It was bad for us. I don’t know, it was such a bad period, eighth grade year, for like finances.”

Community

Disorganized Community

David was exposed to gangs on Brightmoor which is an area in the City of Detroit plagued by violence and other disorganized neighborhood characteristics. It was not alarming for David and his family to hear shootings and witness the burning down of homes in the middle of the night. David was often exposed to the presence of police and even emergency vehicles

including police and emergency sirens. He remembers hearing a lady screaming and he and his mom could sense that she needed some help. His mom called the police and David says the police did not show up for at least three to four hours following his mom's phone call.

David discussed many frustrations growing up in the environments he lived in especially his lack of sleep which was not only often disrupted by outside disturbances but also because he had to wake up very early in the mornings (between 4:30-5:00 AM) because of his mother early shifts. David did his best not to complain because he knew that his mom could not make many changes and had to take whatever job she could.

"It was still not that great of an environment but you could hear a lot of stuff going on outside. At night time it was always a lot of noise; a lot of crazy stuff. I was young at this point but not really understanding what I was seeing and hearing but a lot of people were hanging outside the doors. There was a lot of arguing and stuff."

Economic Deprivation

The community is an extension of one's street and immediate residence. Often times there are not many resources available for youth and others living in poor urban communities to take advantage of. However, for David there was a Recreational Center near his home on 6 Mile. The only amenity that was available was basketball and working out was not available.

"I thought it was for the community? Not a lot of us liked to go there." David said. We would just put up a hoop out in the street." David mentioned having access to other community resources like libraries, which used to be a hangout spot for him and his friends as well as Salvation Army's and food banks. David said he and his family often took advantage of all the resources they could because they were not poor but they were not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination.

Chatham was the area during the bulk of David's growing up and he recalls it being an "ok" neighborhood. The neighborhood was particularly safe for anyone who had a reputation and that reputation might vary from block to block. However, for the most part in Chatham people stayed to themselves and the sense of community was not existent.

David's Final Thoughts

"I think there's a bunch of issues that I feel connect together in this interconnection. I think a big issue is helplessness. Well maybe not helplessness, but we hide behind the excuse of being helpless. Like I said, there are many issues that connect together but everyone is waiting on a savior to come and help them and no one wants to take a step to do something for themselves. They don't understand that if we do the job collectively, put our foot down in this government position, which is supposed to be working for us, we can make one move at one time. Granted, there are not that many opportunities for us out there. So again, there are many issues that plague us as an urban area of society because we don't have that many opportunities to get out there and do more. We don't finish high school and get our GED but we want better jobs. We will stop the excuses from up top then: all the people from on the golf clubs, the club houses, and the country clubs, all those people, who say we're not doing anything, that we are being lazy, we can cut that out.

Education or the lack of knowledge is the root to a lot of issues in our society. I think there are a lot of issues but I am only bringing up two; education and babies raising babies for the fact that we are completing that cycle. How can you teach the baby responsibility when you are not responsible yet? How can you teach your kid how to make it here when you are trying to make it there? The environment that we are in, because we have so many broken, burnt down buildings, just a bunch of broken windows and I think that is an issue because the next

generation is supposed to be ruling this place. We are supposed to set-up our lives for the next generation to do better.

I was not given the same opportunities as people living in Southfield, Bloomfield Hills or those areas but I was given the same opportunities as the people I grew up with. I was presented with opportunities and I took them. I think having faith in God also helped. It may not help all people but I know that who I am is because of God guiding me. David also believed that his belief in God helped him to persevere and believes faith in God can also help others. A lot of people did get in trouble but for some reason I didn't. Those kids would look at me and be like man, go home; you don't need to be around here. The strangers raised me. Detroit raised me.

If I had kids I would not want them to grow up in the same areas I did but I would want them to get the same morals. I would want them to develop the same because granted, from the streets, it is different. It was very dangerous but it teaches you a lot; a lot that you need to get into the real world. Some have it made on easy street but at the same time there is still competition that you have to work your ass off when you are in an urban setting. I think the sense of ambition and determination to do better help you gain from being poor because of those things you have to do to make something out of yourself.

I haven't been able to do certain things as people in better schools have but I think I turned out ok. If I were able to create my own school, it can't be segregated. We have to expose ourselves to other people and cultures. People don't know how to react to differences. I am biased; I want it in an urban setting with the best teachers. I think it's important we shed light on different aspects of life then what these urban kids are seeing. Growing up all young, all kids get to see make it out of poverty are basketball players, rappers and drug dealers. These are our mentors because we don't want to see our moms crying because she can't feed us. We can have

different extracurricular activities, clubs, school government, this, this, and that because you know we trying to get away from that basketball, singing, rapping and stuff. My school would be a k-12; it would take years to teach them what they need to know.”

~ David

David’s Final Thoughts: Researcher’s Reflection

David mentioned a truth that I resonate with - the idea of self-help. He discussed how the issues that residents within Detroit deal with are not entirely their fault. The challenges that persist in Detroit are rooted in deep racial, structural, and political influences. However, David spoke to how people of Detroit can no longer sit around and wait for the government or anyone else to improve Detroit and the livelihood of residents. David expressed that the problems in Detroit can be lessened if people are educated and understand the ramifications of their decision making, which often times affects others (e.g., family members and neighbors) as well. David said that one of the factors that contribute to this perpetual cycle of defeat is the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. David believes that these young women who have kids are often undereducated and are not able to educate their own children and provide them with the adequate tools to succeed because they themselves have not matured and obtained stability educationally and/or financially to support themselves, let alone a child or children.

Second Case Study, Dontae

Participant Profile

Dontae recalls his earliest memories growing up in Detroit with his mom and older brother. It was a very rough upbringing with many challenges. Dontae's dad was absent from the home. His mom and dad broke-up when Dontae was about three months old. Although he was too young to remember his mom and dad ever being together, he has a relationship with his dad and spends time with him on occasions. Dontae often compared his mom's home to his dad as quite a contrast.

"My dad's house had a bunch of stuff. He worked as well as my step mom," Dontae acknowledged. However, Dontae remembers the house he grew up in, with his mom, not being that great. He had to often frequent the Salvation Army for clothes and other necessities. Dontae has had many different experiences, not always the most memorable but many were due to the lack of resources and enduring economic hardship, Dontae recalls living in eight different locations: Seven Mile and Bentley, Seven Mile and Braille (Brightmoor Community), Seven Mile and Stout, Hartford, Grand River and Wyoming, Elmira and Wyoming, Six Mile and Mansfield, and Grand River and Columbus (Dexter area) neighborhoods.

Following Dontae's birth and release from the hospital he lived with his mom and dad on Seven Mile and Bentley. However as mentioned earlier, his mom and dad broke-up when he was three months. When they broke up Dontae, his mom, and brother moved to Seven Mile and Braille which he recalls as being a very memorable time because of the number of children on the block that he and his brother could play with. During this time Dontae mentions a transformation happening in the lives of his family because his mom found a boyfriend who really wanted them to live in a better neighborhood. However, what started off as a great

experience was coupled with difficult ones as well. The relationship between Dontae and his mom's boyfriend became arduous; the relationship became violent and filled with many threats. They moved from house to house, lived in conditions that were not really fit to live, however they had no choice. His mom and her boyfriend ended their relationship resulting in family stress.

The neighborhoods often exposed Dontae and his siblings to gang activity, increased violence and other challenges. However, during many residential moves, Dontae attended four schools. Those schools include McKinney Elementary, Langston Hughes Academy of Performing Arts, Western Technical Academy, and Western International. As Dontae progressed through school successfully, he got involved in extracurricular activities, met friends and continued to find self-worth regardless of his "awkward" size (Dontae stands over six feet tall and weighs about 300 pounds or more).

Home

Disorganized Home

When Dontae stepped outside of his home he recalls the house they were living in at the time had a basketball rim in the backyard with a burned down and abandoned garage. However, Dontae did not really notice the garage was a problem; he was a child and just liked playing. "While we were living on Seven Mile and Braille we moved because my mom started a relationship with a guy and seemed as if he wanted to help us as best as possible". His mom later married him and while they were living with his stepdad, they went without lights for a while. Then Dontae's stepdad hooked up the electricity illegally, and they had lights. Dontae also mentioned that his stepdad hooked up cable for free.

During this time, Dontae recall's there were seven people living in a house that had three bedrooms, one upstairs and two downstairs. Following Seven Mile and Stout, Dontae and his family moved to a six bedroom home on Hartford. "This was the first time I had privacy," Dontae said. What used to be seven people living in one house increased to nine. "It was me, my momma my Dashia, my little sister, Jackie, that's my cousin Violet, my cousin Jodie, my cousin, my auntie her husband, and one of my cousins friends because they didn't have a place apparently. Yeah nine people was living in one house so it was like really compact." When I asked Dontae where he slept, he said that he and his mom slept in the basement in a tent. He mentioned that she would just put down on the floor a lot of comforters and slept in the tent every night and Dontae said that he was, for a while, sleeping on the couch but his aunt no longer wanted him sleeping on the couch and therefore he had to sleep in the basement with his mom.

Dontae said after some time passed, his mom got tired of staying with his aunt and they moved to a one bedroom apartment on Wyoming and Elmira. Dontae slept on a futon while his mom slept in the bedroom. Dontae calls this the worst house he has ever lived in because of all the roaches. Dontae and his family moved again and this time they moved to Six Mile and Mansfield. Dontae described this neighborhood as being a good one. There were no abandoned houses and people would always keep their yards manicured. However, their stay on Six Mile and Mansfield was short, moving to Seven Mile not a year later.

When asked to paint a visual picture of what living on Seven Mile was like, Dontae described that he could see houses on the other block from his house because all the houses directly in front of him were all gone. Also, Dontae recalls living next to a "trap" house. A trap house is a house that is known to engage in illegal activities, like selling drugs. This trap house later got raided.

Following the house on Seven Mile, Dontae and his family moved to Grand River and Wyoming. On Grand River and Wyoming the experiences were more or less the same; gang activity and abandoned houses. Living on Grand River and Wyoming was only temporary. After just a short stay, Dontae and his family move to Grand River and Columbus, which Dontae recalls as being the most memorable. This house is located off of Dexter which Dontae described as the place where most of the deaths happen in Detroit. "If you walk outside of my house on Grand River and Columbus there are three abandoned houses to my left and right."

Social Development

Dontae had a very difficult time making friends. He often would stay in the house and play video games. If Dontae's brother was not around to keep him company he did not engage in much play with other children. However, Dontae knew a lot of kids because the same kids that he knew from the neighborhood were the same kids that he attended school with. Dontae says everywhere he went he saw someone he knew. Dontae attributes the fact that his mom worked at McKinney Elementary School as a main reason the students did not befriend him. It was not until Dontae started attending high school he began to meet more people and felt like there were some people his age he could call his friends.

School

Disorganized School

Dontae attended a school with a mix of Black, White, and Mexican students and grew weary of the chaos that students would often create, partly due to different gangs represented within the school. Dontae recalled his friends had a party during their senior year where different gang members came including Bloods, Crips, and Sureños. Sureños is a Mexican dominated gang.

Dontae said that at the parties they would pat people down but this time he was not the one responsible for patting people down at the door to prevent weapons from getting into the party. Consequently, due to their failure to have someone at the door patting people down, a guy pulled a sawed off shot gun from out of his pants, and pointed it in Dontae's face, demanding all the people to back up. Dontae did just as he was told. The young man that he was looking for was not at the party but was pulling up right as people were running out of the house Dontae said. He immediately told the guy to get out of here because someone was looking for him with a gun. Dontae said the young man left. Dontae was done with parties after this one.

Learning Environment

From the start of Dontae's academic career, he had always done well. Dontae's mom was a no-nonsense mom and always took an interest in his education. It may have been because his mom worked at the school and Dontae was always making sure that he was on his best behavior because he knew, if he wasn't, he would be in trouble. One of Dontae's most memorable times was in sixth grade. He was named class valedictorian. He recalls reciting a speech in front of the Detroit Police Captain, Judge Greg Mathis, and others about how he was going to become president. "It was really fun graduating sixth grade."

Dontae refused to take all of the credit for his academic success. He believed his older brother had a lot to do with how well he did in school because he would learn material that his brother would bring home. Dontae would just take his brother's material and learn to do it better.

I asked Dontae if he believed Western Technical Academy and Western International were conducive environments for learning and he replied, "No, it was the average hood school, kids cutting the teacher off, like hold on, I don't understand none of this, like start over from the beginning." After a while Dontae noticed that he started to treat the teachers with disrespect as

well and he did not care because he already had a good grade point average to get into a college. He was playing sports and felt like the work was easy.

The teachers did try, Dontae said. He particularly remembers his Spanish and Math teachers asking him questions about schoolwork and his preparation for college. Also, Dontae's principal was very encouraging to him and Dontae believes it was due to the relationship they formed. The same principal he had in high school was the same one he had in middle school.

Social Development

Dontae found it difficult to find friends, especially if his brother was not around. Most people would not talk to him and he reflected on how difficult it was for him in elementary school. But he attributed his later activity in football and developing his personality by telling jokes and bringing candy to school as turning points for him socially. People never seemed to befriend him but that changed when Dontae got to tenth grade. He became the 'man.' After a few jokes, which were sometimes disrespectful to teachers and other people, in his mind, he was cool.

Dontae, although never feeling as if anyone would accept him for who is was, found the courage to join the baseball team at Western International; he built many friendships during this time. Western International's student body was predominately Mexican with other ethnic groups. Dontae knew all of the Black students that attended Western because they either played football and/or basketball and Dontae was involved in those sports as well. However, before attending Western, Dontae did not know any Mexican's and was surprised at how they took a liking to him. However, he was overwhelmed by their acceptance and the fact that he was being exposed to another culture gave him an outlook on life that he never had before.

When I asked Dontae about his most memorable experience he said it was his coach. The story begins after his coach dropped him off at home one evening after practice. Dontae said his coach was concerned about his living conditions. The coach did not like where they lived and said that he had to figure something out for them. Dontae said he responded to his coach saying it's nothing that he can do about his living conditions and that it is what it is. A week following the conversation Dontae had with his coach Dontae's mom received a phone call from the Athletic Coordinator expressing their concerns about his living conditions and stated that they had a house for the family to move into. After some time passed and conversations continued between Dontae's coach and his mom they moved into a house that his coach and others found for them. Dontae was very thankful for this and has had a soft spot in his heart for his coach for what he did for his family.

Economic Deprivation

As Dontae reflected on his school experiences in Detroit, he is convinced that the school and teachers really did try to help, especially with college preparation but often remembers an issue of limited resources. A big disappointment for him was that his classes rarely received updated books. "It would be the same book every year," He knew that other schools were getting new books every year.

Community

Disorganized Community

Not only was the neighborhood filled with disorganization but Dontae recalled the smell of the neighborhood being unpleasant. He believed a water pipe or sewage system had broken causing the stench. The smell was poignant. After a while people would forget about it until they left and came back into the community.

Dontae, because of all the gang activity around him, believed that he could have always joined a gang but could not bring himself to do it. One, his mother worked at the school he was attending, two, he refused to be a follower and lastly, his mom had too many restrictions. Dontae came to the conclusion that he would never be able to participate in a gang because his mom required that he be in the house before the street lights came on and “no gang is in the house before the street lights come on,” Dontae laughed.

Economic Deprivation

Dontae remembers living on Grand River and Columbus and recalling that each time he went out of his house there would be a group of people around. Dontae and his family had to walk to the grocery store and it was not of convenience. His family did not have a car and therefore had to walk ten blocks to get to the grocery store. Dontae also recalled that the places he lived in were never places where you felt like you were a part of a community. There were no block parties and no neighborhood watch groups.

Dontae’s Final Thoughts

“I knew I was poorer than most and I knew my momma had a spending problem. We was basically living like we was rich when we wasn’t. If you see my pictures when I was a kid all my clothes were humongous, they came from Salvation Army and my brother, I remember one time when I was younger all my coats used to come about right down here (showing me where on his arm) and I would tuck my shirt in so people would not be like ‘why your shirt so big?’ I was poorer than others and I knew that I had to play my cards better. I did not get the same opportunities as other kids; they didn’t have to watch their back every five seconds. They could just go outside and play and not have to worry about some other kid wanting things and trying to fight me because I got it; a chain, shoes, especially shoes or just an area where they wanted to sit

in. Everybody don't get the same opportunities so I just feel like everybody just need to make the best out of each opportunity and I wouldn't trade my family or who I am for the world. I like the person I am and never wanted to be anybody different. You can keep all the privilege and I know I had to work for everything I have. I know I work harder than them so I just take this opportunity differently.

I think the issues for Detroit and why things continue to be the way it is, is because of pride because I still get flashes of it. Somebody might say something to me and I just be like don't talk to me stupid, why would you talk to me stupid? I think it's just pride like if somebody beat my cousin up, I'm about to go kill this guy. Somebody touch your sister you can't go talk to them, you got to go kill them, just basically like I will kill you at the end, you know? You not gonna disrespect people. People will do whatever to not feel disrespected. Or if you can make them feel like a punk, if you can make yourself look more like a man, people won't mess with you.

If I had children I would want them to grow up in the same neighborhood because I know it would make them tougher and ready for the world. Some people's lives is so peachy, they get all the money. 16th birthday they get their car, they get this, they get that. If I did have a car I would go in it with my mom and then it's not mine it's my family car. I know kids my age was not thinking like that I know some kids my age get money and probably be like I'm going to go and get the new J's (Michael Jordan's). I was in school with the same pair of Air Force Ones because my family did not have the funds for J's you know, that would be one thing.

I wished I was exposed to a better/more focused environment. A lot of teachers cared more about you coming than what you learned. What I did not get about people, if you were at school half the time, come to class and just chill, they not gone say nothing. You just pull out a

piece of paper and sit it on your desk and they not gone say nothing to you. So it's like I did not really see why people skipped school.

Based on my experiences in school I would wish that other kids would have more updated books, better teachers. In my physics class I had a foreigner as a teacher and I'm not saying a foreigner is bad but you could not understand anything he said. I don't feel like that was a good combo, that's where they messed up at. You putting them in school with kids that when they don't get the material up top they just gone stop messing with it.

I also wish we had playgrounds and basketball courts; good basketball courts. The ones I used to go to had no nets or at least chain nets. They would be like one good rim on their rusted. The whole floor cracked all the way in the middle. I went to Palmer Park and would get into fights. There were no bathrooms around so grown men, when they finished playing basketball with the kids, would just pee anywhere.”

~ Dontae

Dontae's Final Thoughts: Researcher's Reflection

Dontae recognized that he was very poor growing up and made a conscious decision that he would not allow his experiences to be an excuse to blame others and not succeed in life. Dontae felt that people have to own their experiences and figure out the best ways of rising to the top. He knew that he may have to work harder compared to others, and although it may not be fair, complaining about it will not change it. David believed that there is a sense of pride that those in Detroit have, which leads to violence. Yes, people are very prideful in Detroit and who they are and associate themselves with means a lot to them. I wonder where this sense of pride comes from. This idea that one cannot be disrespected or else there will be retaliation to the point of death, is possibly an understudied phenomenon. I wonder if this sense of pride is grounded in

wanting to have a sense of life's purpose. It is almost as if violence has become a byproduct of this extreme pride. However, the challenge for most poor people is that they don't have a lot of material possessions to show off, therefore who or what they decide to hold close to them and give meaning too, allows them to have a sense of purpose.

Third Case Study, Nate

Participant Profile

"I say all in all I lived the urban life but they say my parents were protecting me from a certain life or certain friends. I feel like my dad being a cop in the city played a big part of me growing up in Detroit."

Nate, a product of a two-parent family home, has lived in one house his whole life. He was the product of the nineties and although his home environment was more stable than most young males in urban environments, Nate's environment had very similar challenges. Nate grew up on the east side of Detroit, in the Forest and Van Dyke area with his mom, dad, older brother, little sister, grandmother, and uncle. Nate described the home he grew up in as a normal house; three stories and three bedrooms. "A normal house for the city," Nate says.

Nate believes that his experiences growing up in Detroit were sheltered due to his dad's occupation as a cop. Nate articulates that while he felt safe in and around his home, his parents, unlike other parents of his friends, demanded that he be in the house at a certain time, not play in the street or even goes to other streets to play if he was not supervised by an adult. Nate continued to describe his neighborhood as a safe haven with kept up lots and a nice path of cement leading to the basketball rim in his backyard. "The neighborhood I grew up in was a working/middle class neighborhood."

Although Nate describes his neighborhood as nice and having a perspective of the city that some don't, there were experiences that Nate grew accustomed to. Very often the cars would

get stolen out of the driveway of Nate's home as well as "random" fights from "random" neighborhood individuals. He saw people sell drugs as well as use drugs. This became a frequent sight, especially when Nate was allowed to go to the store.

"About once or twice a week you would see a crack head high or something, tweaking, coming down the street. Because there's a store around the corner, an alleyway, crack heads would get real high. Umm you will see it. Needles and everything, crack pipes left in the alley. You could smell it too, "smelt like boo boo" (feces).

Prior to coming to Michigan State University, Nate attended Plymouth Daycare, Milton Elementary, Riley Education Center, Martin Luther King Jr. High School, and Cass Technical High School, which is where Nate graduated. Nate recalls Milton being a great time for him during Kindergarten. Nate described his time as having no care in the world and having a white teacher but not ever thinking that was a problem or anything different about that. Following Milton, Nate attended Riley Education Center which played a large role in developing his character and introducing him to lifelong friends. As Nate progressed through school he was also exposed to other children who came from various walks of life. These exposures sometimes questioned Nate's sense of comfort and introduction of social class systems.

"You can be broke and have no job but have on nice pair of jeans, designer sweater. People be like, "he must be doing something with his life." You can be in debt up to your eyeballs but the image you portray of yourself. I think it kind of comes down to 'fake it until you make it' but most people don't make it so they just keep faking it."

Home

Disorganized Home

"It was just so great I would say although we're stuck in the middle of poverty stricken, gang and violence neighborhood that block was just so different. Just stand in the middle of the street and just see all of the green tress and greenery. It's just a great place to be being so young."

Nate is very proud of the neighborhood he grew up. He and his family have lived in the same house since he was born. It's actually his grandmother's home. His parents thought it was

best they move in to help his grandmother who was ailing in heath and also to take care of his uncle who has Down's syndrome. When I asked Nate to describe visually what one would see if they were standing on his front porch he said that there were two abandoned homes but one they actually tore down. There were some open lots on his street, but he mentioned that people had bought them and made gardens out of them or just fenced them in as an extension of their own yards.

Nate mentioned living near Belle Island and often hearing different sounds, especially during the summer. Belle Island hosted events (e.g., The Grand Prix with loud cars, sporting events or military jets) which were just 20 miles down the shore. However, not all the sounds that were heard were of positive. Nate said he would often hear sirens but believes that due to his over exposure to sirens after a while. "What was so weird to hear became even weirder when you did not hear them." Gunshots were also a constant noise that was heard near Nate's home. "You would only hear them at night," Nate said. He believed that the shootings were coming from the park that was around the corner from his house. Other than that, kids were very happy and would continue to play without a care. When it came to smells Nate said during the summer time someone was always grilling and cars were either zooming down the streets and the engines from the boats on Belle Island could be heard.

Due to Nate's dad being a police officer he often felt that he would always hear about various things going on with the jobs of police officers and can recall a point when the presence of police was decreasing. The effect of police presence made the neighborhood "open territory," Nate said. He recalled there being gangs in the neighborhood but did not believe that they really threatened anyone. Nate believed that they were just kids being kids. Other than those things

Nate also recalled seeing drug dealers, abandoned homes, just right outside of his street and “people who just fell on the wrong side of luck.”

“It’s to the point now my dad has to park his car or my brother’s car on the end. He has to lock the Fusion in the back yard with a chain lock. I remember the last time they stole the car my mom said she had to take my sis to school literally 7 in the morning, got back home 7:15, 8 to go somewhere and the car was gone.”

Social Development

Nate always had peers around him and remembers his fondest memories growing up at about age 13 when all of his friends were in the neighborhood and his older brother was still at home and playing football and basketball and just being happy. Nate and his friends would play in either his or a friend’s backyard until late in the evening and when they were done they would just lounge on someone’s porch until they had to go in the house. When I asked Nate what were some sources of stress growing up he could only recall the older people being mad at he and his friends for playing football on their grass.

School

Disorganized School

Nate’s experience in school as being an honor’s student often prevented him from experiencing a lot of the chaos that was happening within other classrooms. However, one thing that one cannot ignore is the commute to school and the surrounding environment. Nate recalled having an asthma attack and going to the hospital while enrolled at Milton. Following this event, Nate’s parents dis-enrolled him and his brother due to health concerns they had because of the abandoned building that was right next door to the school. Nate mentioned that the students would often play near this building all the time from a conversation the school had with his parents about the health and safety concerns; school officials informed Nate’s parents that

tearing down the building could pose an even greater threat to one's health because the building has been abandoned for a long time and the exposure to asbestos could be high risk.

He described Cass Technical High School as the worst school environment that he attended. The school itself was great and Nate spent three and a half years there. The learning environment was good and the building was also nice but the situation outside of the building was chaotic. There were vacant buildings and there were always 'crack heads.' The students would always tease them. "It was really drug infested," Nate said. The exposure to police was frequent. Nate contributes these experiences as just a downtown experience where things are pretty much expected to occur in a downtown area. Also, because the school was downtown and close to Comerica Park (major league baseball) there would often be a lot of traffic and cars. Cars were often broken into with various parts (e.g., catalytic converters, radios) stolen.

Learning Environment

Nate's memories of school began at Plymouth Daycare remembering his granddad coming to pick him up. He remembers being so happy to see him and things just being great as he learned the basics of education; his a, b, c's, 1, 2, 3's, 911 and stop, drop, and roll (fire drill). The daycare was located in the basement of a church 10 minutes from his house.

The learning environment became important to Nate once he got to high school. Nate began to notice differences when he attended King High School for one semester. He described it as not being a bad school but a bad school. When I asked Nate what he meant by that statement, he explained that the teachers really tried but the students did not care to learn Nate confessed that he often felt fearful that he could get his "ass" beat at any time. "The kids were rough" said Nate and being small in stature, he feared that someone would try and fight him because he knew that people never fought someone their own size. Nate recalled there always being fights from

students who were in gangs. However, gangs were not the only issue at King. Students would just break out in a fight and the security staff would use their pepper spray to break-up fights or if students had disagreements with them.

According to Nate, fights occurred every day at King High School. “You knew there was a fight, you would be in class and there would be a big mob of kids running in a certain direction.” Nate expressed his gratitude for being in honor classes because he believed he had teachers that although they may have been placed in difficult teaching positions, felt that they really did their best to make sure that the students in their classes learned, and the teachers knew how to control their class unlike other teachers. Overall, Nate felt like in some ways, the schools he attended prepared him for college but now that he is here at MSU realizes he was as not as prepared as his fellow school mates. However, Nate gives credit to his parents for doing their best to provide him the best education they could within their means while growing up

Social Development

Nate was involved in different extracurricular activities during his time in school. He played soccer and ran track. Nate was fortunate for the schools he attended because he met two of his best friends during his academic years. Nate was proud of the fact that one of his best friends is a white guy, but if you spoke to him on the phone, Nate said, you would not know it because he talks “black.” While Nate attended Martin Luther King High School he felt that there were some differences between him and the other students. Nate would say that he was not better than anyone but the students at the school were not very serious about their education and did not bond with anyone there. He felt that because he was small in stature he always had to watch his back because he feared that he would probably get beat up at any time.

Economic Deprivation

Often times the teachers would use their own money for teaching supplies when resources were not adequate or available. Nate recalled his class having outdated books and inadequate technology. Technology was not always a part of Nate's educational experience and he believes that was a potential setback for him and his classmates.

"We still had to learn off the old projectors from the 80's," says Nate.

As Nate reflected on the lack of resources in the schools he attended, he interrupted his statement with "I wish I was exposed to white people." Nate explained that the resources and experiences he had were different from his sisters, who attended schools outside of Detroit. Nate's younger sister went to a private school where she was the only Black person in her class. When she came home with similar work he realized how better prepared she was. Her experiences outside of school were also different. He mentioned that his sister was always invited to events that would expand her understanding of culture or the world. Parents from his sister's school were more involved in school outings and the parties were even different. Whereas a party where his sister went was filled with fun and everyone enjoying one another's company, Nate described his parties as filled with drama (e.g., people wanting to fight and compete with one another in some kind of way).

Community

Disorganized Community

Nate is very proud of the neighborhood he grew up in. However, Nate recalled many things that happened as the neighborhood deteriorated. There were often random acts of violence that happened near Nate's home, such as kids fighting in the driveway. He is not sure why people always seemed to pick their driveway but it was the spot for fights, he said.

When the city cut the wages of police officers, his father had to work longer hours. This was the time he recalled when fights increased, more kids seem to get into trouble, and car thefts increased. Their cars were stolen multiple times right out of their driveway. Nate described another act of violence that endangered those who were home. Reportedly, one guy was shooting another person when someone tried to stop him. The guy with the gun ran to Nate's home (with no socks or shoes on) with apparent signs of having been involved in a physical beating, Nate's mom called his dad (who was upstairs) to inform him of what was going on at home and his dad came down to find the guy hiding in their back yard.

"I remember the guy running and I remember my dad using very strong language and telling the man to get out of here and telling my brother to go and get his gun. Then he came downstairs and the guy would not leave and my dad was sitting there. He does not have his gun drawn but he let the guy know if something come down to it I'm trained to use it."

There was a time when Nate's mom was taking his little sister to school and after dropping off his little sister she returned home for a little while to get something and the car was gone when she went back outside. Nate says that his family was the one of the only families on the street that consistently bought new cars so people would often ask him if his dad was a drug dealer. Cars have been stolen so frequently out of their driveway that not they strategically park the cars in a way that no one can steal. They had to park some cars in the backyard with a chain lock.

Economic Deprivation

It was not atypical to see bullet proof homes, stores, gas stations, and restaurants in the neighborhood where Nate lived. Wendy's, which was next to their home, required patrons to literally to walk in, get the food, and walk out. Access to community centers, parks, and nice restaurants required Nate and his family to drive a distance away from their home.

“Yeah when I got up here (Michigan State) I walked to the store. I live in Brody you know? QD, I walked in and was like, “Whoa, there’s an attendant not behind glass” because there was no interaction in Detroit with people. Yeah, I can touch you, hand my money directly to you. That was very interesting.”

I asked Nate if he and his family took advantage of any public service agencies and he mentioned that he would often go to the library if he needed to do research but other than that he felt that they had most things they needed to succeed academically at home like computers, tablets, smart phones or any other technology to do well. Downtown there was a YMCA, Nate says but it was not meant for people in the city because it was not affordable. The membership fee for a family would be like \$1,000 Nate said. In his neighborhood he actually recalls a place called Basketball Warehouse which was an old factory where someone created lines and had cement trash cans. Nate believes this resource was good and kept some of the neighborhood kids occupied. However, if one were to compare Basketball Warehouse to *Joe Dumars’ Fieldhouse* located in the suburbs there would be no comparison Nate said.

Nate’s Final Thoughts

“When you talk about what causes this perpetual cycle of defeat, I feel like it’s all about what you see and what people tell you. If you watching stuff on TV and people always say “oh yeah, you’re going to be dead at 25, you’re going to be in jail by 18;” not saying that that’s what going to happen to you but if that’s all you hear they say, that’s what’s going to happen to you. It’s like conditioning and grooming yourself to put yourself there. People grow up in worse situations all across the world and they get out. You growing up in not the best place for opportunity but where resources are so widely available to you-- it’s just breaking that mindset. Nobody tells you not to go to school. I had friends whose parents did not want to take them to

school so they would wake up and catch the bus or find a ride. You defeat yourself, nobody is holding you back.

I would just tell them, look, Tiger Woods is a Black man who grew up in a predominately white society, and possibly became the greatest in a sport that was not designed for Black man. Nobody stops you from achieving, you know. They (white people) gave us the means but they know we are not going to take advantage of it. They say if you ever want to hide anything from a Black person you put it in a book. I feel like they should prove it wrong. I'm not the best person and I don't always read books and everything but if you threw a book at me I could write a paper, no problem. Nobody told these kids to wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go and stand in line for the new Jordan's. Nobody had to motivate you to post 75 pictures a day on Instagram; it's something that you wanted so you find the means to do it.

I never wanted to trade places with people from the suburbs because they don't like to have fun. Ain't nothing like just being poor and having fun. Not saying not having the means to have fun but you know, parents didn't buy us a car at 16. It felt good to just mob out with your homies (friends) and walk for 5 or 6 miles to go and do something. I really loved my life! Sometimes it would be cool to experience that but on the other hand its white kids wanting to live in an urban area. I guess I would only want to trade places for the experience of having friends yes, but for the environment, no.

My ideal neighborhood would be in the suburb with a nice group of friends, no danger, the kids could play outside. A lovable environment they can enjoy. If I had kids I would want them to have the same experiences as I had. No I wouldn't. I don't want to have to wake up one morning and be like you can't go to school because someone stole the car. I want them to have the experience just not the full thing. I want them to know more or less this is where your father

grew up and even though you're not here you are not any different just because we live in a big house, does not make you any better or worse.

I want to be humble even if I do get rich. I'm not going to spoil my kids. I want my kids to have an appreciation. It's like that kid that killed those four people drunk driving and got a slap on the wrist because his parents were rich. If that was a Black kid he would have gotten life. If you take a White or Black kid from a poor neighborhood who would have killed four people while drunk driving the charges would still be lighter for the white kid. There is a kid in the ghetto who doesn't know the consequences of his actions so what makes him any different."

~ Nate

Nate's Final Thoughts: Researcher's Reflection

Nate is a leader on campus and is often in positions of encouraging students to do their best academically and stop blaming others. Nate mentions the over exposure to negative and the power of words as major sources of Detroit's problems, especially among Black men. When I reflect on Nate's thoughts I think about this idea of self-fulfilling prophecy: if you always hear you won't succeed, that you are going to be no good just like your dad, that you are bad, or perhaps that you are a product of your environment, you begin, as a young child, to believe these things are true of you and begin to reflect these ideals as truth. Nate talks about how those within Detroit never see people who have to the pressures of the city and succeed legally. The stories they hear are only visual reference is from athletes. Unfortunately, this stereotype persists.

In the minds of young people they see sports as being the "ticket" for them to get out of the living situation they are in, without always understanding the process; they see the end result and that is what they aspire to. Lastly, Nate mentioned often this idea of race and its importance in the influence of perspective. Nate believes that those in power and have the resources will try

and implement certain practices because they know that those within the city will not take advantage of them yet they do it because they don't want to be accused for not trying to help. Also, Nate makes it clear that Blacks, when compared to Whites, are often treated differently, negatively.

Fourth Case Study, Sabastian

Participant Profile

Eight Mile and Rosemont, the west side of Detroit, begins the memories for Sabastian. Sabastian grew up in a home where he was the eldest of two, and living with both parents. Sabastian recalls growing up in a very urban environment in a four-bedroom house with an upstairs and downstairs. Although the house was in an urban environment, Sabastian recalls there was not much crime on his block. The block was filled with older people and neighbors who looked out for one another. He described it as "a real community." Yet, because they lived very close to 8 Mile, which is a very busy intersection, therefore parents had to keep their eyes open and make sure their kids were safe. Sabastian described his experience growing up middle class. His dad worked and his mom ran her own daycare inside of the home. Life began to change during the tenth grade, when his parents separated, resulting in Sabastian, his sister and mom moving to Joy Road. The neighborhood was very similar to their previous home where neighbors got along with one another.

I asked Sabastian to recall his fondest memories growing up in the environment he did and at first Sabastian said he could not recall because he was overwhelmed by the separation of his parents. Although Sabastian was dealing with the separation of his parents, he said that his parents were strict and encouraged him to do well in school and not let his schoolwork be affected by the abrupt changes in his family. However, "this is when things got real," said

Sabastian. He remembers getting into fights and getting jumped on by other boys Sabastian attended Einstein Elementary, Roosevelt Middle, and Oak Park High School. Although Sabastian and his family lived in an urban neighborhood in the City of Detroit he did not attend Detroit Public Schools (DPS). The decision to attend Oak Park High School was driven in part by the closing of DPS schools and the creation of open enrollment at surrounding community schools.

Sabastian described the neighborhoods surrounding the schools he attended as being disorganized with kids smoking outside and frequenting abandoned buildings. Inside the schools, hallway fights were common. Sabastian characterized these students as dysfunctional. However, Sabastian remained true to his parents' teachings of taking his schoolwork serious.

"I don't want to toot my own horn but I was in many classes with the honors kids and being as smart as I was, it wasn't a lot of us. Basically you'll have honors classes throughout the day but it was like so weird the drop off because honors made you critically think and then you have your regular classes, you just sit'n there."

Sabastian would participate in various school-sponsored activities because there were not a lot of neighborhood opportunities. While there were YMCA's, parks, and malls, they were described as unsafe and undesirable. Church was only place he and his family frequented and felt safe.

Home

Disorganized Home

"While you are there (Detroit) you have panhandlers and people you got to watch out for because it's Detroit and you see it. It's real. It was not necessarily the block but the community. The stuff you hear there, the fact that you have to look behind, over your shoulder and it should not be that way. It's annoying. Who wants to have to look over their shoulder and keep their guard up?"

When I asked Sabastian to describe his (Joy Road) block to me as if he were standing outside of his home, he began with the home that used to be next door to him where kids lived

and him and his brother played. Currently the house is vacant as well as the house that was next to that one. He also mentioned the corner house that all the kids were told to stay away from.

The home on Eight Mile also had two vacant homes on the side of the house and he remembers his dad always cleaning up the lots when they were littered with trash or needed yard work done. Sabastian said he had a curfew and had to be in the house before the street lights came on – something that was also required of his friends.

There was a very distinct smell coming from the corner house when Sabastian walked by or played in the yard. He later came to realize that it was a Marijuana smell. While Sabastian was living on Rosemont he recalled there break-ins on the street behind him causing their family stress, as they always had to be vigilant about their surroundings. His parents would make sure to lock up everything. Fortunately, they were never victimized. While the break-ins were nerve racking, the sounds of gunshots were frequent, or at least that's what Sabastian thought. After a while Sabastian said he was unsure if the noises he heard were gunshots because of their frequency. But he sometimes admits wondering if he had heard fire crackers. Police sirens and fire trucks were a constant background noise as well as cars traveling on the Southfield Freeway, which was only three blocks away from their home. "It wasn't like a peaceful place...it was loud" Sabastian said.

From the porch on American and Joy there was not a house directly across the street. However, Sabastian was not sure if the homeowners next door owned the property or not because the grass would be kept up. There was a family flat next to the vacant lot and on the other side of the house was another vacant house. On the corner was a church and across the street from there was a liquor store. Sabastian recalls a house that someone continuously tried to burn down. This house was two houses down from where Sabastian lived. To this day, the house

is still the same – a burnt shell. No one has done anything about it. Mugging was common and forced people always to be aware of their surroundings. When Sabastian began driving he was told by his dad to make sure that his car had enough gas because he did not want him stopping after 8pm to get gas.

Social Development

Sabastian described his neighborhood as being inhabited by mostly older people and everyone knew each other. Children were allowed to play together on the streets. Going to neighborhood homes was permitted because of the familiarity with neighborhood residents. Families that moved into the neighborhood were welcomed by existing residents.

Despite the neighborhood friendliness, there was one home that families avoided. It was the corner house where Charles lived with his son, which was suspected to be a drug house. All the kids looked up to little Charles because he had nice things and would also have girls over. Sabastian was glad that his dad was around and he was not exposed to a lot of the really bad things. Growing up Sabastian enjoyed playing basketball and found most of his friends playing basketball or some other sport. Some of those same young men remain Sabastian's best friends.

School

Disorganized School

When I asked Sabastian to describe the environment of the school he attended, he began with his high school stating that the school was located across the street from some houses and to the left there was a parking lot with different professional offices. Down the street was a liquor store. He recalls often picking up his little brother who was attending Einstein. Sebastian did not describe the neighborhood as having significant issues.

Learning Environment

“Do as I say or do as somebody say because they’re older than you.” This was his parents’ motto and he hated it. This motto is the same motto they had for school and his parents were strict about this. Sabastian credits his parents for his beliefs about school as he says they were very particular.

Sabastian did not have many negative experiences in elementary school. He believed elementary school was just like anyone else’s experiences but he remembers there was a lot of chaos once he got to middle school. There was a new principal at the time and although the principal was trying to handle things as best as he could he was dealing with a jungle. Students were always getting kicked out for fights or threats to the school. However, Sabastian was doing well academically and was proud that he had a steady girlfriend at the time. Unfortunately, just because one was doing well academically did not mean that one was not exempt from fights. Sabastian recalls getting jumped in ninth grade by a bunch of high school students for no apparent reason.

While attending Einstein, Sabastian recalls the teachers trying to practice starting in fifth grade, how students would switch classes and have to get to the classes by themselves in middle and high school without supervision. Sabastian mostly remembers his fifth grade teacher and how she loved reading to them and how they would gather on a United States’ carpet map and he would always sit on Florida. Roosevelt Middle School was wild, Sabastian said. Fortunately, after a while the principal who he had during his elementary and middle school years came to that school and things got better. However, the principle had to deal with a lot of students skipping class and the eighth graders would always pick on the sixth and seventh graders. Additionally, eighth graders would always smoke right outside of the school building. This was

an issue for Sabastian because students would always disrupt class or try and make you smoke with them.

I asked Sabastian about his desire to learn and how he succeeded in school? He said it was rough and that he would not toot his own horn but he prided himself for being among the honor students. While in honors classes students were challenged to think critically about the things they were learning, non-honors classes were not described as not doing much at all. Oak Park High School was a zoo. Kids frequently skipped class, yelled at teachers, were involved in fights and doing things that always disturbed others.

Advanced math courses (e.g., calculus, geometry) were described as horrible because of the teacher. Sabastian described how his peers at nearby school districts were better prepared from their freshman year to succeed. Had it not been for The Center for the Advanced School of The Arts for his AP classes (AP statistics, Criminal Justice, Astronomy, and Forensic Science), he expressed that he would have been ill prepared for his undergraduate curriculum.

Social Development

Dr. Drew, Sabastian's former fourth and fifth grade teacher, was a chess coach. Dr. Drew not only taught Sabastian how to play chess but tutored him in different subjects. Dr. Drew assumed the role of mentor in his early experience.

Economic Deprivation

As Sabastian reflected on life here at Michigan State University, he says he felt handicapped sometimes compared to his roommate. Sabastian believes that has to work harder because the high school he attended did not prepare him adequately and the classes were designed to make sure that people passed with little effort. Sabastian has high standards for himself and is a hard worker. He says that when he gets a 70 percent on an exam he feels as if he

has failed whereas his friends are satisfied with that grade. His mother gets frustrated when Sebastian expresses his own personal disappointment in his grades.

Community

Disorganized Community

In the neighborhood Sebastian lived, he and his family often heard of robbing's and people getting shot. Fortunately, Sebastian did not know anyone who was a victim of violence. However, Sebastian recalls a time when his uncle was killed by his uncle's "friend." This was a difficult time for Sebastian's family but he is grateful that nothing bad had happened to his immediate family. As far as death is concerned, Sebastian recalls a girl in his high school falling from the balcony of an apartment building due to the drowsiness from medication she was taking. Other than these situations, he had not experienced personal or violent deaths.

Economic Deprivation

There were no YMCA's near Sebastian's home. However, there was a library that he would frequent to check out video games. He never went for books unless he had to because he was not a fan of reading. Sebastian also mentioned that there were no quality grocery stores in his area. The only grocery store that he can recall was on American and it was not in walking distance, nor does he believe there were many Black owned businesses, which was very important to him. There were no parks that were really in the area except for the park that was associated with Henry Ford High School. However, neither he nor his friends ever utilized the park for recreation. Rather, it was used as a short cut for them to get where they wanted to go quicker.

Sabastian's Final Thoughts

“I believe what causes there to be this perpetual cycle of defeat in Detroit is a lack of certain morals and optimism because I believe that any of us can easily go that way. I had such a strong support group of family and especially friends. That's another thing so when you talk to people on the streets, they were with the wrong group of friends and now they are on the street. I think it starts with people you surround yourself with. Everybody needs a support group; nobody can do it by themselves. I know certain people may have been brought up running the streets (spending a lot of time outside of the home) but you can't be a thug at 70.

The most stressful issue in Detroit is the threat of violence. My eyes were opened to this after I got jumped (neighborhood peers). After I got jumped I was always paranoid. I believe that's the biggest thing and I believe that's the reason why people do what they do and people don't want to be perceived like they weak and they don't want to be picked on. So because of them being paranoid you hear of kids bringing weapons to school. It's not because kids are bad and it's not how they are brought up, it's how they feel they have to survive. Everybody in Detroit is paranoid and do what they do and act the way they act because of the threat of violence.

Sometimes I do wish I could trade places with others. My peers and family members didn't have two parents so I believe that was one of the big things that was different even though my parents ended up splitting they are still both prevalent in my life. Yeah I wish they were together and wish I could trade with people whose parents are together but it's not something I stay up to cry about but I'm glad I still have both of them in my life because some people don't.

I do not feel that I was given the same opportunities as other kids. I believe that academically the opportunities have been somewhat short. I believe that other surrounding

school districts, like Ferndale, have done things like travel abroad. I know this girl who went to Spain with her Spanish class. I took Spanish for two years and my school did not have that available to us. I believe God does things in a way for a reason so I feel that you are put in certain predicaments.

My ideal childhood would have been one, where my parents were together and I had the 8 Mile friend group I could play basketball with. If I had kids the ideal childhood for them would be for them to not grow-up in the same neighborhood I grew up in. Before I even have kids I want to be in a somewhat comfortable place and my idea of comfortable is not Detroit. I would like something like Huntington Woods, Walled Lake, and something low scale like off the grid type, peaceful. There are problems everywhere and those places are not perfect at all but I believe that growing up with kids would be way better than Detroit.

I believe school is the most important thing for a kid because school is the thing that you spend the whole first 30 years of your life learning and stuff like that. It's what you do learn and start implementing so a good school district would be first and then, you know, having two parents would come in close second. I'm not the one to push anything on anybody but if my kids were to be Christian that would be nice to me too and then just, I think, with all of that stuff come the community feeling which I think is one of things optimal for kids and optimal for me."

~ Sabastian

Sabastian's Final Thoughts: Researchers Reflection

Sabastian talked about this idea of support as being crucial to how well one does in life. As I reflected on Sabastian's thoughts, I realized that support can be positive or negative and that it truly has a strong influence on who one may become. I believe peers are more influential than research is able to provide. I believe that youth are always trying to have a sense of belonging

and will do whatever to be a part of the “in-crowd.” However, the more positive influences one has, the better their chances are of succeeding. As Bronfenbrenner notes, it is not one risk factor that influence’ one’s wellbeing, but an accumulation of risks.

Fifth Case Study, Richard

Participant Profile

When I asked Richard to share his earliest memories of the home he grew up in, he responded with hesitation and almost a whisper saying “I got a lot of bad memories.” Richard recalls his earliest memories on the west side of Detroit, where he insists that all of Detroit is terrible.

“It was like hostile. What I mean, like if you walk up the block there like abandoned houses everywhere and you’d see people who like trying to get over on everybody else. Like if you got on a pair of glasses that cost a lot of money and everybody see them, in that environment more than likely everybody who seeing you like a target so if they see you, with something nice, they want it, might try and take it.”

It all began for Richard on Numbers street at least that is what he referred to the street as. I believe it was 33rd street on the west side of Detroit to be exact, off of Puritan. Richard lived in a single parent home with his mom, brother and other family members. Richard explained how they were either always moving or family members were always coming to live with them. He describes this house being similar to a two-family flat and Richard’s dad lived on Parkside. For a short time Richard lived with his dad on Parkside, which he described as being “pretty fucked up.” Richard lived with seven other people in his father’s home. When I asked Richard if he had his own room, he responded, “hell naw! It was all love basically; basically it was just like a big ass bed.”

Richard’s life was fairly unstable. After numbers street Richard moved to Parkside, Fenkell, Dexter, then back over near 33rd and Campbell, respectively. Richard expressed that

throughout his life he has been exposed to many things. As he got older he would catch the bus to school and saw many vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and experienced hostility in his neighborhood while on the city bus. Richard recalls riding the bus. Some boys got on the city bus almost every day to beat people up and rob them. He mentioned that they would never mess with him and he would not say anything to them but as he reflected on this event, he became upset about the daily harassment people and the lack of response from other passengers. “In Detroit, we are used to people not doing anything.” Because of the frequent moves, Richard was exposed to a variety of schools and learned of other school issues from his peers. Richard attended Corner Stone from first through second grade, Voyager for third and fourth grade, Hope of Detroit for fourth and/or fifth grade, ABT (Richard could not remember what ABT stood for) for fifth and sixth grade, Consortium from seventh through ninth grade. He was expelled from Church Hill his ninth grade year and enrolled in Cass Technical High school, where he graduated. Despite attending these schools, Richard praised his mom for never sending him to a bad school.

Richard always wanted to be outside playing and socializing. If there were girls out playing, Richard wanted to be in the midst of them. Richard was exposed to sexuality very early in life and in most of his conversations he referred to girls and his interaction with them. When I asked Richard of his fondest memories of Detroit he said just growing up in Detroit and the experiences he had with girls. At about the age of 12, Richard mentioned losing his virginity as a bet to his cousin. He engaged in sex while being watched by his cousin. Richard never seemed to do many things by himself and often times seemed to be influenced by his peers to engage in various activities.

Home

Disorganized Home

“Everywhere I lived in Detroit was crazy. Like my brothers and my sister was walking to the gas station and the crack head, I don’t know what the crack head was trying to do but I know they came back to the house running, saying dude tried to chase them with a knife or something for no reason.”

When Richard was living in Parkside he recalls there were a lot of abandoned houses. Across the street from him was an abandoned house. Next to that house were four other abandoned houses. On 33rd that’s all there were. If there were not abandoned buildings there were vacant lots overgrown with grass and weeds. Existing homes were the outlier.

Richard described the neighborhood as a bombed out block at night – there was both emptiness and darkness. Walking through these neighborhoods, Richard felt overwhelmed because the families in these neighborhoods, especially the young people, had to grow up there. “That shit be looking like cursed, low key.”

Mark Twain was another street that Richard lived on and he admits that this area was messed up too. Violence was consistent on Mark Twain and he recalled the younger people in the area being aggressive. There was a high school in the area, but residents had to be aware of getting jumped says Richard. Abandoned houses were a staple in the neighborhood. As Richard got older he noticed that when residents moved, their homes would quickly deteriorate with people stealing metal, copper, or anything they could get for money. Homes that were once occupied quickly became an eyesore with doors kicked off their frames or broken windows – all for a few dollars.

There was a “trap” (drug) house on 33rd and no one could go down there, Richard said. The police would often raid the place and when they did, people would always run through his

grandmother's back yard. My dad would just be like "don't take yall ass down there and that's that," Richard said. However, Richard and his siblings were curious and would go down to the "trap" house anyway. After a while his dad or mom would just tell them the places to avoid and how they were to go the other way if they heard people shooting.

Social Development

Richard may not admit it but peer pressure is a real thing and youth are very easily pressured into doing negative things. On the various streets that Richard grew up on he often found himself with a lot of other kids he could play with and he always had this curiosity about girls. When he went outside to play the girls always caught his eye. Double Dutch was the neighborhood game for them and that's where the young boys would also go to see the girls. Double Dutch would often turn into Truth and Dare, which often turned into Hide and Go Get. Truth and Dare and Hide and Go Get were both games with the intention of guys chasing after the girls and engaging in some form of inappropriate play with each other's bodies. During Hide and Go Get, at the age of 12, Richard said he had sex with a girl – his first sexual activity.

Richard remembers stealing his first car at age 12 when he was with his cousin and younger brother. Richard says that he probably engaged in stealing cars because stealing cars is what guys in this neighborhood did. Although he was exposed to guys stealing cars, he says he stole them because he was eager to drive. This type of activity was attractive to Richard especially when young men in whose company he was always exposed were stealing cars. "Dudes were known for that and used to always fly up the block in stolen cars and stuff". It was not until Richard was threatened with jail by the police he stopped stealing cars.

School

Disorganized School

Richard recalls Consortium was located off of Rosa Parks Boulevard and the environment was very secluded. There were a lot of abandoned buildings surrounding the school. While leaving school one day with his cousins, they were robbed at gun point. He believes it was one of the guys with whom they had played the game of Dice. They played Dice with grown men as early as age 13 before, during, and after school.

Richard's cousin was so upset at being robbed that he planned to put a lock in a sock to beat the person down. A fear that his cousin expressed was that the lock might set off the metal detectors. After some time passed, Richard's cousin aborted his plan of attack on the guys who robbed him because they never returned to school.

Learning Environment

When I asked Richard to share of his learning experiences he began with Voyager Academy. He had good experiences and even believed that the teachers were proud to be there and actually enjoyed teaching. He believed that the experience one has in school is really based on how bad they want it. Richard's attitude about school was to get in and get out. He would complete his homework but copied answers from his peers when taking tests.

Richard was never popular and often came to school with some of the worst clothes on because his family could not afford to buy him the nicer clothes. In an attempt to make himself feel better, Richard began to disrupt class and make jokes about the teacher. He recalled being late for class one day and hearing the students chanting his name when he walked into the classroom. Although this may have been fun for a while, Richard's behavior resulted in multiple suspensions. Eventually he was expelled.

Social Development

Hope of Detroit Academy is when Richard's behavior began to change and it started when he was influenced by young male twins to be the lookout guy as they stole some money that the teacher's had been collecting money for a boy with cancer. At first Richard felt bad that these guys were stealing money from a fundraiser but he justified his actions by explaining that he was not the one stealing the money. This appears to have been the trigger point to Richard's increased frequency of stealing cars, gambling, and getting into fights.

However, not all of Richard's friends were poor influences nor were all of his experiences negative. Richard began playing sports at ABT, where he joined the basketball team and developed a bond with teammates. Richard never thought that he would connect with the guys on his team because he only joined to team to gain attention from girls.

Economic Deprivation

Richard was very optimistic about his experiences growing up and wished his family had more money to allow him the opportunities and experiences in school that others had. Richard says that if his family had more money they would have been able to do more things. Unfortunately, it's the reason why people will do anything to get it Richard says.

Community

Disorganized Community

Richard experienced a lot but he refused to share some of these events. He did discuss hearing gunshots and seeing someone killed. While at a neighborhood function Richard, and a lot of other people, were standing around having fun and when they heard the sounds of gunshots. People began to scatter trying to avoid the body that was on the ground dead. Richard also recalled seeing a person hit by a car. "I have seen it all". Richard shared that he not only saw a

person get murdered, but was shown the bodies of two dead girls in the trunk of a friend's car. Richard ended by stating that in addition to all that he has seen he also knew the smell of Marijuana, abandoned homes and death.

Richard said that the 33rd Street neighborhood was neglected. It was not uncommon to see garbage in the streets or dead pets (e.g., cats and dogs). Despite calls from residents, garbage, dead animals, or fallen trees knocked down by storms were left to decay over time.

One final event that Richard shared was a drive by shooting. Richard was walking down a street with his brother and sister when a car that drove past them began shooting. He stated that the people in the car were trying more likely trying to shoot up the house they were walking past rather than to harm them.

"It's just so much, so many problems. It's just going to take time. It's just about power and when the power of love overcomes the love of power we will then have peace.

Economic Deprivation

Richard laughed aloud when I asked him which community resources he used while growing up. He said there were no skate parks nor Boys and Girls Clubs. He mentioned that growing up, there used to be a boxing gym called Kronk but now it's an abandoned building and the parks in the area were overgrown with grass. "Everything is getting closed down says Richard. That's why everything falls apart for the youth."

Richard's Final Thoughts

"The hood is a box. It's what my brother told me, the one in prison. Based on your experiences and shit, that's what you be thinking about. When you see the dope man on his grind you be consumed with the present and what you can do now. You not thinking about the future. I saw all that shit but my mom told me I was always going to college. Yeah, there are

circumstances they can't control like being around wrong stuff. Like I said my mom always told me I was going to college. But if you see the dope man got this and got that then that's what you want. All the bad, all the bad, it's hard to be an angel around all this. That's why the shooting continues.

Like my best friend, he was a crack baby but he didn't look like it. You can't tell or nothing, it's like, I feel like some people just didn't have the same shot as other people. Let me give you an example, like broken homes, like when you grow up in a broken home it changes you. For example, my homie, like his momma used to never be there. His momma or his grandmomma never used to be there and it seem like when he want to do good something always happen. Some people just grow up and when they come out they just crack babies and their moms a crack head so they see her shooting dope or like people get molested you know or people get kidnapped like the girl down the street. They broke in her house and raped her. So it's so much I could have went through but I didn't, so I'm grateful.

As far as trading places with people from other neighborhoods, I always more so was happy being me but I sometimes wish I wasn't from Detroit. Some might by like I wish I was Kobe (Kobe Bryant) son, I wish I was LeBron (LeBron James) son just because the life is totally different. I did not have the same opportunities as others; I think I had it better. I'm not coming from the best but I'm not from the worst.

Would I want my kids to grow-up where I did? Hell naw. White picket fence, nice house is what I want, and me and their mom to be together. I didn't have that. I would guide them, people don't do that. That's what they need, guidance. If you live in the hood (a neighborhood with high crime and disorganization), you can't stay in the house so you see a lot of shit. I would

give them positive vibes, you got to be positive. Stay away from trouble, be a leader, respect elders. Don't do drugs; stay in school, and just pray."

~ Richard

Richard's Final Thoughts: Researchers Reflection

Richard also mentioned this idea of self-fulfilling prophecy. Richard used the example of drug dealers and how people in the "hood" look up to drug dealers because they seem to have nice things. I agree with Richard because, in the eyes of youth, the possessions that drug dealers have – nice cars, shoes, and clothes – are a false representation of success. Richard believes that Detroit can seem like a trap to people and thinking about the future is not even an option as people are too consumed with their day-to-day lives. I believe that this forward thinking is more prevalent in urban environments because people, even if for life's necessities have to worry about survival for today and not for tomorrow. Unfortunately, I believe that this is played out in the area of inner-city education. Most kids are not challenged to think about what they want to do when they grow up, nor is that relevant to them, therefore, their behavior to do better or mindset rarely changes.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The primary objective of these individual interviews was to understand the lived experiences of college-age Blacks who grew up in poor/urban neighborhoods. In this Chapter, I discuss six key findings and multiple supporting themes that emerged from my analysis of data collected during this research project. The primary source of data was one-on-one interviews that I conducted with the five males who lived in the City of Detroit. Based on the findings of this research, I continue to argue that living in a poor-urban environment matters to ones' developmental outcomes.

The six themes presented in this chapter were derived from information provided by the study participants. For example, their perspective on the importance of a parent's presence in their lives; the instability associated with multiple household moves, and challenges within the school environment. Included within this chapter is an overview of their final thoughts related to living in Detroit and their assessment of overall challenges and beliefs about what may perpetuate a cycle of defeat among Black males in Detroit. Each finding is discussed within the three contexts of my research; home, school, and local community. Lastly, I have decided to present protective factors that may have been present in the lives of these young men because, fortunately, not all of their experiences were negative and according to Masten and Powell (2003), a person shows a pattern of resilience when there were significant risks and or adversities the person overcame. The following list is of the six major themes that I have chosen to discuss within this project. Some of these themes will be present throughout the three major contexts of my research while others are specific to one of the major contexts discussed:

1. Parental context
2. Safety housing
3. Inadequate Housing
4. Poor classroom management/ class disruptions
5. Ideal behavior
6. Lack of resources

Participant Profile

Parental Context

Four out of the five males I interviewed spoke about their father's not being present in the home. The physical absence in their lives did not reflect a lack of involvement or influence in the lives of the participants. All five of the participants discussed the desire and importance of the relationships that they maintained with their fathers. David, for example spoke about how he struggled to find himself or even fit-in due to a lack of a male's presence in the home. The struggle for him was never fitting in with his peers, which he attributed to growing up in a house with all women. While growing up David found a male friend that he really began to model after and gives lots of praise to and feels like this young man, who was the same age as David, for taking an interest in him. Additionally, David credits this young man for helping him become a 'man'. David was grateful for his friendship.

A father can sometimes be physically present, which is what the young men desired, but may not be emotionally present. The young men all spoke to this internalized thought of how they should act outwardly due to the environments they lived in and how they felt they could not always be their true selves. This ideal was often played out in the relationships they had with their fathers and how their fathers may have influenced their behavior and thought process for

this outward behavior. Richard talked about how he struggled with a lot of things in life, as he was really trying to find out about himself. He desired to talk to his dad who, in his mind, was not an option because he had never seen his dad emotional nor did his dad like for people to share their emotions. Richard said that not only does his dad not like people to show their emotions but he discourages it in the ways he speaks to people and the lack of emotions that he shows for others. Richard described his dad as a very cold person but felt that it was only because of the environment that he grew up in and how emotions were something that a man does not talk about. David also believed that emotions were discouraged due living in a poor urban environment. David said that he wore his emotions on his sleeve and believed that people in Detroit do not show emotions because it is interpreted as being soft and a sign of vulnerability.

When I asked Sabastian about his most memorable neighborhood experiences he hesitated only to say he wished his mom and dad were together and that their separation really destroyed him. It is very important to note that the women who had relationships with men really seemed to have struggled financially and encountered many other challenges. David did not mention life with his dad, partly because he was very young when his parents separated. However, following the split of his parents he remember his mom not having many resources and their lives were followed by instability as they constantly had to move from place to place.

Home

Multiple researchers (e.g., Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005; Kiser, 2007) assert that poor urban neighborhoods expose youth to risky situations such as drug use or sales, gang activity, and random acts of violence. All five of the participants shared experiences of being exposed to these types of situations that threatened their lives, including

gang activity, shootings, and other anxiety driven behaviors. From their perspective one recurring theme that emerged from each participant's case study was the notion that each participant and their family worried about their safety. Whether it was an exposure to drug houses or trap houses as Richard and Sabastian calls them which their parents and/or other neighbors encouraged them to stay away from. Additionally, the young men and their families were often weary about people stealing their cars or breaking in their homes resulting in a continual state of anxiety and fear.

The way participants discussed fitting in with their peers was a reflection of how they thought they should act. Each of the participants elaborated on the theme that it was important for them to not appear "soft" in their communities to avoid being perceived as vulnerable. Following the five interviews and under the context of the home environment, all of the young men spoke to living in environments that threatened their safety on many different levels. There was this fear that they had that, at any time, someone could harm them and because of that, they had to always be aware of their surroundings. Oftentimes, behaviors associated with a growing child were limited like playing outside, walking to the store or even going to certain homes because of safety concerns.

Also, another recurring theme was this idea of stability or the lack thereof. Nate was the only participant who did not move homes during his childhood. Because of his familiarity with the environment this allowed him more freedom to play outside and even engage with other children. Fortunately, this was encouraging because his parents had relationships with other parents in the neighborhood and if Nate was not in his home at a certain time he could be found at the home of a family known to his parents. The other respondents did not have this freedom and their upbringing was not as stable as Nate's. Moving from place to place was not uncommon

for these young men and when they moved they were either moving in with other family members or moving into environments that were more disorganized than the previous. Therefore, not only was instability a challenge but the environments, specifically the homes, were. Richard mentioned at times either being homeless or living in a house with nine other people where they all slept in the same bed. Dontae also moved from house to house and slept either, in an attic that his mom tried to make comfortable, on the couch or in a tent in the basement of his aunt's home or living in a place without proper heating and cooling.

School

Schools all across America should be functioning in a way that students are fully engaged in the curriculum and can feel safe in doing so. As I asked the interviewee's questions regarding their school experiences, four of the most recurrent themes were instability, poor teacher classroom management, safety/fear, and ones' academic track. Many of these young men have attended many different schools and none of them actually went to a school from enrollment until graduation. Richard would attend a new school approximately every year and a half. This disruption in Richard's learning may not have always been because of a fault of his own but due to his home life. Richard would stay with his mom, dad, or other relatives.

The residences Richard lived in were not always in the same school districts, therefore, causing him to have to enroll in a different school system. This theme of instability affected the respondents in many different ways including a sense of unacceptance. These five young Black men were often the "new guy" in school and had to make new friends. Additionally, the teachers were not always thought of as the best teachers. The classroom environment (i.e., disruptive and disrespectful classmates) was cited as a reason for less than optimal learning environments.

Teachers were often be disrupted during classroom instruction time because students would repeatedly ask the teacher to re-explain the same things. Not only did this behavior disrupt their learning but the learning of other students.

In addition to disruptions in class there were disruptions outside of schools. These schools were often located in neighborhoods with increased incidents of crime, drug infestation, and with known gang activity. The theme of perceived safety was noted within the school environment as well. All of the participants referenced exposure to gangs, fights in classrooms, halls and school grounds and the fear that a fight could break out at any time throughout the school day.

Although the school environments may have been disorganized, these young men valued their education. They all shared that they were involved in honors courses, took AP courses, and maintained their motivation to learn and graduate. A reason that these participants may have succeeded is because the students enrolled in AP classes were segregated from the regular school population (or took AP courses off site) from the general student body. Therefore, the disruptions they experienced were not as common within the classroom but were nonetheless part of the school environment.

Community

Multiple stressors with limited resources is a lived experiences for people living in poor-urban environments (Anderson, Sabatelli, & Koustic, 2007; Zaff & Smerdon, 2009). They all shared concerns for safety. While not readily admitting this, the participants suggested that the neighborhoods they lived in were a cause of anxiety due to fear and safety. Because of the abandoned neighborhoods, low employment, increased exposure to violence and gang visibility, crime, and drug cultures, they put up their guard to protect themselves from danger. A recurring

theme that emerged was this idea of hard exterior or personas that people in these environments believe they have to portray. The young men, especially David, Sabastian, and Richard, all discussed not being able to be themselves because of the fear and attention that certain behaviors could cause them. They spoke about not wearing emotions outwardly, but being mindful of the clothing that is worn. This persona or ideal of certain behaviors is created because they do not believe that they or their “normal” selves will be accepted. Therefore, to protect themselves, they act as if they are not fearful although they are. Most of the men discussed living in environments where people were often robbed. Being a victim of personal crimes was not just something that they heard but also lived.

The availability of resources is crucial for positive development. However, if resources are available and not utilized, due to safety concerns, one’s development continues to be stifled. When study participants spoke about the YMCA’s, parks, and other resources, they mentioned never utilizing them for their intended purpose because not only were they weary about being at certain locations they often received parental discouragement to play in the park because of gang activity. The public parks were also described as unkempt properties that were unsafe. Richard mentioned hearing gunshots from the park near his home while David talked about gang activity and other act of violence known to happen at the park. Unfortunately, there were no YMCA’s or Boys & Girls Clubs for these young men to attend. Resources that were once available (e.g., Kronk and Basketball Warehouse) have closed due to economic challenges.

Lastly, one of the resources lacking in most urban communities that has one of the most influences on ones’ health are grocery stores (Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). As I asked the young men to talk to the grocery stores in their area, most of them acknowledged there were no grocery stores near their homes, at least not ones in a close enough proximity to walk. And once

there, the food quality was very poor. Often times this result in families either eating out at fast food restaurants, which are not healthy, or going to the corner store to purchase food products where the shelf life has expired. Also, food in the convenient stores is higher in price. This is important because inadequate nutrition can hinder the positive development of families in these communities.

Participants Final Thoughts

One of the purposes of this research was to uncover the ideals and lived experiences of five Black men from Detroit. Throughout this research I attempted to better understand these men's perspectives on the state of Detroit but most importantly why they believe Detroit continues to stay in the state it is in when it comes to Black men. Who better to ask this question than Black men whom are not only from the environment but have family and friends still living in the city of Detroit. To start, I asked these men what they believed the issues were that plague Detroit and perpetuates this continual defeating cycle. The following answers included hopelessness, teenage pregnancies, pride, lack of positive role models, and lack of exposure to other people, places, and things that can help to broaden their perspective of themselves and the world.

"People are prideful," Dontae says. This idea of pride is manifested in the way people treat others and or feel they should be treated. People don't want to be seen as if they are insignificant or are not in control therefore people will do what they need to do to have control. Dontae says that people will go to the extreme of killing someone to not feel like they are disrespected. This idea of respect is an idea of entitlement because there's a belief that one should even be respected. Why should they be respected? Is it because of how hard they work, the street credit, their family name, or who they associate with? Either way, it is because of

whom they think they are or their associations they deserves respect or they believe. Sabastian believes the issue is that people lack morals and are too pessimistic. This pessimism is due to one's associates, Sabastian says. Sabastian also believes it is this issue of fear that people have and because they have a sense of fear, their outward behavior and the things that they do, in some ways, counteracts how they perceive their environment, which really makes things worse.

Nate believes that the cycle continues in Detroit because of the things people see on TV and how they are constantly put down by the media and others. Therefore, what this does is creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. I believe once again it is this ideal persona that emerges as a way for one to protect oneself from perceived threats. Richard says that Detroit is like a trap and because of what is going on in Detroit with crime and other negative influences people don't often think about the future or anything outside of Detroit because they are consumed with what is happening in real time. This is often a result of experiences that one is exposed to. What you see can be a challenge, especially when it looks like somebody has something that you want but can't obtain. Secondly, a challenge results in the activities that people engage in around you.

The individual interviews revealed that the participants did not believe that they were given the same opportunities as children their age from other neighborhoods. Knowing that they were not given the same opportunities created this ideal that things are not equal and unfortunately, being men of color, perpetuates this reality that they are less valuable than and have to work harder for the opportunities to experience some of the same things other children from better neighboring cities experience. The young men recognized this and because of the hard work they have had to endure they have accepted that their experiences were not the same and that some privileges that others have they did not. However, these men remained optimistic about their own lives and because of that would not have wanted to trade places with anyone

else. They believe that their experiences have taught them about life and how to make it in the world.

Moreover, these men were grateful for the experiences they have had. However if they were to have children, four out of the five men would not want their children to grow up in the same environment they did. Moreover, they would desire their children understand where they have come from and to impart the same moral and values they believe they learned from living in poor-urban environments. Sabastian, because he did not have both of his parents in the same home while growing up was very adamant about raising his kids in a two parent home and Nate, although he had a different up-bring from the other young men with both parents in the home, did not want to have to tell his kids that he could not take them to school because someone stole the car. Nate remembers many times that his parents' cars were stolen from the driveway and communicated that this experience was not one he wanted his kids to experience. Additionally, David's reason is that the environment is dangerous yet teaches you about determination.

Lastly, the environments that these young men lived in were all lacking resources including grocery stores, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA's, parks and other relevant resources. When these resources close down or are not available, what else is there for these young men to engage in other than negative behaviors? It is important to mention that when resources are available to youth they are available in places that are inaccessible by way of mobility or finances. The lack of resources continues to handicap the thinking of these young men to interact and engage in a world outside of their own. Also, resources like Boys and Girls clubs expose youth to positive role models, which are often lacking in the lives of urban youth. Despite these realities, the response of families is critical in controlling the influence that these stressors have on children (Burton & Jarrett, 2000).

Protective Factors

Family Functioning and Risk-Protective Factors

Many families are aware of the dangers and risks within their communities and have found ways to safeguard family members from physical and moral dangers. Family members may avoid the dangerous sections of neighborhoods by identifying “safe” times to run errands, asking other family members (e.g., fictive kin or family friends) to accompany children when they go to places in and out of the neighborhood, and restricting company among neighbors to avoid burglary and personal victimization (Burton & Jarrett, 2000). These protective factors along with monitoring, support, and rituals or routines, when implemented, help protect the physical, behavioral and emotional wellbeing of families and youth.

Parental Monitoring

Supervision and monitoring increase a child’s protection from a host of environmental risk factors inside and outside of the home (Kiser, 2007). There are very effective methods of keeping track of a child’s whereabouts, activities, and peer relationships when the child is away from home. Among African American and Latino adolescents, parental monitoring has been noted to be effective in reducing early sexual experiences, especially among males (Murry et al., 2002). Parental monitoring is also associated with reduced anger and frustration (Burton & Jarrett, 2000). Tiet et al. (2010) recommend that monitoring among family members and youth be done thoughtfully, otherwise youth will feel as if they are being controlled.

Some parents were said to even confine their child to the home instead of going out to play (Anderson et al., 2007). Because of the increased violence and gang activity in urban neighborhoods, parents would restrict their children from wearing certain clothes or colors and even prohibit them from playing with certain toys as not to draw attention to themselves.

Parental Support

Parental support, especially in minority groups, can insulate children and youth from anxiety and depression, increase self-esteem, reduce problem behaviors, and foster positive psychosocial behavior (Anderson, et al, 2007). Parental support is very important because its lack can hinder a child's long-term positive outcomes. Trauma and negative outcomes can be mediated by an increased family support system (Kiser, 2007).

Children and adolescents who had positive support systems and were able to create bonding relationships with their parents have been observed to function better than youth in families where parental support was not as prevalent (Tiet et al., 2010). Bonding also created coping and interpersonal skills resulting in children being able to understand the values of parents with a genuine desire. Parents often use stories and discuss various forms of punishment to caution their child from associating with deviant peers. These skills were hypothesized to have been mediated by the likelihood of parent and child talks that occurred as a result of their bonding (Tiet et al., 2010). Not being able to bond to parents, peers or other family members cause the child or adolescent to become detached from the home making monitoring difficult. There are a lot of risks within urban neighborhoods, and unstable, crowded, and crime-infested environments can pose a very serious threat to the lives of children when they do not have positive support from a caring person.

Parental Rituals and Routines

Living in impoverished neighborhoods initiates a child's stress and uncertainty. However, families that are organized and schedule various tasks, either in or outside of the home, were families that Burton and Jarret (2007) reported as having family rituals and routines.

Rituals and routines foster positive outcomes among youth. Rituals are defined as task or goal oriented events with a beginning and an end. Examples include birthdays, holiday observances, family traditions and other patterned routines, such as daily rituals that included bedtimes, leisure activities and dinner times.

Rituals help to provide some stability to lives that may often seem unstable and disorganized. Positive family health and psychosocial adjustment in children are strongly linked to constructive family rituals (Burton & Jarrett, 2007). Meaningful family routines can help to decrease chronic physical illness and psychiatric disorders (Kiser, Medoff, & Black, 2010). Children whose families were not as deliberate about keeping rituals showed more behavioral problems than families who did (Kiser, 2007). When routines are in place they begin to take on meaning for family members. These routines symbolized the importance or values families placed on carrying out routines.

Families that are able to implement and strengthen their family ritual practices are allowing for other positive outcomes to occur like building connections among families, thus allowing for increased family cohesion (Kiser, 2007). Cohesion reflects the degree to which family members feel close to one another, enjoy spending time together, share common values, and possess effective communication skills.

Protective factors are constructs that measure resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). When one is able to overcome a certain life challenge whether social, physical or mental, he or she is identified as being resilient (Tiet, Huizinga, & Byrnes, 2010). Resilience is symbolized in many ways and processes. What may be identified as resilience for one person or group may in turn be a risk for another.

Using a convenience sample of college-aged men served two purposes. First, these individuals had survived their lived experiences of growing up in an urban community that is described as an environment in disarray. As reflected by their admission to Michigan State University, these individuals can be described as successful. They not only survived growing up in adversity but built a foundation where access to higher education and future opportunities is a reality, not a dream. Second, the study design was developed to encourage them to reflect on their lived experiences to help achieve the study aims – to better understand how conditions that are considered to be less than optimal impact their lives. Through the sharing of their stories, themes of resilience became apparent, providing insight about the role of these protective factors in overcoming household, school, or neighborhood adversity.

Each participant had an optimistic outlook on their experiences including the importance of school. These young men did not have significant academic problems. They may have had some behavioral issues within school, but they took school work very seriously and were encouraged by their parents to excel. They were all optimistic that they were going to college either because their parents shared this goal or they saw college as a way to escape the hardship of urban life. Most of the young men talked about taking Advanced Placement courses or attending academically rigorous magnet schools. Some even attended schools in surrounding districts. While they all had experiences in the Detroit Public School System, they benefitted from attending other schools. They all expressed appreciation for the sacrifices and encouragement of their parents. They understood that this was part of the reason they were attending Michigan State University.

Another common theme was the importance of extracurricular activities in their lives. All of the young men played sports. While they never talked about their success as athletes, they

did talk about meeting friends and being exposed to people that they might otherwise not have interacted with had it not been for athletics. In addition to peer networks, positive adult role models were discussed during the interviews. Dontae, for example, talked about the rapport he built with his football coach and the influence his coach had on him mentally. He also described at length the appreciation he had for his coach who went out of his way to help find better and safer housing for his family. Other participants shared similar stories related to their experiences with student government and acting classes.

Extracurricular involvement was not the only way these participants were exposed to positive role models. Teachers helped some of the participants to strengthen their focus on academic success by encouraging them to think critically and to succeed so they could attend college. Nate and Sabastian spoke about the positive influence of their fathers. Sabastian talked about working with dad, through which he gained an appreciation of how difficult his father's life was. Nate also spoke about his dad being a hard worker and how he channeled his energies to provide for the family.

Family routines provided an example of structure that helped these participants survive the harsh realities of urban life. All of the participants were required to be home at a certain time. In an effort to protect them from harm, parents restricted their children from visiting neighbors, playing in certain areas, and required their children to keep them informed of their whereabouts. These examples of family monitoring underscore parental involvement and its role contribution to avoiding adversity.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: PHOTO ANALYSIS BY INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I examine the individual photo selections by participants involved in Phase 1 to better understand the stressors they were individually exposed to. The primary objective of Phase 1 was to allow participants to evaluate 130 photos of perceived urban stressors and select the top 15 photos in each category of home, school, and local community. Additionally, this process helped to narrow down the selection of photos that were, after critically evaluation, made the top 45 perceived urban stressor list, 15 photos per category. A score was calculated for each photo that was selected two or more times by participants to determine which photos would make the top 15 list per category.

The following figures give an overview of the type of photos that were selected by individual participants, allowing one to better understand their similarities and differences in photo selections. The purpose of having photos to accompany interviews was to enhance these interviews by understanding how similar, if at all, their experiences were to urban research that examined what the impact of exposures of those in poor urban environments could be. Therefore, the following four figures will show a visual representation of photos that were selected, showing what photos participants selected: 1) by themes; 2) whose most affected by the perceived stressor; 3) how the perceived stress influences development and; 4) the frequency at which the five participants were exposed, themselves, to a particular perceived stressor by theme.

Figure 1: Individual Participants Selection by Theme

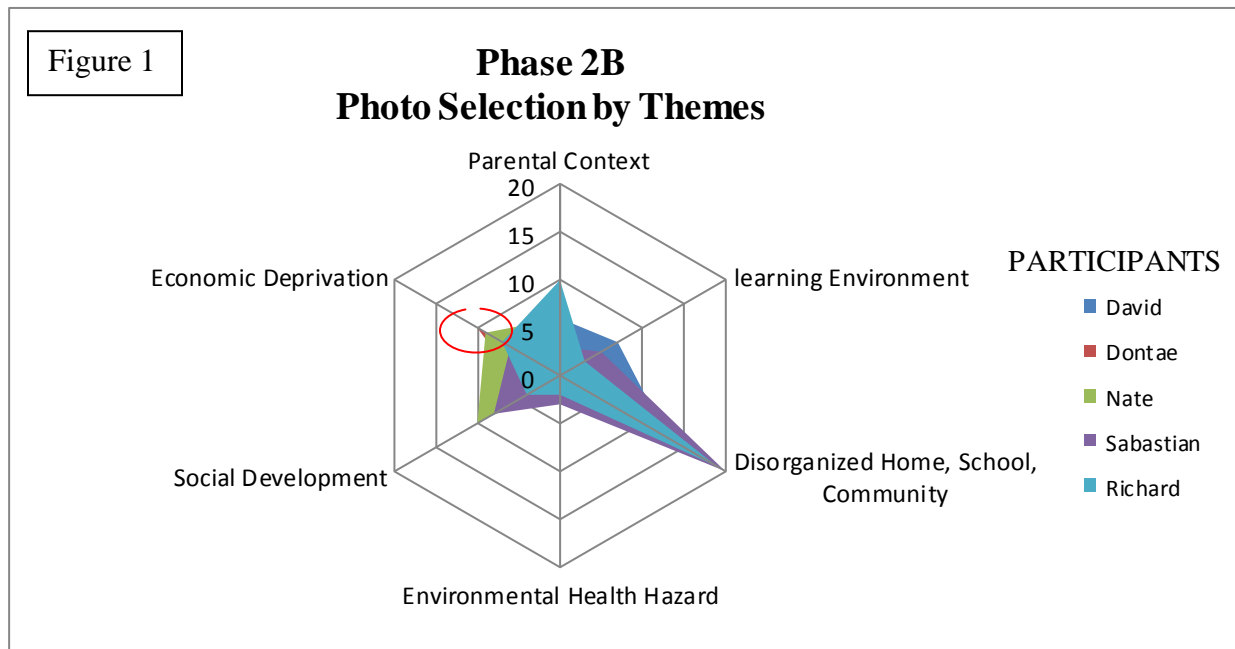


Figure 1 gives an overview of the five participants who were a part of Phase 1. The figure depicts the cumulative perception of experienced stress. To derive the graph, participant identified photos were examined and assigned a theme that would best represent the perceived stressor. The photos were categorized as depicting stressors within the context of home, school, or community and were then subsequently assigned to one of six themes: Economic Deprivation, Parental Context, Learning Environment, Disorganized Home, School, or Community, Environmental Health Hazard, or Social Development.

One of the goals was to determine, what if any differences and/or similarities these men had based on their photo selections. Interviews suggested that there were both similarities and differences in the lived experiences of these participants. Figure 1 is a representation based on the number of photos each participant selected by theme. Notice the small red circle above as it highlights a small section of Dontae photo selection. This peak shows that Dontae selected more

photos that dealt with lack of resources whether financial, material, or structural, all under the major theme of Economic Deprivation.

Dontae mentioned the struggle his family endured financially and to see that he selected photos that were of perceived Economic Deprivation is not surprising. This figure also shows Richard's selected photos, where parental context were most selected. Richard talked about the relationship he has with his dad and the struggles he had with his mom. It is to no surprise that Richard would value the parental context above most others.

The most apparent commonality is reflected in the visual representation of disorganization. Collectively, all of the participants discussed the theme of safety in their home, school, and community as issues of concern.

Figure 2: Who's affected by Context

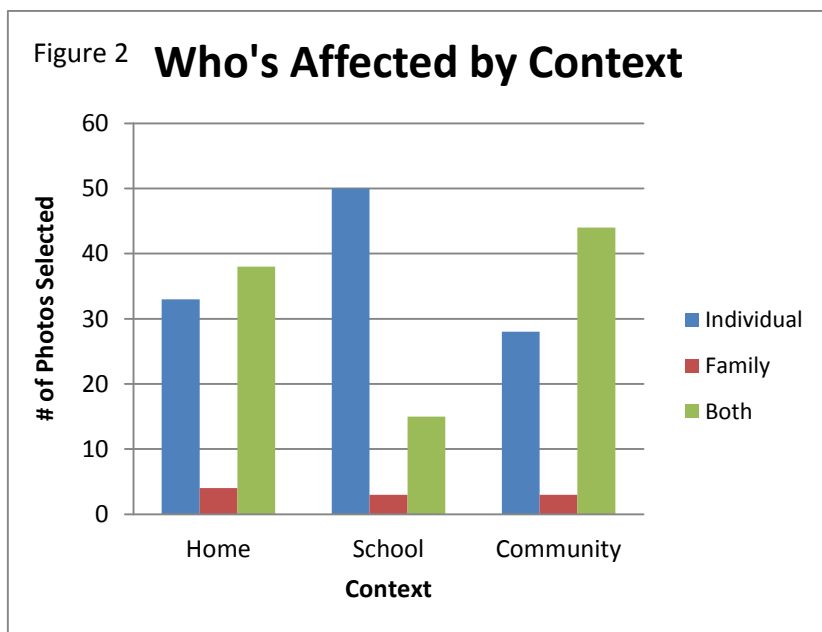
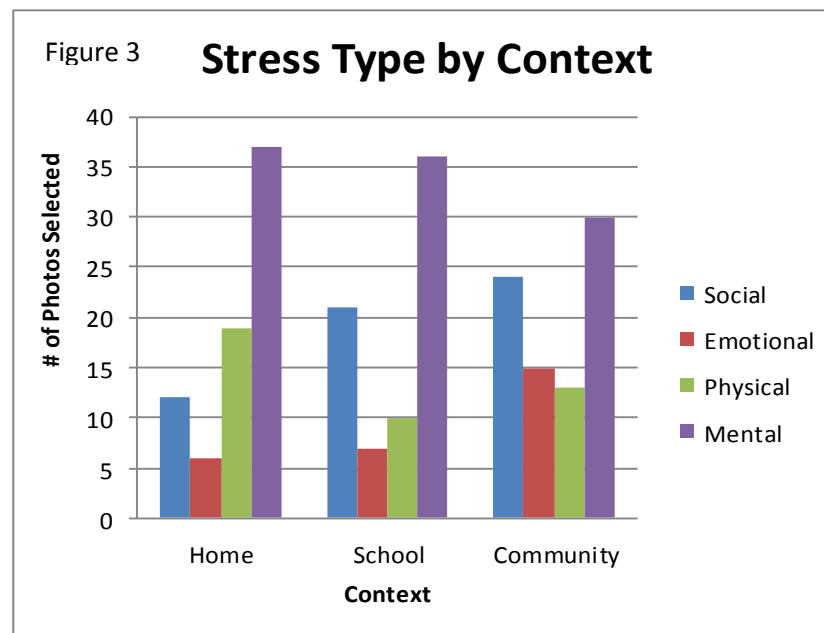


Figure 3: Stress Type by Context



A second focus of this research probed who was most affected by the perceived stressors in poor urban environments, the individual, family, or both (Figure 2). In addition, participants were asked to identify whether they perceived the stressors to impact social, emotional, physical, or mental health (Figure 3) (see Appendix D).

Figure 2 is a representation of the number of photos selected within the category of home, school, and community. As noted in this figure, the most significant impact was reported at the individual level within the school context. During the interviews most of the guys spoke to this idea that regardless of where one is from, if someone wants to succeed, they believed the person could succeed

and that no one or circumstance could change that. Therefore, there is this belief that few of the perceived stressors were outside of the personal determination. It is important that when interpreting who participants believed were most affected by perceived stressors that Figure 2 not be misinterpreted, especially the significance of family. Visually, Family seems to be one who is affected less according to how low it is represented in its bars--this is not the case. When participants selected both, family is inclusive in that selection also. Conversely, Figure 2 is better interpreted when understanding the selection between the individual and family. Therefore, according to Figure 2, family is chosen at a higher rate, although its individual selection is low across all ecosystem categories. According to participants, family is most affected in home and community contexts, not school.

Figure 3 is a graphical representation of the number of photos that were selected where participants believed the perceived stressor influenced ones' development either in areas of social, emotional, physical, or mental influence. Lupien et al. (2002) defined stress as past or current life events that require the individual to make some adaptation. This figure provides a visual representation of the developmental influences of the stressors based on the participants' interpretations. Within the home environment the young men selected mental stress as being the most significant. Following the home environment, mental influence was also selected in school then community, respectively. Within the community, photos that were selected were said to affect the development of men socially within the community. This was not surprising when the environments are often social constructs and/or include ones' interaction with others. Also, the community is where one is influenced often by their peers and family member's to engage in activities outside of their home. Emotional and physical stress were selected by the participants

as having little influence for how they perceive one to be influenced by the stressors they selected.

Figure 4: Frequency of Exposure

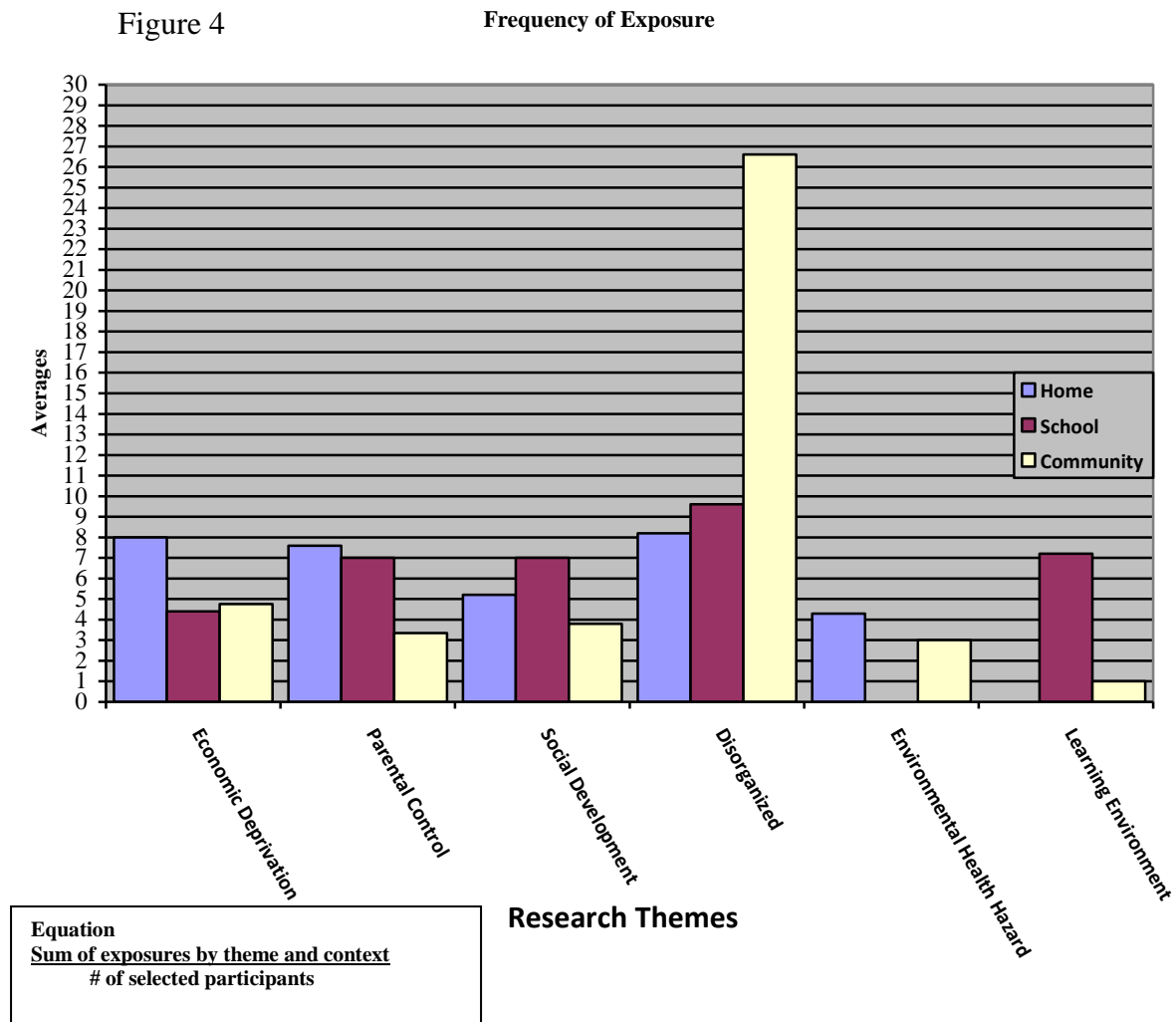


Figure 4 is a representation of how often, if at all, participants selected being exposed to a particular photo under a given theme. During the photo critique section (Phase 1B), participants were asked to place a number that would represent how often they were exposed to a particular stressor, if at all. Their options were never = 0, infrequently = 3, frequently = 2, or all the time = 1. In my original Excel data set, I inverted the numbers so that once averaged the numbers would represent the most frequently experienced stress.

Figure 4 suggests that the participants were more frequently exposed to stressors in the community as compared to the school and home. There are many interpretations as to why Community, especially its high exposure rate of Disorganization was selected: 1) Community is the larger context of a home and school environment, therefore disorganization in the home may also have been selected as part of the community 2) Disorganization may be easily identified and 3) There are possibly more disorganized type of activities in the community than the home or school. For example, the theme disorganized represents issues of safety and violence, like gang activity, prostitution, lack of YMCA's etc. All of the previous examples are of stressors that are inclusive within Disorganized that are not specific to home or school. Also, visual dilapidation and unsettling sounds like police sirens and noise from constant traffic are stressors that contribute more to community disorganization.

There were no reported exposures to environmental health hazards in school. Environmental health hazards are exposures including pollution, alcohol, and/or cigarette smoke. Yet issues of alcohol use and cigarette smoking were evident within the interviews. Participants also expressed being exposed to such issues more frequently in the context of their homes.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS: TOP COMBINED STRESSORS AMONG PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I will present three tables from Phase 2 that show the frequency at which participants were exposed to the perceived stressors under the exposure column, who's most affected (*I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family*), and the type of stress participants believe are influenced by the perceived stressors depicted in the photos (*M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical*) The photos are rank ordered from most stressful to least stressful (See Appendix E for the Top 45 protocol).

Table 1: Home: Combined Stressors among Participants

Rank 1-15 Most Stressful to Least stressful	Perceived Stressor & Photo ID #	Participant	Exposure	Who's most affected?	Stress
1	Increased exposure to domestic abuse 103 Theme: Parental Context	1	3	B	P
		3	3	B	S
		4	2	B	P*
		5	2	B	M*
2	Parental discipline 125 Theme: Parental Context	2	2	I	M
		3	1	I	P*
		4	2	I	M*
3	Lack of finances 111 Theme: Economic Deprivation	2	2	B	P
		1	1	F	M*
		2	2	B	M*
4	Increased fear/anxiety 40 Theme: Disorganized Home	1	2	I	M
		4	2	B	M*

Table 1 (cont'd)

5	Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking 121 Theme: Environmental Health Hazard	4 5	2 0	I I	P* P*
6	Lack of outside play due to unsafe play areas 128 Theme: Disorganized Home	2 3	2 2	I I	M P
7	Absent parents 109 Theme: Parental Context	1 3	3 3	B I	S E
8	Teenage Mothers 20 Theme: Parental Context	1 5	3 2	B B	S M*
9	Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36 Theme: Economic Deprivation	4 5	3 2	B B	P* P*
10	Lack of identity 48 Theme: Social Development	1 3	1 3	I I	M M
11	Peer influences 8 Theme: Social Development	1 2	1 1	I I	S M
12	Inadequate sleeping quarters 86 Theme: Economic Deprivation	3 4	2 3	I B	P M*
13	Inadequate heating and cooling 76 Theme: Economic Deprivation	3 5	1 2	B B	M M*
14	School stress due to home life 122 Theme: Social Development	1 5	2 1	I I	M M*
15	Increased exposure to death 65 Theme: Disorganized Home	1 5	2 3	I B	P M*
<p>Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical</p> <p>All the time=1 (Daily), Frequently=2 (A few times per month), Infrequently=3 (A few times per year), or Never=0).</p>					

* Photo without caption

The top perceived stressor in the home category was ones' increased exposure to domestic abuse. The presence of domestic abuse can make the home environment unstable,

causing fear. The fact that increased exposure to domestic violence was chosen by four out of the five participants is significant. Not only that, two out of four participants, who were not shown photos with captions, also selected the increased exposure to domestic violence as one of their top perceived stressors. What this suggests is that domestic violence is not only easily identified by participants but may have been a stressor they were exposed to themselves.

When asked who was most affected by the exposure to domestic violence both, meaning the individual and family were selected. This is not an individual stressor. However, parental discipline which was selected as the second most stressful was selected as only affecting the individual. Parents, who are often overwhelmed due to unstable unemployment and live in dangerous neighborhoods, are often more aggressive toward their children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

There were two photos that were selected by participants that were not shown the captions. Those were the increased exposure to alcohol and smoking and inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities. Both of these perceived stressors can affect the development of those most exposed to them, especially physically (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). This is significant because it is a stressor that is widely recognized as having some influence on an individual's health yet it was not selected as a stressor in the eyes of the remaining participants.

Who's most affected? Within the home environment the individual was selected 17 times for ten out of the top fifteen photos that were selected as most stressful. However, one photo (lack of finances) was selected as having an influence on family. No other photo was identified as affecting family, solely. Moreover, the fact that family was not selected does not mean participants did not believe they were not affected. The selection of both included family therefore, when a participant selects both they are selecting both the family and the individual as

being affected. A participant believes that either the individual or family was influenced by exposure to that particular stressor.

Stress. Participants were asked to select how they believe the perceived stressor affects one's development, not what type of stress is represented in the photo. For example, a burned down or vacant home represents a physical stressor. However, knowing that a burned down home is a physical stressor does not help to understand how the participants believe that burned down home influences the development of youth exposed to that particular stressor, if at all. Therefore, it is important that this was understood and distinguished. For the home category there were 12 photos that were all selected as causing individual mental trauma. This is very significant because being affected mentally can be very damaging to other parts of a young person's life.

Mental stress can cause the inability to think and has been related to depression that can also affect the way one sees and processes the world around them (Edin & Kissane, 2010). Depression can affect school life and hinder how well one does academically. Within the home environment there were five major themes that were represented within the home environment; parental context, Economic Deprivation, Environmental Health Risk, Disorganized Neighborhoods, and Social Development.

- *The numbers located at the end of the label represent the photo ID Number*

Parental Context

- Increased exposure to domestic violence 103
- Parental Discipline 125
- Absent Parents 109

- Teenage Mothers 20

Within the category of parental context, the ways in which participants labeled these in the “who’s most affected and stress categories” were varied. They were labeled as affecting one either physically, socially, mentally or emotionally. The parental context means a lot to a growing child and black males who, unfortunately, frequently experience broken homes with the absence of fathers or single parent homes. Additionally, the parental context is processed differently for each person and this is a telling sign, in the minds of Black men, who participated in this study according to their interviews in the previous chapters.

Economic Deprivation

- Lack of finances 111
- Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36
- Inadequate sleeping quarters 86
- Inadequate heating and cooling 76

The lack of finances prevents one from being able to obtain the material possessions he or she wants but, most importantly, needs. All of the above mentioned perceived stressors, under the economic stress category could become a non-issue with adequate financial capital.

Inadequate nutrition is a result of inability to travel to places where the quality of food is better.

Unfortunately, inadequate nutrition causes many health challenges in the future and can also cause one to have difficulty concentrating in school (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Inadequate sleeping quarters and inadequate heating and cooling can cause much discomfort physically or mentally. Each participant identified these perceived stressors as having either physical or mental effects on an individual’s development.

Environmental Health Risk

- Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking 121

Environmental stressors are known as environmental toxins that expose one, directly or indirectly, causing harm to one's physical body. Environmental stressors are very significant because one can be exposed to environmental toxins while still in utero. Mothers who smoke and or drink put their unborn infant in harm's way that may cause deformity, brain abnormalities, and premature births.

Disorganized Neighborhoods

- Increased fear/Anxiety 40
- Unsafe play areas 128
- Increased exposure to death 65

Disorganized neighborhoods are neighborhoods in which an overwhelming feeling of anxiety and lack of safety is the norm. This includes violence, abandoned buildings, vacant lots, and even loud noises, to name a few. Individuals who live in disorganized neighborhoods are always on guard. In disorganized neighborhoods, the outside environment is often times unsafe and the children of families are often restricted as to where they are allowed to go and or play. These neighborhoods are often violent and have increased crime rates, where shootings and even death by violence is normative.

Social Development

- Lack of identity 48
- Peer Influences 8
- School stress due to home life 122

Most poor-urban neighborhoods lack positive role models. The lacks of exposure to other people, places, and things that can open the mind, and help to give positive perspectives to Black males are often lacking. What standards Black men often see around them are bleak and as Richard says, there is so much negative in Detroit that you rarely find people that have never done anything wrong.

Table 2: School: Combined Stressor among Participants

Rank 1-15 Most Stressful to Least stressful	Perceived Stressor & Photo ID	Participant	Exposure	Who's most affected?	Stress
1	Over-crowded inner-city classrooms 126 Theme: Learning Environment	1	2	I	S
		2	3	I	S
		3	1	I	S
		4	3	I	P*
		5	2	I	M*
2	Outdated and torn books in inner- city 119 Theme: Inadequate Resources	1	2	I	S
		3	1	I	M
		4	2	I	P*
		5	3	I	M*
3	Metal detectors 71 Theme: Disorganized Schools	1	3	I	S
		2	2	I	E
		3	3	I	P
		4	2	I	M*
4	Lack of school resources 99 Theme: Inadequate Resources	1	2	I	M
		2	2	I	P
		3	3	I	M
		5	2	I	S*
5	Lack of academic interest 53 Theme: Learning Environment	2	2	I	S
		1	1	F	M
		3	3	I	M*
6	Increased drug activity near school grounds 33 Theme: Disorganized Schools	1	2	I	S
		2	2	B	E
		5	2	I	M*
7	Unsafe schools 90 Theme: Disorganized Schools	2	2	I	S
		2	2	I	M*
		1	1	I	M*

Table 2 (cont'd)

8	Increased exposure to abandoned buildings including schools 39 Theme: Disorganized Schools	2 3 5	1 2 1	B B B	M M M*
9	Lack of positive role models 123 Theme: Social Development	1 3	1 2	I F	S S
10	lack of creativity 12 Theme: Learning Environment	1 2	2 2	I I	M S
11	Disinterest in school 101 Theme: Learning Environment	1 4	2 2	I I	M S*
12	Lack of male role mentors 11 Theme: Social Development	2 3	0 2	B I	M M
13	Disinterest in school curriculum 64 Theme: Learning Environment	1 4	2 3	I I	M M*
14	lack of academic interest 22 Theme: Learning Environment	1 4	2 2	I I	M M*
15	Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36 Theme: Inadequate Resources	2 3	3 2	I I	E P
Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical Frequency: All the time=1 (Daily), frequently=2 (A few times per month), Infrequently=3 (A few times per year), or Never=0).					

* Photos without caption

Within the school category, photos were selected more among the participants. Therefore, either there were fewer photos for this category or stressors in the school were limited.

Additionally, the stressors in the school may not have been as easily identifiable. The top stressor that was selected among the participants was over-crowded inner-city classrooms. Out of all the photos in the school category, over-crowded classrooms were selected by all five participants.

This is significant because in photos, overcrowded classrooms are easily depicted; even when the photo was not labeled with the perceived stressor it was selected. Also, overcrowded classrooms are often managed poorly because of all the students who are unable to have questions answered

or given the attention that they may need. It is clear that the fewer students there are in a class the more a teacher can accomplish and the less attitudes and issues a teacher has to deal with.

The research participants mentioned how the learning environment was often chaotic and the teacher had ineffective classroom management skills. Four students selected outdated and torn books as stressful. In urban environments it is not unfamiliar for students to be provided with outdated books with pages torn, if they receive a book at all. If a student is given resources that are not the best for their academic preparation they can often feel like they have been set-up to fail whereas other students may develop a very pessimistic view of school and society, especially when schools in neighboring communities have more adequate resources tools to learn. Overall, for the school environment, the lack of resources and safety were of concern for most participants.

Who's most affected? Within the school category, most participants believed that the individual is the one most affected by the perceived stressor. Out of 15 photos within the school category 14 of those perceived stressors were selected as having influenced the individual and 36 times they were selected. Family was only selected twice out of two different photos. Five times both the individual and the family was selected out of three different photos. Therefore, participants really believe that the stressors that are perceived within the school environment affect the individual very significantly.

Stress. School is an environment where people go to learn. Also a very significant part of their awakened hours and developmental stages happen during school hours. Therefore, mental and social stress were the two types of stress participants selected as having the most influence on the development of Black males. Mental stress was selected 22 times out of 13 different photos. Social stress was selected 13 times out of 10 different photos. Within the school

environment there are four major themes that are represented within the school environment; Economic deprivation, disorganized schools, learning environment, and character development.

Economic Deprivation

- Outdated and torn book in the inner-city
- Lack of school resources
- Inadequate nutrition or lack of resources

Books and other educational material are important for one's academic success. It is not uncommon that inner-city schools often lack the resources that are needed to make learning effective (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Often times due to the limited resources, inside of the classroom, students are asked not to take books home because they may not return them, which then results in more resources not provided to students. How is it that student's within the inner city are given outdated books with torn pages but yet still asked to compete for the same resources as students elsewhere?

Disorganized School

- Metal detectors
- Increase drug activity near school grounds
- Unsafe schools
- Abandoned buildings including schools

Increased exposure to abandoned buildings, including schools is categorized under disorganized schools. Yes, drug activity is also happening too. However, the environment in which schools are located are often plastered with Drug Free school zone signs but yet the school is in the middle of drug infested homes and streets. Schools that have metal detectors are

placed to make students feel safe but what it does is create a sense of fear and makes one feel like a prisoner. The detectors insinuate that these individuals have the potential of carrying weapons.

Learning Environment

- Disinterest in school curriculum
- Lack of academic interest
- Lack of creativity
- Disinterest in school
- Lack of academic interest
- Over-crowded inner-city classrooms

The attitude that one has about school is very important in how well students perform.

Whether their attitude is structured from their family or others, the perception and the importance of school, in the minds of young males, are often dictated by how well they do academically.

Often time, students do not believe that the material is relevant for them and consequently they do not understand how math, science, or any other subject will address the challenges they are experience in their personal lives.

Character Development

- Lack of positive role models

Often times, male role models are not present in schools. A lot of the times males that are in college or have graduated are not always present in the lives of these young men. According to the participants who participated in the interviews, “usually what you see in Detroit is what you get.” Many of the young men spoke about how on television and the words people say to the

young people in Detroit are not always encouraging and the role models are often drug dealers who seem to be “doing well” but living a life that is dangerous.

Table 3: Community: Combined Stressors among Participants

Rank 1-15 Most Stressful to Least stressful	Perceived Stressor by Photo ID #	Exposure	Who's most affected	Stress
1	Death to violence 1 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	1 1 2	B B B	E M* M*
2	Increased exposure to firearms 13 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	2 1 1	B B I	P P P*
3	No true interaction with people 66	2 3 1	B I B	S M M*
4	Lack of community resources 68 Theme: Inadequate resources	1 3 1	B B I	M M E*
5	Exposure to graffiti 15 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	3 2 1	I B I	P S* M*
6	Increased incarceration 17	2 1	B B	M M*
7	Increased police presence 21 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	1 1	B I	M M*
8	Increased exposure to illegal gun use 42 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	2 1	I B	M P*
9	Unsafe neighborhoods/empty lots/abandoned buildings 70 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	2 2	B B	E E*
10	Lack of community resources 51 Theme: Inadequate Resources	2 1	B I	P S*

Table 3 (cont'd)

11	Increased exposure to unemployment 63 Theme: Inadequate Resources	2 1	B I	M S*
12	Increased drug activity 32 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	1 1	B B	S P*
13	Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods 43 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	2 2	I I	E S*
14	Vacant lots 84 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	2 1	I B	M M
15	Increased Crime 73 Theme: Disorganized Neighborhood	1 1	B B	E S*
<p>Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical</p> <p>Frequency: All the time=1 (Daily), frequently=2 (A few times per month), Infrequently=3 (A few times per year), or Never=0).</p>				

* Photos without caption

The community is the larger context in which a person lives. The home and school are a part of the larger community. The community includes Recreational centers, grocery stores, libraries, schools, governmental offices and other things. The community in the context of this research is the environment outside of the home and school interior. The things that are happening and or experienced inside of ones' community can often dictate how a school and homes are run, the rules that are set, and the parameters that are structured.

Within the community category three out of five participants selected death to violence as a significant stressor. When death is experienced due to violence it creates a feeling of anxiety. It makes those within the community feel unsafe. All of the three participants that selected death to violence, as a perceived stressor, within the urban environment, they all selected both, individual, and family as being the ones who are most influenced by the exposure. Also two of

the individuals believe that the development that is influenced the most is ones' mental state and the other participant selected Emotional for how they believe one who has increased exposure to death would be impacted developmentally

Who's most affected? Within the community context participants believe that either the individual or family (both) is most impacted by the perceived stressors one experiences. Out of 15 photos, 14 of them had some marking of being influenced by both. There were 23 different selections for both being chosen. The individual was selected 12 times by 10 different photos. The reasons why some of these photos were selected as individual is because the participants believe that the ways in which graffiti, vacant lots, increased police presence and other things that have been marked with an I can be interpreted differently by several different people. For example, Police presence to one may create a sense of safety and protection whereas for another person the same police presence may create a sense of fear, instability, lack of freedom, and/or restrictions causing a lack of trust towards authority officials.

Stress. Participants within the community context believe that ones' mental development is hindered most due to the stressors believed most prevalent in that environment. Nine different photos were selected 15 times as affecting one's mental development. Out of the photos that were selected increased incarceration, increased police presence, and vacant lots were all said to affect one mental development. Once again, I think this is due to ones perception about that particular stressor. Participants believe that emotional development is hindered less is comparison to mental, physical, and social stress.

Character Development

- Lack of positive role models

Within the community there is an overwhelming amount of perceived stressors that fall under the category of disorganized communities. Once again violence is the norm and creates a sense of anxiety. What is pivotal to explore at some point is why violence is at increased rates in urban environments. If violence is high, then it is no secret that police presence will also be high and if drug activity is high there are usually drug related crimes that make neighborhoods unsafe. Many of the participants discussed their being a “trap” house in their environment where the expectation was that they would not play near there or be outside without supervision.

Economic Deprivation

- Lack of community resources
- Increased exposure to unemployment
- Increased unemployment in urban-inner-city neighborhoods

The lack of resources for members within poor-urban environments may be the cause of many disorganized neighborhood functions. Furthermore, employment rates are low in poor-urban environments.

Table 4: Photo Selection by Category

Table 4	Home	School	Community
Who's most affected			
Individual	17/10	36/14	12/10
Family	1/1	2/2	0
Both	16/9	5/3	23/14

Table 4 (cont'd)

Stress			
Mental	18/12	22/13	15/9
Physical	11/8	5/5	7/5
Social	4/4	13/10	7/7
Emotional	1/1	3/3	6/5

Table 4 is a composite of responses from participants separated by context: home, school, and community. Additionally, who's most affected and the type of stress that may be experienced are a result of being exposed to a particular stressor. There are two numbers represented in each row. The first number represents the number of participants that selected that particular response of who's affected and the type of stress that may be developed as a result. The last number is the number of photos that were selected for that particular selection.

There were 15 photos total per context. Therefore, 15 is the highest number possible. For example, under the home context, out of the all five participants, Individual was selected as being influenced most by the perceived stressors for 14 out of 15 photos total. It is important to report that under the community context family was selected 0 times. 0 infers that family is not solely affected by the perceived stressor and that both family and the individual are affected.

CHAPTER 8

FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

The primary objective of conducting a focus group was to better understand why participants ranked the photos in the order in which they did. A secondary goal was to develop an understanding of how the participants believed a particular stressor influenced development and whom the perceived stressors affected. I originally planned to conduct one focus group with at least five Black male participants. Six men were recruited and committed to participating in the session. Unfortunately, only three attended the session. Therefore, I conducted a second focus group session where six men were invited and agreed to participate, but only two attended.

The information in this chapter provides a summary of why participants in the two focus groups ranked some of the photos in the order they did. In this chapter there are six tables; three tables for each focus group. Within the tables are three columns: The first column lists the perceived stressors as they were selected by the focus group participants, from most to least stressful, along with the corresponding photo identification number. The second column has a letter that represents who the participants felt were affected most by the stressor, Individual, Family, or Both. Lastly, the third column also has a letter to represent the type of stress focus group participants selected as to the most influential on ones' development, by rank, from most stressful to least. Additionally, the reasons for why the photos were selected are captured in some of the tables. Explanations were not given for all selections if participants felt photos were similar to previous photos with the same selection.

Table 5: Focus Group 1: Home Commentary

Perceived Stress with ID # Ranked from most to least stressful (1-15)	Who's Affected?	Stress
<p>Increased exposure to death 65</p> <p>This is most stressful because it is something you see and then you start to maybe let that get to you in a lot of different ways</p>	<p>I</p> <p>Death is individual because if your friend dies it will affect you more than it will your mom so death is more individual.</p>	<p>M</p> <p>It can make you go crazy</p>
<p>Lack of finances 111</p> <p>If you have money all these other things work out. Teenage mothers are bad but if you got money it can help</p>	<p>B</p> <p>If your family can't provide for you it affects both.</p>	<p>S</p> <p>Some people are cool with not having a lot of money but the way they are looked at by others can influence them.</p>
<p>Absent Parents 109</p> <p>It's a lack of guidance</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Family and individual because grandparents or someone else has to take the responsibility of taking care of the child</p>	<p>E</p> <p>The child may have the feelings that he was not wanted if his parents were not there for him. It's like girls and their fathers. They can be very emotional</p>
<p>Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36</p> <p>Lack of food is bad because it can affect your school performance and how you perceive the world especially if you see others with it</p>	<p>F</p> <p>One person is not going to eat without the other so the whole family is affected</p>	<p>P</p> <p>You can't grow and you can get various diseases</p>

Table 5 (cont'd)

Increased exposure to Domestic abuse ¹⁰³ This can mess you up mentally. It's like slavery and having a constant fear	I It only hurts the person being abused	M If you see people arguing it may offend you but also you may grow up thinking it's ok to beat your wife
Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking ¹²¹ This leads to violence in the home and can also be a potential of you doing it as well	B It usually runs in the family and therefore it will affect both people	M If they do it all the time and not doing what they are supposed to be doing, it could bring them down. You see a lot of people doing it; it seems like nothing to people and so their mindset changes and it becomes normal.
Teenage Mothers ²⁰	B If you are still in school someone else has to take care of the child so it influences a lot of people	S People view you negatively
Inadequate heating and cooling ⁷⁶	B Whomever lives in the house	P No explanation needed.
Inadequate sleeping quarters ⁸⁶ You might be scared	B May have to share beds	P You want get sleep and so it will influence your body
Peer Influences ⁸ If you see your friends doing something they are going to talk about you.	I It's individual because of individual friends	M Your peers can shape the way you think
Parental Discipline ¹²⁵ This is a good one depending on the context of it. It's not like domestic violence. This should be here because it is not as bad as these other ones	I	M When parents whip you , it puts stress on your body but it may shape how you think if your parents never tell you what you did wrong

Table 5 (cont'd)

School stress due to home life 122 If you can't do well in school due to what is going on at home, you are not going to do well because that is all you are thinking about.	B It's something at home with the family that is probably affecting you	S You won't be able to get a job if you can't do well in school
Lack of outside play due to home life 128 You might have friends out there but anything could happen to you if it's unsafe	I It's you who is not able to go outside	P If you don't get enough exercise, especially when you are growing. Social is big but physical is most important
Increased fear/ Anxiety 40	I It depends on who you are and what you fear that makes the difference	M It's a state of mind and the way you respond to things
Lack of identity 48 This seems to be the least severe	I You are trying to figure out who you are.	S You don't know how to interact with others because you are unsure of yourself.
Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical		

As Focus Group 1 looked through the photos they were surprised to see certain stressors that were depicted, some they were surprised were stressors while others they were well aware of. Moreover, as the young men discussed which photo they would select as the most stressful, they believed the increased exposure to death would be the most stressful and could set the trajectory for the rest of one's life. They believed if someone is exposed to death, the over exposure can make them feel a certain way about their own life which they may begin to care less about themselves because of the uncertainty that comes with life. Also, participants felt like

if a person is always exposed to death they will be affected mentally and the other perceived stressors will be influenced by the increased exposure to death.

Secondly, money is ranked as the second most perceived stressor. Money can help to resolve a lot of the following issues, the young men thought. However, they struggled with where to rank it because they discussed how some people do not have a lot of money but they are able to be resourceful and make things work out as best as possible. After the discussion they decided that lack of finances should be highly ranked.

Peer Influences and Parental Discipline are ranked lower than expected. These selections were based on interpretations in that if you have positive peers than you will do well and one focus group participant did not see parental discipline as a bad thing because he felt since he was disciplined that all children, short of abuse, should be disciplined. All of the focus group members tended to agree with him and saying that parental discipline is needed as long as parents don't discipline a child without talking to the child about why he or she is being punished for negative behavior.

Table 6: Focus Group 1: School Commentary

Perceived Stress with ID # Ranked from most to least stressful (1-15)	Who's Affected?	Stress
Lack of school resources 99 If you interested but don't have the resources then your school work suffers.	I You don't have those resources	S If you don't have the proper material you are not able to compete with others
Outdated and torn books in inner-city119 If your books are torn or if pages are missing you can't learn	I	M You think that they don't care about me. Makes you feel like you don't deserve better books

Table 6 (cont'd)

Unsafe schools 90	B It can come back home (meaning thing that occur at home are not always left at school but may become issues that contribute to one's home life.	M You are always worried and can't feel safe at home or school
Increased drug activity near school grounds ³³ This has to do with one's safety	B You can take it home and your parents will have to deal with it if you are living in their house.	M Even if you don't indulge you know it's there
Metal Detectors 71 Kids be shooting up schools now.	I I feel like it makes student's want to bring it while others believe it's necessary for the schools	M It gives you the feeling of you are not trusted and you and your fellow peers are looked at like criminals even if you are not.
Lack of male role models 11 A male role model shapes you as being a male. Even if you don't have your father a male can help you to not get involved in the streets	I You could potentially already have someone in your life	M If you did have one they could help in potentially changing the way you think about things
Lack or positive role models 123	I You can have a female role model but having a male is better	M They can help you change your mind and actions about things you do
Lack of academic interest 22 You don't have to be interested in school but if you have mentors it can help you be more focused or understand why school is important so not having male role models is worse.	I	E You can get frustrated if you can't find something that you are interested in and then you get frustrated with school
Lack of academic interest 53	I	E

Table 6 (cont'd)

Disinterest in school curriculum 64	I	E
Over-crowded inner city classrooms 126 This will make you disinterested because you may not get a lot of attention in class	B If you not doing well in school it will influence the people at home	E You may not get the attention you want and get upset because you are not able to do well in class
Disinterest in schools 101	I	E
Lack of creativity 12 If you are creative you will push through your academic disinterest. You may not know how to think critically and it could even shape your interest in school.	I	S
Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36 You won't be able to think if you don't have the adequate nutrition	I	P Can hinder you from growing or even concentrating in class
Increased exposure to abandoned buildings including schools 39	B	M
Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical		

As the young men in the focus group spoke of their school experiences they found some commonality in the fact that they lacked resources in their schools that could have helped them to excel even more than they had. The participants believed that if you do not have the adequate material to learn then school is purposeless and nothing else really matters.

Once the participants continued to rank-order their photos, their placement and ideas of metal detectors were different. Some believed they were necessary while others felt they were

treated like criminals. The commentary the young men made about the lack of male role models versus the lack of role models was poignant. The men mentioned that while any role model can be influential, male role models are especially important for other males, especially Black males.

Table 7: Focus Group 1: Community Commentary

Perceived Stress with ID # Ranked from most stressful to least stressful (1-15)	Who's Affected?	Stress
Increased drug activity 32	B	M Being exposed to this can really affect how people think about themselves and others
Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods43	B	S There are certain things that people will not be able to engage in which will influence who they involve themselves with
Increased crime73	B	M This can really affect one mentally because a young man may often worry about things around him.
Increased exposure to illegal gun use 42	B	P You get scared and start thinking that another has something that can hurt you
Death to violence 1	B This will affect the individual and the family	M This can influence others and if they are exposed to this often, this can cause them to have concerns about their own life

Table 7 (cont'd)

Lack of community resources 51 It depends on what the resource is, like recreational centers. If people don't have anything to do they get involved in crime	B Having resources for participation is can lower the stress on parents and the kids will have something to do	S You can't meet people
Lack of community resources 68	B If more resources people can help others	S The way they interact with others
Increased incarceration 17 Incarceration is supposed to be for rehabilitation	B They are no longer a contributor to their family. Their family is sad because they have to leave and the person is separated from family	S They are removed from society and they was they are perceived affects them socially
Unsafe neighborhoods/empty lots/abandoned buildings 70	B	M This is mental especially if you know that there are people who live in better neighborhood. This can make you think about yourself differently.
Increased police presence 21 Their presence makes people scared	I People respond to the presence of police differently	M Mental because of how they are perceived in your mind
Increased exposure to firearms13	I	M
Increased exposure to unemployment63 Things got really bad when they(the government) took all of the manufacturing jobs	I Depends if that person has a family but either way they are affected first	M How they perceive their job loss is mental

Table 7 (cont'd)

No true interaction to people 66	I	S
Makes you feel like you are not trusted	Some people like the bullet proof glass	People always have their guard up
Exposure to graffiti 15	I	S
Graffiti is art. There is a lot of it downtown	The way one perceives graffiti is individual	For some people it's a way of showing their talent
Vacant lots 84	B Some areas can be dangerous so those who live there will be affected	M
Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical		

Participants believed that the first five perceived stressor were all a result of the stressor preceding it. The focus group participants believed that the use of drugs, often times, causes one to lose their sense of self and do whatever they feel they have to do to continue their habit. Consequently, substance abusers often will spend all of their money to feed their habit and when they have spent all of their money they look for other ways to get drugs or alcohol, even commit crimes. However, having a substance abuse issue is not the only result of crime. Money or the lack thereof, in general, can result in people committing heinous crimes. The focus group members discussed that, in order to commit more crimes and to do it “efficiently,” people obtain weapons and as a result a lot of criminals die and innocent people too. Lastly, the commentary presented within the tables the words of the focus group participants.

Table 8: Focus Group 2: Home Commentary

Perceived Stress with ID # Ranked from most to least stressful (1-15)	Who's Affected?	Stress
Lack of identity 48 If people do not know who they are all of these other things don't matter	I If you don't know who you are it does not influence anyone else	S This influences who you hang around and how you interact with others
Lack of finances 111 Lack of finances make a difference on everything else therefore it should be really highly ranked	I	E If you don't have money, especially for necessities you can be really upset.
Absent parents 109	B	E
Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36	B	P
Increased exposure to death 65	I	M
Increased fear/anxiety 40	I People respond differently to fear. What one person is fearful about is different than the other person	M It starts in the mind about what is fearful
Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking 121	I This only affects the individual	M If you see other people doing It, it may affect if you do it or not so it's a mental thing
Peer influences 8	B Your peers can have an influence and then you take that back home.	S Has to do with who you hang around. You often get your behaviors and thoughts from your peers
Inadequate sleeping quarters 86	B You may have to share beds with someone	M You may be exhausted due to lack of sleep

Table 8 (cont'd)

Inadequate heating and cooling 76	B Everyone living in the house will be cold	M This just fucks with your mind mentally an you start thinking about a lot of different things especially if you are cold
Increased exposure to domestic violence 103	B When you see this shit like your dad beating on your mom you start thinking it's cool to treat women that way	M You start acting based on what you saw
School stress due to home life 122	I Depends on what the stress is but the one going to school is affected so the individual.	M Prevents you from being able to concentrate
Lack of outside play due to unsafe play areas 128	B Your parents have to tolerate you being in the house and you can't go outside and play	S You won't be able to have many friends or interact with others
Teenage Mothers 20	B The mom has kids so it affects her and the kids because she is a teenage mom and not able to provide adequately	S The way they are perceived is not always positive. Socially, It's becoming more accepted. It is what it is.
Parental discipline 125	B You need to discipline the child.	S
<i>Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family</i> <i>Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical</i>		

The second focus group believed that the lack of identity is the most perceived stressor because they believed that if a person doesn't know who he is he can be influenced by a multitude of people, places or things. Also, lack of identity, they believed was a social stressor because one's personality will draw them to a certain group of people, whether positive or negative.

Smoking and drinking alcohol can have negative effects on the body. With all of the studies on second hand smoke and the effects of alcohol, I was surprised the young men believed the perceived stressor would only affect the individual person. Lastly, parental discipline was selected as the least stressful. The young men had the same sentiment that nothing is stressful about discipline. They did however agree that discipline can be painful to the child at the time but discipline is needed and believe that when parents do not discipline their children, their children disrespect them.

Table 9: Focus Group 2: School Commentary

Perceived Stress with ID # Ranked from most to least stressful (1-15)	Who's Affected?	Stress
Unsafe schools 90 Is probably the worst because if everything else is in place you don't want to go to an unsafe school	B If the school is unsafe the parents worry and the child has anxieties	S It influences the interactions people have with each other
lack of academic interest 22	I	M It depends on the person
Lack of male role mentors 11 A male role model is very important for males. More so than a female role model	I The individual can really be helped most	M Having a male mentor can really change the way a person thinks about school all together

Table 9 (cont'd)

Lack of positive role models 123 Any role mode is good but the male role model is more important for other males	I	M
Lack of creativity 12 If you don't care about school all of the following things don't matter	I	M Its mental because it's an individual influence
Outdated and torn books in inner-city 119	I	E When you realize that other schools have better books it makes you feel like you are good enough
Lack of school resources 99	I	E
Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities 36	B	P If you are not eating you can't do well in school or grow
Disinterest in school 101 This affects the following two stressors	I Some like school and some don't	M
Disinterest in school curriculum 64 If the material or curriculum is not interesting enough then you be interested	I	M
Lack of academic interest 53	I	M
Increased drug activity near school grounds 33 In most of the schools there is this issue so you get used to this	B The family is influenced because of what could possibly happen to their child while in school	S You may not be able to go outside or when you walk home you are always worried
Over-crowded inner-city classrooms 126 Don't feel like this is that bad. I think it would be fun to be in class with a lot of people	I	S Socially because you have a lot of people around you to be cool with
Metal detectors 71 Not that bad. It's necessary	B	S

Table 9 (cont'd)

Increased exposure to abandoned buildings including schools 39	B	M It depends on how people look at it
<i>Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family</i> <i>Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical</i>		

The school category was a category where participants felt the stressors were all dependent upon perception. The focus group participants selected unsafe schools as the top perceived stressor. They believed that if the environment is unsafe a person cannot focus and concentrate on his school work because he is unsure if he will be inflicted with bodily harm. Participants believed that unsafe schools affect family members as well as the child because family members will always have to be concerned about the wellbeing of their child.

Secondly, participants believed that the lack of interest is a very important stressor that should be considered because if students are not interested in the material even if they are in an environment that is free from harm, has role models, and all the resources available they will not care because they will lack the motivation to take advantage of the resources. Lastly, outdated books as a perceived stressor, the focus group participants thought were highly stressful. However, not only did they think that not having adequate material was stressful but the effect not having the material can have on one's psyche was also important. The participants mentioned that a child realizing he doesn't have adequate material to learn, especially when he is aware that students in other schools have better materials, he feels as if he is not important and people don't care about him or his success.

Table 10: Focus Group 2: Community Commentary

Perceived Stress with ID # Ranked from most to least stressful (1-15)	Who's Affected?	Stress
Death to violence 1 This is worse than anything because you adjust your life according to this	B The family and the individual are influenced	E Makes you always worried about if it's going to be you
Unsafe neighborhoods/empty lots/abandoned buildings 70 Some reasons why neighborhoods are unsafe is because of violent deaths	B	S There may be certain things that you can and can't do because of the neighborhood
Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods 43 Somebody has got to be homeless, so it's not that bad.	B	M When you homeless it's a mental issue
Increased police presence 21 You can drive around in Detroit with no license. Here in (East Lansing) you always have to watch for them	B	S The way you act and what you do is influenced by the presence of police
Lack of community resources 68 We had a library but it was always empty	B	S
Lack of community resources 51 Recreational centers are important	B	S Affects you socially because things that you may be able to do you can't
Increased Crime 73 Crime is probably a result of not having resources in the community so that would follow resources	B	S You always have to be on guard and watch out

Table 10 (cont'd)

No true interaction with people 66 When going to the liquor stores in Detroit I feel like it's someone just giving me something that will harm me. It has to be there or people will get hurt and robbed	I	S If you not interacting with people. They don't get to know you and you don't get to know them. The stereotypes continue.
Increased incarceration 17 All of the above things boil down to incarceration	B	M Knowing that you will be locked up. But its mental because if you doing wrong it's a part of life for you, to go to jail
Increased drug activity 32 When you in a bad environment you don't know why people start doing certain things	B	M People are affected by drugs differently
Increased exposure to illegal gun use 42	B	S
Increased exposure to firearm 13	B	S You always worried about someone using it on you
Increased exposure to unemployment 63	B	S Affects what you can or can't do
Vacant lots 84 Vacant lots is better (The young men would rather have vacant lots over vacant or abandoned buildings.	B If the neighborhood is bad that vacant lot can affect both because parents may feel is unsafe	S It can be unsafe or it can be an area that kids can play
Exposure to graffiti 15 Is a form of art	I It really depends on how people look at it	S Some like it and some don't. It's an individual thing and therefore more social than the others
Who's Affected: I=Individual, B=Both, F=Family Stress: M=Mental, S=Social, E=Emotional, P=Physical		

Participants, at the beginning of the photo sort for inner-city communities, thought very carefully about how one stressor affected the other. They were able to quickly place their photos in descending order from most stressful to least stressful. Death to violence, participants believed was the most perceived stressor. They selected this believe they believe this stressor has emotional affects that can influence how one interacts with his environment. Safety was a theme that was important for these participants and they felt that when an environment is unsafe it may be as a result of crime which leads to more chaos. Following safety, participants believed there is an interchangeable symbiotic relationship between safety and the lack of resources. Participants felt like the more the lack of resources there are in a community the more illegal activity a person involves himself in. Subsequently, they believe crime makes the community fearful. Resources for the community are unfortunately often not invested in because of a belief that the resources will be taken advantage of or not appreciated.

Lastly, participants were surprised that graffiti was selected as one of the top 15 stressors because they felt that there was nothing stressful about graffiti. The focus group participants thought that the presence of graffiti is all based on interpretation and their interpretation of graffiti was explained as being an art form. However, one of the focus group participants did mention how it does however depends on the type of graffiti that is displayed because if it is graffiti of various gang signs then graffiti can be disturbing and stressful because then you feel like you are in a dangerous neighborhood.

CHAPTER 9

FINDINGS: COMPARISON OF TOP 15 ECOSYSTEM CATEGORIES BY GROUP

The following tables were created to allow one to see how the top 15 stressors in each eco-system category (home, school, community) were ranked. Two different groups are represented in the following tables. The first column is the top 15 stressors that I calculated from the combined participant's photo selection from phase 2 (see Appendix E). The second column is the top 15 stressors combined, which I calculated (See Appendix E) from Focus Groups 1 and 2, from phase 3, in an effort to consolidate to one focus group. To minimize confusion, the combined data for Focus Group 1 and 2 is labeled as Focus Group.

Table 11: Home: Top 15 Stressors

Perceived Stressors Participants 1-5 (Combined)	Ranks 1-15 (Most to least stressful)	Focus Group Data
Increased exposure to domestic abuse	1	Lack of finances
Parental discipline	2	Increased exposure to death
Lack of finances	3	Absent Parents
Increased fear/anxiety	4	Inadequate nutrition or lack of Necessities
Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking	5	Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking
Lack of outside play due to unsafe play areas	6	Increased exposure to domestic abuse
Absent Parents	7	Lack of identity
Teenage mothers	8	Inadequate heating and cooling
Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities	9	Inadequate sleeping quarters
Lack of identity	10	Peer influences

Table 11 (cont'd)

Peer influences	11	Increased fear/anxiety
Inadequate sleeping quarters	12	Teenage mothers
Inadequate heating and cooling	13	School stress due to home life
School stress due to home life	14	Parental discipline
Increased exposure to death	15	Lack of outside play due to unsafe play areas

The object of these tables is to see where each photo was ranked in relation to the other photo in a different group. The Lack of finances is ranked within the top 3 among both groups. The first group ranked lack of finances as their third most perceived stressor, whereas the focus group ranked lack of finances as their top perceived stressor. The lack of finances is within the top five. That is significant. The lack of finances prevents one from being able to acquire the necessities of life and often exacerbates other risk factors. Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking was ranked within the same range. Peer influences and school stress due to home life was ranked within the same range or no more than two rankings from one another. When it comes to lack of finances, there were different rankings and perspectives as to their rank. The combined data from participants 1-5 believe that increased exposure to domestic violence was most harmful to the development of youth, whereas the combined data from the focus groups ranked increased exposure to domestic violence as the sixth most perceived stressor.

Table 12: School: Top 15 Stressors

Perceived Stressors Participants 1-5 (Combined)	Ranks 1-15 (Most to least stressful)	Focus Group Data
Over-crowded inner-city classrooms	1	Unsafe schools
Outdated and torn books in inner-city	2	Lack of school resources
Metal detectors	3	Outdated and torn books in inner-city
Lack of school resources	4	Lack of male role mentors
Lack of academic interest	5	Lack of academic interest
Increased drug activity near school grounds	6	Lack of positive role models
Unsafe schools	7	Increased drug activity near school grounds
Increased exposure to abandoned buildings including schools	8	Lack of creativity
Lack of positive role models	9	Metal detectors
Lack of creativity	10	Lack of academic interest
Disinterest in school	11	Disinterest in school curriculum
Lack of male role mentors	12	Disinterest in school
Disinterest in school curriculum	13	Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities
lack of academic interest	14	Over-crowded inner-city classrooms
Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities	15	Increased exposure to abandoned buildings including schools

The stressors within the school context were more recognizable among research participants. Academic interest, which had the same ranking for both groups: outdated and torn books, increased drug activity near school grounds, and disinterest in school were all fairly consistent in their ranking across groups. However, there were some variances in the thought process that preceded their ranking of the photos from most to least stressful. Group 1 ranked

over-crowded inner-city classrooms as the top stressor for the school category. During the focus groups, the participants mentioned how there are many feelings that surface when they are placed in over-crowded class. One participant thought it would be fun because it the more people in the class the better one's chances of making more friends. Outdated and torn books were ranked one and two respectively. Participants mentioned that students feel as if they are not good enough to receive adequate books when students in neighboring communities have new ones. Also, participants expressed if students did not have the learning materials they needed to succeed that they would likely lose focus, academically and engage in risky behaviors – thus increasing the number of stressors that impacted their lives. Lastly, I am surprised that inadequate nutrition and the lack of resources were ranked within the bottom five as the most stressful experiences. I believe that without adequate nutrition, your motivation at school lessens.

Table 13: Community: Top 15 stressors

Perceived Stressors Participants 1-5 (Combined)	Ranks 1-15 (Most to least stressful)	Focus Group Data
Death to violence	1	Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods
Increased exposure to firearm	2	Lack of community resources
No true interaction with people	3	Death to violence
Lack of community resources	4	Increased Crime
Exposure to graffiti	5	Increased drug activity
Increased incarceration	6	Unsafe neighborhoods/empty lots/abandoned buildings
Increased police presence	7	Lack of community resources
Increased exposure to illegal gun use	8	Increased police presence
Unsafe neighborhoods/empty lots/abandoned buildings	9	Increased exposure to illegal gun use
Lack of community resources	10	Increased incarceration

Table 13 (cont'd)

Increased exposure to unemployment	11	No true interaction with people
Increased drug activity	12	Increased exposure to firearm
Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods	13	Increased exposure to unemployment
Vacant lots	14	Exposure to graffiti
Increased Crime	15	Vacant lots

Within the focus groups discussion of community, there were a lot of discussions among the participants as to their experiences. Most of the participants have been exposed to some of the same stressors but the ways in which they perceived them varied. Death to violence was ranked as the top stressor among the first group, which is represented in the first column, compared to the focus group participants, represented in the second column, who ranked increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods as their top choice.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Conclusions

Children and adolescents who grow up in poor urban neighborhoods are faced with many challenges that can hinder them from positively developing into productive adults. These challenges are attenuated by the stress and/or lack of resources accessible to many individuals in these communities (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Clark, Barrett, & Kolvin, 2000; Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002).

Research that focuses on urban environments and the prevalence of stressors within these communities are vast (Beyers et al., 2003; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Gutman, 2005; McLoyd, 1998; Weiss, 2000). However, there is little research that allows those living in these environments to share their personal experiences. Therefore, this research was designed to determine what young men from Detroit consider to be stressful and to share their experiences from the homes, schools, and communities in which they grew up.

My hope has always been that my research would take seriously the experiences of those who grow up in economically distressed communities, especially where violence and the lack of resources are normative, and the academic community would see residents of inner-city communities as individuals and not statistics. There were six key findings and multiple supporting themes that emerged from my analysis of data collected during this research

The first research finding is the importance of the parental context in the lives of these young men, specifically the presence of their fathers. In each interview the young men mentioned their fathers as having some influence on their lives, whether negative or positive. Richard shared very private moments with me, and his desire to talk to someone about the many

struggles he has figuring out life and growing into manhood. Richard believes that if he had someone to speak with about his challenges, he would be at a better place mentally.

Unfortunately, he does not consider his dad as someone he can speak with, due to his dad's hard or unwelcoming demeanor. Additionally, during the focus group sessions both groups discussed how important role models were – but not just any role model, male role models. The young men shared how there are just some things that women cannot do when it comes to teaching and raising a boy into manhood. I believe that the number one role model in a young man's life should be his dad, especially if the dad is living and able to take care of his responsibilities as a father.

My second and third research findings are the lack of safety and adequate housing and safety, which were challenges these young men faced in their lives. The interviews helped to engage men in dialogue about the places they lived and schools attended. Unfortunately, due to finances, most of these young men moved from house to house causing them to always have to make new friends or never feeling as if they could call a place home. Often times when these young men moved, the places they moved to were worse than the previous locations. This often disrupted their lives and where they slept did not make it easier for them to adjust. One young man spoke about how he slept on the couch and after that slept in a tent with his mom in his aunt's basement. Most young men never had a room by themselves and lived in places with multiple families where space was limited.

Issues of safety were concerns for all five young men and they spoke about having to be vigilant and watch over their backs at all times because of the unpredictability that living in Detroit caused them. Also, research participants often spoke about how they had to be in the

house before the street lights came on, being restricted from going to certain places, whether it was the neighborhood park, or the next door neighbor's home, because of drug or gang activity.

My fourth research finding stems from the questions I asked that would allow me to better understand the school environment. The schools that these research participants attended seemed to be poorly managed by the teachers, causing a lot of class disruptions. Either there were fights breaking out at any given time or teachers were often harassed and interrupted to start lessons over because students, who were disengaged, would ask the teacher to repeat themselves. I believe that students are often trying to please the other students and will do anything to fit in and seem like the "cool" kids. Unfortunately, this is a reality because a couple of the research participants spoke about how they, at some point in their academic career, did not fit in but once they started to be disruptive in class and make jokes about the teacher or other students they were then liked.

My fifth research finding is one that I think is very pivotal in assessing behavior, and that is the ideal way to behave due to environment. The young men mentioned that Detroit was not an environment to be "soft," to show your feelings, or care for the needs of others. There was a hard exterior that you had to always put on. This persona is very mind boggling to me because I wonder how many people have to act like someone that they are not. This persona or ideal behavior is said, by the participants, to protect them from being robbed or taken advantage of. This is a finding that I believe needs further investigation. Due to Detroit's high crime rates and economic and political instability, people believe they often have to watch their backs for fear of being taken advantage of or robbed. I reflected on the thought of realness to oneself and wondered how much of this mentality or hard persona is a facade and, if so, many of Detroit's residents or residents of any other inner-city residents wear a mask.

The young men shared their experiences in East Lansing – home of Michigan State University - and how their lives are different than that which they experience in Detroit. In East Lansing they feel comfortable wearing whatever they want, acting how they want, and feeling they can be themselves. However, when they go to Detroit there are certain behaviors they discontinue and clothes they choose not to wear because they may be ridiculed or victimized.

My sixth research finding is the lack of resources that were evident in each area of my focus: home, school, and community, resources were often limited. What is unsettling is that food, which is a necessity for survival, is often scarcely available or lacking quality nutrients. Nutrition is important for a growing child and the environment in which he or she lives may not have or provide adequate nutrients. Poor nutrition affects brain growth both pre and postnatal (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Grocery stores are often not easily accessible to people in these environments and what happens is that families will frequent a convenience store, where the food is more expensive, yet accessible. In addition to grocery stores, resources that often build community among people are nonexistent; recreational centers, YMCA's, Boys and Girls Clubs, and parks, just to name a few. There is no surprise that crime becomes an option for young men when they have idle hands, especially during out-of-school time. However, when resources including schools, parks and recreational centers were available, the young men mentioned how they could not or felt their livelihood could be threatened because much of the activity that occurred at these places made them breeding grounds for drug activity, fights, and even gang violence. Therefore, if community resources were available they were often not accessible to the public.

Lastly, not all the experiences these young men had were negative. These men were motivated to be successful and graduate from high school and attend college, regardless of the

negative experiences they have had. However, they did not do it by themselves. They had, in addition to family members, role models in the school, or in the community. All of the research participants played sports and became friends with like-minded peers. Coaches were influential, and even some teachers. Unfortunately, uncovering protective factors were not as poignant as I had hoped. These young men have faced many challenges and could have become another statistic. However they did not. Therefore, being able to uncover any protective factor could have been enlightening, as well as helpful, for implementation by parents raising young Black men in economically distressed neighborhoods. In retrospect I could have asked questions that probe at factors influencing resilience.

Conversely, I believe it is significant that although these young men lived in urban environments, the majority of schools they attended were either the best in the city or schools located in neighboring school districts. However, I think the fact that these young men have overcome surmountable odds and were accepted to Michigan State University (MSU) is a more tell-tale sign of how, if at all, they adjusted. Furthermore, while being accepted to MSU is an achievement, the change of environment and academic challenges introduced to these young men are needed to adapt and adjust in personal interactions for them to do well. Additionally, a theme that evolved is the racism in the city is systemic. However, at MSU, it is a personalized experience.

Case study analysis and focus groups helped tell the story of these young men and confirmed some of the experiences that my literature review highlighted about the exposures youth have in poor urban environments. The purpose and primary objective of this research was to better understand the lived experiences of Black men from the inner-city of Detroit by examining three research questions: 1) Do the experiences of these Black men and what they

were exposed to confirm current research? 2) What are most frequently reported perceived stressors depicted through photos, in the home, school, and community and what are their thoughts of a future in Detroit with their own family? And 3) what, if any, themes of resilience occur in the lives of these young men?

Based on my review of the research literature, participant focus groups, interview discussions, and cross case analysis of five Black males, it is significant that the lives of these men and where they are from should not be undervalued. The findings I discussed above confirm some of the current research about the types of exposures that one faces in urban environment. The experiences of these men and the previous research both confirm that increased exposure to violence, increased noise levels, and random acts of victimization in poor-urban environments are normative (Lupien et al., 2001; Kiser, 2007; Murry et al., 2011).

My second research question identified the top stressors within phases 2 and 3 as follows: in the home, increased exposure to domestic abuse and lack of finances; in schools, overcrowded inner-city classrooms and unsafe schools; and lastly in the communities, death to violence and increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods. I was surprised that money or the lack of resources did not make the number one stressors among all groups. However, even as focus group participants mention in the commentary sections, money is very important for one's livelihood however, there are some things that money cannot buy.

Throughout this research study, I realized that things not mentioned explicitly by participants were just as important as those that were. In the photos that depicted urban stressors I was intentional about adding photos that were of environmental toxins which included mercury, lead, and pollution. I added these environmental toxins or stressors because research that focuses on urban environments often reports of the negative effects that increased exposure to

environmental toxins can have on the brain and other areas of development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Because, often times the effect of social stressors on one's development are unknown, I thought it would be interesting to see if the young men in this study would identify these photos of perceived stressors as factors that would affect the development of others in poor-urban environments. Out of 130 photos of perceived stressors, the photos that depicted pollution, lead, or mercury were not chosen as any of the top 15 stressors in the home, school, nor community categories.

Research makes it clear that these environmental toxins have an effect on development. Therefore, the young men may not have selected these photos because environmental toxins like household and industrial pollutants, especially mercury and lead, may not have visible effects on these young men and the social stressors because they don't see these stressors and cannot identify with them. Consequently, the idea of these men being affected by a certain stressors was not always recognized. Often times the young men would talk about how, due to certain things that happened, in their neighborhoods, whether fear of home break-ins or being without electricity, they were not affected. Moreover, what I have learned is that it is important to allow men those that have first-hand accounts of living in environments that can hinder their positive development is pivotal. Additionally, just because one may not be able to identify or articulate how a particular experience is stressful does not mean it is not.

Discussion

This research was an exploratory study in which I sought to understand what, if any, stressors and phenomena would surface as a result of this research design. Most of the research conducted about urban environments rarely reports internal effects that living in urban environments may cause to one's developmental outcomes. It is difficult to prove how one's experiences affect them. However, I believe the things that people see and are often exposed to affects them socially, mentally, physically, or emotionally.

What is most critical in this research is the understanding of how frequent exposures to neighborhood stressors impact one's future, especially academically. I persist in the belief that where one is from matters to their developmental growth and when they are unable to succeed, because of constructs that can't be explained, they are often blamed for their own misfortune. Yet, no one truly understands how heavy the weights of one's experiences are growing up in crime ridden and unsafe neighborhoods. Bronfenbrenner (2005) noted that there is no one factor that is correlated with one's behavior or outcome; it is an accumulation of factors.

There were many limitations to this study. This research design made it difficult to compare results because of the variance in interpretation from one participant to another. Maybe this is often the challenge with qualitative research and ordinal data. Also, an individual's definition of harm is different than the next person's and how someone believes he is affected is undefined. For example, when asked if one is affected by the noise level or drug activity in one's neighborhood, participants will say they were not affected by those stressors. I argue differently, and believe that just because you recognized gangs in your neighborhood but did not become a gang member does not mean you were not in some way affected or had to adapt to that exposure.

Regardless of the challenges, I believe research on poor urban communities is important. There are many unexplored truths to how one's social experiences influence who they are and become. However, I don't believe the effects are only behavioral in nature, but also often influence our brain in the way that it functions. When conducting research on young Black American men in urban environments, one would think that the issue of race would come up and just because it did not come up does not mean that it was not significant. When the young men spoke of their ideal school experiences and if the schools they attended prior to coming to MSU were ideal, they said no. Conversely, the young men compare their experiences to their White roommates who seemed to have had a better transition from high school to college. Nate mentioned his desire to have been exposed to White people and some of the experiences that White people have. He thought that his sister had it better than he did because of the experiences she had going to school with White people. He compared his lack of resources, and experiences to his sister's and felt she would be comparatively better well-rounded because of it.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Appendix A

Interview Questions

*Research suggests that the neighborhoods in which a person lives in can directly and indirectly affect several domains of youth development. I am interested in learning about the neighborhoods in which **young Black American male adults** resided in prior to their coming to MSU. Environmental exposures include experiences in the home, school, and local community.*

1. I want to hear about the neighborhood(s) in which you grew up in prior to your coming to MSU. Tell me about your earliest memories of the neighborhood and home you grew up in?
 - How old do you believe you were?
 - Describe the layout of the house.
 - Who all lived with you? How many bedrooms? Parents, siblings, grandparents, friends...? How many people stayed in the home? Did you have your own room?
 - *Was this a comfortable environment? Can you recall any concerns in the home that were sources of stress for you or your parents...?*
2. Recall all of the places you have lived, the school(s) you attended, and with whom you lived prior to your coming to MSU... Can you tell me where those places were and with whom you lived? Starting with the earliest you can remember. How long did you live there?
3. *How would you describe your neighborhood? Poor, working class, middle class, why ...?*
4. *Describe a typical day in your neighborhood*
 - Your street, the houses, and places in walking distance from your house. How old were you at this place? Had you started school?
 - Did you have neighbors nearby? Were you able to go to the neighbors to play?
 - What was your relationship like with your neighbors?
 - Would you say you live in a clean neighborhood? Did people cut their grass?
 - Did you see people going to work everyday
 - Would kids stay out late on a school night? Did you? Friends have a curfew?

5. Do you remember going outside to play?

As you walked outside *to play* can you paint a picture or sort of describe for me the different things you would have observed? Where did you play? (Backyard, front yard...playground, boys and girls club, neighbor's house, vacant lot). (Play any organized sports? If so, what did you play?)

6. Let's visualize being back there at this first home.... (interior, exterior---surrounding) If you were standing outside in front of your home what are some things that you would have observed? *Cars parked in the street, only in the driveway, cars on the lawn, bars on windows, busy street? Flowers, nice yards...*

- What were the fondest of memories of your growing up? What about things not so great?

7. *Can you recall any smells, sounds, visuals, either good or bad in this environment? Can you recall any stressful situation or things that you observed that were not good?*

8. Were there things that were great about this environment? Can you tell me about those things?

- What is the first school experience you can recall?
- What was the neighborhood like surrounding your school, how about the aesthetics of the schools? The classrooms. How was the learning environment?
- When you think about your school experiences, do you believe the schools you attended prepared you for college? If not, please explain.
- Knowing what you know now, what things would you wish you were exposed to in school that would have bettered your opportunities?
- If you could create your own school experiences, what would they look like?

Neighborhood resources

- Research suggests that inner-city neighborhoods have high crime rates. Have you ever experienced any act of violence in your neighborhood including in your home, school or know of people that have?
- Would you say this was a safe environment? Why or why not?
- Have you ever had anyone close to you die your age? Have you ever attended any funerals? If so, how many?

Did you or your family have the need to take advantage of any public services in your neighborhood like the public library, gym, YMCA, Social services, churches, food banks?

What are some community or neighborhood resources that you believe were lacking from your neighborhood, that other neighborhoods may have had?

What do you believe are some things within the inner-city that that seems to create this perpetual cycle of helplessness and defeat among Black men, specifically?

Was there a sense of community?

Did neighbors communicate with one another?

Did you have neighborhood watch?

Final Thoughts

- 9. Do you feel like you were given the same opportunities as other children your age growing up in other neighborhoods*
- 10. How was your childhood different from other friends, peers or family members in your neighborhood, your age?*
- 11. Have you ever wished you could trade places with people from other neighborhoods? If so, why?*
- 12. What would your ideal childhood have looked like?*
- 13. If you had children would you have wanted them to grow up in this neighborhood? Describe for me the ideal neighborhood for your children*

Appendix B

Main Participants: Preliminary Photo Critique

Appendix B

Form A

Main Participants: Preliminary Photo Critique

Step 1:

You have been given 130 photos depicting increased sources of stress for urban/inner-city youth. Separate the photos that you believe best represent stressors most frequented in a home, school or local community setting. At the completion of your sorting, select the top 15 photos from each category you believe are most stressful, totaling 45 photos in all across categories.

Step 2:

In the first column from **most stressful to least stressful**, in each category, **mark the Photo Identification Number** of the top 15 stressful exposures you believe would influence ones' development the most while growing up in an urban/inner-city neighborhood. *Also, mark the photo identification number of the photos you have placed in each category after the top 15, these do not have to be in any particular order.*

Step 3:

After examining each pile separately what, if any, urban/inner-city stressors do you believe may have been overlooked that may hinder positive youth develop?

Step 4:

In the second column titled **Frequency of Exposure**, mark the number that best represents how often, it at all, you were exposed to the perceived urban/inner-city stressor depicted in the photo you identified in the first column.

All the time=1 (Daily), frequently=2 (A few times per month), infrequently=3 (A few times per year), or never=0).

Step 5:

In the second column titled **Who's affected?** mark either an **I** for **I**ndividual, **F** for **F**amily, or **B** for **B**oth according to who you perceive the stressor in the photo influences.

Step 6:

In the third column, mark according to the four areas of stress either an **M** for **M**ental, **E** for **E**motional, **P** for **P**hysical or **S** for **S**ocial, according to how you believe the stressor is most influential on ones' development.

Form A: Preliminary Photo Critique

Participant Number: _____

[illegible]

Appendix C

Focus Group: Photo Critique

Appendix C

Form B Focus Group: Photo Critique

Participant Number: _____

Step 1:

You have been given 45 photos total. Separate the photos that you believe best represents stressors most frequented in a home, school or local community setting. At the completion of your sorting the 45 photos for each category, you should have 15 photos under each category.

Step 2:

In the first column from **most stressful to least stressful**, in each category, **mark the Photo Identification Number** of the top 15 stressful exposures, in each category, you believe impacts youth growing up in an urban/inner-city neighborhood.

Step 3:

In the second column titled **Frequency of Exposure**, mark the number that best represents how often, it at all, you were exposed to the perceived urban/inner-city stressor depicted in the photo you identified in the first column.

All the time=1 (Daily), frequently=2 (A few times per month), infrequently=3 (A few times per year), or never=0).

Step 4:

In the third column titled **Who's most affected** mark either an **I** for **I**ndividual, **F** for **F**amily, or **B** for **B**oth according to who you perceive the stressor in the photo influences.

Step 5:

In the fourth column, mark according to the four areas of stress either an **M** for **M**ental, **E** for **E**motional, **P** for **P**hysical, or **S** for **S**ocial, according to how you believe the stressor is most influential on ones' developmental outcomes.

Participant Number: _____

PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

Appendix D

Areas of Stress Defined

Appendix D

Areas of Stress Defined

The most common types of stress include: Physical, emotional, mental, social, process and time, cultural, systemic and value stress. For the purposes of this research and according to the literature I will only ask about the physical, emotional, mental, and social stressors presented in urban/inner-city environments.

Physical Stress: Physical stress factors are poor food, unsuitable diet, too little sleep, poor hygiene, excessive noise, bright lights, strong scents, all kinds of chemicals in household products, paints, and clothes, too strenuous physical labor, heavy lifting, heavy labor inappropriate for one's age, multitasking, too many hours of work, too much sun, extreme and sudden changes in weather, excessive speed or changes in speed, all forms of environmental pollution.

Emotional Stress: Emotional stress factors can be feelings of fear and dread, rejection, abandonment, anger as well as guilt, shame, embarrassment and humiliation. Emotional stress can result from extreme situations like bullying.

Mental Stress: Mental stress factors include worry, anxiety, fear, impossible expectations or demands, unreasonable expectations or demands, inappropriate expectations or demands, inflexible thinking, resistance to necessary change, powerlessness.

Social Stress: Social stresses are common and varied. Some more common ones are moving; adding to the family, marriage, divorce, family members having difficulties, heavy social expectations, and social rituals can be unhealthy (drinking)

Appendix E

Protocol for Calculating Top 15 Stressors per Category

Appendix E

Protocol for Calculating Top 15 Stressors per Category

Part A: Created three different tables. Each table had dimensions of 6x15. The first row of the table had numbers 1-15, to represent which photos were placed where. 1 being the most stressful and 15 being the least stressful.

Part A₁) Table one represented all 15 photos that each 5 participants categorized from most stressful to least stress in the home category.

Part A₂) Table two represented all 15 photos that each 5 participants categorized from most stressful to least stress in the School category.

Part A₃) Table three represented all 15 photos that each 5 participants categorized from most stressful to least stress in the local community category.

Part B: Identified which Photo ID number was identified two or more times in each category

Part C: Following the identification of each photo ID number I recorded which photo ID numbers were selected among all five participants, four participants, three participants, and two tow participants.

Part D: I then marked where on a scale from 1-15, 1 being the most stressful and 15 being the least stressful, where each photo fell on the scale. For example, Photo ID number 10 may have been selected by three participants however each participant may have ranked photo 10 at place 1, 5, and 15 respectively.

Part E: These numbers were then added to get another ranking and placed within 1-15 as the most stressful stressor. After adding the numbers together, the ID numbers that had the lower number would represent the most stressful.

Part F: If a photo was selected five times I considered that as one of the top stressors due to its selection and all five participants also thinking that stressors were significant regardless of its rank. The only time the photos initial rank needed to be added to figure out where it fell on the scale is when there was the same selection of photos. For example, if there were three photos that were selected among all five participants then I would calculate their ranks to see which out of the five photos have the lower number. The photo with the lower number would represent the most stressful photo out of those three.

Part G: After identifying what if any photos were selected five times I then identified the photos selected four times, three times, and lastly two times.

Appendix F

Photos of Perceived urban/inner-city stressors

Appendix F
Photos of Perceived urban/inner-city stressors

Figure 5: Death due to violence



Death due to violence

1

Figure 6: Limited interaction/Felt like criminals



Limited interaction/Felt like criminals

2

Figure 7: Lack of adult supervision



Lack of adult supervision

3

Figure 8: Disorganized neighborhoods



Disorganized Neighborhoods

4

Figure 9: School closings



School Closings

5

Figure 10: Abandoned houses/open lots



Abandoned Houses/ Open lots

6

Figure 11: Unsafe play areas/abandoned buildings



Unsafe play areas/ abandoned buildings

7

Figure 12: Peer influences



Peer influences

8

Figure 13: Absent mother



Absent Mother

9

Figure 14: Increased exposure to law enforcement



Increased exposure to law enforcement

10

Figure 15: Lack of male role mentors



Lack of male role mentors

11

Figure 16: Lack of creativity



Lack of creativity

12

Figure 17: Increased exposure to firearms



Increased exposure to firearms

13

Figure 18: Lack of male role models in education



Lack of male role models in education

14

Figure 19: Exposure to graffiti



Exposure to graffiti

15

Figure 20: Lack of two parent homes



Lack of two parent homes

16

Figure 21: Increased incarceration



Increased incarceration

17

Figure 22: Unsafe work environments



Unsafe work environments

18

Figure 23: Not belonging



Not belonging

19

Figure 24: Teenage mothers



Teenage mothers

20

Figure 25: Increased police presence



Increased police presence

21

Figure 26: Lack of academic interest



Lack of academic interest

22

Figure 27: Unsafe/abandoned homes



Unsafe/abandoned homes

23

Figure 28: Lack of adequate transportation



Lack of adequate transportation

24

Figure 29: Lack of role models



Lack of role models

24

Figure 30: Abandoned homes



Abandoned homes

25

Figure 31: Dilapidated housing



Dilapidated housing

26

Figure 32: Increased exposure to crime



Increased exposure to crime

27

Figure 33: Prostitution



Prostitution

28

Figure 34: Abandoned homes



Abandoned homes

29

Figure 35: Presence of liquor stores



Presence of Liquor shops

30

Figure 36: Exposure to disabled individuals



Exposure to disabled individuals

31

Figure 37: Increased drug activity



Increased drug activity

32

Figure 38: Increased drug activity near school grounds



Increased drug activity near school grounds

33

Figure 39: Increased noise level due to fire, ambulance, or police sirens



Increased noise level due to fire, ambulance, or police sirens

34

Figure 40: Unsafe play areas. Exposure to unlivable living conditions



Unsafe play areas. Exposure to unlivable living conditions

35

Figure 41: Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities



Inadequate nutrition or lack of necessities

36

Figure 42: Lack of grocery stores in urban/inner-city areas



Lack of grocery stores in urban/inner-city areas

37

Figure 43: Increased exposure to homeless



Increased exposure to homeless

38

Figure 44: Increased exposure to abandoned buildings including schools



Increased exposure to abandoned buildings
including schools

39

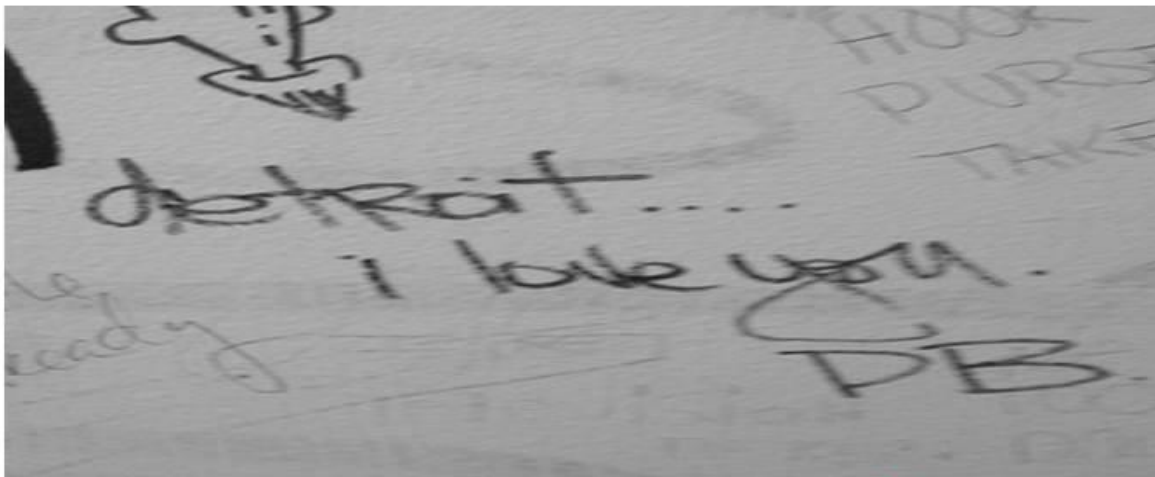
Figure 45: Increased fear/anxiety



Increased fear/Anxiety

40

Figure 46: Graffiti



Graffiti

41

Figure 47: Increased exposure to illegal gun use



Increased exposure to illegal gun use

42

Figure 48: Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods



Increased unemployment in urban/inner-city neighborhoods

43

Figure 49: Increased homeless



Increased homeless

44

Figure 50: Increased hopelessness



Increased hopelessness

45

Figure 51: Increased exposure to social services



Increased exposure to social services

46

Figure 52: Transportation



Transportation

47

Figure 53: Lack of identity



Lack of identity

48

Figure 54: Lack of role models/motherless homes



Lack of role models/motherless homes

49

Figure 55: Incarcerated parent



Incarcerated parent

50

Figure 56: Lack of community resources



Lack of community resources

51

Figure 57: Hopelessness



Hopelessness

52

Figure 58: Lack of academic support



Lack of academic support

53

Figure 59: Hopelessness/academic disinterest



Hopelessness/ academic disinterest

54

Figure 60: Unsafe play areas due to violence



Unsafe play areas due to violence

55

Figure 61: Fatherless home



Fatherless home

56

Figure 62: Over exposure to emergency services



Over exposure to emergency services

57

Figure 63: Walking the streets/fear of neighborhood



Walking the streets/ Fear of neighborhood

58

Figure 64: Increased exposure to gang activity



Increased exposure to gang activity

59

Figure 65: Grocery store



Grocery Store

60

Figure 66: Loneliness



loneliness

61

Figure 67: Bars on windows (unsafe housing)



Bars on windows (Unsafe housing)

62

Figure 68: Increased exposure to unemployment



Increased exposure to unemployment

63

Figure 69: Disinterest in school curriculum



Disinterest in School Curriculum

64

Figure 70: Increased exposure to death



Increased exposure to death

65

Figure 71: No true interaction with people



No true interaction with people

66

Figure 72: Dehumanized/unsafe schools



Dehumanized/ unsafe schools

67

Figure 73: Lack of community resources



Lack of community resources

68

Figure 74: Bars



Bars

69

Figure 75: Unsafe neighborhoods/empty lots/abandoned buildings



Unsafe neighborhoods/ empty lots/ abandoned buildings

70

Figure 76: Metal detectors



Metal detectors

71

Figure 77: Community resources



Community resources

72

Figure 78: Increased crime



Increased crime

73

Figure 79: Status/having the latest brand names



Status/ Having the latest name brands

74

Figure 80: Inadequate heating and cooling and have young children near by



Inadequate heating and cooling and have young children near by.

75

Figure 81: Inadequate heating and cooling



Inadequate heating and cooling

76

Figure 82: Parental concern



Parental concern

77

Figure 83: Increased exposure to violence



Increased exposure to violence

78

Figure 84: Lack of finances



Lack of finances

79

Figure 85: Pollution



Pollution

80

Figure 86: Abandoned areas



Abandoned areas

81

Figure 87: Unsafe play areas



Unsafe play areas

82

Figure 88: Increased police activity



Increased police activity

83

Figure 89: Vacant lots



Vacant lots

84

Figure 90: Peer influences



Peer influences

85

Figure 91: Inadequate sleeping quarters



Inadequate sleeping quarters

86

Figure 92: Sagging



Sagging

87

Figure 93: Sagging



Sagging

88

Figure 94: Increased exposure to food banks



Increased exposure to food banks

89

Figure 95: Unsafe schools



Unsafe schools

90

Figure 96: Imprisoned



Imprisoned

91

Figure 97: Lack of grocery stores in urban/inner-city environments



Lack of grocery stores in urban/inner-city environments 92

Figure 98: Increased exposure to alcohol and drugs



Increased exposure to alcohol and drugs 93

Figure 99: Lack of community



Lack of community

94

Figure 100: Abandoned buildings



Abandoned buildings

95

Figure 101: Lack of male role models for young boys



Lack of male role models for young boys

96

Figure 102: Unclean environments



Unclean environments

97

Figure 103: Lead paint exposure



Lead paint exposure

98

Figure 104: Lack of school resources



Lack of school resources

99

Figure 105: Lack of prenatal care



Lack of prenatal care

100

Figure 106: Disinterest in school



Disinterest in school

101

Figure 107: Abandonment



Abandonment

102

Figure 108: Increased exposure to domestic abuse



Increased exposure to domestic abuse

103

Figure 109: Urban/inner-city pollution



Urban/inner-city Pollution

104

Figure 110: Inadequate nutrition



Inadequate nutrition

105

Figure 111 : Inadequate nutrition



Inadequate nutrition

106

Figure 112: Increased exposure to alcohol



Increased exposure to alcohol

107

Figure 113: Lack of positive opportunities



Lack of positive opportunities

108

Figure 114: Absent parents



Absent parents

109

Figure 115: Raised by grandmother



Raised by grandmother

110

Figure 116: Lack of finances



Lack of finances

111

Figure 117: Exposure to false masculinity



Exposure to false masculinity

112

Figure 118: Exposure to increased parental stress



Exposure to increased parental stress

113

Figure 119: Lack of play area



Lack of play area

114

Figure 120: Exposure to smoking while an infant



Exposure to smoking while an infant

115

Figure 121: Lack of a positive role model



Lack of positive role model

116

Figure 122: Abandonment



Abandonment

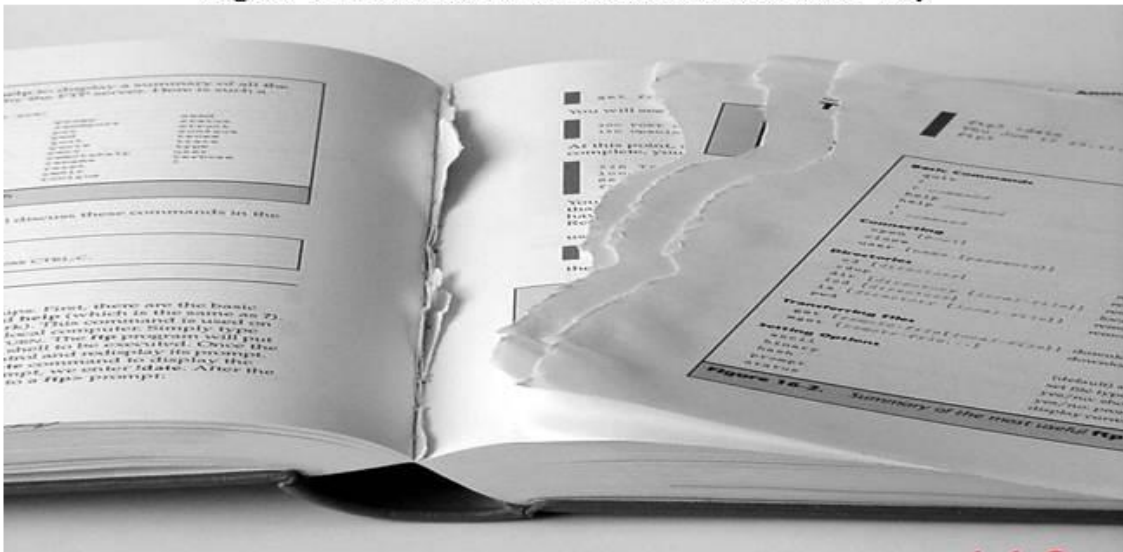
117

Figure 123: Neighborhood disorganization and trash exposure



Neighborhood disorganization and trash exposure 118

Figure 124: Outdated and torn books in inner-city



Outdated and torn books in inner/city 119

Figure 125: Increased noise level



Increased noise level

120

Figure 126: Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking



Increased exposure to alcohol and smoking

121

Figure 127: Smoking while pregnant



Smoking while pregnant

121

Figure 128: School stress due to home life



School stress due to home life

122

Figure 129: Lack of positive male role models



Lack of positive male role models

123

Figure 130: Lack of adequate nutrition



Lack of adequate nutrition

124

Figure 131: Parental discipline



Parental discipline

125

Figure 132: Over-crowded inner/city classrooms



Over-crowded inner/city classrooms

126

Figure 133: Exposure to mercury through contaminated water



Exposure to mercury through contaminated water 127

Figure 134: Lack of outside play due to unsafe play areas



Lack of outside play due to unsafe play areas 128

Figure 135: Exposure to mercury and lead on playgrounds



Exposure to mercury and lead on playgrounds

129

Figure 136: Raising siblings



Raising siblings

130

Appendix G

Information Letter and Consent Form

Information Letter and Consent Form

Title: Poor Urban Neighborhoods: The influence of stress of Black American Men

I am asking you to participate in research that will help me understand your experiences of living in the urban neighborhoods. Based on your availability you may be asked to participate in either the interview with photo analysis phase or focus group phase. This interview with photo analysis or focus group involves a photo critique that will help provide information related to selected topics.

This research is being done to: 1) better understand the individual experiences of African American men who lived in urban communities with a focus on their homes, schools, and community, 2) identify stressors associated with their homes, schools, and communities, 3) determine which experiences, through photos, these men identify as most stressful, and 4) identify themes of resilience or protective factors.

Participation is voluntary and requires your signature on this consent form. Should you agree to participate you have the right to not respond to questions. You have the right to discontinue your participation in this research if you feel uncomfortable at any time without consequence.

If you agree to participate, you will be one of about 15 persons. Your participation may involve two separate sessions, an interview with photo critique or a focus group session.

Phase 1: Interview with photo critique

This session will involve 5 participants who will not be involved in Phase 2 of the focus group.

If you agree to participate in this session, you will be asked questions that allow the researcher to better understand your experiences and exposures within the context of your home, school, and local community in which you grew up. These questions will probe at your experiences of household, school, and community stressors.

Following the interview, either immediately after or at another appointed time, you will be asked to complete a photo sort task with 100+ photos that depict urban realities, which will include sorting photos from what you believe are most stressful to least stressful influencing positive development for young Black American Men in a poor urban context.

Time Allotted: Approximately two hours total. One hour for interview and one hour for photo sorting.

Phase 2: Focus Group

Focus group: Ten additional participants, not involved in the interview with photo critique, will be recruited to participate in the focus groups.

As a focus group participant you will complete a photo sort task that will include you and other group participants collectively sorting photos of perceived urban stressors in three different categories of home, school, and local community. Following this task you will be asked to collectively sort the photos hindering the development of Black American males in poor urban neighborhoods from most stressful to least stressful. It is important that as a group you discuss what photos should go in each pile and rank photos from most to least stressful.

Time Allotted: Approximately two hours.

You will only be asked to participate in either the interview with photo critique session or the focus group which will also involve the photo critique session. What you say or record during the interview or write on the photo critique forms will not be used to identify you individually, but will be used collectively to summarize information that is given by all participants.

Notes will also be taken during the interview as well as recorded. The notes from the interviews or responses from the photo critique sessions will be coded to identify issues that have been discussed. All documents collected from this research will be kept for three years and stored in a private office that will only be accessed by me and my adviser. Additionally, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access for any auditing purposes.

What you say in the interview or in the focus group will provide important information for research involving a better understanding of the neighborhoods people grow up in. The information from the interview or focus group with the photo critique may also show the need for new programs that don't currently exist. These changes can benefit those who need help now and assist others in the future.

There are no known risks associated with this research. The participants in this research will be asked explain how these pictures are interpreted as stressful for urban youth, based on your lived experiences. You will not be asked how these situations have influenced your life. However, there is a possibility that in their descriptions of these situations, participants may share lived experiences that evoke negative memories. If any photo or question causes you any stress, you have the right to not respond or request that we move on to the next question or photo. If the investigator perceives that these memories evoke unresolved stress, a referral to the MSU Counseling Center will be offered.

If you have any concerns or questions about the study, you may contact Rome Meeks, (313) 478-0634 or e-mail meeksrom@msu.edu. Dr. Francisco Villarruel (HDFS Professor, Michigan State University, (517) 432-7298 or e-mail @ fvilla@hdfs.msu.edu) will provide

guidance as I complete this project. He may be in attendance at some sessions to assist me in note taking and data analysis and interpretation.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-423-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

If you wish to be informed about the concluding results of the research findings that fulfill the requirements of my master's thesis, a research article will likely be written about the findings. If you wish to have a summary of the findings and/or any articles published from this research, please indicate below and these will be forwarded to you.

☐ I would like to receive articles or other publications related to this research

☐ I would like to receive a summary of this research when it is completed

Thanks,

Rome D. Meeks

Participant's Voluntary Consent

I have read the information provided above and understand this information. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature for agreeing to have notes taken or recorded

Date

Printed name for agreeing to have notes taken or recorded

Signature of the Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of the Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

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