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HOPE AMONG RESILIENT AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

by

Jessica B. McClintock, M.S.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,  
Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT  
HOPE AMONG RESILIENT AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

Jessica B. McClintock, M.S.

Marquette University, 2015

African American youth have historically been disproportionately affected by an array of environmental stressors that have put them at higher risk for poor adjustment outcomes (Adams III et al., 2003; Mcloyd, 1990). Despite their hardships, not all of these youth fall victim to negative environmental influences (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). Many exceed expectations and their lives take positive trajectories that lead to positive adaptation (Hunter, 2012; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). This positive adaptation in spite of significant risk is referred to as resilience (Cicchetti, 2010). While the importance of resilience has been well documented in European Americans, the majority of the scholarship on resilience has ignored African American youth. Therefore, little is known about the factors that contribute to resilience in this population. The literature has suggested that one source of resilience is the construct of hope (Ong, Edwards, & Bergeman, 2006). Hope, as conceptualized by C.R. Snyder (1991), consists of “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally-derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 571). Hope has been linked to several positive outcomes in adolescents, but research focused on hope and African American youth is limited. Moreover, there are no published studies that have investigated hope as a resilience factor with African American youth. Therefore, more needs to be understood about how hope may support resilience in this population.

The purpose of this study was to explore how resilient African American youth use hope in their lives. Grounded Theory research methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to analyze this construct from the perspective of African American high school students. Seventeen adolescents (5 male, 12 female) participated in individual interviews where they were asked to discuss goals as well as how they generated pathways and maintained movement towards their pursuits in the face of obstacles.

Results revealed that participants used hope to: (a) facilitate academic and long-term goals, (b) formulate goals influenced by family role models as well as aspirations for an improved quality of life, and (c) call upon multiple support systems (e.g., family, friends, teachers) and use personal coping strategies (e.g., perseverance) to combat a variety of obstacles (e.g., racial discrimination, procrastination). Additionally, participants also offered ideas for other youth to reach their goals. Limitations of the study, as well as implications of the present study, and future directions for research are also discussed.

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## Hope Among Resilient African American Adolescents

### Chapter I: Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

Research has continually shown that African American youth face numerous obstacles, including environmental stressors (e.g., reside in distressed communities, poverty, exposure to violence), familial concerns (e.g., single-parent households, low parental investment), and social factors (e.g., discrimination, racism) (Farmer et al., 2004; Perkins & Hartless, 2002). These factors may exacerbate feelings of hopelessness or negative expectancies toward oneself and the future (Beck et al., 1974; Joiner & Wagner, 1995; Kazdin et al., 1983; Stoddard et al., 2011; Zimmerman et al., 1999), which have been associated with negative outcomes such as violence, depression, school problems, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and accidental injury (Bolland, 2003; Bolland et al., 2001; DuRant et al., 1994; Kashani et al., 1989; Spirito et al. 1988; Stoddard et al., 2011). With such hardships it is not surprising that African American youth often exhibit poorer outcomes relative to their European counterparts on many objective measures of well-being (Adams III et al., 2003). However, despite their hardships and higher incidents of poor adjustment, many African American youth are resilient and demonstrate that they have the ability to succeed in spite of challenges and adversity (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008).

While the importance of resilience has been well documented in European Americans, the majority of scholarship on resilience has ignored African American youth. Instead the research has focused on the risk factors and disparities mentioned

above, and “fails to inform about attitudes, behaviors, and processes (i.e., protective factors, positive adaptation indicators) that contribute to the strength and resilience of African American youth” (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008, p. 1). As a consequence, little is known about the factors that contribute to resilience and the healthy development of this population. Recently, there has been call for resiliency research involving African American youth that meaningfully considers and takes into account the cultural values and unique experience of this population (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008). Further, there is a clear need for further research to identify factors that can promote resilience in African American youth.

Researchers have noted that one source of resilience is the construct of hope (Ong, Edwards, & Bergeman, 2006), which has been used by African Americans as a means to combat adversity (Adams III & Nelson, 2001). Hope, as conceptualized by C.R. Snyder (1991), has been linked to academic achievement, health, and mental health outcomes such as life satisfaction and psychotherapy treatment adherence (Edwards & McClintock, 2013). Snyder’s theory of hope is essentially cognitively based (i.e., way of thinking), and describes a motivational state based on *goals*, *pathways*, and *agency*, or goal-directed thinking (1994). Individuals who are high in hope are effective at overcoming obstacles and maintaining positive thinking as they work towards goals in their lives. However, similar to resilience research, prior research focused on hope and African American youth is limited. To date, there is only one published study of hope that exclusively focused on African American youth and utilized Snyder’s conceptualization of hope. Moreover, there are no published studies that have

investigated hope as a resilience factor with African American youth. Therefore, more research is needed to understand how hope may support resilience in this population, as African American youth will need resilience to overcome future challenges they will likely face as an involuntary ethnic minority in the United States (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008).

### **Definition of Terms**

Before examining the pertinent literature, it will be helpful to clearly define several key terms that appear throughout this manuscript. For the purposes of this study, the term *resilience* refers to elements that interrupt the trajectory from risk to problematic behavior or mental health concerns (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). In other words, resilience indicates why some people succeed in the face of adversity and others do not. It is a multifaceted and dynamic process that incorporates the interaction between three components: risk factors, protective factors, and positive adaptation (Hunter 2012). The term *risk factors* will be used to describe the everyday challenges and stressful situations that contribute to making some youth susceptible to unhealthy outcomes (i.e., poverty, lack of resources, residing in violent communities, and racism) (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Zimmerman et al., 1999). The term *protective factors* denotes, “those factors that influence, modify, ameliorate, or alter a person’s response to an environmental risk that predisposes him or her to a maladaptive outcome (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008, p. 16; Rutter, 1985). In other words, protective factors are the variables that reduce the likelihood that an adolescent will develop abnormally (Gonzales, 2003). Protective

factors operate at the individual, family, and community level and may change depending on age and developmental stage, as well as the type of risk or adversity being faced (Hunter, 2012). Protective factors may include self-esteem, social support, extracurricular involvement, and church (Gonzales, 2003). *Positive adaptation* has been defined as “behaviorally manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental tasks” (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). In order to demonstrate positive adaptation, the indicators used to represent this notion must be appropriate to the type of risk examined in terms of the domain evaluated and criteria used (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). For example, in young children an indicator might be the development of a secure attachment with primary caregivers; whereas for adolescents a more appropriate indicator would be good academic performance, the absence of emotional or behavior maladjustment, and peer social competence (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Hunter, 2012; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).

For the purposes of this study, Snyder’s definition of *hope* was utilized: “*Hope* is defined as the process of thinking about one’s goals, along with the motivation to move toward (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) these goals” (Snyder, 1995, p. 355). *Pathways* or *waypower*, can be described as an individual’s ability to generate paths toward desired goals in the face of obstacles (Snyder et al., 1991, Snyder, 2000). *Agency*, or *willpower*, refers to the motivation to propel and maintain movement towards goals (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2000).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how resilient African American youth use hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991). Snyder’s hope theory was used to guide

qualitative interviews with 17 (5 male, 12 female) resilient (i.e., as determined by the criteria for inclusion) African American adolescents. Specifically, questions probed participants' goals and how they generated pathways towards goals in the face of obstacles. Furthermore, questions aimed to understand how this adolescent population sustained motivation (agency) to propel and maintain movement towards goals.

The study is one of the first studies to explore hope in a resilient sample of African American adolescents. This study helped to elucidate how resilient youth develop and maintain goals in their lives, including the ways in which they manage obstacles. The results of the study may assist mental health professionals or school personnel in the development of intervention strategies to promote hope in African American youth with poor adjustment as a means to overcome obstacles and improve well-being.

### **Research Question**

The principal research question of this study was "How do resilient African American youth use hope in their lives?" Because there is an absence of research on this topic of interest, the study applied a modified grounded theory methodology to focus the study. In other words, Snyder's hope theory (1991) was used to guide questions, which allowed participants to speak directly to how they utilize the elements (goals, pathways and agency) of hope in their lives. This represents a slightly modified grounded theory approach since participants were not asked about their own approach or theory of hope. Nevertheless, the research question was original and aimed to develop a new explanatory theory of how hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991), is used in the lives of resilient African American youth.

Grounded Theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is particularly relevant to this study given the dearth of strength-based research conducted with African American youth and grounded theory's inductive approach. Furthermore, qualitative methods such as grounded theory are well suited to examine individuals within their cultural frameworks, which is one of the objectives of this study (Morrow, 2005). Thus, in line with the essence of qualitative researcher the participants were invited to discuss their experiences utilizing hope to support resilience.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

The research question for this study was developed based on a review of the literature that examined the following areas: (a) the experience of African American youth within the United States (b) factors that constitute resilience (i.e., risk factors, protective factors, positive adaptation) (c) resilience in African American youth (d) hope among diverse populations, particularly African American youth, and (e) the role of hope in supporting resilience.

### **African American Youth**

#### **General Demographic Data**

In order to appreciate the critical need for this study, it is important to have an accurate understanding of the African American population in the United States. According to the 2010 Census, African American individuals make up 13% (38.9 million) of the United States population of 308.7 million people. From 1990 to 2000, the African American population increased faster than the total U.S. population (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). The majority of African Americans reside in the southern region of the United States (U.S. Census, 2010). Although African Americans have a long history in the United States, this population continues to be marginalized and many struggle daily to overcome obstacles (Li et al., 2007).

A number of African Americans experience poverty and a lack of resources, forcing a disproportionate number of individuals in this population to reside in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and households (Farmer et al., 2004). Between 2009 and 2010, the overall poverty rate for African Americans increased from

25.8 % to 27.4 % in the United States, reflecting a total increase from to 9.9 million to 10.7 million African American individuals living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). These statistics do not fully capture the enormity of the poverty epidemic in the African American youth population (0 to 17 years). In 2010, an estimated 4 million (38.2 %) African American children were living in poverty, which is double the rate for European American children (U.S. Census, 2011b).

This higher incidence of poverty perpetuates a host of complications for youth adjustment, including academic failure, emotional distress, and behavioral difficulties (Li et al., 2007; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Evans, 2004; Luthar, 1999). The consequences of poverty are evident in African American youth as they continue to drop out of school at a higher rate than their European American counterparts (11.6% African American youth vs. 9.1% European American youth) (U.S. Census, 2012a). In addition, neighborhood poverty accounts for a comprehensive array of stressors, including crime, drug and gang activity, racism, unemployment, lack of safety, and below standard housing (Dubow et al., 1997;McMahon, Felix, & Nagarajan, 2011). These chronic stressors have adverse effects on global self-worth, thus increasing the incidence of participation in risky behaviors for youth (Kincaid et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2011). For instance, African American youth are overrepresented in the U.S. juvenile justice system, making up 26% of the arrests and 45% of cases resulting in incarceration (Gudino et al., 2008; Rawal et al., 2004).

In addition, the family composition of African American youth is quite different than other youth, as fewer than 40% of African American youth live in a two-parent household, versus about 75% of European American children (Children's Defense Fund,

2011). A majority of these youth who do not reside in a two-parent household are more likely to live with their mother. Over half of African American youth (56%) are raised in single mother homes (Kincaid et al., 2011). Plus, African American children are more than twice as likely as other children to live with neither parent. Thus, about 5% of African American children live with grandparents and a little over 2% live with other relatives (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). African American youth are four times as likely as European American children to be in the foster care system (Children's Defense Fund, 2011).

### **Class Trends among African Americans**

There is much diversity within the African American community as not all African American families are economically disadvantaged or underclass. Unfortunately, the majority of African Americans do fall within the low income or poor category. For the purposes of this review, annual household income will be used as a method for distinguishing the socioeconomic classes of this group. The following four income groups will be identified: poor, working class, middle income, and upper income (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

**Poor families.** African American families are classified as poor when their annual household income is less than \$15,000 (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). In 2009, 23.5% of African American families were in this range, which represented an increase from 21% in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2012c). The percentage of European American families in this category has consistently remained half that of African American families: 11.4% 2009 versus 10.8% 2000 (U.S. Census, 2012c).

Hill (1999) divided poor African American families into two groups: the nonworking poor and the working poor. The term nonworking poor refers to the lowest income group among African Americans. This same group has also been referred to as “the underclass” (Wilson, 1987; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Wilson (1987) used this term to refer to individuals living in severe poverty primarily in inner city areas that have faced prolonged unemployment or are welfare-dependent. While Hill (1999) defined the working poor as African American families in which at least one head of household had a consistent attachment to the workforce, many of these families have one or more earners with adults and youth contributing to the household income. Furthermore, these individuals usually work low paying part-time jobs that do not provide benefits (Hill, 1999). Therefore, these working poor families cannot survive a crisis, such as a head of household losing a job as they often struggle to survive (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

**Working-class families.** African American families are referred to as working class when their income is between \$15,000 and \$49,000 (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). In 2009, the percentage of African American families in this category was 43.4 %, which has remained constant since 2000 (U.S. Census, 2012c). European American families over the last two decades have consistently had fewer families in this category due to higher concentrations in the higher income levels (U.S. Census, 2012c). Several individuals in the African American working class work a full time job (40 hours week) in addition to another job and still cannot advance their economic situation. Parallel to the poor, these families are often struggling to survive, and are particularly vulnerable in a weak economy (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Therefore, those in the lower end of this continuum have also been characterized as the “working near poor” with similar circumstances to

the working poor (e.g. low paying jobs with one or more earners in the family) (Hill, 1999).

**Middle-class families.** Middle-income African American families are those who earn between \$50,000 and \$99,999 (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). In 2009, 23.8% of African American families were in this range, which represented a small increase from 22.7% in 1990 (U.S. Census, 2012c). The percentage of European American families in this category has traditionally remained higher: 30.7% in 2009 versus 33.5% in 1990 (U.S. Census, 2012c). Hill (1999) identified middle-class African Americans as those in which both heads of household are members of the work force. Individuals in this category tend to hold middle-income white collar or professional occupations. Many of these families are headed by two parents and reside in the central city and suburban areas (Hill, 1999; Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

Although not economically disadvantaged, these middle-income families are not without problems, as upward mobility can have negative consequences. Middle-class African American families continue to face discrimination in the workplace and their communities. Further, these families often live in two worlds exposed to different cultures while trying to maintain their cultural identity (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). This is especially descriptive of African American youth who are raised in predominately European American schools and communities.

**Upper-income families.** An upper-income African American family earns over \$100,000. Although the proportion of African American families in this range has increased since 1990 (6.4%), their numbers are still less than half of European Americans in 2009: 9.3% versus 21.4%. Hill (1999) defines upper-income African American

families as those in which both the heads of household are members of the labor force. These individuals are employed in upper income white-collar jobs or professionals commonly in the private sector. Members of this group often face the same challenges of upper mobility as those in the middle-income range (Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

Overall, demographic data confirms that a large proportion of African American youth reside in economically/socially-disadvantaged environments and these conditions often increase the incident of poor adjustment outcomes. Although the odds are against many of these youth, not all succumb to the negative influences of their environment (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). Instead, many African American youth are resilient and are able to positively adapt to significant adversity (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999).

### **Resilience**

As previously noted, resilience is a dynamic, multifaceted process and a great deal of ambiguity exists in the definition of this construct (Luthar, et al., 2000; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). However, for the purposes of this literature review, resilience refers to elements that interrupt the trajectory from risk to problematic behavior or mental health concerns (Zimmerman Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). In other words, resilience is the “ordinary magic” that enables some individuals to positively adapt in the face of significant adversity (Burley et al., 2010; Masten, 2001, p. 235). There is also a debate in the resilience literature that concerns the conceptualization of resilience as either a trait or process (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Luthar et al., 2000). This discrepancy leads to “little consensus around the terms used within models of

resilience” (Luthar et al., 2000, p.546). For example, terms such as *protective* or *vulnerability* and *adaptive functioning* or *attributes* have been used interchangeably in varied and inconsistent ways depending on the purpose of the research and the outcomes sought (Hunter, 2012; Luthar et al., 2000). Despite these differences in conceptualization and use of terms, three main components of resilience have been identified (Hunter, 2012). Therefore, for the purposes of this literature review and study, resilience exists when three major components or conditions are present: (1) exposure to threat or *risk factors*; (2) *protective factors* that help ameliorate the impact of risk factors; and (3) and the achievement of *positive adaptation* through competence in various domains (Burley et al., 2010; Luthar et al., 2000; Gonzales, 2003). In this section, a brief overview of resilience literature in the context of the three major components will be presented, along with a select group of studies that are most salient to the understanding of resilience in African American youth.

### **Risk Factors**

As previously mentioned, African American youth raised in the United States experience significant challenges that are generally more taxing than those encountered by European American youth and other minority groups (Gibbons et al., 2012a). As a consequence of their challenges they are exposed to a variety of risk factors that usually generate from their environment and social interactions. These challenges could potentially hinder resilience and lead to problems with adjustment. Numerous risk factors experienced by African American youth have been identified in the literature, such as residence in impoverished neighborhoods and exposure to violence. However in this study, risk factors that are descriptive of the potential participant sample, such as

socioeconomic related stressors, family composition, and African American identity/attributes will be focused on and reviewed below.

**Socioeconomic related stressors.** Research evidence has continued to provide evidence that consistent economic strain has an adverse influence on psychological well being and adjustment (Conger, Ge, Edler, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). Experiencing environmental risk factors such as low family income and exposure to major stressful life events may severely impact the coping skills, adaptive abilities, and academic achievement of children (Pungello, Kupersmidt, Burchinal, Patterson, 1996). In recent decades, researchers have studied the longitudinal impact of such risk factors on youth adjustment and achievement outcomes.

In an early study about socioeconomic status (SES) and adolescents, Dubois, Felner, Meares, and Krier (1994) conducted one such longitudinal study that examined the relationship between socioenvironmental conditions and early adolescent adjustment in a sample 339 primarily low-income European American youth. Using socioeconomic disadvantage, major/minor life events, and social support as risk and protective factors, the results concluded that conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage projected poorer academic performance and higher occurrences of absences and disciplinary problems at school. Furthermore, youths in the sample who experienced various conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage were found to exhibit increased vulnerability to stressful events such as daily hassles.

In accordance with the previous study, Pungello et al. (1996) examined the longitudinal effects of low family income and stressful life events on academic achievement with 1253 European American and African American children/adolescents.

The researchers used low family income, exposure to stressful life events, minority ethnic status to measure level of risk. Results indicated that children from a low income home obtained significantly lower math achievement test scores than children who were not from a low-income home. In particular, African American children who resided in low-income homes who were exposed to stressful life events obtained the lowest achievement test scores, and these scores decreased over time. This finding was consistent for both reading and math scores.

More recently, Hammack, Robinson, Crawford, and Li (2004) examined the role of family stress as a mediator of the relationship between poverty and depressed mood among a sample of urban African American adolescents. The results of indicated that higher rates of poverty were linked with increased endorsement of depressed mood. Li, Nussbaum, & Richards (2007) reported similar findings when they examined risk and protective factors for urban African American youth. In particular, the findings indicated that poverty, hassles, and exposure to violence predicted higher rates of externalizing (i.e., behavior problems) and internalizing (i.e., depression) symptoms. Goosby (2007) also found that impoverished adolescents (i.e., predominately African American) scored higher on scales assessing depression/anxiety and peer problems/social withdrawal. Taken together, these data suggest that SES related stressors could have detrimental effects on youth outcomes in areas such as academic achievement and mental health. This is likely more salient in African American youth since poverty has become increasingly concentrated in urban neighborhoods commonly occupied by a large population of African Americans” (Hammack et al., 2004).

**Family composition.** Psychological stress and its related mental health symptoms can also be associated with family composition. As previously mentioned, single mothers or other caregivers raise a large majority of African American youth. As a consequence of their SES, African American single mother families are more likely to live in lower income neighborhoods and youth in these households are at increased risk for adjustment problems, including psychological distress and behavior problems (Kincaid et al. 2011; Sterrett, Jones, & Kincaid, 2009).

In a recent study about the role of single mothers in youth outcomes, Kincaid et al. (2011) investigated the association between maternal psychological control, youth psychosocial adjustment, and youth risk behaviors among a sample of 194 African American single mother adolescent dyads. Psychological control as defined in the study is an indirect approach to controlling a child's behavior through the use of guilt to manipulate emotions and cognitions (Kincaid et al., 2011). The findings from a measure of mothers' knowledge related to their children showed that both lower levels of maternal knowledge and higher levels of maternal psychological control were associated with increased psychosocial adjustment problems as well as increased youth risk behavior. Furthermore, externalizing problems were significantly associated with risky behavior (e.g. alcohol use, sexual intercourse). In accordance, Mandara and Rogers (2011) investigated the effects of family composition on African American adolescent marijuana use. The researchers found that adolescents with absent fathers were at risk for higher marijuana use.

In addition to single parent households, grandparent-headed households have become a common occurrence in the lives of African American youth due to risk factors

such as teen pregnancy and drug abuse that have disproportionately plagued the African American community (de Toledo & Brown, 1995). Robbin, Briones, Schwartz, Dillon, & Mitrani (2006), examined differences in grandparent and parent-headed houses in substance use behaviors of African American adolescents. The results indicated that youth in grandparent-headed households endorsed more marijuana use than did youth from parent-headed households. Research such as this along with the previously mentioned single-parent studies suggests that family structure or composition can reduce or increase both internalizing and externalizing problems in African American youth.

**African American identity/attributes.** The fact that an individual appears African American due to physical attributes, name, and dress can define their experience within the United States. As previously, mentioned African American youth are a risk for a number of environmental and social challenges due to their minority status within the United States. Research has shown that one of the prominent challenges that African American youth experience is discrimination (Farmer et al., 2004). Racial discrimination experienced during childhood and adolescence has been associated with an array of negative developmental consequences, including: delinquency, substance use, diminished academic achievement, elevated depression and anxiety, as well as anger (Gibbons et al, 2007; Gibbons, et al., 2010; Gibbons et al., 2012b; Gibbons, Gerard, Cleveland, Willis, & Brody, 2004; Prelow, Danoff-Burg, Swenson, & Pulgiano, 2004; Roberts et al., 2012; Simons, Chen, Stewart, & Brody, 2003). These relationships have been shown to be elevated in African American youth who tend to experience more discrimination than other racial groups. The theoretical explanation for these associations is that discriminatory experiences are extremely stressful for African American youth, and the

cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to this stress stimulate maladaptive behaviors (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Roberts et al., 2012; Sanders-Phillips, Settles-Reaves, Walker, & Brownlow, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). A number of studies have investigated the connection between racial discrimination and risk in African American youth.

Roberts et al. (2012) explored how early experiences of racial discrimination affected the consequent risky sexual behaviors of a sample of 745 African American early adolescents. The investigators were specifically interested in the social and cognitive mediators that may help describe the anticipated discrimination that led to risky sex relations. These mediators or risk promoting factors associated with risky sex relations were: negative affect, affiliation with deviant peers, and favorable attitudes toward risky sex. The findings indicated that early discrimination at age 10 or 11 was positively related to risky sex behaviors at age 18 or 19. Early discrimination was also positively related to deviant affiliations, negative affect, and attitudes about sex. Likewise, negative affect mediated effects of discrimination on defiant affiliations.

Racial discrimination not only promotes risky behavior, but may also have health implications. Guthrie, Young, Williams, Boyd, and Kitner (2002) examined the relationship between racial discrimination and substance abuse. The researchers sought to identify how perceptions of racial discrimination influenced smoking habits in a sample consisted of 105 African American adolescent girls. Results revealed that perceptions of everyday racism were significantly correlated with the smoking habits of African American girls, thus demonstrating that African American girls perceived high levels of

discrimination, and that discrimination has negative consequences on their health behaviors.

As previously mentioned, perceived discrimination has been linked to a range of mental health symptoms in minority youth. Brody et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal analysis to examine the links between perceived racial discrimination and the adjustment of African American youth. The sample was comprised of 714 African American adolescents. The findings indicated that increases in perceived discrimination across this age group was positively associated with the development of conduct problems and depressive symptoms. The relationship between perceived discrimination and conduct problems was stronger for boys than for girls. However, no gender differences emerged for depressive symptoms. In addition, the influence of perceived discrimination on the adjustment outcome variables was decreased when youths experienced nurturant-involved parenting, had prosocial friends, and performed well academically.

In summary, research assessing risk in African American youth has demonstrated an association between life stressors (e.g. environmental, familial, social) and poor youth adjustment. Specifically, these stressors may exacerbate feelings of hopelessness or negative expectancies toward oneself and the future (Beck et al., 1974; Kazdin et al., 1983; Joiner & Wagner, 1995; Stoddard et al., 2011; Zimmerman et al., 1999), which has been associated with negative outcomes such as violence, depression, school problems, substance abuse, behavior concerns, and accidental injury (Bolland, 2003; Bolland et al., 2001; DuRant et al., 1994; Kashani et al., 1989; Spirito et al. 1988; Stoddard et al., 2011). Therefore it seems as though this population could potentially benefit from protective factors that provide opportunities to counter the effects of risk factors (Miller &

MacIntosh, 1999). Gramezy (1991) found that if there is the presence of one or more protective factors in “at risk” youth’s life they are more likely to combat the negative consequences of risk factors.

### **Protective Factors**

The evidence clearly suggests that many youth exceed expectations and their lives take positive trajectories (Garmezy, 1991; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). Therefore, it is critical to identify those protective factors that enable many individuals to overcome life’s difficulties. Miller and MacIntosh (1999) suggested that protective factors fall into three categories: individual characteristics, supportive family and positive relationships with at least one parent or relative, and available and useful external community supports. Within these categories, various protective factors have been identified that alter an adolescent’s response to a risk that predisposes them to a maladaptive outcome (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents; Rutter, 1985). However, similar to the risk factors summary, this section will review protective factors that are particularly salient to the participant sample and the aim of the study: satisfaction with self/high self esteem, social support/supportive relationships, and extracurricular participation. The additional protective factor, hope, will be reviewed in its own section later within this chapter.

**Satisfaction with self/high self-esteem.** Self-esteem is an evaluation of self – concept that includes positive and negative appraisals (Adams, 2010; Greene & Way, 2005). Rosenberg defined high self-esteem as “ the feeling of being satisfied with oneself, believing that one is a person of worth” (1985, p. 210). Similarly, Harter defined self-esteem as the evaluations that individuals make about their worth and value (Harter,

1999; Prelow, Weaver, & Swenson, 2006) Self-esteem has been shown to be an indicator of overall well-being and is linked to positive psychological and behavioral outcomes for youth (Greene & Way, 2005).

In a study with African American and European American adolescents, Prelow et al. (2006) examined self-esteem as a mediator of ecological risk and depressive symptoms. The results, derived from self-report measures, indicated that self-esteem mediated the link between ecological risk and depressive symptoms for both ethnic groups. These results included a link between high self-esteem and lower levels of depression symptoms (Prelow et al., 2006). Barber, Bell, and Armistead (2003) demonstrated similar findings in a sample of African American urban adolescent females. In this study, self-esteem operated as a potential mediator between parent-adolescent relationships and adolescent psychological functioning. The results revealed that strong positive relationships between parents and children lead to positive self-esteem that ultimately reduces levels of depression (Barber et al., 2003).

Self-esteem has also been linked to ethnic-identity. In particular, ethnic or racial identity may be an important domain of self-esteem for minority youth (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). Using this ideology, Miller and MacIntosh (1999) examined the protective factors that promote resilience in 131 urban African American adolescents. Educational involvement was used as an indicator of resilience to investigate the mediating effect of protective factors on competence and mastery in the education setting when environmental risk factors are commonly experienced. The protective factors were racial socialization and racial identity, which have been found to protect African American youth against unfavorable environmental conditions (e.g., poverty, racism).

The findings indicated that a positive racial identity could protect African American adolescents against discrimination and daily hassles that they experience while attempting to perform well in school. Furthermore, high collective self-esteem was found to increase the likelihood of students participating in school activities with other students. The findings of the study highlight that resilience among African American adolescents is likely influenced by culturally relevant protective factors. Overall, these findings demonstrate the protective nature of self-esteem as a predictor of psychological functioning and well-being (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008).

**Social support/supportive relationships.** Research has identified various factors that affect a youth's sense of self, including the amount and type of social support they receive from caregivers, teachers, and peers. Historically, social support in the African American culture comes from multigenerational extended families in which relatives come together into a kinship network of shared emotional and economic support (Billingsly, 1968; 1992; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hill 1972, 1993, 1999a; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1996; Logan, 2001; McAdoo, 1981, 1996, 2002). The African American family is often cooperative operating as a collective family structure, where reciprocity and sharing resources is important to the survival and advancement of the African American community (Belgrave & Allison, 2010; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Wilson et al., 1995).

Included within the kinship network are individuals with a diversity of ties, such as immediate family members, extended family, friends, neighbors, and church members. The living arrangements are varied and exceed marriage, parentage, and children to include other individuals in a shared residence situations (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). For

example, African American children may reside with grandparents or other adults outside of their immediate family through informal adoption, or kinship care. Therefore, extended family networks can provide resources and be a positive attribute for African American individuals and families (Belgrave & Allison, 2010; Wilson et al., 1995). Furthermore, as noted by Hill (1972): “ [the tight kinship network within black families has proven itself to be an effective mechanism for providing extra emotional and economic support in the lives of thousands of children”. In particular, this means of social support may have positive affects on youth by directly influencing his/her sense of self-worth and buffering the negative effects of stressors on self-esteem (Cohen & Wills, 1985; McMahon et al., 2011).

These kinship networks may also provide valuable insights and lessons (i.e., culturally informed strategies and strengths modeling) that allow African American youth to positively adapt in the face of risk. Carter-Black (2001) explored the resilience strategies employed by middle-class African American families. Nine themes emerged from qualitative interviews of African American families: achievement of personal goals, the importance of education, events that reinforce positive self-images (e.g., cultural and educational activities), the importance of family and family activities (i.e., including the extended family/kinship networks), responsibility and respect, religion, protection of children (i.e. reducing risk), and racial and gender-specific socialization (i.e., teaching youth to embrace their cultural heritage and gender).

Marsh, Chaney, and Jones (2012) also qualitatively explored cultural strengths that sustain resilience in as sample of 16 high-achieving African American high school students in a racially diverse setting. In particular, the researchers used the Hill (1972)

strengths of black families perspective as a theoretical perspective on resilience. The results indicated that African American students demonstrated resilience by working through initial apprehension through use of internal attributes (i.e., positive beliefs and sense of purpose) and establishing a community (i.e., racial and gender solidarity) and through school clubs. The study revealed the importance of understanding strengths and their role in sustaining resilience in African American adolescents.

In addition to providing strategies and modeling strengths, support systems can influence or promote individual protective mechanisms. McMahon et al. (2011) examined the influences of neighborhood stressors and social support on global self-worth among 85 disadvantaged urban African American youth. Using measures of social support and global self-worth as risk and protective factors, the results revealed that neighborhood disadvantage and social support from parents, classmates, and close friends were associated with self-worth cross-sectionally. In addition, parental support and close friend support were associated with self-worth longitudinally. In a similar study, Hammack, Richards, Luo, Edlynn, and Roy (2004) longitudinally investigated the potential protective effects of social support for 196 African American adolescents exposed to community violence. The youth participants were from low-income households, with the nearly half (48%) living in single-parent households. The findings indicated that when reports of maternal closeness were low, witnessing violence predicted higher rates of anxiety. Higher maternal closeness in context of high witnessing of community violence was associated with fewer depressive symptoms.

Social support can also lead to positive outcomes in the school environment. Connell, Spencer, and Aber (1994) found that urban African American adolescents

experiences with social support, sense of control in academics, and their feelings of self-worth predicted school engagement and better academic performance. Similarly, Cunningham and Swanson (2010) investigated factors within the school setting that promote educational resilience among a sample of 206 African American high school students from a large metropolitan area in south central United States. Many of the sample participants lived in single-parent households (46%) and belonged to families described as the “working poor.” Measures of social support, academic self-esteem, and future expectations assessed protective factors and internal attributes. The results revealed that educational resilience was associated with perceived school support, higher expectations from adults, academic self-esteem, and parental monitoring.

Building on the Cunningham and Swanson (2010) study, Williams and Portman (2014) qualitatively examined high achieving urban high school graduates’ perceptions of educational resilience (i.e., what they need to succeed academically despite risk factors). The findings revealed six themes: participants see the importance of multiple entities (e.g., schools, families, communities) sharing responsibility for students educational outcomes; participants noted taking personal responsibility for their success; participants noted that parental involvement is crucial for success; participants recognized the significance of having natural supports (i.e., resources inherent in students’ family, school, community); participants emphasized that school counselors must make genuine connections with students; and participants reiterated the importance of communities coming together to provide students the necessary resources to succeed (i.e., housing, education, job training, employment).

Similarly, Land, Mixon, Butcher, and Harris (2014) conducted a qualitative narrative study to explore the experiences of six successful African American male high school students. In particular, the purpose of this study was “to investigate the life experiences of African American males successful in high school who are without a father figure in the home” (Land, Mixon, Butcher, and Harris, 2014, p. 145). All of the participants were 18 years old, attended the same urban school district in a low performing school situated in an impoverished area, originated from low income households, had a grade point average of 2.5 or better, a positive reputation in the school, and were committed to attend college. The results also indicated that support from school personnel facilitated academic success.

Therefore, the findings of the four studies mentioned above suggested that those with high adversity can potentially overcome their hardships (i.e., achieve educational resilience) when they have supportive school environments, adults (i.e., counselors, teachers/administrators, community members) who promote academic self-esteem, and parents who have a vested interest in their academics. These results demonstrate that social support, defined in broad ways, is an important protective factor in lives of African American youth.

**Extracurricular participation.** In addition to social support, there is a growing body of research suggests that participation in extracurricular activities has beneficial effects in regard to youth adjustment (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). In particular, activity participation has been positively associated to academic outcomes in regard to grades, test scores, school engagement, and educational aspirations (Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999). Additional research has demonstrated a link

between activity involvement and psychological outcomes, such as increased levels of self-esteem and reduced rates of depression (Mahoney, Schweder, & Stattin, 2002). Activity participation is also associated with a reduction in problem behaviors, including delinquency and substance abuse and is linked to lower drop out rates (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003, Youniss & Yates, 1997). Furthermore, extracurricular activity participation is a predictor of positive outcomes in youth, including educational attainment, mental health, and civic engagement (Fredricks & Eccles, 2010).

Using this research as a foundation, Fredricks and Eccles (2006) examined the association between participation in high school extracurricular activities and developmental outcomes among a sample of economically diverse African American and European American youth. The results indicated that participation in extracurricular activities such as school clubs and organized sports was linked to positive academic and psychological adjustment. In addition, participation in both activities was predictive of educational status (i.e., higher likelihood of college attendance) and civic engagement two years later. Finally, participation in both clubs and sports predicted lower rates of alcohol and drug use for males in the sample. Building upon these findings, Fredricks and Eccles conducted another study (2010) that examined the relations between participation in a variety of organized activity and developmental outcomes in a similar sample of African American and European American youth. The results indicated that participation in a breadth of activities was positively linked to indicators of academic adjustment while in high school and one year post graduation. Furthermore, parallel to their previous

study's findings, breadth of participation predicted reduced rates of alcohol and drug use and was associated with civic engagement two years post study.

Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkins (2007) also assessed the association between organized activity involvement and adjustment outcomes in areas such as prosocial behavior and academic achievement. The sample was comprised solely of African American male adolescent students who participated in a two year after-school program involving tutoring, group counseling, and various enrichment activities (Martin et al., 2007). The results of the outcome assessments suggested that program participants had higher rates of school attendance, decreased discipline referrals as a consequence of behavior concerns, and had no suspensions or expulsions. In accordance, Irvin (2011) found that school engagement (i.e., involvement in extracurricular activities and positive affect and satisfaction with school) predicted higher achievement in a sample of 335 African American adolescents from low-income rural communities.

Extracurricular activity is not limited to school activities (i.e., clubs and sports) and can include participation in community-based organizations such as the church. As research suggests that a variety of organized activity participation is beneficial (Fredricks & Eccles, 2010). Religion has been found to be a significant protective resource against many types of maladaptive adjustment outcomes among various adolescent samples (Ball, Armstead, & Austin, 2003). The church is important in the African American community and is one of several values that contribute to achievement in African American families (Billingsley, 1968; Cook, 2000).

Cook (2000) explored the church's role in the resilience in a sample of 16 urban African American, Haitian, and Latino youth. The researchers recruited at-risk youth

from eight Boston churches known to have large youth groups. The results of qualitative interviews and measures of well-being indicated that those youths who attended church experienced greater stability in their lives than did those who did not attend. Furthermore, the majority of the church participants (i.e., 15 youths) stated they appreciated the self-regulatory abilities that the church helped them to develop. The abilities most often mentioned were that the church offered a standard of behavior, a reference point for conversation, and served as a guide for right and wrong. Also mentioned, was the church's role in shaping identity.

Another study that explored the relationship between religiosity and adjustment among 492 African American urban adolescents was conducted by Ball et al. (2003). More specifically, the researchers examined the relationship between overall religiosity and current sexual activity, self-esteem, and psychological distress in African American female adolescents. The findings of the study revealed a significant association between overall religiosity and both self-esteem and psychological functioning. Therefore, as religiosity increased, functioning increased (i.e., higher self-esteem, fewer psychological symptoms). These results indicated that the adolescents with the highest levels of self-esteem reported having "somewhat" religious families, in comparison to those with the lowest levels of self-esteem who reported being "unsure" about their family religiosity (Ball et al., 2003). In terms of sexual activity, it was found that the more frequently teens attended church, the less likely they were to be engaging in sexual activity. Taken together with the previously discussed studies' results, extracurricular involvement operates as a protective factor for at-risk youth.

Despite their everyday struggles, African American youth do have access to protective factors such as social support and extracurricular participation, including school activities, and religion. Furthermore, many exhibit individual protective factors such as self-esteem. Overall, the research indicates that these factors help buffer the negative effects of risk factors. Therefore, youth with these resources have a reduced chance of having a maladaptive response to risk (Gonzales, 2003), and are more likely to exhibit positive adaptation.

### **Positive Adaptation**

Positive adaptation has been defined as “behaviorally manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental tasks”(Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858) or “symptoms related to internal well-being” (Masten & Obradović, 2006, p. 15). In order to demonstrate positive adaptation, the indicators used to represent this concept must be appropriate to the type of risk examined in terms of the domain assessed and criteria used (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). For example, in young children an indicator might be the development of a secure attachment with primary caregivers; whereas for adolescents a more appropriate indicator would be good academic performance, the absence of emotional or behavior maladjustment, and peer social competence (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Hunter, 2012; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). While African American youth likely show competence or positive adaptation in many areas social competence/social skills and academic achievement will be focused on due to the relevance of these concepts in the participant sample.

**Satisfaction with friends/social competence/social skills.** As noted above, social competence or having high social skills has been found to be a common internal attribute

evident in resilient youth (Bernard, 1991). For example, teachers have noted that competent or resilient children are equipped with social skills and are well liked by other children (Garmezy, 1991). In addition, life satisfaction and self-esteem are positively associated to the perceived quality of social relationships (Clark, 1991). Overall, the link between social competence and positive outcomes has been indicated by the empirical studies.

Luthar (1991) examined the factors that allow youth to maintain socially competent behaviors despite risk in a predominately minority sample (77%, African American and Latino) of adolescents. In this study, social skills served as a moderator variable of risk. The results demonstrated that social skills were a protective factor against risk and related stress. In a similar study, McMahon, Wernsman, and Parnes (2006) examined the relationship between prosocial behavior and positive outcomes among adolescents. The researchers focused on empathy and gender as predictors of prosocial behavior among a sample of African American early adolescents. The results revealed that youth with more empathy or the ability to understand another's perspective, an aspect of social competence reported more prosocial behaviors. In other words, empathy for peers is an indicator of positive adaptation that reduces maladaptive behaviors and other risk factors.

**Academic achievement.** Research has indicated that academic achievement and academic self-efficacy (i.e., an individual's belief in their academic competence) are indicators of competence that predict positive adaptation in African American youth (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Bandura, 1986). Therefore, academic achievement likely buffers the impact of risk in the

lives of African American youth. To test this hypothesis, Crum, Ensminger, Ro, and McCord (1996) investigated the impact of educational attainment, school dropout, and early school adaptation on the development of alcohol abuse and dependence in adulthood. The longitudinal sample consisted of urban African American children, who were assessed in the first grade and at ages 32-33 years. The results revealed that educational underachievement and school dropout were linked with risk for alcohol use disorders. In an analogous study, Estell et al. (2007) examined the associated between patterns of middle school adjustment and the adaptation of rural African American adolescents following the transition to high school. Included in this study was analysis of the impact of grades on substance use. The results indicated that higher grades were predictive of lower rates of substance use. In addition, it was found that those with positive adaptation tended to have higher grades. These findings point to the important role of academic achievement in resilience as an indicator of positive adaptation.

### **Summary and Critique of Resilience Literature**

Overall, there is consensus in the research reviewed above regarding the potential impact of risk factors and the importance of protective factors for successful development in youth (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). In addition, these studies provide support for the notion that several protective factors play a role in the positive adjustment of African American youth from a variety of backgrounds. For example, risk factors such as socioeconomic stressors, family composition, and African American identity/ attributes increase the incidents of poor adjustment or adaptation to the environment, and protective factors along with positive adaption indicators, such as satisfaction with self/high self-

esteem, social support, extracurricular involvement, social competence/social skills, and academic achievement, help adolescents transcend risk factors.

However, these findings are not without limitations. For example, although many of the studies reviewed focus exclusively on African American youth they cannot fully capture the power of resilience in this group, as there is so much heterogeneity within this population. For example, there are within group variations that occur in the African American community in relation to SES and geographic areas of residence. Relatedly, many of the participants were drawn from convenience samples with high proportions of African American females, which hinders generalizability. In addition, a majority of the resiliency studies reviewed were solely informed by self-report quantitative measures. Using multiple sources, such as interviews along with family and teacher observations may have reduced bias and enriched the findings. Finally, only four studies utilized qualitative methodology (Carter-Black, 2001; Land et al., 2014; Marsh et al., 2012; Williams and Portman, 2014). Qualitative methodology may have enriched the findings by giving a voice to participants. Their personal narratives would give first hand information about the factors that support and sustain resilience.

More importantly, these studies focused on a narrow scope of protective factors such as self-esteem, school achievement, activity involvement, and social support, areas that have already been shown to promote resilience. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted to uncover additional factors that increase resilience in African American youth. Researchers have noted that one source of resilience is the construct of hope (Ong, Edwards, & Bergeman, 2006). Hope has been associated with various positive outcomes in adolescents and has demonstrated protective qualities for African Americans (Adams

III & Nelson, 2001). Therefore, its use was explored in this study as a protective factor in the lives of African American youth.

### **Hope**

According to the New Oxford American Dictionary hope is defined as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” The concept of hope has been familiar to human kind since ancient times due to secular and sacred traditions. According to a Greek pagan myth, hope was the only good spirit to escape from Pandora’s box (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, 2000). Early Christian writers identified hope as one of the positive essential virtues along with faith and charity (Muykens, 1979; Snyder, 2000). In a similar fashion, historical religious figures such as Saint Paul and Martin Luther placed hope at the same level as love as the core of what is good in life, and felt it was necessary to exhort their followers to hope (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Snyder, 2000). Despite these favorable views, various writers throughout history have portrayed hope as an evil force.

Writers such as Nietzsche and Sophocles described hope as a human burden that only served to create suffering and damnation. Plato, Benjamin Franklin, and Francis Bacon held similar views about hope labeling it an illusion that lacked substance (Snyder, 2000). Therefore, “it seduced humankind with a false promise” (Snyder, 2000). However, research conducted by mental health professionals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, began to rediscover the positive aspects of hope. Research during this period suggested that a lack of hope or negative thoughts and feelings were related to poorer health, coping, and medical recovery (Cohen, 1979; Cohen & Lazarus, 1979, Snyder, 2000). The general theme was that hope could have a positive effect on health and well-being.

In recent decades psychologists have strived to conceptualize and measure hope in an effort to understand its potential influence on individuals' lives (Edwards & McClintock, 2013). Stotland (1969) constructed a theory of hope based on a cognitive schema framework. He assumed that individuals with higher levels of hope would exhibit a higher probability of reaching their goal (Snyder, 1995). Stotland also reasoned that it was essential for an individual to perceive a goal as important for hope to be effective. Stotland's conceptualization emphasized cognitive evaluation of goal-related outcomes. However, instead of measuring hope with a scale he inferred it from observing behavioral reactions to antecedent conditions.

Averill, Catlin, and Chon (1990) developed another theory of hope, which hypothesized hope was an emotion governed by rules. Furthermore, this theory suggests "the emotion of hope is seen as being appropriate when a goal is important, under some control, at midrange in terms of probability of attainment, and socially acceptable". Snyder (1995) argued that the emotion and rule-based definition of this theory make it difficult to measure.

While other conceptualizations of hope exist and have been described in many disciplines, the most known and highly researched is Snyder's (1991), and as such will be reviewed in this chapter. Snyder's theory of hope is essentially cognitively based, and describes a motivational state based on *goals*, *pathways*, and *agency* goal-directed thinking. Research about hope over the past two decades indicates it is an important construct that is associated with positive adjustment outcomes in both youth and adults. Furthermore, hope as conceptualized by Snyder (1994) has been linked to academic achievement, health, and mental health outcomes such as life satisfaction and

psychotherapy treatment adherence (Edwards & McClintock, in 2013). An overview of Snyder's hope theory will be discussed below.

### **Overview of Snyder Hope Theory**

Snyder and colleagues (1991) initially defined hope as a positive motivational state based on three major interactive mechanisms: goals, pathways and agency. Another early definition of hope offered by Snyder and colleagues (1991) described it as “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally-derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p.571). Over the years Snyder's definition of hope has evolved and the following definitions have also been utilized: “Hope is defined as the process of thinking about one's goals, along with the motivation to move toward (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) these goals” (Snyder, 1995, p. 355); “Hope is defined as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (Snyder, 2002, p. 249). Despite their slight differences, all conceptualizations of hope theory provided by Snyder include the three main components: goals, pathways, and agency.

**Goals.** Hope theory operates under the assumption that human beings are innately goal-directed (Snyder, 1995). Goals function as the cognitive component to hope theory and provide the “endpoints” of mental action sequences (Snyder, 2002). Furthermore, in order to necessitate hope, goals need to be valued by an individual. Thus, individuals must be able to imagine that they have the ability to reach their goals (Snyder, 2002).

**Pathways thinking.** In addition to the ability to clearly construct goals, pathways thinking is an individual's ability to generate paths toward desired goals, which Snyder

also identifies as *waypower* (Snyder et al., 1991, Snyder, 2000). Pathways thinking allows individuals to find routes around obstacles to goals, which occur organically as people often face challenges in their goal pursuit. For example, if a college student is struggling in their coursework, it might be difficult to find time to study, or to identify individuals (e.g., a tutor or professor) who are available to work with the student on a regular basis. Pathways thoughts would be those that the college student uses to encourage him/herself to utilize down time to study, and to ask for assistance from professors and tutors on campus.

**Agency thinking.** Agency, or the motivation to propel and maintain movement towards goals, is the final component of hope (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2000). Also referred to as *willpower*, agency thinking allows individuals to remain tenacious and exercise their pathways thinking to navigate around obstacles and stay focused on reaching their goals. Again using the college student who is struggling in their coursework as an example, agency thoughts would be those cues he or she uses to continue working towards their goal. These mental willpower cues usually come in the form of motivational mantras or self-talk (e.g., “I can successfully complete this”, “I’m making headway,” or “I’m going to continue working until I am able to improve my grades”).

Snyder (2000) iterates that pathways and agency components of hope continually enhance and affect each other throughout the goal pursuit process. However, these aspects of hope are not equivalent because barriers in the pursuit of goals can occur. For example, some individuals demonstrate the ability to maintain agency thoughts, but are unable to pinpoint particular pathways towards goals, or vice versa. Snyder’s hope theory

is unique in that all three components of hope work together to help an individual reach their goal pursuit. Furthermore, Snyder noted that other motivational theories bear strong resemblance to his conceptualization, but he classified hope as a separate construct.

### **Motivational Theories Related to Hope**

Hope is considered a motivational theory, but it is conceptually and statistically distinguished from other theories about motivation such as optimism, self-efficacy, and problem solving. Optimism, as described by Seligman (1991), focused on the attributions that people develop for negative life events. Within optimism theory it is assumed that the negative outcomes are significant and individuals are trying to distance themselves from the past negative outcome. In contrast, hope theory proposed that the individual is focused on reaching desired future positive-related outcomes (Snyder, 2000).

Another theory of optimism proposed by Scheier and Carver (1985) emphasized that optimism is a goal-based approach that is stimulated when a major value is attached to a perceived outcome. This optimism theory emphasizes agency-like thought, while hope theory gives equal attention to pathways and agency thoughts (Snyder, 2000). A theory of motivation grounded in self-efficacy proposed that goal-related outcome is of sufficient value to capture an individual's attention (Bandura, 1982; Snyder, 2000). In other words, the person engages in a cognitive analysis as a means to understand the relevant possibilities of goal attainment (Snyder, 2000). This theory is related to agency, however it does not address the pathways component of hope. In contrast, problem-solving approaches highlight the individual's identification of a desired goal as the solution to the major problem (Heppner & Hillerbrand, 1991; Snyder, 2000). This idea parallels the pathways component of hope theory, but does not address the motivational

component of agency, which is often essential for both understanding and facilitating change (Snyder, 2000).

An empirical study that provides support for the uniqueness of hope was conducted by Magaletta and Oliver (1999). The study examined the associations between Snyder's hope construct, and theories based on self-efficacy, and optimism. In addition, the researchers investigated the ability of hope, self-efficacy, and optimism to predict overall well-being in a sample of 204 mostly European American college students. The results revealed that self-efficacy, optimism, and hope were associated but not identical constructs. Furthermore, it was found that hope provides unique variance beyond optimism and self-efficacy in the prediction of well-being.

A study conducted by Bruininks and Malle (2005) also distinguished hope from optimism and related affective states. The researchers conducted three studies that examined psychological differences between hope and related mental states in a sample of undergraduate students. In Study 1, participants provided definitions of hope, optimism, want, desire, wish, and the non-anticipatory state of joy. In Study 2, participants wrote about a time when they had experienced each of these states. These definitions were coded for psychological features that were used to differentiate the different states. In Study 3, the researchers mapped the differences among the six mental states into a conceptual space using multidimensional scaling. Overall, the findings suggest that hope is closely related to mental states such as wishing and optimism but unique in its own right.

## Measuring Hope

Over the past twenty years, Snyder and colleagues have developed useful measurements of hope for both adults and youth. In this section, the Children's Hope scale and the Adult Dispositional Hope scale will be reviewed because they are most common measures of hope, and both can be used to assess hope in youth. In addition, other measures that assess specific components of hope will be described. Such as, the African American Adolescent Hope Scale, which is an instrument specifically developed to measure hope in African American youth (see scale descriptions below).

### **Children's Hope Scale (CHS)**

**General description.** Children's hope is defined as “a cognitive set involving the beliefs in one's capabilities to produce workable routes to goals (the pathways component), as well as the self-related beliefs about initiating and sustaining movement toward these goals (the agency component)” (Snyder et al., 1997). The Children's Hope scale (CHS; Snyder et al., 1997) is a six-item self-report measure of children's hope validated for use with children ages 7 to 17, second grade and beyond (Lopez, Ciarlelli, Coffman, Stone, & Wyatt, 2000).

**Administration and scoring.** When administered the CHS is referred to as the “Children's Goals Scale”. The scale is easily hand-scored in about 3 minutes. The administrator of the scale can have the children complete it independently or read the items aloud if the child has reading difficulties (Lopez et al., 2000). In accordance with Snyder's model of hope, three of the six items tap into agency (“I believe I'm doing fairly well”), and three are designed to assess pathways (“I have the ability to come up with

many ways to solve any problems I may experience”). Participants taking the CHS are instructed to rate statements using a six point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 6 (all of the time). The agency and pathways subscale scores can range from 3 to 18, while total scores (sum of both agency and pathways scores) can range from 6 to 36.

**Normative data.** The CHS was standardized using multiple samples ( $n=7$ ) of 1115 school children in four states, some of who were diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or who had a history physical health issues such as arthritis, sickle cell anemia, or cancer. The norming samples were predominately European American, and only two samples had sufficient numbers of children from diverse racial/ethnic groups. However, in both samples African American children were the minority (i.e., Texas sample  $n=12$  of 143 participants; Pennsylvania sample  $n=26$  of 170 participants). According to descriptive statistics performed by Snyder, et al. (1997) in the development of this scale, the average level of hope on the CHS is approximately 25.

**Psychometric properties.** During item selection a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotations, and a requested two-factor solution was performed on the data on two occasions. As a result of the factor analysis, the scale went from an original 12-item version to the final published six-item scale. Internal consistency was demonstrated by the Cronbach alphas computed for the normative samples that ranged from .72 to .86, with a median alpha of .77 (Snyder, et al., 1997). The test-retest correlations over a one-month period were found to be both positive and significant, ranging from .70 to .80 (Snyder et al., 1997). Concurrent construct validity was supported in a number of ways. For example, parents’ judgments of their child’s hope level, was found to be correlated positively with their children’s scores on the CHS. Youth’s CHS

scores were also found to be positively correlated with scores on various measures of children's self-perceptions and control related attributions. Self-perceptions were assessed in the areas of scholastics, social acceptance, athletics, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct (Snyder et al., 1997; Lopez et al., 2000). CHS scores were negatively correlated with scores on the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1985). The fact that higher scores on the CHS were not associated with intelligence provided evidence for discriminant validity. However, scores on the CHS were positively correlated with cumulative percentile scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Snyder et al., 1997).

**Applications.** Snyder et al. (1997) suggested a variety of applications of the CHS, particularly with children who have health-related problems. Hopeful thinking is essential to this population of children because their medical conditions often generate barriers that create obstacles for goal accomplishment (Lopez et al., 2000). The process of hopeful thinking can help these children concentrate on finding ways to overcome obstacles to reach their goals, and establish the motivation needed to complete difficult medical treatment regimens. More importantly, the CHS can be used to explore strengths and areas for potential growth in children (Lopez et al., 2000).

### **Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (ADHS)**

**General description.** The Adult Dispositional Hope scale or Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) is a twelve -item self-report measure of hope developed for use with ages 15 and older.

**Administration and scoring.** During administration the Hope scale is referred to as the "Goals scale" as way to disguise the purpose of the assessment. Participants taking

the Adult Hope scale are instructed to rate statements using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely false) to 4 (definitely true). Recently an 8-point Likert scale has been used to encourage score diversity. Four items measure agency (“I’ve been pretty successful in life”), four measure pathways (“I think of many ways to get out of a jam”), and four items are distracters (“I feel tired most of the time”) (Snyder et al., 1991). Total Hope scale scores range from 8 to 32 using a 4-point scale, and from 8 to 64 using an 8-point scale.

**Normative data.** The Hope Scale was normed on six separate samples of University of Kansas introductory psychology students and two samples (one outpatient and one inpatient) of individuals in psychological treatment. No information was given about the racial background of the norming sample. During the process of norming the Hope scale, Snyder et al. (1991) found that the average score for college and non-college student samples was 24 using the 4-point scale, and 48 using the 8-point scale. Those seeking psychological treatment had lower hope scores, however these treatment sample participants scored on the hopeful end of the hope scale (i.e., approximately a 3 on the 4-point response scale for each hope item).

**Psychometric properties.** Reliability coefficients were determined by assessing six samples of undergraduate college students and two samples of individuals in psychological treatment. Cronbach alphas ranged from .74 to .84 and test-retest correlations of .80 or above were found for a period of over 10 weeks (Snyder et al., 1991). Concurrent construct validity was assessed by comparing Hope scale responses to responses on similar scales of psychological processes (Snyder et al., 1991). For example, Hope scale scores were found to be correlated in the range of .50 to .60 with

measures of optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Lopez et al. 2000). Experimental construct validation was demonstrated by testing hope's application to daily life. For example, it was found that high-hope people view their goals in a more positive manner (Snyder et al., 1991). Finally, discriminant validity was supported by comparing Hope Scale scores to unrelated measures, such as the Self-Conscious scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Bus, 1975), and no significant correlations were found (Lopez et al., 2000).

**Applications.** Snyder (1995) proposed several practice setting uses of the Hope Scale. For example, it can potentially be used with a larger battery of assessments as a preliminary measure of hope. In addition, this scale may be beneficial for identifying high hope individuals and to understand how they naturally maintain hopefulness. Similarly, the Hope Scale may be used by therapists to assess their own levels of hope. Research has implicated that higher-hope therapist are less likely to experience the negative effects of burnout (Snyder, 1995). Therefore, therapist awareness about their hope may provide essential information about their effectiveness as a helper.

### **Adult State Hope Scale**

**General description.** The Adult State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996) is a 6-item self-report scale (3 agency and 3 pathways items) that measures goal-directed thinking in the present moment (i.e. the "here and now"). The scale has a response range of 1=Definitely False to 8=Definitely True.

**Administration and scoring.** The State Hope Scale is administered as the "Goals Scale for the Present". Respondents are directed to adopt a "here and now" mindset when answering items. Administration of the scale can be done in approximately 2 to 5 minutes, and hand scored in a minute or less. The scale is written at approximately a

sixth-grade reading level. In terms of scoring, a total score is attained by summing responses to all six items. The agency and pathways subscale score are obtained by summing their three items. Scores on each subscale range from 3 to 24, with a total score range from a low of 6 to a high of 48.

**Normative data.** The State Hope Scale was standardized on 444 students enrolled in introductory psychology course at the University of Kansas. In an initial screening session, these students completed the Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) and the State Hope Scale. Based on their dispositional hope scores 240 participants (40 males, 40 females from top, middle, and bottom portions of the score distribution) were recruited to participate in a second study. Individuals from the extremes of the distribution were recruited to maximize variability. An equal number of males and females were recruited as a means to explore potential gender differences. Of the original 240 participants, 72 did not complete the study due to drop out.

**Psychometric properties.** Internal consistency alphas for the State Hope Scale ranged from .79 to .95, in the studies involving college students. Agency subscale alphas ranged from .76 to .95 and .59 to .93 for the pathways subscale (Snyder et al., 1996). Test-retest correlations (.48 to .93) varied as expected due to the scales sensitivity to “here and now” or given moments in time. The State Hope Scale was found to be correlated (.79) with the Dispositional Hope Scale on a test of concurrent construct validity (Snyder et al., 1996). In addition, the State Hope Scale and the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) correlated with each other from .45 to .75.

**Applications.** The State Hope Scale is useful for research studies that are investigating change in goal-directed thinking over time (Lopez et al., 2000). The scale

can also be used to explore how state hope is related to temporal goal-related activities in adolescents such as academics and sports performance.

### **Adult Domain Specific Hope Scale**

**General description.** The Domain Hope Scale (DSHS, Sympson, 1999) was created as a part of a dissertation. The scale measures hope in relation to six life domains: social, academic, family, romance/relationships, work/occupation, and leisure activities (Lopez et al., 2000).

**Administration and scoring.** Respondents are directed to rate the significance of, and their satisfaction with, the six life domains on Likert Scales from 0 to 100. Within each arena, respondents rate the personal relevance of each item on an 8-point Likert scale (1=Definitely False to 8=Definitely True) (Lopez et al., 2000). The total score of the DSHS is acquired by summing the scores across the 48 items, while the domain specific scores are obtained by summing the eight items within each domain (Sympson, 1999; Lopez et al., 2000).

**Normative data.** Similar to the other hope assessments the DSHS was standardized using a sample of 343 college students. Mean total scores were as follows: 302.88 ( $SD=36.03$ ), and 50.20 ( $SD=9.04$ ) for social hope, 49.38 ( $SD=9.24$ ) for academic hope, 43.66 ( $SD=12.10$ ) for romantic hope, 52.32 ( $SD=10.12$ ) for family hope, 53.67 ( $SD=8.25$ ) for work hope, and 53.66 ( $SD=7.09$ ) for leisure hope.

**Psychometric properties.** The internal consistency alphas ranged from .86 to .93. The DSHS was found to have concurrent construct validity with the BDI (-.45). In addition, the DSHS family domain score and scores on the Perceived Social Support

Friends/Family (Prociando & Heller, 1983) were correlated in the positive direction (.64 and .46). General support was found for discriminant validity.

**Applications.** The Domain Specific Hope Scale allows mental health professionals to assess client's hope in various domains. Thus, using this scale therapist may gain a better understanding of the importance of certain life domains (Lopez et al., 2000). This information could help therapists identify appropriate treatment strategies and interventions for distressed clients.

### **African American Adolescent Hope Scale (AAHS)**

Despite the promising psychometric properties of the various hope scales, differences in hope scores have been found between racial groups. For example, while developing the Hope Scale Snyder (1991) noticed that ethnic minority groups disproportionately had lower hope scores. As a result, he rationalized that hope may be experienced differently in minorities when compared to the mainstream population (Snyder, 2002). To understand these differences Snyder and his colleagues completed a survey of college students from various ethnic groups. They found that African Americans exhibited hope but seemed to have lower goal standards than their European American counterparts. Snyder believed that the tendency for African Americans and other minority groups to limit their goals was influenced by persistent exposure to societal forces such as racism and oppression. These findings led Snyder to call for further research studies to examine these cultural differences in hope. In particular, he suggested studies to examine the cross-cultural applicability of hope measures due to the lack of diversity during the development and validation of the hope scales previously

described (Snyder, 2000). To fill this gap in hope measurement, Moore (1998) developed the African American Adolescent Hope Scale (AAAHS).

**General description.** The AAAHS was created to measure hope in African American adolescents in grades 7 through 12. The content of the instruments is culturally specific and takes into account the needs and environmental concerns of the African American adolescents. For example, the scale items were written to assess such factors as racism, oppression, spirituality, racial identity, academic performance, poverty, interpersonal relationships, parental encouragement, and career aspirations (Moore, 1998). Scale items were developed to reflect the three components of hope, hopelessness, and spirituality (Pringle, 2007).

**Administration and scoring.** The original version of the AAAHS scale included 90 items, but after two rounds of item analysis 32 items were removed due to problems with clarity and cultural relevance. The final version was a 58-item self-report measure that includes 29 negatively worded items that require reverse scoring. Overall scores range from 58 to 290, as items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=definitely disagree, 2=mostly disagree, 3= neither disagree or agree, 4= mostly agree, and 5=definitely agree). During administration the scale is referred to as the “Outlook Scale” to decrease bias (Pringle, 2007).

**Normative data.** To establish significance the scale was normed on 105 African American junior and senior high school students aged 12 to 18 years. Participant recruitment was conducted through school districts, churches, and youth organizations in North Mississippi (Pringle, 2007).

**Psychometric properties.** The internal consistency alpha for the full-scale version of the AAAHS scale was .92 and removal of items did not affect the alpha coefficient. Test-retest administrations resulted in a correlation of .74. Convergent validity analysis revealed a positive correlation between the AAAHS and the Children's Hope Scale ( $r(100) = .51, p < .01$ ).

It should also be noted that Moore (2006) developed a 7-item revised version of the AAAHS (scores range from 7 to 35). The AAAHS-R also demonstrated a significant internal consistency alpha of .83 and correlated with the Children's Hope Scale ( $r(103) = .47, p < .01$ ). Therefore, the AAAHS scale is a valid measure that assesses hope within the cultural context of African American adolescents.

**Applications.** The AAAHS is the only scale developed to assess hope among African American Americans. Therefore, mental health professionals can use this scale to conceptualize hope in this population. Furthermore, the scale can help therapists identify in what life arenas these youth experience low hope.

### **Hope and Outcomes Among Youth**

Hope has been shown to be associated with many significant outcomes in adults, from academic and athletic achievement in college students, to positive mental and physical health indicators (Snyder, 2000; 2002). A growing but small body of literature provides similar support for the relationship between hope and positive outcomes in children and adolescents.

## Academic Outcomes

It has been demonstrated that hope has a significant effect on academic achievement in youth of various ages. Although hope scores are not significantly correlated with intelligence, youth with higher hope scores have been shown to perform better on standardized achievement measures such as semester grades, graduation rates, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1997; Snyder, Ilardi, et al., 2000).

More recently, Gilman, Dooley, and Florell (2006) investigated the relationship between hope and academic and psychological indicators of school adjustment among 341 middle and high school students. The majority of the participants were European American. The results indicated that youth with high hope reported higher academic and psychological adjustment. In accordance, Ciarrochi, Heaven, and Davies (2007) investigated the role of three positive thinking variables (self-esteem, trait hope, and positive attributional style) as predictors of future high school grades, teacher-rated adjustment, and students' reports of their affective states in 784 high school freshmen. The study was conducted in Australia but the researchers failed to delineate their demographics. The results indicated that hope had a greater positive effect on total school grades and individual subject grades (i.e., English, Religious Studies, Math, Science, and Design) than attributional style or self-esteem. Therefore, the results of these studies identify hope as a protective or internal attribute that contributes to academic success.

## **Health Outcomes**

Hope has also been shown to have positive physical health outcomes for youth. A study conducted by Berg, Rapoff, Snyder, and Belmont (2007), examined the relationship between hope and pediatric asthma treatment adherence. A total of 48 asthma patients ages 8-12 years old were monitored over a 14-day period on their adherence to an inhaled steroid using a metered-dose inhaler that measures the time and date of each use. The majority of the participants were European American and male and from intact families. The results indicated that hope was a significant predictor of adherence to the asthma treatment.

Continuing along this line of research, Barnum, Snyder, Rapoff, Mani, and Thompson (1998) examined the relationship between hope and social support in the psychological adjustment of adolescents who have survived burn injuries. The participant sample consisted of 15 burn survivors and 14 same gender friends of the survivors who were identified as the control group. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 19 years old. Results demonstrated that adolescent burn survivors with higher hope engaged in fewer externalizing behaviors that undermined recovery. Also, higher hope and increased levels of social support contributed to the prediction of global self-worth. Therefore, hope serves as a protective factor that promotes the formation of other internal attributes that help youth positively adapt to risk or adverse life experiences.

## **Psychological Adjustment**

Research with youth has also garnered support for the association between hope and psychological adjustment. In the original CHS development and validation study,

Snyder et al. (1997) found that hope scores were positively correlated with children's perceptions of athletic ability, physical appearance, social acceptance, and academic achievement, as well as negatively correlated with depression. In accordance, Gilman et al. (2006) found that high hope youth reported higher levels of personal adjustment and global life satisfaction, and less emotional distress than youth with lower hope scores. Building upon this research, Ashby, Dickinson, Gnilka, and Noble (2011) examined the relationship between hope and depression in a sample of 153 of mostly European American, early adolescent youth. Similar to the Snyder et al. (1997) findings, the researchers discovered an inverse relationship between hope and depression symptoms. In other words, as hope scores increased among middle school students, scores of depressive symptoms decreased.

Hope has also been shown to divert youth from participating in risky behaviors such as substance use. Carvajal, Clair, Nash, and Evans (1998) examined the relationship between intrapersonal factors (e.g., optimism, hope, and self-esteem) and youth substance abuse in a sample of 1,985 early adolescents. Similar to the previous studies a majority of the participant sample was European American. The results revealed that hope, as well as optimism and self-esteem, were determinants of avoiding substance use in these youth. In an analogous study, Hagen, Myers, and Mackintosh (2005) found that at-risk children who were more hopeful had fewer externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems. Therefore, hope may serve as a protective mechanism that averts youth from engaging in risky-behaviors.

Hope has also been found to be a factor in school connectedness among youth. You et al. (2008) investigated the role of school connectedness in the relationship

between hope and life satisfaction for a sample of youth in grades 5 to 12 ( $N = 866$ ) with varying levels of exposure to peer victimization. The students were broken into three groups: Bullied Victims, Peer Victims, and Nonvictims. The results revealed that those youth with greater life satisfaction were able to envision various pathways to desired goals, which is an attribute found in higher hope individuals. Furthermore, those who were bullied exhibited less hope and experienced less school connectedness.

Significantly, hope has also been indicated as a protective factor in the lives of 669 adolescent youth facing stressful life events (Valle, Huebner & Suldo, 2006). Valle et al. (2006) conducted one of the few longitudinal studies on the topic of hope among youth. It should be noted that the majority of the sample was African American (58%). Findings indicated that participants with higher hope were more likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction a year later. Moreover, hope was shown to be a moderator in the relationship between stressful life events, global life satisfaction, and adolescent well-being. Taken together, the results highlight the utility of hope as a psychological strength and protective factor in the lives of youth.

Although these studies provide promising information regarding the correlations between hope and positive adaptation, these effects may not be applicable to diverse populations. For instance, the majority of findings of the studies discussed were the product of a participant sample that was predominately European American. This may cause issues with the cross-cultural comparison or equivalence of the construct of hope to African American youth. Also, these studies did not take into account the unique experiences of non-majority youth. The level of risk is usually greater for those who are not in the majority due to their status within the United States. To determine the potential

of hope in relation to developmental outcomes, cultural variables such as values and experiences with discrimination and/or poverty needed to be included in future research.

### **Hope and Diverse Populations**

Despite the recognition that hope is associated with greater psychological functioning among adults and youth, few studies have examined hope theory in relation to diverse populations (Chang & Banks, 2007). To date, the majority of the research examining Snyder's model of hope has been conducted on predominately European American college students (Chang & Banks, 2007). An exception is a study by Chang and Banks (2007), where the authors aimed to extend hope theory to more diverse populations by examining agency and pathways thinking, and their relation with social problem solving affects and life satisfaction across a sample of college students from various racial/ethnic groups. The results of the study indicated that African Americans reported higher scores on measures of pathways thinking, positive problem solving orientation, positive affect, and life satisfaction compared with different racial/ethnic groups (e.g. Asian, Latino, European American). Therefore, African American youth were able to generate paths toward their desired goals in the face of obstacles as hope helped to promote internal attributes that contributed to their level of well-being. In a similar study, Prelow, Danoff-Burg, Swenson, and Pulgiano (2004), found that African American college students with increased hope exercised greater coping efficacy and used more problem-focused coping than students with lower levels of hope. Finally, Banks, Singleton, and Kohn-Wood (2008) found that increased levels of hope were associated with decreased levels of depressive symptoms in a sample of African American college students. In accordance with the previous study, the findings suggest

that hope acted as a protective factor that reduced the chances of African American youth developing mental health symptoms.

Another study that investigated hope with a diverse sample was conducted by Roesch, Duangado, Vaughn, Aldridge, and Villodas (2010). The aim of the study was to assess the impact of hope on daily coping in a low SES adolescent ethnic minority sample. This quantitative analysis revealed that hope was positively related to direct problem solving, planning, positive thinking, and overall coping (Roesch et al., 2010) among all youth. However, specific differences among ethnic groups were not explored. A similar study by Hinton, Roberts, and Snyder (2006) explored hope in relation to exposure to violence and vulnerability to victimization in a diverse sample of inner city adolescents (78.7% African American). The results suggested that high hope was present in adolescents exposed to high levels of violence. These studies portray hope as a protective factor that promotes resilience and buffers the effects of risk factors.

In a series of studies conducted by Adams and colleagues (Adams, 2002; Adams & Jackson, 2000; Adams & Nelson, 2001) hope consistently has been found as an essential variable in the subjective well-being of African Americans (Adams et al., 2003). For example, Adams and Jackson (2000) conducted an analysis on a national survey of African Americans and the results indicated a correlation between high hope and increased satisfaction. In a similar survey study, Adams and Nelson (2001) assessed life satisfaction among African American fathers. They found that hope predicted these fathers' perceptions of being able to support their families (Adams et al., 2003). Adams (2002) reported similar findings in a study examining African American mothers (Adams et al., 2003). Overall, the findings suggest that African Americans "draw on hope as a

way of way of remaining resilient in the face of adversity” (Adams III & Nelson, 2001). Unfortunately, these findings do not answer questions about the role of hope in the lives of African American youth.

### **Hope and African American Youth**

Although the above research studies have produced some potential implications for hope theory as a resilience factor in small portions of African Americans, few have focused exclusively on African American youth using Snyder’s operationalization of hope. The only study that focused primarily on African American adolescents rather than adults/college students, or a mixed group of ethnically diverse youth, and used Snyder’s definition of hope, was conducted by Adelabu (2008). The researcher investigated the relationship of academic achievement to future time perspective, hope, and ethnic identity among low-income, rural and urban African American adolescents. The sample was comprised of 661 African American middle and high school students. The findings of the study indicated that youth who were directed to the future, determined to reach their goals (hope), and had high levels of ethnic identity tended to academically outperform those with lower scores in these areas (Adelabu, 2008). Furthermore, the analysis revealed that hope agency and ethnic identity were significant predictors of academic achievement in both urban and rural African American adolescents.

Additional studies focusing on hope and African American adolescents did not utilize Snyder’s conceptualization of hope. Brown and Gourdine (2001) examined the impact of violence and perceptions of environmental supports on the lives of African American females. The sample was comprised of 75 African Americans adolescent girls. The researchers collected demographic information and obtained information on

exposure to violence and fear of violence in the participant's neighborhood, school, and home settings. Data analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Results indicated that high incidents of exposure to violence and fear of violence did not completely damage the outlook on life of the girls as they sustained a positive outlook. Therefore, they continued to remain hopeful in the context of risk.

Davis-Maye and Perry (2007) also investigated the relationship between support (i.e., maternal figure support) and hope for the future among low-income African American adolescent girls (N = 866). The participants completed a 294-item self-report Youth Survey created by Institute of Social Science of Research at the University of Alabama. The survey included items that established measures of maternal figure support and hope. A correlation analysis suggested that higher levels of maternal figure support decreased hopelessness. Unfortunately, hope levels decreased with every grade change preceding the tenth grade.

Taken together, the scant amount of literature about hope among African American youth suggests that hope can be useful in academic performance (Adelabu, 2008); contributes to greater coping and problem-solving (Prelow et al., 2004; Roesch et al., 2010; Chang & Banks, 2007); improves psychological adjustment (Banks, Singleton, & Kohn-Wood, 2008); and defends against the negative impact of environmental stressors when coupled with social support (Brown & Gourdine, 1998; Davis-Maye & Perry, 2007). Taken with the large body of literature about the utility of hope in the lives of youth and adults, it is clear that this is a construct that plays a role in resilience and should be further explored. In particular, a qualitative exploration of how hope is utilized by African American youth will help to further the field.

### **Purpose of the Study**

While the small body of literature presented on African American youth aids in understanding the unique experience of this population in the context of hope and resilience, very little is known about how hope is used by this population. Furthermore, no research was found that focused solely on the role of hope in a sample of resilient African American adolescents. Considering the challenges that African American youth face regardless of level of success, having a better understanding of the processes that underlie and sustain resilience in African American adolescents is critical. Therefore, this study explored how resilient African American youth use hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991), to shed light on strength of this population and set the foundation for future intervention research that aims to integrate hope into the lives of African American youth as a whole, whether at risk or highly resilient.

### Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991), is used in the lives of resilient African American youth. In order to study this phenomenon, a qualitative research approach was employed. There are a variety of reasons why qualitative research methodology was appropriate for studying this topic. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore and understand variables that are not easily identifiable or unknown (Morrow 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, it is ideal for gaining insight into phenomenon such as behavior, social trends, or action/interactional relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Given the absence of research regarding how hope may support resilience in African American youth, qualitative methodologies afford the opportunity to gather a more detailed and in-depth view of a phenomenon of interest (Morrow, 2007). Furthermore, qualitative research is a particularly useful approach to understand the meanings people make of their experiences (Morrow, 2007). Through their own words, with the aid of interviews, the meaning that participants make of their experience was captured. In particular, Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used as the qualitative methodology to discover how hope supports resilience.

Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser; 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was particularly appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to discover how people define their realities on the basis of their understandings of social interactions without the researcher having to be an expert on the phenomenon or having a preconceived hypothesis (Fassinger, 2005). The purpose of Grounded Theory is “to produce a theory that is “grounded” in data collected from participants on the basis of

complexities of their lived experiences in a social context” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157).

Grounded Theory is an inductive way of generating theory through a concurrent process of data collection, coding, conceptualizing, and theorizing. New data are constantly compared to evolving concepts (theoretical sampling) until no new themes, categories, or relationships are discovered. Once this process is complete, the constructs are specified into a substantive theory about the phenomenon under investigation (Fassinger, 2005).

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the procedures that were used to achieve the objectives of this study. These procedures include defining the target population, research team, participant recruitment, instruments, and data collection/analysis procedures.

### **Target Population**

This study’s target population was defined as male and female African American adolescents (i.e., self-identified) aged 14 to 18 who fit the resilience profile outlined by Gonzales (2003). The World Health Organization identified the adolescent age spectrum as youth ages 10-19. However, this study focused on high school aged adolescents, due to their “ability to reason effectively, problem solve, think abstractly and reflect, and plan for the future” (APA, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the following resilience indicators were used: (a) *risk factors* such as African American identity/attributes, low socioeconomic status, and single or foster parent household, (b) *protective factors* such as hope, satisfaction with self/high self-esteem, social support (i.e., from family, teachers, and the community), and extracurricular adaptation and (c) *positive adaptation* such as academic achievement, satisfaction with friends/social competence/social skills, and lack of engagement in risky behaviors. Table 1 provides a list of each of the risk, protective,

and positive adaptation indicators as well as the primary source from where this information was obtained. These markers were used as criteria for inclusion in the study.

Table 1

*Risk, Protective, and Positive Adaptation Indicators*

<b>Risk Factors</b>	<b>Source (SR* or TR*)</b>	<b>Protective Factors</b>	<b>Source (SR* or TR*)</b>	<b>Positive Adaptation Indicators</b>	<b>Source (SR* or TR*)</b>
*African American identity/attributes (i.e., self-identified)	SR	*High hope (CHS score of 29 or higher)	RA	*Lack of engagement in risky behavior (i.e., no expulsions, suspensions, referrals)	SR/CR
Socioeconomic stressors/low-income household (defined by free or reduced lunch)	SR	Satisfaction with self/high self-esteem	CR/PR	*Satisfaction with friends/Social competence/social skills (i.e., get along with others)	PR/CR
Family composition (i.e., single-parent household/foster system)	SR/CR	Social support/supportive relationships (e.g., family, friends, mentor, community, church)	CR/PR	*Academic Achievement (i.e., current strong academic performance as defined by GPA of 3.0 or above)	SR
		Extracurricular participation (i.e., clubs, sports, other organizations)	SR/CR/PR		

\*SR=student records. CR= school counselor report. GPA=grade point average. RA= researcher administration. PR= participant report. CHS= Children's Hope Scale.

Indicators with an asterisk (\*) represent criteria that must be met by all participants. At least one additional indicator in each risk and protective factor category must be met.

### **Participant Pool**

The participant pool was limited to African American adolescents enrolled in two high schools within the School District of West Allis/West Milwaukee (WAWM). The West Allis/West Milwaukee school district has a partnership with Marquette University to incorporate Hope into the districts curriculum and broader school climate. The district encompasses three high schools (i.e., Nathan Hale, West Allis Central, WAWM Learning Center), however the participants were not recruited from the WAWM Learning Center, due to the schools non-traditional enrollment requirements not meeting the studies inclusion criteria. Nathan Hale and West Allis central high schools are located in West Allis, Wisconsin a border suburb of Milwaukee, WI. Due to the cities geographic location students who reside in Milwaukee, WI may be eligible to attend West Allis/West Milwaukee district schools.

### **Participants**

Eighteen participants (5 male, 13 female) were recruited from Nathan Hale and West Allis Central, and 17 (5 male, 12 female) completed the study. The first participant interviewed was designated as the pilot interviewee and therefore this data was not analyzed. All of the participants fulfilled the aforementioned inclusion criteria (i.e., risk factors, protective factors, and positive adaptation indicators). The participants ranged in age from 14 to 18 and represented 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Ten out of 17 participants were 15 years old representing grades 9 and 10. Three out of 17 participants

were 18 years and were able to sign the consent form without parent/guardian permission. One participant was 14 years and one participant was 16 years. Two of the 17 participants were 17 years. There were two sets of twins in the participant sample (i.e., male and female). A description of the participants' demographics and brief personal details can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Research Participants' Demographic Information and Brief Personal Details*

<b>Pseudonym Selected by Participant</b>	<b>Demographic Information</b>	<b>Information Related to SES</b>	<b>Family Composition Information</b>	<b>Extra-curricular/School Involvement Information</b>	<b>Influential Person in Life</b>
Addison Vogel	Age: 15 Grade: 9 City of residence: New Berlin, WI	Parent/Guardian Education Level: College Graduates Housing: House	Household: Adoptive Parents. No contact with biological parents	Activity: Softball, Basketball, Track, Clubs	Role Model: Adoptive Mother
Allison Gray	Age: 15 Grade: 9 City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/Guardian Education Level: Graduate Degree Housing: House	Household: Single-parent (mother)	Activity: Soccer	Role Model: Mother
Alyssa Weber	Age: 14 Grade: 9 City of residence: West Allis,	Parent/Guardian Education Level: BA, some college	Household: Single-parent (mother)	Activity: Tennis	Role Model: Parents

	WI	Housing: House			
Amy Walters	Age: 18  Grade: 12  City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: BA, High School  Housing: House	Household: Mother and new Stepfather. No contact with biological father	Activity: Soccer, Poms, National Honor Society, Student Council, Mentor	Role Model: Mother
Antonio Blue	Age: 15  Grade: 10  City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: Did not complete high school  Housing: House	Household: Single-parent (mother), foster care 1 year	Activity: Track, Spoken word poetry, Interact Club	Role Model: Brother
Beyoncé Gomez	Age: 15  Grade: 9  City of residence: West Allis/ Milwaukee, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: College Graduates  Housing: House/ Condo	Household: Parents divorces split ½ time between mother and father	Activity: Basketball	Role Model: Parents
Brittany Michaels	Age: 18  Grade: 12  City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: High School/ Technical School  Housing: Apartment	Household: Guardian (grandmother since age of 5)	Activity: Orchestra, Musical/Plays Stage Props	Role Model: Grandmother
Brooke Brown	Age: 15  Grade: 10  City of	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: BA, enrolled	Household: Single-parent (father) and father's fiancé	Activity: Orchestra	Role Model: Sister

	residence: West Allis, WI	in graduate coursework  Housing: House			
Diego Gomez	Age: 17  Grade: 11  City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: High school, GED  Housing: House	Household: Single-parent (mother)	Activity: Track	Role Model: Mother
Emily Black	Age: 15  Grade: 10  City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: BA, enrolled in graduate coursework Housing: House	Household: Single-parent (father) and father's fiancé	Activity: Orchestra	Role Model: Sister
Havillan Smith	Age: 15  Grade: 10  City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: BA, Graduate Degree  Housing: House	Household: Single-parent (mother), father in summer (out of state)	Activity: Band, Best Buddies	Role Model: Parents
Jerome Romanski	Age: 16  Grade: 11  City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: College Graduates  Housing: House (rented)	Household: Mother/ Father	Activity: Theatre, Choir, Football	Role Model: Mother
Marie Smith	Age: 18  Grade: 11	Parent/ Guardian Education	Household: Single-parent (mother),	Activity: Student Council,	Role Model: Self/Mot

	City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Level: Did not complete high school  Housing: House	foster care previously	Invisible Children, Basketball, AVID	her
Monica Book	Age: 15  Grade: 9  City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Parent/Guardian Education Level: Currently enrolled in college  Housing: House	Household: Mother and new stepdad	Activity: Basketball, Church nursery/ events	Role Model: Mother/ Grandmother
Nikolai Wilson	Age: 15  Grade: 10  City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Parent/Guardian Education Level: Did not complete high school  Housing: House	Household: Single-parent (mother), foster care 1 year	Activity: Track, Interact Club, Football, AVID	Role Model: Mother/ Teachers
Roger Clemons	Age: 17  Grade: 11  City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/Guardian Education Level: High school, College Graduate  Housing: House	Household: Guardian (grandparents), mother resides in upstairs of duplex	Activity: Football, Choir	Role Model: Grandparent/Family
Shay Roman	Age: 15  Grade: 9  City of residence: Milwaukee, WI	Parent/Guardian Education Level: High School  Housing: Apartment	Household: Single-parent (mother)	Activity: Choir	Role Model: Mother

Nicole Pena (pilot)	Age: 18  Grade: 12  City of residence: West Allis, WI	Parent/ Guardian Education Level: High school  Housing: House	Household: Mother/Fathe r	Activity: Unknown	Role Model: Mother
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### **The Research Team**

This study utilized a research team to carry out data collection and analysis. A team approach to analysis is useful because it allows for a variety of perspectives and is an opportunity to manage unwanted bias through the reflexivity process (Morrow, 2005). Furthermore, this approach contributes to the rigor of the study, because it allows for credibility checks of the findings and the research process as a whole (Fassinger, 2005).

The team consisted of the following individuals: a principal investigator, a primary team, an external auditor, three external consultants, and two interview transcribers. The principal investigator facilitated all research team training, screened all study participants, created the protocol, conducted all of the interviews, transcribed three interviews, and participated in all stages of data analysis. The primary team, which included the primary investigator, was comprised of 4 members who were responsible for transcribing and analyzing study data. The primary team members were comprised of two doctoral-level graduate students in counseling psychology and two master's-level students in counseling. The primary team members included: two 29-year-old African American women, a 23-year old European American Woman, and a 24-year-old biracial (Middle Eastern and Caucasian) woman. Two of the primary team members had prior experience with ground theory research and two had no prior experience with qualitative

research. However, these two team members did have extensive quantitative research experience. The primary team members without experience in grounded theory research were trained in this methodology prior to and during their participation in data analysis.

In addition to the primary team who carried most of the responsibility for data collection and analysis, other research team members were also involved. An external auditor, for example, was consulted to “help minimize the bias of the researchers and serve as a “devil’s advocate, proposing alternative interpretations to those of the investigator” (Morrow, 2005, p.254). This auditor was a professor in counseling psychology with extensive research experience in grounded theory methodology. The three external consultants were also utilized in a consultative manner during the participant recruitment period (i.e., pulling potential participants school records, connecting principal investigator with potential participants). These individuals were WAWM school counselors and district personnel. Two master’s-level graduate students in counseling, who were not members of the primary team, served as transcribers. These individuals did not participant in data collection or analysis and participated in transcription-related duties predominately for training purposes (i.e., to increase familiarity with qualitative research).

With the exception of the external transcribers, all members of the research team were familiar with the aims of the proposed study (i.e., they reviewed/discussed the dissertation proposal). In addition, the primary team and the external auditor had at some period received training in grounded theory methodology (i.e., read about grounded theory procedures, reviewed grounded theory studies, and participated previously in grounded theory research studies). Moreover, in accordance with Fassinger’s (2005)

recommendations for preparing interviewers, the principal investigator, practicing interviewing and completed a pilot interview prior to conducting any interviews that were analyzed for the study. Finally, the principal investigator attended a planning meeting on hope with the WAWM student services personnel. The purpose of this meeting was to brainstorm strategies to incorporate hope in the curriculum and school environment of the district. The meeting was also an opportunity to familiarize the primary investigator with the WAWM student services personnel/district climate and vice versa.

To enhance the study's trustworthiness, the primary team reflected upon and described their perceived assumptions, expectations, and biases that would possibly impact the study prior to data collection (Morrow, 2005). Reporting both expectations and biases have been suggested as a tool to help team members become aware them so they do not negatively impact the data analysis process (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Biases in terms of qualitative research, have been defined as "personal issues that make it difficult for researchers to respond objectively to the data" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 539). Biases and/or assumptions can develop from demographic variables in addition to values and beliefs about the topic and were assumptions prior to, during, and following data analysis (Hill et al., 2005). The following assumptions, expectations, and biases were reported and reflected upon by the primary team: (a) participants will spend of a majority of the interview discussing race, (b) participants will report that race is a large factor in their resilience, (c) participants adolescence status will lead them report dating drama, (d) participants will be immature due to their adolescent developmental level, (e) participants will fail to report plans for the future, (f) participants will report race having a significant negative impact on their school environment (i.e., due to the school

enrollment being predominately Caucasian), (g) participants will be actively working to disprove stereotypes or be despondent and underachieve because they are expected to (i.e., due to their school environment), and (h) participants may have difficulty reporting traumatic personal experiences (i.e., due to mistrust toward interviewer).

The primary team also discussed biases they bring to the study as a result of their unique demographic backgrounds (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic statuses, level of education, state of origin) and/or their level of comfort interacting with African American adolescents. Furthermore, primary team members reflected upon biases that may have arose from reviewing Chapter II (i.e., literature review) of this manuscript and/or by prior experiences they had participating in qualitative/grounded theory research. For instance, they expected participants to report extensive kinship networks that improved their ability to overcome certain obstacles they had learned about resilient African American adolescents when they read Chapter II of this manuscript.

### **Instruments**

**Background information form.** Prior to being interviewed, each adolescent completed a Background Information Form (see Appendix D). This form requested various types of background information from participants including their age, grade in school, important person/role model in their life, parent/guardian educational level, city of origin, household members (i.e., parent marital status), type of housing, and participation in extracurricular activities. The principal investigator administered this form orally before beginning each individual interview to build rapport.

**Measures of risk factors.** Research has shown that African American youth face numerous risk factors in a variety of domains (Farmer et al., 2004; Perkins & Hartless,

2002). For the purposes of this study, three risk factors were focused on and the source of information for each criterion for inclusion risk factor was primarily school records. As outlined in Table 1, the criteria for inclusion indicated that participants must self-identify as African and have one or more of the remaining risk factors (i.e., SES, family composition) in their lives. See details below.

***African American identity/attributes.*** This risk factor was identified through school records of racial identification provided by school counselors and district personnel.

***Socioeconomic stressors/low-income household.*** This risk factor was defined by free or reduced lunch. In order to qualify to receive this service student's had to reside in a low-income household. School records provided by school counselors were the source for this information.

***Family composition.*** This risk factor was identified through student records and school counselor report. Students who are in the foster system were also included under this risk factor.

**Measures of protective factors.** The source of information for each criterion for inclusion protective factor is described in detail below. However, each participant had high hope and one or more of the remaining protective factors (i.e., satisfaction with self/high self esteem, social support, extracurricular participation) in their lives.

***Hope.*** The Children's Hope Scale (CHS) (Appendix C) was used as a screening measure to meet the criteria for inclusion. Students who received high hope scores (29 or higher) and met the other criteria for inclusion were asked to participant in the study. Children's hope is defined as "a cognitive set involving the beliefs in one's capabilities to

produce workable routes to goals (the pathways component), as well as the self-related beliefs about initiating and sustaining movement toward these goals (the agency component)” (Snyder et al., 1997). The Children’s Hope scale (CHS; Snyder et al., 1997) is a 6-item self-report measure of children’s hope validated for use with children ages 7 to 16, second grade and beyond (Lopez, Ciarlelli, Coffman, Stone, & Wyatt, 2000). When administered the CHS is referred to as the “Children’s Goals Scale”. The scale is easily hand-scored in about 3 minutes. The administrator of the scale can have the children complete it independently or read the items aloud if the child has reading difficulties (Lopez et al., 2000). In accordance with Snyder’s model of hope, three of the six items tap into agency (“I believe I’m doing fairly well”), and three are designed to assess pathways (“I have the ability to come up with many ways to solve any problems I may experience”). Participants taking the CHS are instructed to rate statements using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 6 (all of the time). The agency and pathways subscale scores can range from 3 to 18, while total scores (sum of both agency and pathways scores) can range from 6 to 36.

The rationale for choosing 29 as a high hope cut off was determined by the validation study of the CHS (Snyder et al., 1997). Across all samples in the validation study of the CHS, the standard deviation ranged from 3 to 6. Furthermore, The mean CHS score that was obtained for two small samples of African American youth ( $n=12$ ,  $n=26$ ) within the validation study was between 24 and 26. However, the standard deviation was unclear. Because the high score is 36, a high hope range between 29 and 36 is reasonable and was used for this study. The principal investigator administered and scored the CHS for all potential participants.

It should be noted that although the AAHS has been shown to be a valid measure of hope among African American adolescents, the CHS was chosen as a screening measure for this study because it has been highly researched with a diverse set of participants in a variety of settings. The studies that have served to validate the AAHS are unpublished manuscripts, as such the scale is still being developed and studied to gather further empirical support for its use with African American youth.

***Satisfaction with self/high self-esteem.*** Satisfaction with self/high self-esteem or a positive view of self was identified by participant and school counselor report or observation.

***Social Support/supportive relationships.*** Social support/supportive relationships include strong family supports, mentor relationships, a relationship with the community or church. Participant and school counselor report or observation identified supportive relationships.

***Extracurricular participation.*** Involvement was defined by participation in extracurricular activities including clubs sports, and other organizations. Involvement was identified through participant report, school counselor report, and school records.

***Positive adaptation indicators.*** Participants met the criteria for all three positive adaptation indicators. The source of information for each indicator of positive adaptation is described in detail below.

***Lack of engagement in risky-behavior.*** Positive behavior or lack of behavior concerns was identified through school counselor report or observation and school records.

***Satisfaction with friends/social competence/social skills.*** Satisfaction with friends/social skills was identified through participant report and school counselor observation.

***Current strong academic performance.*** Strong current academic performance was defined by grade point average (GPA) from fall quarter grades. A GPA of 3.0 or above was considered strong academic performance. Strong academic performance was identified through school records provided by the school counselors.

**Interview protocol.** In grounded theory studies, data are usually collected through narratives, primarily in the form of interviews (Creswell, 1998; Fassinger, 2005). Therefore, interviews were this study's primary means of collecting data. According to Fassinger (2005), grounded theory interviewing strategies tend to use some degree of structure in presenting protocol questions to participants along with allowing the participant perspectives to determine the focus. As such, a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix E) was used to guide the interviews. This protocol encouraged participants to discuss their goal pursuits (e.g., "Tell me some important goals you have in your life"), origin of their goals (e.g., "How or what helped you come with these goals?"), sources of support for goal pursuits (e.g., "What or who helps you to meet those goals?"), potential obstacles that may distract from reaching goals (e.g., "What kinds of things will get in the way of those goals?"), personal experiences with goal setting (e.g., "Give me an example of one big goal that you achieved in your life" and "What did you do (strategies) to reach this goal?"), individuals who influence goal pursuits (e.g., "Who or what helps you reach your goals in life?"), personal experiences with racial barriers (e.g., "Is race an obstacle?").

Consistent with grounded theory research, the protocol evolved through theoretical sampling. As such, a modified interview protocol was introduced after the first few interviews given that “analysis begins with the collection of the first pieces of data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; p. 47; see Appendix E for additions). The original protocol was modified such that (a) additional questions about race were introduced by participants (e.g., “Is race and obstacle?” and “Do you believe that if you were a different race would you still have the same obstacles?”) and (b) questions regarding motivation were added by participants (e.g., “Do you follow any customs or use inspirational quotes to motivate you to achieve your goals?” and “What helps you stay motivated at home? Or when others are not around?”) Special attention was given to building rapport with the participants, as the quality and content of interviews is dependent on the relationship between the researcher and participant (Artinian, Giske, & Cone, 2009).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

**Participant recruitment and obtaining consent.** Participants were recruited from two high schools in the suburbs of Milwaukee from which the principal investigator had made contacts. In order to gain access to students, the study had to be sponsored by the Director of Student Services and approved by the district school board. Once the research study was approved the principal investigator was given a list of 38 potential participants at both schools that met some of the inclusion criteria (i.e., African American, above 3.0 GPA, no risky behaviors or school suspensions) from the district Director of Student Services. School counselors from both high schools also nominated nine additional students, not included on the original list, who they believed would meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. Potential participants who were identified as

meeting the inclusion criteria (Checklists Appendix F) were invited to an information meeting facilitated by the principal investigator. The principal investigator held a study information meeting at each of the participatory schools during school hours. At these meetings participants were given a brief information packet, which included a summary of the study and consent forms. Those potential participants (10 students) who did not attend the information meetings were mailed information packets. A total of 27 youth completed consent forms and returned them to the principal investigator. On two other occasions at both schools, informed consent was reviewed with youth and they were screened for hope using the Children's Hope Scale. After potential participants completed the screening measure, those 18 students (1 pilot) who met the cutoff score (i.e., 29 or above) were scheduled for an interview. Upon completion of interviews, each participant received a Target gift card valued at \$5.

**Pilot data collection.** The recruitment procedures discussed above and the data collection procedures were piloted with one individual who fulfilled the study's inclusion criteria. The purpose of piloting the protocol was to ensure the clarity of interview questions prior to the start of the study (Fassinger, 2005). The pilot interview was also used to help determine an estimate of how much time would be needed to complete the interviews.

**Interviewing.** Individual, face-to-face interviews facilitated by the principal investigator were completed with the participants utilizing the original or modified protocol (see Appendix E) and all of the interviews were audio recorded. Face-to-face interviews were chosen for confidential purposes (i.e., a majority of the population were minors), their ability to build rapport, and the opportunity to they provide in capturing

participants unique stories/voices. Interview duration ranged from 20 to 45 minutes.

Upon completion of the interviews, the participants were thanked for their involvement in the study and informed about when they would receive their gift card. When participants left the interview session, the principal investigator took a few minutes to reflect on the interview and jotted down thoughts or questions on the participant background information forms. These thoughts were shared with the primary team at research meetings, and used to inform future interview sessions.

Participants were recruited and interviewed until saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was achieved (n=17). Saturation was determined by primary team discussion and reflection session with the external auditor regarding the lack of emergence new themes and/or information. Interview transcription aided in identifying saturation. The ideology of saturation makes it difficult to determine the number of participants prior to the start of the study (Corbin & Strauss). However, Ritchie et al. (2004) suggested that 12-15 participants, is a sufficient number to conduct a qualitative research study.

**Transcription.** Each interview was transcribed verbatim, with the exception of minimal encouragers. To maintain confidentiality, alias were created by participants and identifying information was removed from transcripts.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data for this study was analyzed following the Grounded Theory approach outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The hallmark of this methodology is theoretical sampling or constant comparison method, an analytic process in which each new piece of data is compared to existing data until an illuminative theory is developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Fassinger, 2005). In essence, data from different individuals is compared;

data from individuals is compared with their own data; incidents are compared to incidents; and categories are compared with categories (Charmaz, 2000; Fassinger, 2005). The ultimate aim of Grounded Theory is to formulate a Grounded Theory that encompasses the individual lived experiences of participants (Fassinger, 2005).

To reach this overreaching goal, data are analyzed, compared, and condensed into categories through the process coding. Coding is the “process of data analysis” in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). In Grounded Theory, there are three phases of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding all of which were used in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These three forms of coding occur recursively as opposed to chronologically as a result of the constant comparison method (Fassinger, 2005). Nevertheless, the coding process begins with open coding and ceases when saturation occurs. Saturation is the point where no new information or incidents can be analyzed through the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The three types of data analyses are described in further detail below.

**Open coding.** Open coding is defined as the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data into meaning units (i.e., concepts) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Fassinger, 2005). Open coding involves the analysis of study data, which is generally in the form of interview transcripts. There are various ways to examine interview transcripts (e.g., line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, entire document, etc.; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is ultimately up to the researcher to determine how they will approach the process of open coding and record (i.e., code notes) the phenomena that emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These ideas are then taken apart and named (i.e., something that represents a phenomenon

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once phenomena in the data have been identified through conceptualization, the concepts can be grouped around them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process of grouping concepts that appear to pertain to the same phenomena is called categorizing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). At this point in the coding process the relationships are still considered tentative. Therefore, as these categories are continually modified through the incorporation of new information they are interrogated for relevance and descriptive capacity (Fassinger, 2005).

For this study, each transcript was open coded by every member of the primary research team. Each transcript was examined and coded line-by-line, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Fassinger (2005) to generate the largest amount of concepts and categories. Each open code or idea was labeled in the transcript margin (i.e., given a conceptual name) and examined by the primary team for its properties and dimensions. These identified concepts were then grouped into preliminary or tentative categories, which were also assigned a conceptual name and further examined for their properties and dimensions until consensus was reached.

Once the primary research team achieved consensus, the principal investigator consulted with the external auditor. The external auditor was provided with a select number of open coded transcripts for review. After the principal investigator received the auditor's feedback, all comments or concerns were discussed and evaluated among the primary research team. Also based on the auditor's comments the data and identified tentative categories were reevaluated by the primary team member.

The final product of this level of analysis yielded a list of concepts and categories that would be further analyzed in axial coding. Overall approximately 1,900 open codes

emerged from this stage of coding. Examples of open codes include: “participant believes that family support helps them reach their goals,” “participant identifies teachers as an influence for type of goal pursuits,” and “participant believes that drama with peers can distract them from accomplishing goals.”

**Axial coding.** The second level of coding in Grounded Theory analysis is axial coding, the process by which connections between categories are organized and further examined (Fassinger, 2005). Open coding results in the identification of initial categories, and these categories are termed fractured or provisional. However, axial coding puts the fractured data back to together in more precise way by making connections between a category and its subcategories (Straus & Corbin, 1990). In order to link subcategories to a category in a set of relationships the following paradigms must be addressed: casual relationships (i.e., events that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon), phenomenon (i.e., central idea to which the set of actions is related), context (i.e., specific set of properties that pertain to a phenomenon), intervening conditions (i.e., the broad and general conditions bearing upon action/interactional strategies), action/interaction (i.e., strategies developed to manage, handle, carry out, respond to a phenomenon under specific conditions), and consequences (i.e., outcomes or results of action and interaction) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data is constantly compared for relevance and support until no new information is revealed about the categories.

While axial coding is known as the second phase of coding following open coding, it has been suggested that these two processes go “hand in hand” and occur simultaneously (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 198). As such, the primary research team began the process of identifying tentative categories during open coding. During axial

coding, the primary research team reviewed these tentative categories, properties, and dimensions that were created during open coding. Tentative categories were further collapsed into themes/categories and subcategories by the team analyzing the causes, conditions, and consequences of each phenomenon. Transcripts were re-read to arrive at this greater understanding of the relationships between the categories.

Once this phase was complete a tentative outline was submitted to the external auditor for review. Any discrepancies or disagreements between the external auditor and the primary research team were examined in depth, and data was reexamined until consensus was achieved. This process resulted in 18 categories, 6 subcategories, and 4 themes. Examples of axial codes that emerged include: “participant believes support from friends helps them reach their goal” and “participants learn through experience and use this knowledge for future goal pursuits.” An example of a theme that emerged include: obstacles or barriers and support.

**Selective coding.** Straus and Corbin (1990) define selective coding as “ the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p.116). While axial coding involves making connections between categories and subcategories, selective coding moves this process forward by focusing on a core or main category as a means to create substantive theory (Dey, 1999; Fassinger, 2005). In essence, a core category is selected that encompasses all of the other categories into “an explanatory whole” or theory (Fassinger, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In accordance with the other stages of analysis, this theory is constantly compared to the

data (participant responses) to ensure that it is an accurate representation of the participants' experiences (Fassinger, 2005).

The core theme for this study goal setting was preselected from the onset given that the study was focused on hope. As a result, selective coding was focused on the primary research team integrating the categories and subcategories that emerged during axial coding to develop a central story line. The primary research team refined, revised, and consulted the external auditor on multiple occasions throughout the process of story line construction. The story line that emerged from these methods was, "Resilient African American youth use hope to facilitate academic and long-term life goals, by calling upon multiple support systems, and persevering to combat obstacles such as racial discrimination and procrastination." The story line discovered through selective coding and the corresponding categories/themes and subcategories are presented in Chapter IV as well as outlined by Figure 1 in Chapter IV.

### **Quality Assurance Processes**

Several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness or conceptual and analytical soundness of the inquiry (Fassinger, 2005). Researchers have identified specific criteria to ensure credible or trustworthy research (Charmaz, 2006; Morrow, 2005). These criteria established to evaluate trustworthiness include the following constructs: credibility/authenticity, transferability, dependability/auditability, and conformability (Fassinger, 2005; Morrow, 2005). Throughout the current study several measures were employed to ensure its overall quality.

The first step the team took to ensure the trustworthiness of the study was to participate in *bracketing* or reflexivity. This is the process of reflecting and becoming

aware of one's assumptions and bias, and setting them aside to avoid having them influence the study (Morrow, 2005). The research team utilized this reflective strategy to discuss and document their implicit assumptions and biases at the beginning of the study. Therefore, everyone made this information overt to themselves and other team members.

Second, the study followed the grounded theory approach and incorporated, continued comparison and verification of the data. Therefore, the theory that emerged was an accurate depiction of the participants' experience. Third, an external auditor was involved in this research project. The external auditor served to evaluate the aforementioned data collection and analysis procedures through providing feedback. Finally, detailed memos were used to document content from team meetings and thoughts or early hypothesis about the study findings.

## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to develop an explanatory theory of how hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991), is used in the lives of resilient African American youth. The central research question of this study was “How do resilient African American youth use hope in their lives?” To explore this question, seventeen African American adolescents participated in individual semi-structured interviews in which they were asked to discuss their goals, how they generate pathways towards goals in the face of obstacles, and strategies utilized to sustain motivation (agency) to propel and maintain movement towards goals. The primary research team analyzed the data over several months and the findings that emerged from the interviews are presented in this chapter.

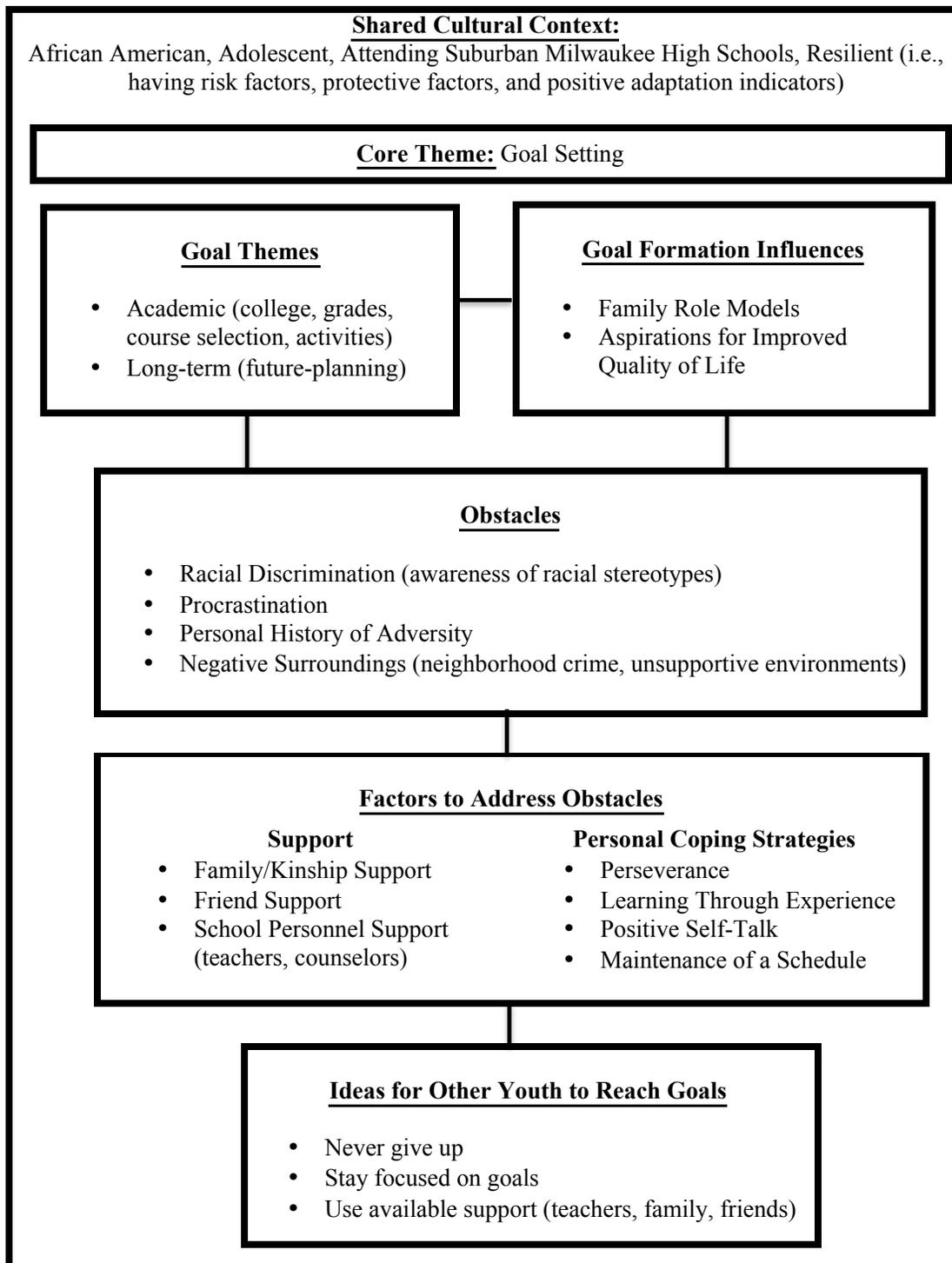
The story line or theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) that emerged from the data analysis was as follows: *Resilient African American youth use hope to facilitate academic and long-term life goals by calling upon multiple support systems and persevering to combat obstacles such as racial discrimination and procrastination.* As discussed previously, the core theme that was preselected before the onset of the study was “goal setting.” Figure 1 provides a visual summary, or model, of the theoretical scheme and how the core theme, categories/themes, subcategories/subthemes are linked given the participants shared cultural context.

In the sections that follow, illustrative quotes will be used to present the findings and provide context for the information provided in the visual summary. The following words and phrases were used to note the number of participants who endorsed each category/subcategory: (a) *Almost all, the majority, many, and most* indicate that a participant response emerged in more than half (9 or more) of the interviews; (b) *some,*

*several*, *half* (when N=8), *nearly half* (when N=7), and *a number* are used when a response was characteristic of 7-8 of the interviews; (c) *a few* is used when a participant response emerged in 3 or fewer interviews. More specific wording (e.g., all, one, almost all) is also used occasionally. The language used to discuss participant responses has been utilized in previous grounded theory studies (Timlin-Scalera et al., 2003).

Figure 1

Story Line: *Resilient African American youth use hope to facilitate academic and long-term life goals by calling upon multiple support systems and persevering to combat obstacles such as racial discrimination and procrastination.*



## **Shared Cultural Context**

The findings that emerged from the current study cannot be interpreted independently of the context from which they were derived. The participants in this study shared a similar cultural context. All of the participants were African American adolescents who attended high schools in a suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In addition, each of the participants was screened for high hope and resilience using the measures outlined in Chapter III (see Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter III). All seventeen participants were able to describe current and past goal pursuits and the steps taken to move toward successful completion of goals in the face of obstacles (i.e., how they use hope in their lives). How this sample used hope is described below.

## **Goal Themes**

When asked to describe their current and past goal pursuits, a majority of the participants described goals that were academic in nature and long-term goals that were focused on aspirations related to participants' hopes and dreams for their future.

**Academic.** Within the academic realm, participants discussed aspirations to attend college, improve or maintain their GPA, enroll in a range of courses, and participate in extracurricular activities.

**College.** Most of the youth discussed ambitions to attend college and the specific universities they hoped to be accepted. For instance, Brooke stated, "I definitely want to be able to go to college and I have always wanted to be able to go to [name of prestigious research institution]." In a similar fashion Beyoncé reported, "My major goal is to go to [name of Ivy League University]," and Brittany noted, "Well, my most important goals

was to go to college...[name of research institution].” Relatedly, a few of the participants discussed college in relation to career pursuits. Nikolai explained, “Going to a good college, being what I want to be, cause what I want to be now is a surgeon, but if it doesn’t work out, then a police officer or something... just reaching my career goals.” Addison similarly explained her college goal in relation to her career, “I want to go to college to become a nurse. I want to work with little kids. I want to try to get into a PA program.” Monica went on to explain college as a stepping stone to future academic interests that would lead to her ultimate career goals stating, “...after college I want to get a degree in law and guidance counseling.”

**Grades.** Several of the youth believed that academic achievement manifested through good grades were a necessity for accomplishing their goal of attending college, gaining increased self-esteem or having personal feelings of accomplishment, and continued engagement in enjoyed extracurricular activities. For example, Brittany noted, “Well I wanted a higher GPA for [prestigious university] to get in...” and Jerome reported, “Right now, I know that what grades I get now will affect what classes I get into later and that will affect if I get into college.” In accordance, Marie indicated, “...I’m trying to make sure that I finish all my high school with at least a 3.0 so that way I can get into certain, a good college.” Allison shared similar sentiments, emphasizing the consequences of getting good grades: “Right now I know that what grades I get now will affect what classes I get into later and that will affect if I get into college.”

In regards to improved self-esteem or personal feeling of accomplishment, Brooke explained, “My education means a lot to me, and I really want to be able to get good grades...I got a 4.0, and I was really proud of myself.” Finally, a few participants

discussed grades as a means to stay eligible for sports or extracurricular activities. Allison reported, “For sports you have to have certain grades. You have to keep your grades up when you are playing sports.” Monica further explained, “. . . keep my grades up and play at the same time because you have to have a certain GPA and you can’t have F’s. I try to maintain my grades above a C at least.”

**Course selection.** Nearly half of the participants were enrolled in advanced coursework or specialty elective courses. These youth usually sought out these courses because of interest and/or as a means to move toward a larger goal. As Shay explained, “ever since I was young I really liked school and I was always in like higher classes and it just pushed me forward to extend my abilities in school.” Jerome reported, “I took a biology class my freshman year, honors biology and I just kind of fell in love with it and once we got into the biochemistry unit I was just really getting into it.”

A few participants discussed the importance of course selection for staying motivated and reaching future goals. Nicolai stated, “I’m in [name of college prep program] already, it’s a class where you try to go to a good college, and your field trips are fun, we go to colleges, and dorms and stuff. It’s just fun, and that pretty much keeps me motivated too.” Similarly, Marie noted, “I think also taking like Health Careers and Medical Terms will kinda help me too. Because, with the Health Careers class, it helps you, like, with the different careers you have or what careers you want to have, so it basically gives you an idea of what you want to do. And I think with the Med Terms, that will help you understand better, like in a medical field. Or what they say, because they have different sayings and what that is.”

**Activities.** A number of the participants discussed participation in extracurricular activities such as clubs and/or sports. In congruence with the other academic categories described above, these youth saw these activities as a resource to accomplish long-term goals. As Antonio explained, “I started to volunteer with [name of volunteer club]... Well I have always had problems being around people, and I thought it would help me be more comfortable around people... If I’m ever going to be a chef, I have to not just be in the kitchen, but talking to customers and stuff.” Similarly, when discussing participation in a club related to her career pursuits, Maria noted, “[name of career club] will help me because, like, it will probably give me a better idea or help me get a feel of what it would be like.” Amy described how participation in sports helps her stay motivated toward her goals in a different way by stating: “Well I use outlets if I’m stressed or angry I always have soccer or if not soccer season I have poms. And I’ve just find outlets for my anger or stress and frustration and it helps me keep going.”

**Long-term.** Participants’ current academic goals were associated with long-term goals set to prepare for future career paths or other personal goals that would in essence lead to a better quality of life. As Marie reported:

Because my main goal is try to get somewhere in the medical field... So, I’m trying to make sure; it’s like step-by-step, actually, because I’m trying to make sure that I finish all my high school with at least a 3.0 so that way I can get into certain, a good college. So I’m trying to make sure my academics stays well, so that way, I can, you know, so that way I can like get scholarships or grants or anything with that. And hopefully, by the next step, it’s like to get in, pick a good college for me to go to or make sure that the major that they have there is a good

fit for me so I can figure out what I want to do in the medical field. Marie went on to say, ... So, for me to set these goals up or for me to do these goals, will help me in the long run with what I want to do in my future or to make a future happen. For me to be successful.

Similarly, Havillan shared, “Graduating high school, and I want to be a pediatrician...because you need math, math is everywhere...and for my profession I wanna be, I have to do a lot of math.”

Several participants described their long-term goals in terms of personal successes that may or may not be related to academic accomplishments. For example, Brooke reported, “I definitely want to go to college...and um I just want to be able to get a nice job when I’m older.” Others discussed personal goals such as having a family when asked about their most important goals overall. As Alyssa offered, “Well I want to go to college and get a good job and, maybe have a family.” Roger also noted, “Well, basically I really want to be a good person and just be the best person I really can be and I would like to finish college, and have a nice job, and have a nice family and everything. And live the basic life.” Finally, Amy described personal successes that would lead her to being gratified by stating, “One of my most important goals is doing well in school. So this year it was getting accepted into a good college and maintaining my grades and starting off college the right way next year. Also maintaining a good relationship with my family is one of my most important goals. And just making sure that I make myself happy while also making the people around me happy.”

### **Goal Formation Influences**

The interview protocol included questions that were aimed at understanding how

or what helped participants formulation of their goals. Many of the participants mentioned family role models, either positive or negative, who led them to develop a positive goal pursuit. Several of the youth also discussed aspirations for improved quality of life for themselves or their family that aided them in developing ideas for long term and short term goals.

**Family role models.** The majority of the participants named a family role model such as a parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle, sibling, or cousin that provided reinforcement for goal development through indirect modeling. Usually the participant observed individuals in their lives and used knowledge of their experiences (i.e., positive or negative) to facilitate goal setting. As Addison noted, “I think, you know, what motivated me is just seeing, like people in my family, some of the people in my family, have struggled financially, because they did not try in high school. They didn’t get a good education. They didn’t, you know, my older brother, you know, blew off his chance at high school and now he’s paying to go back to college, and they’re struggling financially.” Nikolai stated, “I saw people and my family going back to jail, and I know that’s not a good life. I don’t want that for me...” Emily added, “My mom, she never really like went out and like...she kind of was a failure in life... So and I just don’t want to be like that...” Lastly, Allison stated, I know a lot of my relatives didn’t get very far in school so it’s like I respect them but not like how far they got in school. I want to do better than that.”

In regards to positive role models, Beyoncé noted, “Well, because I know that umm, well my auntie, she has a good job and her husband has a good job, ... and they have their college degree and Bachelor’s degree and that inspired me to go to college and

get good jobs like they do.” Brooke stated, “My cousins all went to [name of academic institution]. They are all really smart and now they are all really successful “Marie offered, “My mom because she’s there right now, like a CNA, so she kind of help me...I know what she’s been through. She been there, done that, and she trying to get me to not be where she has been at before.”

**Aspirations for improved quality of life.** Several of the participants discussed individual and collective reasons for wanting to strive for a better life. These ambitions to improve their situation or quality of life served as a form of inspiration for their short-term and long-term specific goal pursuits. As Diego stated, “I just wanted to do something that my parents didn’t and be better if I have kids for them.” Nikolai offered, “Yea, going to college because, because I’m the only one in my family, but also because, I see people, ...not educated, on the streets. They should be in an office or a workplace, no doing anything, not working. And they need a job, and I want to have a nice job, a good paying job, with a salary, not an hourly (wage).” Allison shared, “ I want to be able to go through live without worrying about money...when I was little my mom didn’t have as much money.”

### **Obstacles**

Hope theory suggests that within the process of goal setting it is inevitable that obstacles come up on the way to goal achievement (Snyder, 1991). As such, participants were queried regarding the types of obstacles they have faced while trying to maintain movement toward their goal pursuits. Obstacles discussed by all of the youth were both internal and external conditions that temporarily halted their path toward successful goal completion.

**Racial discrimination.** Many of the youth discussed their awareness of and personal experiences with racial discrimination within their school environment as well as in society as a whole. This discrimination came in the form of lowered expectations of these youth in regards to level of intelligence and ability to succeed academically because of their race. For instance, in discussing how her friends react when they see her high GPA, Brittany reported, "...they will like freak out about my GPA. I'm like, 'It is normal. I know kids with higher ones than me in school.' They will like freak out and people will freak out just because I'm black that my GPA is good, 'cause it is like a stereotype that we suck at school." Havillan shared similar sentiments, stating, "...people like group us all together, so if another Black person is doing bad, then this person probably doesn't understand it either. So there have been a lot of times where I understand what I'm doing, and they will just be like, 'do you understand what you are doing?' And talk down to me, like I'm stupid. I don't like that." Beyoncé noted, "Yes, I think so because there is so much criticism on our race... That's one thing in middle school that I had a problem with because many kids thought that I couldn't succeed... and they think that all African Americans are dumb and violent and stuff, what they hear on the news, and that's just not true."

Other participants discussed how they believe society views African Americans, and the assumptions that are made about this group. As Jerome stated, "I have been able to beat that obstacle so many times it's ridiculous, but I know the obstacles are there because my name isn't exactly a normal name for a white person or something. So if you go and apply for a job or something they know your name is different and if they see...I'm just pulling a name out of nowhere but if your name is Uniqua you are going to

apply for a job and they are going to see that and just going to assume your background and how you act so they might not even look at you application.” Shay added, “Because people think that just because you’re black you’re dumb and if you’re white you’re smart or if you’re Hispanic you don’t mean anything or like yeah or if you’re Chinese you just achieve higher. Like these stereotypes are like...of races are not true and people should understand that...” Nikolai noted, “...other races don’t have anything pulling them back pretty much, they can go, all you mostly hear is black people doing this and that, they are not looked at wrong because there is nothing in their past that they have done, it could be different though.”

Some of the participants also described personal experiences with discrimination in the form of microaggressions (Pierce, 1995) or directly racist comments. As Jerome offered, “When I first came to high school, I was in all honors classes so when I walked into a class my freshman year everyone was just like ‘oh wow there is a black guy in here!’ So that’s odd because no one expects a black person to come out and actually be that super smart person in the room and so I guess what I am saying is that they expect less of you and that’s always an obstacle because they see you in the classroom and they are like ‘Oh he’s not going to do much.’ So you always have to strive to prove yourself rather than doing what you need to do.” Similarly Addison stated, “There are kids at our school that I know are racist. Me, personally, I have heard racist things towards me before.” Allison provided, “Sometimes they say I am trying to act white or something. And it’s like you can’t even act like a certain race. You are who you are. It’s kind of annoying but...I mean they will be like you aren’t really Black but obviously I am if you look at me.”

**Procrastination.** Almost all of the participants described times when they have procrastinated or put things off due to a reduced motivation level. As Roger noted, “I’m a really big procrastinator, so I’m like, ‘oh I can do this another time, I can do this two days from now and then be done.’ And just that one thing was kinda hard for me.” Similarly, Alyssa stated, “Um, laziness, procrastination. I do that a lot.” Diego offered, “Umm motivation. I was lacking motivation sometimes.” Addison reported, “Um, in school, I didn’t really know what I was doing, whether I asked for help or not. Or I would just hang out with my friends and kind of be like, “Oh, hey, I’m just kind of here for my friends,” and I’d kinda half do my homework or just put half of the effort into it and not really think about it.”

Other youth also discussed how this period of procrastination or low motivation persisted until they reminded themselves of their overarching goal. Once this reflection occurred, they were able correct the issue and maintain progress toward accomplishing their goals. As Allison noted, “Well now because if I had kept slacking off last year I wouldn’t have been able to get into Algebra 2, and ya know this year affects next year and next year affects all the way up until college. So I am thinking more about college. Similarly, Emily provided, “Because sometimes, like, if I forget about missing work and stuff like that, my grades will drop. And like you can’t do that, especially to get into [name of college].”

A few youth also suggested how the strain of multiple commitments could decrease motivation and get in the way of goal pursuits until motivational enhancing strategies were used. As Jerome noted, “Not being totally devoted and motivated. Like when I had the leader role last year of sophomore year, it was like very stressful because

you have to keep up with your homework and you have to keep up with your lines. So you have to figure out how to balance it out and put your full devotion towards the play while also putting your devotion towards school at the same time so then it's not like you are failing school but you are doing good at the play.”

**Personal history of adversity.** Several of the participants explicitly described uncontrollable situations or adversity that they have experienced and were obstacles to their goal attainment. Personal adversities included, medical illness/crisis, custody changes, parent substance abuse/illness, mental health issues, parents giving up parental rights leading to guardianship, and familial poverty. These life situations served as obstacles in the way of their goals by decreasing their self-esteem or their perceived ability to follow through with their pursuits. As Emily stated, “I kinda went through this stage where I was kinda lost, like I didn't know what I was doing and like stuff like that, and I was, like felt, kind of like alone and depressed.” When discussing what previously got in the way of her academic goals, Marie stated “Yeah, it was like I had complications, like, because I was like bouncing from house to house because I was in foster care at the time, so at the time, I got into a bad situation where they took me from my elementary school... So, at the time I really, because I felt, when I was little, like, ‘Oh, do nobody love me? Do nobody care?’ Because my dad wasn't around, like he wasn't trying to take care of his responsibility, so it's like, ‘Don't nobody care?’ You know, mom left me, and stuff like that.”

A few participants also discussed the positive effects of their personal adversities. As Nikolai, who had experienced childhood illness described, “Well for a surgeon, because like a long time ago, I had a lot of surgeries and I seen how he helped my life, so

I always thought, ‘Could I do this for somebody else? Can I impact somebody else and help them?’ So what ever I do it’s going to be to help somebody else other than myself.”

In addition to the adversities discussed above, some participants also acknowledged current financial challenges that could pose a threat to their goal achievement. As Roger provided, “Well maybe some financial things too. Like uhh, my family is not that great off, to do, we can get by, but it’s not like, you know. Just like having to pay all those bills. That’s why they push me and say you gotta get all these grants and scholarships so you can help pay for that.” Similarly, Beyoncé noted, “I would say the money maybe and my parents cannot afford [Ivy League institution] because that’s a very expensive school, and I don’t have enough scholarships so if my grades drop that would ruin me and if I don’t get accepted.” Lastly Brittany discussed financial obstacles in the way of her goal of attending college, “Probably, financial problems...I got \$27,000 something in financial aid, but I have to come up with like \$18,000 or something...My grandma is poor . . . they just put her on social security. So, she isn’t allowed to work. So, she only gets like \$700 a month.”

**Negative Surroundings.** Nearly half of the participants discussed negative things in their surroundings such as neighborhood crime and unsupportive school or home environments that they considered an obstacle to reaching their goals. For instance, Nikolai mentioned, “probably seeing people like making money, and when they do illegal things. It seems so tempting cause they are making a lot of money, but you don’t see the ugly side of it. You don’t see all the stuff they can get into. It looks enticing now, but I don’t really think it’s gonna be so good, so that is one obstacle, like ‘ahh look at that’.” Roger noted, “Just my surroundings and seeing how people act towards another, it

doesn't really make sense to me, why people would be so down and negative to everyone else... Just around like, everywhere, like in the streets, in the school. A few participants discussed unsupportive school and home environments that posed a barrier to goal fulfillment. As Emily shared when discussing her struggles in a course and receiving unsupportive feedback from teachers, "A lot of the time it was really difficult, because my teachers would like yell at me like, 'Oh, you need to know this'." Jerome noted, "...when I go home not a lot of people are smiling. They are kind of depressive for me."

### **Factors to Address Obstacles**

All of the youth discussed factors to address the obstacles noted above. Specifically, these youth strategically called upon multiple support systems and utilized personal coping strategies to combat barriers that naturally occur in the goal setting process.

**Support.** Various forms of support such as family/kinship, friend, and school personnel were crucial in helping youth overcome obstacles and reach their desired goals.

***Family/kinship support.*** A majority of the participants acknowledged family members or kinship relations that pushed for or encouraged academic success. Parents or guardians used verbal motivation, monitored their student's school progress and provided resources when necessary to help their child succeed. As Marie offered, "I think my mom would help me because she push me to like a certain, like, she push me a lot through certain stuff, so she knows, she tell me, like, 'You don't want to be mediocre,' or whatever the case may be. 'You don't want to have to struggle. Work as hard as I do'." Similarly, Roger stated, "Well my grandparents, and my mom, cause they pushed me really hard to achieve and be the best that I can really be...they tell me 'Roger you can

do better than this, you can get a better grade than this, better than your getting now, and you can always be a lot better’.”

In regards to monitoring progress, Beyoncé noted, “Well my auntie and my cousin Alice, they help me because when it comes to studying and when it comes to my grades, they make sure I am on top of everything, and I should always work hard for it.” Brooke provided, “My dad, mostly. He keeps me in line...he, with my school work and stuff, if I really need help on it, he will help me.” A few participants mentioned that their parents provided tutors and other resources to improve their academics. For instance, Nikolai offered, “Well, a few years ago I got a tutor from my mom.” Havillan stated, “In elementary school, I was really bad at it, and then my dad is really good at it, and he was trying to explain it to me, but he wasn’t explaining it very good. So I got a tutor, and they helped me out, and I just put in my own efforts.”

Several of the youth also described how their family members provided emotional encouragement which motivated and pulled participants upward when they struggled. This form of support helped them continue on the road toward their goals. As Jerome noted, “I’d say mostly my mom because she kind of like pushes me a lot. She just pushes me forward and pushes me forward and if I take a step back she is right there to pick me up and say ‘hey no, you go’... She says, ‘I’m not going to let you fail’ most of the time she believes in me, and she knows I can do it.” Monica shared, “Mainly it’s my family. Just knowing that they are there to support me it really encourages me and motivates me. Like my sister, she’s only 7 but she will encourage me more than my friends would.” Similarly Havillan provided, “My whole family, cause they encourage me, and they don’t put me down.”

***Friend support.*** Most of the participants identified peers or friends who influenced their goal pursuits. Whether positive or negative this influence from friends encouraged them to set positive goals. As Allison stated, "...a lot of my friends are really smart and I don't want to be that one person who's slacking behind so I try to keep up with them." Havillan noted, "Well, my friends. Because they are all doing good in school, and when I don't feel like doing something, they encourage me, and then I encourage them back, so it's like mutual encouraging." Emily offered, "We have a lot of deep conversations with my friends about our future and stuff and we talk about it and like, I don't want to fail in life kind of...And like, if we're ever feeling like down or something, then we'll like down or something, then we'll like try and help each other and push each other back up." A few participants discussed negative influences from friends that led to positive results. For example, Diego provided, "Yeah like growing up all my friends were doing the opposite. Like wasn't doing good and I didn't want to do what they was doing."

A few participants discussed how influences from peers could potentially divert their goal aspirations if they allowed this to happen. For instance, Roger noted, "Well probably some people that I meet along the way, that will try to stray me from my path, but I just gotta persevere through that." Nikolai shared, "Peers, like peers or friends that would distract me or something. Seeing things, and wanting to try new things, and it's not really good things to try, or something like that...I stopped being friends with some of those people. Like some of my friends, I'm trying to help them, to help them not think about stuff like that, but I don't know, but I can't do much. I can tell you, and try not to let you do that but. I just stopped hanging with some of them that wouldn't stop. I'm over

here and you stay over there. You can come with me if you stop, but if not.”

***School personnel support.*** Many of the participants noted teachers, counselors, or other school personnel as an important source of support that helped them to eliminate obstacles and accomplish their goals. School personnel also pushed these youth to succeed by reminding them of their potential. As Jerome stated, “There is like some teachers that have a passion for what they are doing let’s just say and they can pull aside and talk to you and say you are doing this is the class right now and I need you to do this and from my experience that I still remember when I got pulled aside in seventh grade by [Ms. Teacher] in seventh grade and I still remember that to this day. She said that she know I can do it and I’m very smart. She just needs to see me do that effort and so that stuck in my head and I will always remember that and that really helped me.” Similarly, Roger shared, “Some teachers here too, they kind of influence me as well... They just call me as a leader sometimes, and I think that kinds helps me, cause Oh well if they think that I’m that good, then obviously I am.” Diego offered, “My coach like motivated me and told me I could do it.... I just got to tell myself I can do it and believe in myself.” Shay noted, “I would say some of my teachers. They like talk to me and like push me through everything and tell me how to do stuff and that pushes me.”

A few participants discussed how their teachers and/or counselors influenced their career goals. As Monica provided when discussing who helped her come up with her goal, “Counseling because of my counselor in middle school he encouraged me to...Well the way he would help me it inspired me to become a counselor and help other people.” In addition, a few youth also reported that they purposely sought help from teachers to overcome an academic obstacle and continue movement toward their ultimate goal (e.g.,

getting good grades for college acceptance). As Beyoncé noted, “I work hard and if I have a problem with the class, and I am not just getting it, I go to the teacher and ask for help.” Similarly Addison noted, “staying after school with the teacher helps.”

**Personal coping strategies.** Participants shared personal coping strategies such as perseverance, learning through experience, positive self-talk, and maintenance of a schedule, that they draw upon to maintain agency.

*Perseverance.* Most of the participants discussed how they persevered or pushed themselves forward to build and sustain motivation toward goal attainment. As Marie shared, “I just keep pushing myself. Even though it can be frustrating and even though I have my times when I’m lazy or anything the case may be, I still manage to get it done and push myself.” On a similar note, Allison stated, “Sometimes I just motivate myself. Like if it’s the end of the quarter and my grades aren’t very good I like push through sometimes.”

Participants also discussed practical strategies they use to persevere and successfully deal with obstacles. As Nicolai noted, “Research a lot, research colleges, when I research stuff like that, it make me think, ‘how will I be there, is it going to be fun?’ And then you think about the fun stuff in college too, like being in the dorms and making friends and then. It just makes you want to go there. And I’m in [college prep program]...it’s just fun, and that pretty much keeps me motivated too.” Shay provided, “Basically I just push myself a lot and do a lot of work for myself and like I look up a lot of stuff to help me... Research a lot of stuff like help me learn something or like say I missed a day of geometry and I didn’t know how to do something. I look up online a YouTube video of how to do it and I could it from there.” When discussing the specific

strategy she exercised to reach her goal, Emily stated, “I practiced for a long time. Like before every competition or anything like that, I practice about 12 hours like each day, like on weekends and stuff, I’ll practice about 12 hours a day.” Similarly, Roger offered, “I studied a lot more, I slowed down a little bit, I didn’t go through the problems as fast as I usually do. I took more time just analyzing it all.”

*Learning through experience.* Many of the participants shared the lessons they learned from successfully completing their goals and navigating obstacles. These youth also discussed what they learned through their experiences of making mistakes while attempting to surmount obstacles and not putting enough energy into their goal pursuits. As Marie offered, “You have to really learn from stuff because if you don’t learn from one, they say you’re not really living. If you don’t learn from your mistakes or you don’t do anything or whatever they say, you haven’t really tried anything new. In regards to motivation level and learning through experiences, Roger stated, “Well, I pretty much learned not to be as lazy as I usually am, I really pushed myself and did the best that I actually could, and it really resonates with me now, I don’t really slack as much as I use to, but there are certain slips and I have to push myself back to doing it.”

On a similar note, participants discussed the power of effort or trying when attempting to reach a goal. In other words, these youth noted that putting in more effort was important and reflected on this lesson each time they set new goals. As Brooke provided, “I learned that if you really try then you can succeed at whatever you want to do.” Similarly, Havillan stated, “I know if I try, it will all work out in the end.” Addison, shared, “I learned that if you actually do give 100%, like you may be able to slip on by with, like, getting average, but if you work a little bit harder, then you might go above

and beyond your goal.”

These experiences also provided positive feelings for participants and a sense of self-accomplishment related to the experience of moving toward goal-pursuit or reaching their objective. Successfully accomplishing their goals also inspired future goal pursuits.

As Beyoncé noted, “It taught me that I can do anything if I just work hard for it.”

Similarly, Addison offered, “there are nights when I don’t want to do my homework and I’m like, I tell myself in my head, “This’ll pay off in the long run. This is your future.

You know that you’re capable of doing it.” And so, I’ve, I’ll do that, and I’ll get my homework done and then I’ll end up getting an A on the project and I’ll be happy. Or an A on the test, and it shows that I actually have the strength to do it and the capability.”

When discussing how he felt after reaching his goal Diego stated, “ It felt good and I wanted to keep going and do even better.”

***Positive self-talk.*** Many of the participants discussed thoughts or things that they tell themselves such as “you can do this,” that serve as motivation to continue moving toward their goal pursuits. A few participants also discussed the power of prayer or religion as a motivating force when queried about things that inspire them to keep them going in the face of obstacles. Jerome shared his unique motivational words, stating, “Winning...Yes I have to win. That’s my overall goal. Like if you tell me that I can’t do something my goal is that I can do it so it’s like you can’t do that and I am like ‘Yeah I can’. So I just keep trying to beat the odds per se.” Brooke noted, “I try to tell myself that I can do it, and if I keep pushing myself, I will succeed.” Emily offered, I kinda kept telling myself, like, ‘You can do this.’ . . . just keep pushing myself forward.” Roger

stated, “I just talk to myself, and say you can do this. You’ve gone through a bunch of other things before.”

A few of the participants shared inspirational quotes that they recite to themselves or reference when they are struggling in the goal pursuit process. As Nikolai noted, “Einstein’s quote insanity, ‘like doing the same thing over and over’, I forgot how it goes, but if one thing is not helping me than I should probably switch it up and do something else and do something else, like solving a math problem, I shouldn’t keep doing the same exact thing, do something, try another formula to reach my goal, and complete this equation.” Relatedly, Addison offered, “Some of the quotes that I always look up online too inspire me. Like, I think this one was by Michael Jordan and he said that, “I can accept failure, but I can’t accept not trying.” And that really hit home to me because, you know, you shouldn’t be able to accept not trying at something, but rather than failure, you know that you put forth the effort and you did your best.” Amy did not have a particular inspirational quote but stated, “I always go on Pinterest and I actually have a board that I keep private and I just pin things that I find inspirational or quotes to help me get through things or help me realize what’s important.” Jerome discussed how music keeps him motivated. He stated, “I love motivational music and that stuff...there is a new song that I actually like. There is Macklemore, his new song, ‘Can’t stop us now’. It’s something like that. I love that song. This year that was my theme song.”

Three participants mentioned the power of prayer or religion as motivating force. For example, Shay stated, “Just pray and know I can do it.” Similarly, Monica shared, “...I can do anything through prayer, through encouragement and yeah just keeps me

going.” Addison noted, “Um, well praying helps me a lot, because when I’m stressed out.”

***Maintenance of a schedule.*** In addition to the mental coping strategies they utilize to address obstacles, several participants described organizational approaches that they use. In particular, youth discussed the importance of maintaining a schedule or managing priorities to sustain focus toward their goals, which tended to be academic as stated above. As Addison noted, “I’ll schedule things, or plan things out, or write them out. Um, I’ll put them in my calendar on my phone to make sure that I’m constantly reminded, and I stay on task.” Similarly, Alyssa stated, “Just, um, having the same schedule. I like things to be orderly, so if I keep doing something the way it’s supposed to, that’s good.” In regards to managing priorities, Marie offered, “Basically, try to manage my time and what I need to do, need to get done, because I have to decide which one is more important than the other.”

### **Ideas for Other Youth to Reach Goals**

Youth were asked about advice that they would provide to a teen that is trying to reach a goal. Three main themes emerged. First, youth stated that they would tell other teens to never give up, second they advised other teens to stay focused on goals. Finally, they encouraged other teens to use available support such as family, and friends to successfully accomplish goals.

**Never give up.** When asked what advice they would offer to other teens regarding goal pursuits, many of the participants stated they would advise other youth to ‘stick with it’ or ‘never give up’. As Nikolai noted, “Um, stick with it, don’t stop, cause once you start and your almost there you might as well finish it off, and you’ve lost all that

progress, and you feel like real crazy at the end of the day, when you think about it, like awwwww, look at this, look what I did.” Havillan also shared, “Just keep trying and know that if you try, everything will work out in the end. And you don’t have to do your distractions first, cause it will always be there. But high school is not always here.” Roger provided, “Basically you just have to try your best, and keep pushing yourself, sure you can get discouraged, but don’t get to the point where you just shut down, or give up, you just gotta keep going, just never give up.” Finally, Marie suggested:

Don’t ever give up on your dreams or your goals that you have for yourself.

Always manage to accomplish them because, yeah, in the long run, it’s going to help you out in the long run, so if you waste time now and try to do the fun things now, you’re not going to have nothing to look forward to in your future later. So you might as well get everything done, like the way you’re supposed to or whatever the case may be. Like you’re not supposed to let anybody shoot you down; like don’t listen to anybody. Like, if you feel like you want something, wanna go after something or whatever the case may be, you’re supposed to go after it and never give up. Always keep pushing yourself. Even if you don’t have nobody else, you have to be your own, you have to self-motivate yourself.

**Stay focused.** These youth also suggested that other teens stay focused and continue to work towards their goals despite obstacles. As Diego offered, “Just keep working hard and staying focused.” Brittany suggested, “Make a plan and don’t stress the small stuff, because when you are older it is not going to matter.” Beyoncé stated, I would tell them that they should always work hard and that it does get harder and that there is a struggle sometimes, but you will get through it and there are many things in the

way but you can get through it if you just work hard.” Jerome advised teens to stay focused their own goals. He noted, “Most of the time, I say ‘do it for yourself. Don’t do it for anyone else. Just do it for yourself. Think about where you are going to be in the future if you don’t do this. Don’t worry about his future or her future. Just worry about your own’.”

**Use available support.** A few of the youth also advised other teens to utilize support from others to reach their goals. As Addison noted, “I think that if you don’t see progress right away to keep trying, because if you give up, you’re never going to know, like, how far you really could go with your goal. And maybe you’ll exceed your goal. And if you can’t really have support of your family, you know, show them how bad you want to complete that goal. If you can’t get it from your family, get it from your friends. And, um, you know, talk to people about it, you know, say, I have this goal, and I need you to help me stay motivated.” Monica suggested, “I would say that they should at least try. If they can’t do it on their own then should have someone else to help.”

### **Results Summary**

The story line or theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) that emerged from the data analysis was the following: *Resilient African American youth use hope to facilitate academic and long-term life goals by calling upon multiple support systems and persevering to combat obstacles such as racial discrimination and procrastination.*

Participants indicated that academic goals were priority over other goal pursuits and family role models were influential in goal formation. Results also revealed that obstacles such as racial discrimination, procrastination, personal history of adversity, and negative surroundings served as temporary barriers in their path toward successful goal

completion. However, support from others and personal coping strategies were important factors in addressing and positively overcoming obstacles that organically surfaced as they moved toward goal attainment. Also, youth offered ideas or advice for other youth to reach their individual goals, which included 'never give up' and 'keep working hard'.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how resilient African American youth use hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991). The central research question of this study was “How do resilient African American youth use hope in their lives?” To explore this question or overarching phenomenon of hope, 17 resilient (i.e., as determined by the criteria for inclusion) African American adolescents participated in individual semi-structured interviews where they were asked to discuss their goals, how they generate pathways towards goals in the face of obstacles, and strategies utilized to sustain motivation (agency) to propel and maintain movement towards goals.

Grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to analyze interview data. The story line that emerged from these procedures was, “Resilient African American youth use hope to facilitate academic and long-term life goals by calling upon multiple support systems, and persevering to combat obstacles such as racial discrimination and procrastination.” As discussed, the core theme that was preselected before the onset of the study was “goal setting.” Ultimately the findings revealed several categories/themes and subcategories/subthemes including, goal themes, goal formation influences, obstacles, factors to address obstacles, and ideas for other youth to reach goals.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the study findings outlined in Chapter IV and discuss them in relation to the existing hope and resilience research. The study findings will also be discussed in reference to academic achievement research, due to the

participants speaking almost exclusively to academic goal themes. In addition, the implications of the findings, limitations, and directions for future research will be discussed. The chapter is organized by categories/themes identified by the explanatory theory regarding how resilient African American youth use hope in their lives.

### **Goal Themes**

The majority of the participants identified goals that were in academic in nature, even though they were given the opportunity to discuss goals from any aspect of their lives. These goals included aspirations to attend college and to improve or receive good grades. Study participants reported intentionally selecting courses and extracurricular activities that would support their academic goals and pursuits toward higher education. Participants also demonstrated their future orientation by discussing current academic goals in the context of long-term goals set in preparation for future career paths or other personal goals that would lead to a better quality of life. In particular, they described their dream professions (e.g., physician, nurse, chef) and family values (e.g., having family of their own, good family relationships).

These findings regarding educational themed goals is understandable given the participants' established academic achievement level. As discussed, participants were screened for strong grades and were all performing well academically (e.g., GPA of 3.0 or above). Therefore, academics are important to this group of youth and are prioritized over other goals. Another potential explanation for the participants' propensity to choose academic goal themes may be their elevated hope levels. As discussed in Chapter II, hope in itself has been shown to be related to academic achievement in youth (Snyder et al,

1997; Snyder, 2000; Snyder 2002). Thus it makes sense that these hopeful youth are also high achieving in regards to academia.

In regards to academic goal theme specifics, many youth in the current study described goals to attend college. Higher education was conceptualized as a means to improve quality of life and to exceed expectations of others in the majority population. Many of these youth had personal risk factors such as low SES, experiences with racial discrimination, and single-parent households that influenced their aspirations for an improved quality of life. Also, given that the research confirms African American youth experience higher incidents of poverty and other chronic social stressors (Dubow et al., 1997; McMahon, Felix, & Nagrajan, 2011), it is likely that academic achievement in the form of a college education is a way to move past their current circumstance. Further, as a whole the African American community, which included the current study participants' networks, often reinforce educational attainment as a way out of poverty (Boyd-Franklin, 2005), which also may have influenced the participants' motivation to set goals for higher education.

The current findings regarding the importance of extracurricular involvement for participants are interesting given the previous research on the benefits of extracurricular participation. Various studies (e.g., Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, Mahoney, Schweder, & Stattin, 2002) have noted correlations between extracurricular participation and positive adjustment (i.e., psychological, academic, reduction risky behaviors) in youth. While it is unknown whether involvement actually led to academic achievement in the current sample, it is clear that participants have an understanding of the importance of extracurricular activities towards their academic

goals. Perhaps teachers, school counselors or parents/family have emphasized the importance of extracurricular involvement due knowledge of its known benefits (e.g., improved grades, positive social interaction), and participants engaged in these activities based on this influence.

Overall, participants' initiative to prioritize academics and engage in a number of strategies (e.g., grades, selecting advance courses, extracurriculars) as a stepping-stone toward long-term goals showcased their ability to plan for the future (i.e., pathways thinking). As is characteristic of high hope individuals, they had the ability to look beyond the present, maintained a positive outlook or future orientation, and believed in their ability to find ways to solve problems and accomplish goals (van der Westhulzen, de Beer, & Bekwa, 2011). These students tended to take responsibility for their own goal pursuits and take the necessary steps to ensure future success.

### **Goal Formation Influences**

In discussing goal influences, many of the participants identified family role models that led to the formulation of positive goal pursuits. Parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, siblings, and cousins were named as direct or indirect role models. These family role models were not always positive influences and in those cases the participants used these negative observations or lessons as motivation to do well. Participants' motivation to succeed appeared to be fueled by their aspirations for an improved quality of life, as various participants also explicitly mentioned this phenomenon in their narratives about goal influences.

These findings regarding the importance of family role models are similar to previous research on parent's characteristics or role in adolescent's academic

achievement. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) assessed parental characteristics, ecological factors (e.g., parent education level, family structure, church attendance, parent monitoring, parenting style), and the academic achievement of African American high school students. The findings revealed that father's education level was a positive predictor of participant's GPA. In accordance, several studies have reinforced the impact of parent's level of education on adolescents' academic success (Stewart, 2006). In particular, findings suggested that students with highly educated parents had significantly higher achievement levels than students with parents who were less educated (Anick, Carpenter, & Smith, 1981; Mullis, Owen, & Phillip, 1990; Stewart, 2006).

While the studies mentioned above included samples that differed (e.g., only males, younger adolescents) from the current study participants, they shed light on the importance of family role models on student academic achievement. Participants in the current study also discussed how family members with higher education levels influenced them to pursue similar educational aspirations. This is likely due to the fact that parents or family members with educational backgrounds usually have more knowledge about how to navigate the schooling process, have relationships with others who can share important resources or information, and the capability to assist their children with academic work (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy 2013).

Interestingly, participants also mentioned how parents or family members with lower levels of education reinforced the importance of getting an education. In contrast to the previously discussed findings about relatives with higher education and their influence, the current findings suggested that observing family members not reaching their goals or full potential may be as influential as witnessing others academic success.

Anecdotally this makes sense, as seeing others make poor decisions can deter youth from making similar choices. However, this has not been documented in the literature to date. Perhaps the current participants, who are highly resilient, are better able to view others' situation and reflect upon it with respect to their own goals. Their high levels of hope may give them the ability to look at the situation and use agency/pathways thinking to realize that they want more for themselves and an improved quality of life. In accordance, it also may be that participants' family members with lower education were still encouraging them to reach high in order to have a better quality of life, something they did not have the opportunity to experience. Marie's narrative is a perfect example of this ideology; she stated in regards to her mother, "...she is trying to get me to not be where she has been before."

### **Obstacles**

Participants identified several obstacles that were threats to their goal attainment. These obstacles included racial, discrimination, procrastination, personal history of adversity, and negative surroundings.

**Racial discrimination.** Many of the study participants discussed their awareness of and personal experiences with racial discrimination as obstacles to their goal attainment. The youth in the current study are not alone in their experiences, as African American youth experience racial discrimination at higher rates than their European American, Latino, and Asian counterparts (Gaylord-Harden, Burrow, & Cunningham, 2012). Furthermore, similar to adult prevalence rates, more than 90% of African American youth noted encountering at least one incident of racial discrimination during their lifetime (Gaylord-Harden, Burrow, & Cunningham, 2012; Gibbons et al., 2004). As

such, navigating these encounters with racial discrimination appears to be a normal part of these youth's lives.

The forms of racism discussed by the participants appear to coincide with the six types of racism-related stress identified by Harrell (2000). The six types include: racism-related life events, vicarious racism experiences, daily racism microstressors (i.e., microaggressions), chronic contextual stress, collective experiences or racism, and the transgenerational transmission of group traumas (Harrell, 2000). Racism-related life events are stressors that occur infrequently across several domains including education, neighborhood, and social environments. An example of racism-related life events presented in the current study was illustrated by their narratives about others having lowered expectations regarding their level of intelligence and ability to succeed academically because of their race. A few participants discussed vicarious racism when they recalled experiences of prejudice and discrimination that happened to fellow classmates and family members (Harrell, 2000).

Study participants also discussed chronic contextual stress such as lack of resources for people of color in their environments, which persuaded their parents or guardians to move or enroll them in schools with more opportunities. Collective experiences of racism are those that involve the perceptions of racism's effect on members of one's same racial group (Harrell, 2000). An example of this form of racism-related stress was highlighted by participants' comments about stereotypic portrayals of African Americans in the media. In addition, transgenerational transmission of group traumas was evident in the study participants' narratives regarding racial discrimination. They were cognizant of the dominant cultures stereotypes of African Americans and the

unique historical contexts of this racial group (Harrell, 2000). It is very likely that stories have been passed down from generations and conversations have been had that shaped these participants view of the world. As noted they are aware of negative beliefs about their racial group, but are determined to prove naysayers wrong. What may fuel their determination and sustain their resilience will be discussed in the *factors to address obstacles* section of this chapter.

Interestingly, a majority of the participants who reported experiences of racial discrimination discussed descriptions that fall into the category of racism microstressors or “microaggressions.” Microaggressions, as described by Pierce (1995), are “subtle, innocuous, preconscious or unconscious degradations and putdowns” (p. 281). Jerome’s quote, “oh wow there is a black guy in here!” is a perfect illustration of this phenomena. This form of racism is likely a testament to racism in contemporary America, as racism tends to be more covert in modern times. While there has been a great deal of progress in race relations in America, the microaggressions noted by participants serve as a reminder that racism continues to be alive and well in the world (Gaylord-Harden, Burrow, & Cunningham, 2012). Pierce suggested that, “most microaggressions have to be allowed to pass to protect one’s time, energy, sanity, or bodily integrity” (p. 282). This argument appears to be descriptive of the study participants who did not succumb to the negative effects of ‘stereotype threat’ or societal stereotypes about minorities alleged intellectual inferiority (Farrington et al., 2012). In other words, these youth used various factors to overcome slights by classmates and others in their lives to succeed in their goals.

**Procrastination.** Procrastination has been described as the “the instance of postponement of the works and tasks that are better to be done today until the following

day” (Deniz, Tras, Aydogan 2009, p. 623). The majority of the participants described instances where they engaged in what the literature has referred to as *academic procrastination*. Academic procrastination is the frequent postponement of duties and responsibilities related to school or academic achievement (Haycock, McCarthy, & Skay, 1998). This form of procrastination behavior usually occurs as incompleteness of assignments or delayed test preparation (Beck, Koons, & Milgrim, 2000; Deniz, Tras, Aydogan 2009). Academic procrastination is noted to be a debilitating practice due to its strong association with low academic achievement, mental health diagnoses (e.g., anxiety), and low self-esteem (Owens & Newbegin, 2000).

In addition to discussing forms of academic procrastination, a few of the participants described how participation in multiple activities (e.g., school, clubs, sports) temporally decreased their motivation to work toward their goals. This finding is compelling given the research about the relationship between procrastination and coping with stress. According to Flett, Blankstein, and Martin (1995), there is a positive association between procrastination and coping with stress in that procrastination operates as a mechanism for coping with stress (Alexander & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Deniz, Tras, Aydogan 2009). Researchers have also found that anxiety increases the tendency of individuals to engage in procrastination (Deniz, Tras, Aydogan 2009).

As noted by the youth in the study, being involved in various activities can be stressful or overwhelming and avoidance serves as a form of relief in the short term. Nevertheless, participants also noted that academic procrastination persisted until they reminded themselves of their overarching goals (e.g., attending college to get a good job). Despite their brief procrastination, these youth quickly overcame their obstacle to regain

movement toward the successful completion of their goals. This was done through the use of support (pathways thinking) and personal coping strategies such as positive self-talk (agency thinking).

These findings regarding procrastination are notable, given the absence of research with African American youth on this topic. Although African Americans were included in some of the studies on procrastination with individuals from various racial groups, these participants tended to be college students. The importance of these findings in regards to professionals serving African American youth will be discussed in the implications section of this chapter.

**Personal history of adversity.** Given that youth from ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience adverse life experiences such as being reared in disadvantage communities and poor families (Wickrama, Simons, & Baltimore, 2012), it is not a surprise that participants in the present study endorsed a history of personal obstacles. Several of the participants reported previous experiences with uncontrollable situations or adversity that served as obstacles to their goal pursuits. Examples of personal adversities included mental health issues, time in the foster system, medical illness, and familial poverty. These findings are compelling given the short-term effects of these obstacles on the participants' ability to follow through with their goal pursuits. For instance, the participants acknowledged that their experiences with adversity were difficult to overcome at the time, resulting in residual effects such as decreased self-esteem or depression. However, all of the participants were able to navigate around these setbacks by turning them into positives or by utilizing their problem solving skills, which will be discussed below.

**Negative surroundings.** In discussing obstacles to goal attainment, some of the participants identified negative things in their surroundings such as neighborhood crime and unsupportive environments that posed a threat to success. Much has been written about the negative effects of residence in disadvantaged neighborhoods and unsupportive environments. Several researchers have focused on urban neighborhoods since poverty is heavily concentrated in these areas. Results of these studies have suggested that urban neighborhoods are often associated with social and psychological problems (Wandersman & Nation, 1998). Specifically, disorganized urban neighborhoods have been linked to poor educational attainment, behavioral and emotional problems (e.g., juvenile delinquency, depression, substance abuse), and risky sexual activity (e.g., adolescent childbearing) (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Similarly, unsupportive home environments that include risks such as negative parenting, a chaotic household, parents' with minimal education or income level, and single-parent family structure, have been linked to poor academic achievement in youth (Swanson, Valiente, & Lemery-Chalfant, 2012). Finally, research on students' perceptions of their school environment concluded that positive student reports of their school environment were significantly correlated with academic achievement (Gietz and McIntosh, 2014). Therefore, negative perceptions of school environments may be associated with poor academic outcomes. The current study sample was mindful of negative surroundings as an obstacle to their goal pursuits, but used various factors to address these obstacles (see next section).

## **Factors to Address Obstacles**

Factors to address obstacles identified in the previous section were described by all of the participants. In particular, multiple support systems and various personal coping strategies were utilized by these youth to combat obstacles that come up on the road to successful goal completion.

**Support.** Multiple forms of support such as family/kinship, friend, and school personnel (i.e., teachers, counselors) were crucial in helping participants overcome obstacles and successfully complete their goals. Social support has been noted to serve two major functions: “to contribute to adjustment and development and to provide a buffer against stress that can result in physical and psychological illness” (Clark, 1991, p. 45). Various forms of social support (e.g., parents, peer, school personnel) are a protective factor against stress because it provides self-esteem maintenance and has been associated with increased self-worth in youth (Clark, 1991; McMahon et al., 2011). In accordance, the interaction between individual-level predictors such as student effort, parent-child discussion, and associations with positive peers have been found to play a role in increasing youth academic achievement (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy; Stewart, 2007). In relation to the current study participants, resilience research has confirmed that resilient African American adolescents have developed support systems that provide the assistance necessary for achievement in and out of the school environment (Clark, 1991). Therefore, it is evident why the current study youth, who are successful in school, lean on these sources of support as a means to increase the likelihood of reaching their goals.

***Family/kinship support.*** A majority of the participants discussed family members or kinship relations that pushed for or encouraged academic success. The participants

noted that their parents and guardians utilized strategies such as verbal motivation or emotional encouragement, monitoring of school progress, and the providing of resources to encourage academic success. The participants' family/kinship support may be one of the underlying reasons why these youth were able to successfully combat obstacles and remain resilient.

Of note is the participants' lack of resistance to family involvement in their academic lives. In fact youth in the current study appeared to independently seek out support from family members because they recognized the value of this support in helping them achieve their academic goals and hopes for the future. Also, this purposeful seeking out of family support may again point to the pathways component of hope. Pathways thoughts allow individuals to identify individuals and to ask for assistance as a means to find routes around obstacles to goals.

***Friend support.*** Similar to family/kinship support, peer influence was also found to be crucial in helping youth in the current study successfully address obstacles to their goals. The majority of the study participants identified friends that influenced their goal pursuits. Whether or not friends provided positive or negative influences, the outcome was the same as their experiences with peers encouraged positive goal setting. Several participants noted that their friends shared similar goals about the future related to academics and career paths. These friends also served as motivation to continue movement toward their goals and were a source of encouragement when obstacles threatened their goal pursuits. These relationships were noted to be mutual and reciprocal in that participants also played this support role when it came to their friend's aspirations or goals.

The importance of friend support or peer influence on educational aspirations of the youth uncovered in the present study are also similar to the experiences expressed by African American college students in another previous grounded theory study. Holland (2011) utilized interview data from forty-nine African American university students to investigate the effect that peers have on students' academic engagement and education aspirations. The core theme that emerged was "Encouragement." The study participants reported that their friends or peers encouraged them to consider going to college, to consider particular colleges and programs, to visit various higher education institutions, and to accept or decline enrollment at a particular college/university. Participants also discussed the social aspects regarding their relationships with peers and how their friendships influenced their academic lives both in positive and negative ways. Although the study sample was composed of college students, the findings are still relevant to the current study. As noted previously, the current study participants also reported that their friends encouraged them to attend college and to look toward higher education as a gateway to a successful future.

Interestingly, in accordance to the Holland (2011) study, the current study participants also mentioned that friends were sometimes a negative influence. However, unlike the participants from the Holland (2011) study, the youth in the present study used this negative influence as inspiration to excel beyond their peers and succeed in their goal pursuits. In particular, when they witnessed others doing poorly they reflected on their own goals, which at times outweighed friendship. For example, participants discussed ending friendships with individuals that did not share their goals for success. Also, similar to negative family influences discussed previously, these youth who were highly

resilient were able to reflect on others' situations in reference to their own goals. This goal-directed thinking and level of hope was a truly a protective factor that supported resilience in these adolescents.

***School personnel support.*** Research over the last few decades has continued to confirm that school personnel (i.e., teachers and counselors) “can serve as social support agents for African American adolescents” and are “uniquely positioned to help students define, work toward, and reach their goals in many arenas” (Clark, 1991, p. 48; Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2008, p.100). Given the importance of this form of support it seems crucial that this construct is understood in the context of African American adolescents’ who are resilient. Many of the participants acknowledged teachers, counselors, or other school personnel as an important source of support that influenced their goal success. In particular, school personnel encouraged these youth to succeed through the use of positive language and through reminders referencing their level of potential.

Of importance, in the current study school personnel offered support based on participants’ level of engagement in their academics. In previous research that addressed the importance of school-based support (Land, Mixon, Butcher, and Harris, 2014), it appears that school personnel were responsible for helping students realize their potential. However, in the current study the participants were confident and hard-working individuals that were aware of their strengths, which were likely noted by school personnel. Also, school personnel tended to respond to those who are willing to admit that they needed assistance. Thus, if a student asked for help it would inform teachers that they were invested in doing well academically. The participants in the current study were those model students who were hopeful, which contributed to their ability to problem

solve and successfully address obstacles to their goals.

**Personal Coping Strategies.** All of the participants discussed personal coping strategies that they utilize to maintain movement toward their goals. These coping strategies included perseverance, learning through experience, positive self-talk, and maintenance of a schedule. The participants' ability to develop and exercise these coping strategies is a testament of their inner motivation to succeed, which was likely fueled by their high levels of hope. Similar to the participants in the Williams and Portman (2014) study, the current study youth understood that in order to reach their goals they needed to stay focused and find multiple sources of motivation to succeed in their pursuits despite adversity.

**Perseverance.** The majority of the participants discussed how they built and sustained motivation toward their goals by pushing themselves through obstacles that emerged on the way to success. Their ability to push through and come up with practical strategies (e.g., making a schedule, self-talk) to persevere may be a reflection of hope. As previously noted, individuals with higher hope have also been found to exhibit increased senses of control and favorable outlooks of their futures (Snyder, 2000). The participants in the current study have these favorable qualities as showcased by their stories of success. In particular, as noted these youth appear to be more confident and have what some refer to as "grit", which likely helps them problem solve more successfully and navigate obstacles. Grit, as theorized by Duckworth and colleagues (2007), is a form of perseverance that allows individuals to stay focused on long-term goals despite obstacles (Farrington et al., 2012). Within the current study, the participants' grittiness is connected to the agency component of hope.

An example of the current study participants' perseverance or grittiness through the use of hope was their ability to combat obstacles such as procrastination. Alexander and Onwuegbuzie (2007) found that college students who exhibited higher levels of hope were less likely to procrastinate on various academic tasks (e.g., writing paper, exam preparation, weekly assignments) than were those with lower hope scores. Although the participant sample in the Alexander and Onwuegbuzie study consisted of mostly Caucasian female college students, the findings evidence the power of hope. For the participants in the current study it appears that their hope propelled their agency and pathways thinking. As a result, participants were able to sustain movement toward their goals by reflecting on the purpose of their pursuits and generating pathways toward their goals when procrastination threatened their success. In other words, hope protected these youth from falling into deeper academic procrastination behaviors (i.e., risk factor) and supported positive adaptation (e.g., academic achievement), which is the definition of resilience.

***Learning through experience.*** Many of the participants discussed lessons they learned from successfully completing their goals. These youth also discussed what knowledge they acquired through their experiences of making mistakes on the road to goal attainment. In particular, the youth discussed obstacles such as low motivation and the importance of effort in the goal process. The participant's comments regarding effort aligned well with previous research on attribution theory that explored students' attributions for success and failure in terms of academic achievement (Farrington et al. 2012). According to this theory, if students attribute an occurrence of poor performance to a lack of ability, they tend to hold back effort when faced with a similar task or

obstacle (Kelley, 1973; Farrington et al., 2012; Weiner, 1986; Vispoel & Austin, 1995). Conversely, if students attribute poor performance to a lack of effort or motivation, they are more likely to escalate their effort to reach their desired goal. In essence, the participants aligned with *attributions for success* component of this theory, as these youth attributed past low performance to lack of effort, which likely increased their effort on the next try (Farrington et al., 2012).

An additional explanation for their ability to use lessons from the past to move toward their future goals is also conceivably due to their reflective skills. Specifically, participants discussed thinking about what they could have done differently and how giving up would have conflicted with their goals. Participants also alluded to processing positive and negative goal experiences with support systems, such as family. Positive self-talk (discussed below) was another factor that motivated participants to continue setting goals and an example of how they use hope. The current study participants are distinct from some of their peers because of their hope. They have the ability to adapt, finding intrinsic motivation through past lessons to continue movement toward their future oriented goals, because they believe in themselves and can visualize an improved quality of life.

***Positive self-talk.*** Many of the participants reported thoughts or things that they tell themselves such as positive messages (e.g., ‘yes I can’), inspirational quotes (e.g., Einstein’s insanity quote), or prayers that motivate them to continue movement toward their goals. Specific examples of positive self-talk are the following: Brooke’s quote, “I tell myself that I can do it, and if I keep pushing myself, I will succeed” and Addison’s use of Michael Jordan quote “I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can’t

accept not trying." This ability to stay focused on the positive through self-talk, found in many of the current study participants, likely keeps them feeling more challenged and invigorated by their goals (Snyder et al., 1991).

Notably, only three participants discussed prayer or religion as form of coping. This finding does not align with prior literature that suggests that African American youth tend to have a strong religious orientation and therefore, usually value religion, have a notable reliance on a higher power, and utilize spiritual principles in their everyday lives (Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003; Land et al., 2014). It is not entirely clear why more individuals in the sample did not endorse religious faith, but questions about the subject were not explicitly asked, which may have skewed the findings. Also, participants may not have felt comfortable discussing religion due to stigma and lack of familiarity with the examiner. Religion continues to be regarded as a private subject that is not appropriate for conversations between strangers. One of the participants explicitly asked permission to discuss prayer and another hinted that religion is taboo in the school environment.

***Maintenance of a schedule.*** In addition to personal or mental coping strategies, several participants discussed practical strategies such as organization that they use to address barriers that come in the way of their ability to their reach goals. Strategies such as maintaining a schedule in order to manage multiple priorities were highlighted by the youth as a means to maintain focus on their goals. In particular, the use of reminders and calendars on cell phones, the use of planners to record and organize assignments, taking thorough notes in classes, and using "down time" to get ahead in their school work were strategies discussed by participants. As noted previously, a majority of the participants

reported goals that were along an academic theme and hope has been significantly correlated with academic achievement. The intersection of the participants' strong academic mindset and high hope likely helps them find multiple pathways (i.e., maintaining a schedule, prioritizing tasks) to desired educational goals.

### **Ideas for Other Youth to Reach Goals**

Participants' ideas or advice for other youth to reach goals closely mirrors the encouragement they received from their support systems. Participants suggested that it was critical that youth stick with their goals and to keep trying because it would be of benefit in the future. In accordance, several of the youth also stated that they would inform other adolescents to stay focused on goals to continue movement toward goals when obstacles surface. Finally, participants suggested that their peers utilize available support from others to reach their goals. Given that high hope individuals tend to call upon their supports (i.e., family and friends) when encountering stressors and have better social adjustment (Snyder, 2002), it makes sense that they would see the value in eliciting others in their goal pursuits.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Taken together, the findings highlight the unique use of hope in the lives of resilient African American youth. It is evident that these youth highly value academic excellence as a means to ensure future success and an improved quality of life. Therefore, hope is a vital tool that these youth use to facilitate their academic and long-term life goals by influencing their ability to develop and utilize various factors, such as social support and personal coping strategies to combat natural obstacles that come in the way

of their pursuits. Overall, these youth are highly confident, determined, future oriented, problem-solvers, and optimistic, which encapsulate all of the qualities usually found in hopeful individuals. The findings that emerged from this study offer several implications for those working with African American youth, with or without elevated hope.

First, school personnel or mental health providers working with African American adolescents should be aware of their goal themes and who influences these pursuits. Asking about and acknowledging the goal pursuits of this population may help these youth build agency or motivation to continue movement toward their aspirations. Also, since family role models and peers have been found to be a prominent aspect of goal development, professionals should communicate to parents or other family members that they are an important influence in these children succeeding. During this inclusion of families in the goal setting process, it will also important to inform parents that they do not need have experienced educational (i.e., attended college) or occupational success to influence their children's aspirations for the future. As the study results indicated, just showing curiosity and encouraging their children to reach high can make a difference. Finally, for those that do not have family role models, teachers or counselors can step into this influential role.

Second, professionals working with this unique population should acknowledge procrastination as an obstacle to goal accomplishment. It may be helpful for professionals to assess the degree to which their students or clients are impacted by procrastination and what strategies they are using to overcome this barrier. The study findings suggested that when professional encounter this obstacle, it will likely be important to remind youth of their goals and promote the use of personal coping strategies such as positive self-talk,

music, and inspirational quotes. Helping African American youth develop and practice strategies to address potential obstacles may be an important factor in building resilience and increasing the incidence of goal success.

Third, teachers, counselors, and mental health providers are in a unique position to promote self-esteem and confidence in these adolescents as a means to increase the likelihood that they take responsibility for the outcome of their pursuits. This study highlighted the fact that self-initiative and the ability to advocate for one's individual needs is an important part of the goal-setting process. In particular, it appears to directly contribute to successful goal accomplishment. As noted by the participant narratives, these youth independently sought resources (e.g., support, personal coping strategies) to facilitate their goals. Therefore, it is important to let youth know that various resources are available if they seek them out. However, goal success may be delayed or fail to come to fruition if youth wait for opportunities to present themselves.

Finally, since the study findings appeared to confirm that hope could serve as an important factor in resilience, professionals may want to consider strategies to promote hope in the lives of African American adolescents. Several strategies have been proposed to build a culture of hope in the educational setting at the secondary level, many of which align with the current study findings. For example, Pedrotti, Edwards, and Lopez (2008) discussed the importance of school personnel using the following to promote hope in students: engaging in discussions about goal setting with students, encouraging positive self-statements instead of negative self-talk, setting smaller goals or subgoals to navigate around obstacles, and hope groups to enhance hope. Similar strategies could be used to build hope in African American youth with the inclusion of cultural values that are

unique to this population. For example, facilitating discussions about hope using high achieving African American role models who have faced their share of obstacles (e.g., Martin Luther King, Oprah, President Obama) and utilizing available support systems such as a family and peers. Also as suggested by the results it seems like a very practical implication for those working with youth would be integrating motivational resources, including quotes and music to facilitate hope.

### **Limitations**

Given that the current study is one of the first of its kind to explore hope in a resilient sample of African American, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the generalizability of the study findings are limited due to participants being recruited from predominately Caucasian schools in the suburbs of a large urban city. Along these lines, most of the participants resided in neighborhoods close to their school. Given that experiences of youth in the inner city may differ from those of suburban African American youth, a useful future study could involve examining whether variations exist in terms of hope and resilience among youth from several environments (i.e., urban, rural, and suburban). In addition, some of the inclusion criteria (i.e., self-esteem level, social competence) were collected solely through school counselor perception or observation data. As such, participants' perceptions of their own strengths may differ from other's reports, which may have slightly skewed findings by leaving out or including youth that did not fully meet the study's inclusion criteria. Future studies may consider using standardized measures to collect such data to ensure that accurate inclusion information is being gathered about participants.

Finally, another limitation of the study is that the interviews took place on a single

occasion with each participant, and follow up interviews with study participants were not completed. There has been much debate about the number of interviews that should be conducted with participants in qualitative research. Some researchers prefer multiple interviews because they allow the researcher and participant to build a relationship that could result in a more authentic discussion of difficult or emotional experiences on the behalf the participant (Knox & Burkard, 2009). It is probable that additional interviews with these participants could have prompted them to discuss other controversial topics as a direct result of feeling more comfortable with the principal investigator, and perhaps they might have spoken in more detail about other topics. Conducting several interviews with participants also gives participants a chance to clarify previous points and explore thoughts, feelings, or reactions to earlier interviews (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Given that the participants were minors who juggled school among other activities, their commitment to the study was time limited, and conducting follow up interviews was not feasible.

### **Future Research**

There are various ways that future studies can build upon and expand the findings of this research project. First, it would be interesting to further explore why some youth show certain markers of resilience but do not have high hope. During the screening process several potential participants met all of the inclusion criteria except for the hope score cutoff. These youth were doing well in school and succeeding in many arenas despite significant risk factors, leaving the question of why their hope scores were lower than their counterparts who were included in the current study. A valuable next step, therefore, would be to conduct other types of studies (e.g., longitudinal, quantitative,

follow-up) to help clarify the relationship between hope and resilience. It will be important for these studies to consider variables such as geographic areas (e.g., urban, rural, suburban), involvement or sense of belonging school, esteem issues, and access to resources as a means to give more insight into how these constructs operate in a diverse sample of these youth.

Second, given the absence of research about procrastination in African American adolescents, more investigation of this topic is warranted. This study indicated that procrastination might be a significant obstacle that prevents these youth from reaching their goals. Additional information about this topic may also elucidate why some adolescents are able overcome this obstacle and others are not, as well as shed light on factors that support or undermine resilience. The results of these studies may give professionals information on how to address this obstacle preventatively, before it threatens the ability of these youth to succeed in their goals.

Third, many of the participants discussed being motivated by witnessing individuals who were doing poorly or living lives that were incongruent with their aspirations. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for future studies to explore this phenomenon. In particular, it would be valuable for future studies to explore whether family members who have not fulfilled their goals are pushing them to take a different path or if these negative examples are “scaring them straight.”

Finally, it was interesting that religion was not found to be a significant factor in addressing obstacles. As noted, questions about religion were not included in the protocol. However, given the history and importance of church or religion in the African American community (Ball, Armstead, & Austin, 2003; Billingsley, 1968; Cook, 2000)

it would be meaningful to explore this topic in future research. In particular, follow up studies could explicitly query about the role of religion in the goal setting process, perhaps as it works to promote agency.

### **Overall Summary**

In summary, the aim of this study was to develop a new explanatory theory that encapsulates how resilient African American youth use hope, as conceptualized by Snyder (1991). Seventeen resilient (i.e., as determined by the criteria for inclusion) African American adolescents (5 male, 12 female) participated in individual interviews. The data was analyzed using grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Results revealed that, “Resilient African American youth use hope to facilitate academic and long-term life goals, by calling upon multiple support systems, and persevering to combat obstacles such as racial discrimination and procrastination.”

Several major themes emerged from the analysis, including: goal themes, goal formation influences, obstacles, factors to address obstacles, and ideas for other youth to reach goals. While this study gave valuable insights into the function of hope in the lives of resilient African American youth, many more questions remain about how hope supports resilience in this vulnerable population. Fortunately, the results offered implications for those working with this population as well as a number of directions for future research.

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## APPENDIX A: Informed consent form for participants who are 18 years old

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY  
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS  
Hope among Resilient African American Adolescents  
Jessica McClintock  
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this research study is to explore strengths in resilient African American. You will be one of approximately 38 participants in this research study.

**PROCEDURES:** If you participate in this study, you will first be given a brief set of questions about goals. Based on your responses, you may be asked to conduct a confidential interview with a graduate student for 45-60 minutes at school. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy and interview questions will ask about your strengths and goals for the future. The recordings will later be transcribed and destroyed after 5 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, your name will not be recorded; instead a fake name will be used as an identifier.

**DURATION:** Your participation will consist of a brief questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and a 45-60 minute interview conducted on your school campus.

**RISKS:** There will be no obvious risks associated with participation, however there exists the small possibility of some discomfort in answering interview items about goal pursuits. Participants will be given the opportunity to debrief with the researcher— who is a graduate student in counseling psychology and who has a master’s degree in counseling— after completing the interview if discomfort arises. Also participants will be referred to their school counselor for further discussion if necessary.

**BENEFITS:** No direct benefits to the subjects but yours responses could help school personnel and mental health professionals understand how to promote resilience and hope in African American adolescents. Additionally, you will receive a token of compensation of a \$5 gift card upon completion of the interview.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential except for the potential identification of child abuse. If child abuse is identified the researcher is mandated to report this information to the proper authorities. Otherwise, information such as consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Also, hard copies of interview transcripts identified only through code names will also be kept in a locked file cabinet and electronic copies will be kept in a password protected computer file.

Audio recordings will be erased immediately after transcription. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files 5 years after the completion of the study. Your research recordings may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees.

**COMPENSATION:** You will receive a \$5 gift card from a local merchant upon completion of an interview.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you would like to withdraw from the study please contact the Graduate Student Researcher, Jessica McClintock or Dan Weast, West Allis/West Milwaukee School District Student Services Director at the numbers below and their data will be destroyed.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Jessica McClintock, M.S. at (909) 229-4973 or Dan Weast, West Allis/West Milwaukee School District Student Services Director at (414) 604-3016. If you have question or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Name of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B: Parent consent form for participants who are under 18 years old

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY  
PARENT PERMISSION FORM

Hope among Resilient African American Adolescents

Jessica McClintock

Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

Your child has been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to allow your child to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to give permission for your child to participate.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this research study is to explore strengths in resilient African American. Your child will be one of approximately 38 participants in this research study.

**PROCEDURES:** If your child participates in this study, he/she will first be given a brief set of questions about goals. Based on his/her responses, he/she may be asked to conduct a confidential interview with a graduate student for 45-60 minutes at school. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy and interview questions will ask about your child's strengths and goals for the future. The recordings will later be transcribed and destroyed after 5 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, your child's name will not be recorded; instead a fake name will be used as an identifier.

**DURATION:** Your child's participation will consist of a brief questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and a 45-60 minute interview conducted on their school campus.

**RISKS:** There will be no obvious risks associated with participation, however there exists the small possibility of some discomfort in answering interview items about goal pursuits. Participants will be given the opportunity to debrief with the PI – who is a graduate student in counseling psychology and who has a master's degree in counseling—after completing the interview if discomfort arises. Also participants will be referred to their school counselor for further discussion if necessary.

**BENEFITS:** No direct benefits to the subjects but your child's responses could help school personnel and mental health professionals understand how to promote resilience and hope in African American adolescents. Additionally, your child will receive a token of compensation of a \$5 gift card upon completion of the interview.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information your child reveals in this study will be kept confidential except for the potential identification of child abuse. If child abuse is identified the researcher is mandated to report this information to the proper authorities. Otherwise, information such as consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Also,

hard copies of interview transcripts identified only through code names will also be kept in a locked file cabinet and electronic copies will be kept in a password protected computer file. Audio recordings will be erased immediately after transcription. When the results of the study are published, your child will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files 5 years after the completion of the study. Your child's research recordings may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees.

**COMPENSATION:** Your child will receive a \$5 gift card from a local merchant upon completion of their interview.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:** Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary and your child may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. If your child would like to withdraw from the study please contact the Graduate Student Researcher, Jessica McClintock or Dan Weast, West Allis/West Milwaukee School District Student Services Director at the numbers below and their data will be destroyed.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Jessica McClintock, M.S. at (909) 229-4973 or Dan Weast, West Allis/West Milwaukee School District Student Services Director at (414) 604-3016. If you have question or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS PARENT PERMISSION FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO GIVE MY PERMISSION FOR MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Name(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Name(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C: Children's Hope Scale

**Children's Hope Scale**

**Directions:** Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes YOU and put that number in the blank provided.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>None of the time</b>	<b>A little of the time</b>	<b>Some of the time</b>	<b>A lot of the time</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>All of the time</b>

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I think I am doing pretty well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.

## APPENDIX D: Background Information Form

Participant Fake Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Background Information Form

Let the participant know that you are going to start with some basic questions about their history and current living situation.

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. Who is the most important person in your life? Why?
4. What is your parents/guardians highest level of education?
5. Where were you born and raised?
6. Who do you currently live with?
7. Do you live in a house or apartment?

## APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol

Participant Fake Name \_\_\_\_\_

Language of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Protocol

Before turning on the audio recorder say: “Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview with me. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are doing well in a number of areas. If you remember I will be asking you some questions about your personal goals, and how you accomplish your goals. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions—I just want to get your unique story. Feel free to let me know if you have any questions or if what I am asking does not make sense”.

1. Tell me some important goals you have in your life.
2. How or what helped you come up with these goals?
3. What or who helps you to meet those goals?
4. What kinds of things will get in the way of those goals?
5. Give me an example of one big goal that you achieved (e.g., improving your grades, making a sports team, running for student office, getting perfect attendance) in your life.
  - a. Why did you pick that goal?
  - b. Why was this goal so important to you?
  - c. What did you do (i.e., strategies) to reach this goal? For example, to get better grades did you study more or get tutoring?
  - d. What obstacles came in the way of reaching the goal?
    - i. How did you deal with the obstacles?
    - ii. Sometimes people talk about thoughts that help them keep moving forward and persevering even when things get hard. Do you have any of those thoughts in your head about your goals? What are they?
    - iii. What other things do you do to stay motivated and keep moving forward?
  - e. How long did it take to achieve the goal?
  - f. When you accomplished this goal how did you feel?
  - g. What did you learn from this experience and do you use this experience with your current goals?
6. Who or what helps you reach your goals in life? (probes—family, friends, school, church, etc.)
7. Sometimes we see that other kids or people near us aren’t reaching the goals that they want. What do you think is getting in the way for them?

Ending questions

1. What advice would you give to a teen who is trying to reach a goal?

2. What else do you think is important to ask in a study of goal setting and achievements among African American adolescents who are doing well?

Protocol Additions from Participants

1. Is race and obstacle?
2. Do you believe that if you were a different race would you still have the same obstacles?
3. Do you follow any customs or use inspirational quotes to motivate you to achieve your goals?
4. What helps you stay motivated at home? Or when others are not around?

## APPENDIX F: Checklists for Criteria for Inclusion

## Information from Student Records

Risk Factor	Yes/No	Protective Factors	Yes/No	Positive Adaptation Indicators	Yes/No
Student is African American		Student has a hope score of 29 or above		Student has demonstrated academic achievement as determined by GPA of 3.0 or above.	
Student is enrolled in free/reduced lunch		Student is involved in school related extra curricular activities or leadership activities		Student has exhibited positive behavior and lack of risky behavior	
Student is from a single parent or foster home					

## Information from Teacher/School Counselor Report

Risk Factor	Yes/No	Protective Factors	Yes/No	Positive Adaptation Indicators	Yes/No
Student is from a single parent or foster home		Student has satisfaction with self and high self-esteem		Student has exhibited positive behavior and lack of risky behavior	
		Student has supportive relationships in their life (e.g., family, mentor, community, church)		The student has exhibited social competence/social skills through friendship and getting along with others	
		Student is involved in school related extra curricular activities			