

HARDINESS SCRIPTS: HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS IN A CHICAGO CHARTER SCHOOL NAVIGATING COMMUNITY VIOLENCE AND SCHOOL

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Youth exposure to violence, criminal activities and deviant peer affiliation may impact overall development and the transition into adulthood. Low income African American youth are disproportionately exposed to chronic stressors, but little is known about how they conceptualize challenges and success once they enter adulthood. We examine how low incomes African Americans reflect on exposure to chronic stressors during adolescence that impact their description of challenges and successes in emerging adulthood. We interviewed thirteen African American males and females who are former participants of Chicago Youth Programs. Participants identified three challenges: neighborhood violence, familial stress and financial instability as barriers to success in emerging adulthood. Participants identified conditions that facilitated success in emerging adulthood: perseverance and access to Chicago Youth Programs. Understanding challenges and successes associated with emerging adulthood for

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low-income African Americans may lead to better informed support services for low income African Americans across the life course. © 2016 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Risk factors associated with community violence exposure are well documented in the psychological and sociological literature (Bowen, Bowen, & Richman, 1998; Cooley et al., 1995; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998; Grant et al., 2000; Hill et al., 1996; Paxton, Robinson, Shah, & Schoeny, 2004; Perkins, Kleiner, Roey, & Brown, 2004). Protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of community violence exposure remain largely understudied, but there is a growing interest in the protective factors associated with community violence exposure (Luthar, 1999; Osofsky, 1999; Sullivan, 2013; Garbarino, 2015). These studies, however, tend to focus on African American males who are most at-risk for violence exposure and perpetration (Harding, 2009, 2010) and do poorly in school (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Sharkey, 2006; Author & Johnson, 2010; Spencer, 2001; Author, Woolley, & Hong, 2012). But these are not the only African American males dealing with community violence. Some male youth in these communities are doing well in school and still have to cope with the high levels of violence in their communities.

Little is known about these youth because there is a dearth of research that examines the protective factors of high-achieving African American males who live in similarly violent communities (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2011; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Hurd et al., 2012). This is part of a larger problem, namely, the study of successful youth in high-risk environments. For example, the Search Institute has reported that the rate of school success (grade point average) is 50% higher for youth who possess strong social competencies, such as resistance skills and a positive identity, than it is for youth with general support from family and friends and empowerment only. Most relevant to the present research, they also report that 61% of youth, with only support and empowerment as “developmental assets” identified as promoting positive development, had significant problems with violence, and 39% did not. The pressing question arising from these data is not why are the 61% violent, but why aren’t the 39%?

The purpose of this study is to identify the protective factors among high-achieving African American adolescent males that protect them from increased exposure and perpetration of community violence and help them to stay focused on school. This research was guided by two key research questions: (a) How do high-achieving African American males navigate community violence?; (b) What protective factors are a part of that process?

Literature Review

Community violence, a serious problem in urban communities, is particularly detrimental for African American males (Ander, Cook, Ludwig, & Pollack, 2009; Stevenson, 2002); homicide is the leading cause of death for African American males aged 15-25 years, with a startlingly murder rate 49 times greater than their White male counterparts (CDC, 2000; National Urban League, 2007). African American males living in Chicago are disproportionately affected by community violence (Voisin et al., 2007, 2011). Recent studies show that African American males are the most likely victims and perpetrators of violence, that they mostly come from single-parent households, and that they are more likely to

be poorer than other youth (Ander et al., 2009). Exposure to community violence is associated with negative sequelae that include anxiety, suicidal ideation, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and low academic achievement (Borofsky et al., 2013; Bowen, Bowen, & Richman, 1998).

Conventional “accumulation of risk” approaches make it clear the connections that lead to the high incidence of violence exposure and its detrimental effects on the psychosocial development of African American males. The more productive task, however, is to determine protective factors that may mitigate the psychological distress associated with violence exposure. Focusing specifically on high-achieving African American males who face community violence will allow us to identify the strategies they employ to remain successful and engaged in school. This will also give us insight into the types of protective factors youth use to mitigate the psychological distress associated with community violence exposure, particularly if those factors include variables subject to intervention, such as habits of mind and heart, values, beliefs, daily practices, and other aspects of consciousness, rather than structural factors less amenable to intervention without major social and economic restructuring.

By using what are termed *hardiness scripts*, which emphasize their perceived control over their individual experiences with violence as an explanatory framework, this study extends our understanding of resilience among adolescent African American males. Furthermore, we believe that understanding hardiness scripts can refine and enhance intervention and prevention strategies that focus on self-esteem building and cognitive reframing.

Theoretical Frameworks

A considerable body of research seeks to understand factors that promote resilience among youth beyond the several developmental assets noted earlier. These studies have identified three factors as central to youth resilience: (a) worldview, (b) ability to engage with others, and (c) patterns of processing stressful events (see Garmezy, 1993, and Walsh, 2012). This research sheds light on how youth designated as “at risk” mitigate challenging and often dangerous circumstances through their thinking, feeling, and behavior. But what are the specifics of the “interpretive lens” through which resilient youth perceive, interpret, and process stressful events? And how does that lens influence the interactional repertoire activated during such situations? We build and expand on the at-risk resilient youth literature, suggesting that the social situations of some youth provide them with a psychological, interactional, and interpretive repertoire from which to draw during challenging times. In our sample, we found these respective repertoires to resemble hardiness. The concept of hardiness has been used to explain how highly traumatized individuals remained buffered against the psychological distress associated with their traumatic experience.

Hardiness

Kamtsio and Karagiannopoulou (2013) have defined hardiness as “a combination of attitudes that provides the course and motivation to do the hard, strategic work of turning a stressful circumstance from potential disasters into a growth opportunity” (p. 808). Prior research suggests that hardiness may influence coping that leads to good health and better performance overall (Maddi 2013). Hardiness is conceptualized as three attitudes, per the Search Institute’s Development Assets: (a) general commitment to finding a

purpose in life (e.g., assessed with the item “Young person reports his or her life has a purpose”); (b) feeling in control rather than powerless (e.g., assessed with the item “Young person feels he or she has control over things that happen to him or her”); and (c) seeing the world as a challenge rather than a threat (e.g., assessed with the item “Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future” (Bonano, 2004; Garbarino, 1999, 2008).

Hardy individuals view stressful situations as less threatening, which ultimately minimizes their experiences of distress. In addition, hardy individuals exhibit more confidence and use active coping and social support, which help them to manage the distress they do experience (Bonano, 2004).

Conceptually, hardiness resembles other well-studied constructs that endeavor to explain success in the face of stressors, specifically grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007) and mastery orientation (Dweck, 2006; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Grit characterizes individuals who deliberately set long-term goals and who strive, in the absence of positive feedback, to achieve these goals. Individuals with mastery orientation respond to negative feedback by seeking to improve their performance outcomes via increased effort. These individuals see failure as an indication that they need to work harder. Hardiness, grit, and mastery-orientation all seek to explain resilience.

Drawing on the results of this study, we argue that hardiness better encapsulates the responses that study participants describe in navigating community violence; that is, mastery-oriented individuals structure their actions in response to negative feedback (e.g., a bad test grade), not in response to external stresses (e.g., violence in the community). Moreover, individuals with both hardy and gritty characteristics exhibit courage, but hardy individuals are more attuned to feedback (positive or negative) and are therefore more likely than gritty individuals to deliberately engage in strategies that help overcome hardship (Maddi et al. 2013).

The way individuals interpret events and social situations influences their range of responses (Munkata, 2006). Researchers have demonstrated that certain cognitive processing styles lead to aggressive behavior in childhood (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 2006; Li, Fraser, & Wike, 2013). These include a hypersensitivity to negative social cues, an obliviousness to positive social cues, a narrow range of responses to arousal (namely, aggression), and an internalized belief that aggression is successful in social relations. Cognitive processing styles are influenced by cognitive structures, which determine how situations are interpreted.

Abelson (1981) research suggests that people create cognitive structures, known as *scripts*, for interpreting events in their lives so that there is a link between the content of scripts and the direction of responses. Scripts operate in two main ways: (a) helping people interpret social situations and (b) helping people select their response to social situations (Abelson, 1981; Gioia & Manz, 1985). We suggest that hardy individuals use “hardiness scripts” that allow them to interpret stressful life situations in a less threatening way, by exhibiting more confidence and using active coping and social support. In the present study, we examine how participants interpret violence in their community in ways that allow them to respond positively. Our guiding hypothesis is that participants interpret events through a hardiness perspective (i.e., “lens”), which leads them to develop hardiness scripts (patterns of thinking and behavior that allow them to cope with community violence and still remain connected to school).

METHODS

The findings reported in this article are based on semistructured interviews with 18 high-achieving African American males who participated in a cross-sectional qualitative study, from which the first author drew the data. We interviewed 18 participants for two reasons. First, data saturation is achieved quickly when the sample comprises members of the same demographic group, and in this case the participants were all high-achieving African American males from the same charter school (Saumure & Given, 2008). Second, expert qualitative researchers suggest that a sample size of 15-20 is appropriate for saturation of themes during analysis (Saumure & Given, 2008).

Participants were purposively selected from among students at a charter high school in Chicago, pseudonymously referred to as Butler College Prep (BCP), during the 2009-2010 academic year. The overall goal of this study is to identify protective factors among high-achieving African American adolescent males who are exposed to community violence by exploring their understanding of how they accomplish this important achievement when so many others in their communities do not. This requires an in-depth investigation of consciousness and cognitive processing. Booth (1977) has called this a “thick description” of the mechanisms and processes that shape one’s protective factors in the face of community violence exposure.

Setting

Participants were recruited from BCP, a charter high school that seeks to promote academic and college achievement among primarily African American students from low-income communities. The school opened in 1998 with 83 students and currently serves over 900 students on two campuses. The students predominately come from Chicago’s West Side neighborhoods. The student population is 98% African American and 2% Latino, and 95% of the students are considered low-income and qualify for free and reduced lunch. Students are selected to attend the high school through a blind lottery process that admits less than one third of all applicants. The student teacher ratio is 14:1, so classroom sizes are small compared with traditional public schools in Chicago. The school offers honors and advanced placement, and most juniors and seniors take at least one advanced placement course. The school boasts one of the highest student and teacher retention rates in Chicago, and 90% of the students attend college.

Sample

This study used a nonprobabilistic, purposive sampling strategy. The inclusion criteria are as follows: (a) African American males; (b) 14-18 years of age; (c) currently enrolled at BCP; and (d) had a GPA of at least 2.5 or above. The exclusion criterion was being a ward of the state. African American adolescent males were specifically chosen for this study because, as a group, they are most likely to be victims and perpetrators of community violence (Bureau of Justice, 2007).

Participants with GPA’s above 2.5 were selected for multiple reasons. First, 2.5 GPA signals a C+/B- average, indicating an above average student. The average GPA for males at BCP is approximately 2.0. Second, we were particularly interested in identifying protective factors among high-achieving African American adolescent males who are exposed to community violence and attend a school that provides a supportive context

for both academic achievement and prosocial behavior (both of which are often in short supply in the participants' home communities).

We believe that high-achieving African American males who live in violent neighborhoods can speak to the experiences of navigating violence and managing safety in their neighborhood while highlighting important protective factors that may use to successfully navigate neighborhood and school. Participants were recruited from a leadership group of African American males and from English and math classes. For their participation, students received two free movie tickets and lunch. We received student assent and parental consent for all participants. They were interviewed at least twice during the academic year and four participants were interviewed three times for clarity on emerging themes.

Data Collection

Participants completed two semistructured, audiotaped interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each. Participants were given pseudonyms at the beginning of the study. The first interview examined how the participants describe their neighborhood and identified protective factors at the individual level as well as at home, at school, and in the neighborhood. The second interview focused on specific violent events and how those protective factors were used during the violent event. Participants were interviewed in the English department chair's office during their lunch or homeroom period. The location was specifically chosen to protect the participant's privacy.

The interview protocols were designed to understand how high-achieving African American males navigate community violence and identify protective factors that are a part of that process. The interviewer probed participants to determine the people (e.g., family, friends, teachers, and others) who helped them navigate violence. Participants were also asked to reflect on their internal capacity to manage violence through questions that examined how the participants navigated a specific experience with violence. In particular, students were asked about the type of violence they experienced, who was there, how it happened, why they thought it happened, who or what helped them in the moment, and how they were able to move forward after the incident. The interviews closed with asking participants to offer advice to the city of Chicago for ending youth and community violence.

Data Analysis

We transcribed and entered interviews in the qualitative analysis program Dedoose (version 4.5), a web-based mixed-method data management program. Our analysis is focused on identifying protective strategies that high-achieving African American males use to navigate violence in their neighborhood and stay focused on school. This study used an inductive approach to analyzing data, meaning the analysis did not start from specific hypotheses regarding the hardiness process in these youth, but rather sought to identify themes that emerged "naturally" as the youth discussed their experience.

This inductive analysis approach allows the researcher to identify themes that emerged most frequently from the raw data, without the constraints of a formal or structural methodology (Thomas, 2003). The inductive approach has three components: "(1) condense extensive and varied raw text into brief, summary format; (2) establish links between the research objectives and the findings to ensure the links are clear and defensible; and (3) develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of the experiences or processes that are evident in the text" (Thomas, 2003, p. 238). This study employed multiple

methods to ensure rigor throughout the analysis, including identifying rival cases or cases that did not confirm our theory around hardiness scripts and validation meetings with trained qualitative researchers or “peer debriefing”).

Coding

Interviews were coded using three approaches: open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first author conducted the first phase of data analysis using open coding and then discussed the preliminary findings with a large qualitative research team of doctoral students and a senior faculty member, to refine and develop refined codes. During this phase, codes such as neighborhood, violence, protective factor, family, and school were developed. This discussion resulted in the development of a final codebook.

In the selective coding phase, each transcript was double-coded using the refined codebook and Dedoose. Selective coding allows the researcher to focus the data by comparing interactions embedded within the initial open codes while simultaneously comparing interactions to the larger concepts that emerge. For example, within the protective factor’s code, we looked for variation in how participants used protective factors and identified conditions and elements that influenced how and why a participant used a protective factor. During this phase, we noted across the sample that participants used narratives or scripts to represent themselves and describe how they navigate community violence and school. We then went back to the literature to identify a theoretical concept that best explains the scripts we observed. That concept was hardiness.

We created a hardiness script code to fully capture the three components of hardiness mentioned earlier in the manuscript. We used codes from the Search Institute’s lists of developmental assets for adolescents to screen for hardiness scripts. First, the *sense of purpose* code describes the participant’s examples of specific actions or personal attitudes, beliefs, and values that highlight commitment to finding, sustaining, or maintaining goals that indicate life purpose. Second, the *personal power* code describes the participant’s examples of exercising control over life circumstances, such as chronic exposure to community violence. Third, the *challenge over threat* code describes the participant’s examples of viewing life circumstances such as avoiding a fight after school as an obstacle that can be overcome versus an immediate threat to one’s life.

Using the hardiness script codes, we examined relationships among categories. Hardiness scripts were applied as a theoretical lens, and interviews were recoded through the lens of hardiness, paying close attention to how participant narratives fit within the hardiness paradigm (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To test the idea of hardiness scripts, we identified interview quotes that fit our criteria and viewed them against negative or rival cases that did not support the theory. For example, there were a few cases ($n = 2$) in which the participants did not use what we define as hardiness scripts to navigate violence in their neighborhood. In these cases, the participants specifically identified the support of adults at home and school as the mechanism by which they coped with violence.

The end result of the theoretical coding phase resulted in the integration of categories and relationships, from which the concept of hardiness scripts emerged. To ensure that interviews were rigorously analyzed, a team of students trained in qualitative methods and qualitative methodologists discussed the codebook and emerging themes. In addition, rival cases were compared with and contrasted against emerging themes. Selections from several participants’ narratives are highlighted in the findings section; these selections

Table 1.

<i>Violent event</i>	<i>Student Account</i>
Shooting, gun	<p>“Two people got killed right on my block.”</p> <p>“We was at a BBQ, and the Kings shot down from a house and my brother got shot three times.”</p> <p>“I’ve been around so much violence, it’s ridiculous. One of my two friends got shot around the corner from my house.”</p> <p>“I saw someone get shot like 30 times on the corner, and the night before that, somebody came out the gangway and started shooting.”</p>
Physical violence, assault	<p>“The time I remember the most was when I got jumped coming off the ‘L.’”</p> <p>“I got suspended for a gang fight at school.”</p> <p>“A group of boys tried to jump my little brother.”</p> <p>“I witnessed an event a couple of months ago. I was walking to the gas station and these drug dealers were sitting out front and some other people came in and just started jumping on them. It was brutal, they was going at it.”</p>
Robbery	<p>“I got robbed for a dollar at the bus stop. It was kinda funny to me at first. It was like, are you this serious over a dollar?”</p>

both illustrate and provide context for the hardiness scripts participants used to navigate school and community.

RESULTS

All participants claimed to have experienced, witnessed, or heard about a violent act in their neighborhood. Table 1 provides a summary of the students’ reports of violent events.

When describing how they navigate violence in their community, most participants ($n = 16$) possessed one or more qualities of hardiness. In addition, we observed that participants not only embodied hardiness in their behaviors but also invested in a ritual of speaking of hardiness scripts about their violence exposure, consequently allowing them to reinterpret and exert some control over how they experienced violence. The participants’ positive identity, construction of masculinity, and future orientation influenced the hardiness scripts. Below we present a snapshot of the experiences of our participants that best illustrate how hardiness scripts were used to navigate violence in their neighborhood.

Commitment to Staying Focused on School

Of the participants, 16 out of 18 described being committed to staying focused on school despite their exposure to violence. Mike, a 17-year-old senior from North Lawndale explains how he was able to compartmentalize his exposure to community violence and exercise greater control over his responses to that violence. Mike shared a story about being beaten up by a group of boys one day after school:

I still want to come to school. I don't let that, you know, into my school life. But I think that if you're not focused on school and then, like, something like that happens, then that will take you out and you will be in the streets.

Mike knows that violent incidents like these have the potential to reroute his future life course. He implies that responding to these circumstances in a negative way could take him "out of school" and lead to a life "in the streets." He resists this unwanted alternative by identifying what is at stake (school vs. the streets) and compartmentalizing his experiences ("I don't let that into my school life"). Mike conveys his ability to stay in control again after a friend was shot.

One of my friends was running through the neighborhood and got shot. I mean, I feel bad, but at the same time I know, like, I got to keep going. Like, I can't let everything that happens get me down. I guess I'm used to it. So it just don't stop me.

Mike acknowledges his concern for his friend, but states that he has to "keep going" as he believes these kinds of events have the potential to "get him down." Mike is also concerned about distractions, as evidenced by his insistence on not allowing this incident to hinder him. Mike's de-emphasis of this situation allows him to be more in tune with himself and his own needs.

Control

Of the 18 participants, 15 expressed feeling control over their life as adverse life conditions like death and violence in their neighborhood. For them, control was connected to being able to control one's emotions when coping with a difficult moment. Russell, a 17-year-old from Englewood, demonstrated his capacity of being in control when he described a school camping trip that ended with three of his friends dying.

Three people on the [school] trip drowned. So that was pretty, like, extreme for me to take in. I didn't know how to take that because it happened on my birthday, so that was kind of, like, one thing. But I would consider that a good thing too, because now it's like I have something to look forward to on my birthday. So I can like do more on my birthday now and just see why my birthday is more appreciable now. Because, like, now I see how some obstacles is, like, not actually obstacles you can't get over; it's just like a stepping stone for you to rise above something.

Even though his friends died on his birthday, Russell reframes this traumatic event, taking control over its characterization in relation to other aspects of his life. By asserting control over how he interprets the event, Russell makes it more manageable and somewhat easier to navigate. This does not change the objective reality that three of his friends died. It may, however, change how Russell relates to their death and allow him to distance himself from aspects of the event he cannot control.

Challenge

Through our analysis, we found that 15 out of the 18 participants saw their experiences with violence in their neighborhood as a challenge but not insurmountable. Tavis, a 17-year-old senior who lives with his Brother in North Lawndale, describes how he handles peer pressure from gang members in his neighborhood. Russell demonstrated the hardy capacity to see the world as a challenge rather than a threat:

I don't feel pressured to be like them [the gang members] because I know me. I'm my own person. So even though I grew up around most of these people who act like this, and they were older than me, I'm not going to be in the same shoes as them. I felt like I should embark on my own shoes, like, have my own feet. So once I got to the age, [I said] "I'm going to do something better than them or different from them. I'm going to fulfill my dream."

Tavis recognizes the challenges of living in a violent neighborhood, including the pressure to join gangs. He not only stays safe but also engages neighborhood residents with whom he has grown up. Tavis goes against the norms of his neighborhood and the behavior he sees perpetrated by adult men. Because Tavis does not have a problem with being different, he is able to distinguish his personal identity from that of his community identity, thus being able to visualize his future and believing he has the capacity to reach his dreams.

Developing Hardiness Scripts

Positive identity. Participants develop hardiness scripts by drawing on positive aspects of themselves. When asked, "Who are you?" participants routinely reflected on their positive characteristics and thoughts about their future.

Zane, an 18-year-old from North Lawndale, described himself as "determined and smart." When asked to elaborate on his identity he stated, "Well, I guess I don't let nothing stop me or to hold me back. Whatever I go through I try and come out of it and continue on what I was doing in the beginning." Zane expects challenging times. Rather than focusing on the difficulty of the challenges, though, he expresses a confident tenacity that will allow him to meet them head on. Zane's tenacity and plan will allow him to navigate challenges in such a way that it does not deter him from his intended path. One aspect of a positive identity is belief in oneself even when that belief goes against popular opinion. Zane says:

I think I'm a standout person. When people get to know me they don't expect that I would be high up. When I came here to play quarterback for football, they wouldn't think I would, 'cause I'm little, but I have heart. I'm smart. I'm smarter than what people think too, 'cause some people be putting me down, and once you prove them wrong, they can't say that. My GPA is a 4.3.

Zane is motivated to succeed in athletics *and* in scholarship, drawing on an interpretive repertoire that has been refined in each. In athletics, Zane must push himself physically because of his small stature. At the same time, he pushes himself intellectually, despite how others perceive him as an African American male athlete.

Hardiness scripts and future orientation. Study navigated community violence by remaining focused on two future-oriented considerations: (a) How would my death affect my family and friends? (b) How would my response affect my educational and career goals? For example, Carlos, a 15-year-old sophomore from North Lawndale, expressed concern about how his reaction to violence would affect both his family and his career goals:

I had an associate that was found dead in the alley, shot in the head twice, and I started thinking—I'm my mom's only son. I decided to focus on my career goals and play sports. I do that by staying out my neighborhood . . . I don't even go to school in my hood.

Corey's consideration for his family and future directly influences how he chooses to engage his neighborhood, which may affect his future exposure to community violence.

A focus on the future also characterizes Jamar, an 18-year-old senior from Englewood. He describes his response to being attacked en route from a summer program:

Interviewer: Tell me about your last experience with violence.

Jamar: The time I remember most is when I got jumped getting off the "EL."

I: How did you cope with this experience?

J: I did nothing. I don't know. It was just like, "I got jumped. I'm gonna go home now and do my homework and forget what happened."

I: Were you afraid?

J: No, I wasn't afraid.

I: Did this experience affect your attitude about school?

J: No, 'cause they were coming from Englewood High School and I was coming from math camp at the University of Chicago. I had my bags; none of them had that. They looked like they were major playing around in school.

Hardiness scripts appear to be influenced by the participants' future orientation. Jamar used his impending homework deadline to distract himself from the experience of victimization. It also appears that because he was returning home from math camp at the University of Chicago, he maintained a sense of superior academic motivation ("I had my bags, none of them had that"). His attackers, by his estimation, were likely less academically inclined ("They were major playing"). Though many of the participants believed their choices regarding school and their future differ categorically from those of their neighborhood peers, they often rejected the suggestion that they, as individuals, differed from their peers. Jamar stated, "Outsiders will see us and think we are different and our life is different, but we just the same, just different choices." In Jamar's case, his choices seem to be related to strong beliefs regarding his academic potential.

Not everyone responds to experiences with community violence with hardiness. Participants in this study also described experiences interacting with neighborhood peers or students in their charter school. For example, John, a 17-year-old senior, describes some of the students in his homeroom.

Got a lot of people that don't come to school, people that just don't do work. They get mad and throw stuff. And they talk about each other and all that. You know, they play a lot and don't listen. Like, there's one kid name Charlie, he doesn't come to school at all—at all. One time I was in my counselor's office and she was telling me about him; when she called his mother to ask why he doesn't

come to school, she said he has been going to school. He goes out of the house every day to go to school.

It isn't easy to maintain hardiness scripts outside of school. Dante, a 16-year-old junior, describes the challenges with moving between the neighborhood and school environment.

Dante: In the neighborhood, you've got to be on guard. It's hard because if you are in school or something, somebody probably want to act tough; they see that, like, you're cracking jokes or something, then it's all good in school, but outside something happens. We was just all laughing in school, now you want to fight me.

I: So what do you do?

D: Like, you just know what to do and, like, growing up in it, so you already know, like, "I've got to do this." Then I've got to do this. So it's, like, your surroundings, the people you are surrounded by or your environment.

John's and Dante's experiences in and outside of school bring complexity to the development of hardiness scripts. John's narrative suggest that just because he attends the same school and has the same teachers as others, does not necessarily mean they all view the world and specifically school in the same manner. Dante highlights the challenge of going between his charter school and then back to his neighborhood. He recognizes that although one can embrace a less guarded schooling environment, the street code necessitates that you must be ready and willing to "do this," which we interpreted as *defend yourself, whenever needed*.

DISCUSSION

This study underscores the importance of considering the resilient ways in which a selected group of African American adolescent males cope with community violence. The use of hardiness scripts, which refer to patterns of thinking and related behavior that allows study participants to behave in hardy ways, is one way to interpret African American males' coping responses to violence. These scripts are useful for understanding the behavioral responses that emerged in this study because they emphasize participants' agency as they strive to overcome challenging situations in their neighborhood environment. For example, participants use hardiness scripts to respond to their exposure to community violence in positive ways that may have some influence on their ability to successfully remain connected to school.

In the current study, hardiness was related to positive results when participants maintained a positive identity and remained focused on their future. For the youth who participated in this study—a selective group attending an enhanced educational institution—belief in their academic and athletic ability, intelligence, and general good nature lie at the core of positive identity maintenance and the activation of their hardiness in challenging situations, which is consistent with the findings from the Search Institute report on developmental assessments of adolescents.

Hardiness scripts are at work when participants remain focused on their future, whether it is a desire to go to college, finish high school, get a good job, or leave neighborhoods plagued by violence. In addition to maintaining a positive identity, participants also embody hardiness by remaining connected to their future desires. The future is a

constant reminder of why it is essential to stay safe in the neighborhood. The importance that individuals place on their future or their future orientation affects the choices they make in the present (Ebert, 2001; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). A future orientation helps youth keep their goals present, giving them a sense of purpose (Hill & Burrow, 2012), which can mitigate a host of psychosocial stressors and contribute in positive ways to youth development (Hill & Burrow, 2012).

However, research suggests that adolescents are more likely than adults to emphasize short- over long-term goals, giving more weight to short-term rewards than the long-term consequences of their current decisions (Boyer, 2006; Reyna & Farley, 2006). This is particularly interesting given that the capacity for future orientation and critical thinking skills develops during adolescence (Nurmi, 1991). Despite this, we find that among the high-achieving African American males in this sample, long-term consequences are apparent and heightened as youth navigate community violence as evidenced in their hardiness scripts.

Research Implications

We offer hardiness scripts as a protective factor that positively influences how high-achieving African American males navigate violence while remaining connected to school. Because little to no research has been conducted in this area, we offer two directions for future research as this approach is brought to bear on African American youth not a selective sample and not experiencing the kind of enhanced educational experience these youth had access to at their charter school.

One research direction should be to consider and categorize the phrases African American males use when describing how they navigate violence. Considering participants' experiences through their hardiness scripts highlights specific strategies they used for remaining safe in their neighborhood while maintaining a strong school affinity and desire for a positive future.

A second research direction may focus on how hardiness scripts are developed and maintained in the broader African American youth population. Although prior research has examined sources of resiliency for youth in at-risk communities, hardiness scripts further explain how community violence exposure influences an individual's school values: They help us to understand the process through which participants were able to remain connected to their school and in their neighborhood in spite of living in a dangerous community. An examination of hardiness scripts among high-achieving African American adolescents exposed to violence enhances our understanding of protective factors by highlighting the importance of individual resiliency language in shaping how African American males respond to violence while remaining interested in school.

It is important to note that participants were not developing hardiness scripts on their own. They drew on supportive anchors that offer a range of emotional, academic, and instrumental support to buttress their individual efforts. Another way of explaining this is to say we believe that compared with other youth in their communities, these youth had access to multiple developmental assets, for example, espousing a belief in their own self-worth and feeling control over things that happen to them (Search Institute, 2012). As such, it becomes even more important to fully understand how the presence and development of hardiness scripts influences how high-achieving African American males experience community violence. This naturally leads to research designed to discover whether these same supports can be disseminated to African American males who are

not high-achieving and not enrolled in the kind of enhanced educational environment provided by a charter school, such as the one attended by the participants in this study.

Clinical and Policy Implications

The goal of research on hardiness scripts among high-achieving African American youth is to contribute to broader discussions on protective factors, particularly for African American males exposed to community violence. Our focus on high-achieving African American youth who live in violent communities represents an intentional effort to identify protective factors among youth who have successfully navigated a positive path through chronic exposure to violence while negotiating important neighborhood relationships and remaining in school. Hardiness and hardiness scripts have clear implications for supporting prevention programs.

Our results suggest that creating and maintaining hardiness is connected to the language participants use to tell their stories of success with how they navigate violence. Prevention programs that include a component in which participants are asked to reflect on how they navigate violence could serve as a reminder of interpersonal and external strengths they can readily call upon when faced with violence and a mechanism for building out their sensed of self.

Results also show that a focus on long-term consequences served as a protective for high-achieving African American males. Focusing on long-term events may be challenging for African American males who live in communities where living to 25 years of age is viewed as success. Strategies aimed at incorporating long-term plans of goal setting into broader discussions with African American males exposed to community violence may hold promise for shifting fatalistic thinking in urban communities—replacing *terminal thinking* with *future orientation* (Garbarino, 2015). Although many prevention programs may already focus on identifying internal and external resources and long-term plans, this study clarifies the importance of the language African American males use to discuss protective factors present in their life. Hardiness scripts hold promise for reconfiguring young African American males' experience with and relationship to community violence.

Limitations

Although we conducted a rigorous qualitative investigation, the data have several limitations. First, the sample includes a small, selective sample of high-achieving African American adolescent males. However, small samples are appropriate for qualitative studies. The dimensions of the hardiness scripts are applicable across age groups and urban contexts. We believe this study reveals that scripts are useful in locations in which young African American men (a) face multiple challenges navigating through communities with a high incidence of violence and (b) have the personal and social support implicit in being selected for and choosing to attend a charter school.

Although participants in the current study were not gang involved or actively selling drugs, they have faced many of the safety constraints as their involved counterparts in the neighborhood and have responded with hardiness scripts. Further, this study does not present participants' full range of protective factors or violence exposure or portray them as passive victims of violence. However, the qualitative methods employed do allow us to show how participants absorb and process information about their environment, evidenced by their use of language, to navigate violence and remain interested in school

Conclusion

Our study highlights the various ways in which high-achieving adolescent African American boys navigate community violence in Chicago. Specifically, the use of hardiness scripts helped participants navigate and interpret tough situations they encountered as they moved to and from school. As such, the ability to interpret and make sense of stressful violent and traumatic experience provided participants with a coping strategy for maintain success in and outside of school. These results support the importance of helping high achieving adolescent African American boys living in violent neighborhoods continue to build protective factors to successfully navigate their home and school environments.

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