YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN A COLLEGE TOWN: STORIES OF

STRENGTH

by

JESSICA NOBILE

(Under the Direction of June Gary Hopps)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to collaboratively narrate risk and resilient factors experienced by young African American women living in a Southeastern college town. The goal of this research endeavor was to help develop a storied understanding of how family, community, and school risk and resilient factors impact this population's higher educational aspiration (or ambition), using narrative inquiry. Moreover, this study aimed to highlight what factors promoted resilience for young black women. Theory-driven thematic analysis was employed to deduce findings from the two theories that undergirded this research endeavor: critical race feminism along with risk and resilience theory. Findings of this study suggested that young black women experience the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism, along with other risk factors in their immediate environment.   Despite heightened exposure to risk, a variety of resilient factors were identified and participants shared strategies they employed as individuals that helped to buffer the impact of adversity. As such, these young women presented as highly resilient and all participants expressed a desire to pursue higher education.

INDEX WORDS: Social work, critical race feminism, risk and resilience theory, narrative

inquiry, young African American women

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the young women who participated in the study, for sharing their stories of strength with me. Also, to Dr. June Gary Hopps, for her lifetime commitment to the social work profession and unwavering support throughout my years as a doctoral student. In the loving memory of Tony Donofrio, whose untimely death shortly after obtaining his BSW, inspired me to do his social work along with my own. Finally, in loving memory of Zio Valentino, whose recent death reminded me that what matters most in life, is the love we receive from family and friends.

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I owe every aspect of my existence to God, who gifted me with salvation through his son, Jesus Christ, thus purifying my heart; and to the Holy Spirit that has endowed me with my purpose, while providing me with the strength to never give up. Without God and his intervening love, I would not have been able to endure the grueling task of completing this dissertation or maintain my service to the world as a social worker. Thank you, God, for holding me up each time I felt like falling.

> I saw the Lord ever before me,
>   with him at my right hand I shall not
>   be disturbed;
> Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue
>   has exalted;
>   my flesh, too, will dwell in hope,
> because you will not abandon my soul to the
>   nether world,
> nor will you suffer your holy one to
>   see corruption.
> You have made known to me the paths of life;
>   you will fill my joy in your presence. (ACTS 2:25)

Without God, I can accomplish nothing; through God everything is possible.

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Additionally, I would like to acknowledge The University of Georgia's School of Social Work. It was at this Institution where I learned how to be a social work educator and researcher. I also realized the depth of my own strength as a student here. Specifically, I would like to thank Dean Maurice Daniels, who built a school culture that fostered students' professional and personal growth and Dean Anna Scheyett who is continuing that same legacy. Additionally, I send my sincerest gratitude to Drs. Michael Holosko, Harold Briggs, and Leon Banks for their time, advice and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Located in Athens, Georgia is The University of Georgia, the oldest and first state chartered university in the United States, which is now a nationally ranked and prestigious institution (Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974). In addition to many university resources, libraries, research facilities, academic buildings, and student amenities, an abundance of wealth characterizes parts of Athens, Georgia: plantation-style mansions, multimillion-dollar sports facilities, and upscale student condos adorn parts of this town and the University's streets. Within that beautiful and well-maintained space also exists extreme poverty, segregation, and inequality for many local citizens, including African Americans, as evidenced by communities filled with crime, gang violence, and substance abuse.

This dissertation examines aspects of absolute poverty, that is, people who live chronically below the poverty line as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), and how these components impact the educational aspirations of young African American women living in Athens. Absolute poverty is often characterized by such factors as malnutrition, high unemployment and/or low wages, high crime rates (including escalated rates of selling and using illegal substances), inadequate housing, and low rates of higher educational attainment (Isareli & Weber, 2014; Partee, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau 2013; 2015)

Due to the high poverty rates in their communities, many young African American women live below the poverty line, exposing them to challenges associated with poverty- food insecurity, familial unemployment, community violence, and other social ills. (University of

Georgia, 2015). Approximately 26% of the total population in Athens makes less than $25,000.00 per year, and 37% live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Per the University of Georgia (2015), 36% of African Americans in Athens live below the poverty line, however, they make up only 27.7% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; University of Georgia, 2015).

African Americans living in Athens are negatively impacted by poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and lack of resources that in turn affects their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Hopps et al. (2010) define "overwhelmed clients" as "those suffering with multidimensional problems (i.e., physical, emotional, psychological, employment, family, and economic) reinforced by social factors (i.e., race, gender, class, poverty)" (p.155). Young African American women living in Athens, Georgia, constitute an overwhelmed population due to the prevalence of institutional classist, racist, and sexist social structures. These conditions often impede their ability to achieve academically, as poverty is correlated with poor higher educational outcomes, which further perpetuates the cycle of poverty by limiting opportunity (Brown, 2013; (Gibson, 2015; Partee, 2015; Pratt-Clark, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

The systemic nature of poverty, racism, and gender discrimination in Athens, Georgia, exists in other parts of the country as well. Young African American women are often treated as a stigmatized group even prior to entering their first school building (Brown, 2013; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). This study intends to provide a narrative account of the experiential risk factors faced by young African American women living in Athens and how those experiences impact higher educational aspiration. In addition, this study intends to highlight the resilient nature of these young women, despite the social inequalities so evident in their environment.

To contextualize the study, this chapter will present an overview of the historical background of slavery in the United States, and more specifically in Athens, Georgia. Also included in this chapter are the purpose of the study and research questions. Finally, the significance of the study and its corresponding practical implications will be thoroughly discussed. Of note, the term "African American" will be utilized to encompass the terms Afro-American and black throughout all chapters of this dissertation.

Historical Background

Slavery created an institutionalized system of oppression, inequality, and injustice that persists today in the form of economic, legal, educational, health, and social disadvantages for black Americans in the United States (O, Connell, 2012: Shapiro 2004; Constance-Higgins, 2011). The slave trade of Africans emerged early in the colonialization of America as an attempt for landowners and merchants to procure wealth quickly in European countries and in the New World (Horne, 2012; Grynaviski & Munger, 2014). The enslavement of black persons allowed for increased profits, making them a sought-after commodity and a necessity for financial growth in colonial America (Grynaviski & Munger, 2014; Horne, 2012; Mallipeddi, 2014).

The benefits of the slave trade, in turn, caused colonialists to avidly oppose British control over the slave trade, and in 1698, the Royal African Company opened the slave market to all traders, increasing the number of Africans brought to America from 5,500 in 1697 to 15,000 in 1698- a 300% increase that year alone (Horne, 2012). During the transatlantic voyage to America, the enslaved were treated as chattel, and mortality rates were astronomical. It is estimated that 1.5 billion enslaved persons died during the Middle Passage, which contributed greatly to the dysphoria felt by enslaved Africans while on board slave ships and prior to their arrival on American soil (Chassot, 2014; Marcum & Skarbek, 2014).

The Middle Passage initiated a physical and emotional disconnect from Africa, which led to melancholia and feelings of dread among the enslaved about their future life circumstances (Frazier, 1966; Horne, 2012; Mallipeddi, 2014). Upon their arrival in America, the enslaved were not viewed as human beings; instead, they were defined in economic terms and embedded as a financial enterprise during colonial and post-Revolutionary War America. To exert social control, owners of enslaved persons attempted to annihilate the remnants of African culture through brute force. Africa became a dim memory and a foreign entity for many who were African-born and enslaved.

While on plantations, enslaved people were often shackled, malnourished, beaten, and exposed to epidemic diseases. The lives of enslaved persons were defined by their owners, who socially controlled them by any means. Thus, social control was brutal and considered in terms of economic rather than humanistic consequences. Slave owners inflicted a variety of punishments- whipping, branding, and ear cropping were normal. Besides corporal punishment, physical ailments were common, brought about by labor overexertion, poor nutrition, and frostbite. The bodies of enslaved women were also exploited by white masters, as sexual assault was a common practice as a tool to intimidate and break their spirits, while also increasing the production of enslaved persons (Boster, 2013; Frazier, 1966; Millward, 2010).

Due to Southern plantations owners' financial dependency on free labor, slavery was legalized at the start of the United States government, with the creation of the Constitution as a pro-slavery document. This document de-humanized enslaved persons with its inclusion of the three fifths clause, counting them as three-fifths of a person for voting representation purposes, although black enslaved persons were not enfranchised themselves (Frazier, 1966; Horne, 2012; Grynaviski & Munger, 2014; Knowles, 2007; Waldestreicher, 2013). The slave trade and

fugitive slave clauses were later included in the Constitution to prevent escape from slavery; free-trade of the enslaved was also made a taxable and proper business (Knowles, 2007; Waldestreicher, 2013). Escape from slavery and assisting runaway slaves was thereby criminalized. Thus, freedom for the enslaved was deemed illegal, which was ingrained in the initial and ongoing social construction of the United States of America through its Constitution. This ideology had a negative and everlasting emotional and psychological impact on African Americans (Boster, 2013; Grynaviski & Munger, 2014; Frazier, 1966; Knowles, 2007).

Slave rebellions did occur, despite fragmentation caused by loyalty to plantation neighborhoods that served to hinder a united enslaved force. Since colonial days, the enslaved had organized rebellions to dismantle slavery and procure their freedom. The four most famous rebellions in America were: 1) The Stono Rebellion of 1739, 2) The New York Conspiracy of 1741, 3) Gabriel's Conspiracy in 1800, and 4) Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831. The Stono Rebellion of 1739 was an attempt to overthrow slavery, which occurred near the Stono River in the colony of South Carolina. More than 20 slaves fought against the English settlers for over a week, until all were eventually killed. The New York Conspiracy of 1741 lasted throughout the summer and ended after 17 enslaved persons were hanged and 13 burned at the stake (Gates, 2013; Kaye, 2007).

Gabriel's Conspiracy of 1800 was also a large-scale revolt, spearheaded by a popular and well-respected slave, named Gabriel. During this rebellion, over 1,000 of the enslaved organized and marched toward the armory in Richmond, Virginia. Ultimately, they were all captured, sentenced or killed by the state's militia. Finally, in Southampton, Virginia, Nat Turner organized and armed 70 people who were either enslaved or freed persons during his rebellion in 1831. After Turner's forces attacked 15 homes and killed between 50 and 60 European

Americans, the Virginia militia attacked and captured both Turner and his men, ending the rebellion. Thus, uprisings occurred throughout the time of slavery in the United States (Gates, 2013; Kaye, 2007).

Additionally, fugitive slaves, or those who had run away from their masters, were common since the onset of slavery. Typically, slaves ran away to states or territories that had banned slavery, which led to the passing of The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Underground Railroad was developed to aid slaves on their voyage to freedom. Stations were set up in churches, barns, private homes, and caves to give the escaped places to stay as they journeyed toward the North. People, like Sojourner Truth, helped lead slaves to freedom. The exact number of fugitive slaves is uncertain; however, running away was a form of insurgency often applied by enslaved people (Blackett, 2014; Lennon, 2016; Porter, 1960; Reese, 2011).

During the 18th century, European Enlightenment thinkers, often desiring to help the enslaved were developing theories related to justice, human rights, and equality; these notions spread to Americans living in the North (Matsui, 2013; Mayblin, 2013). This led to an abolition movement abroad and in the Northern portion of the United States. Abolitionists in America, called for an end to slavery, and over time the Mason-Dixon Line was created to demarcate slave-South from free-North; this established slavery as a Southern institution in the United States. The call for national emancipation of the enslaved caused many Southern owners to react defensively for fear of financial calamity and a decrease in political power. Most plantation owners responded by promoting slavery as both a constitutional and state right to justify and maintain it as a financial enterprise. This fundamentally altered how the South viewed the enslaved, slave-ownership, and has had an everlasting impact on African American-European

American relations in America, especially in the South (Hancock, 2013; Grynaviski & Munger, 2014; Matsui, 2013).

The election of President Abraham Lincoln spearheaded the rising tensions between Southern plantation owners and Northerners calling for abolition, which led to Civil War in 1861. Many Southerner owners felt that the emancipation of the enslaved violated state rights and viewed President Lincoln's election as a threat to the economic stability created by slavery. Southern plantation owners dependent upon the institution of slavery for economic wealth, stability, and a way of life, chose to secede from the North rather than put an end to enslavement. The secession of the South triggered a Civil War that lasted for a period of four years, as an effort by wealthy and white Southern plantation owners to maintain their economic stronghold created by free slave labor (Calomiris & Pritchett, 2016; Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974).

After the Confederate army lost the Civil War, a period of Reconstruction was implemented that lasted from 1865-1877 and represented a short-lived positive turn for freed people. European Americans also benefitted from the Reconstruction Era, as those who were formerly enslaved and European Americans alike, were offered access to free education. Additionally, the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 reserved three million acres of land for freed people and charged the Freedman's Bureau with land distribution and enforcement of civil rights. Freed people were promised 40 acres under this Act, but this was a myth and the act was repealed 10 years later. No one received the promised 40 acres, and the majority of the allocated land, was returned to the original land owners after the Reconstruction ended (Drago, 1992; Dubois, 1969; Fryer & Levitt, 2012; Hollis, 2009; McAdam, 1999; Smith, 2014; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

During the Reconstruction Era, freed people attempted to farm their own lands and create homesteads, but were often attacked by the Ku Klux Klan and/or left indebted to white land owners through the system of sharecropping. Freed people gained a political voice during this time, but this was quickly halted by Southern white politicians and forcefully sustained aggressive attacks (often fatal) by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a hate-based organization supported largely in part by white upper and middle-class elites, who used the working class as foot soldiers to inflict terror on African Americans across the South (Drago, 1992; Dubois, 1969; Fryer & Levitt, 2012; Hollis, 2009; McAdam, 1999; Smith, 2014; Thurmond & Hester, 2001). One in eight European Americans were members at its peak and Klan membership exceeded four million members during the 1920s. The KKK, along with other economic and political pressure from the Southern elites, led to the end of the Reconstruction Era (Drago, 1992; Dubois, 1969; Fryer & Levitt, 2012; Hollis, 2009; McAdam, 1999; Smith, 2014; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

History of Athens, Georgia

Athens, Georgia, the location of this study, was a proponent of slavery like most Southern states. The land now known as Athens-Clarke County was originally a part of Jackson County and was carved into its own territorial establishment in December of 1801 (Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974; Thomas, 1992). In 1801, a governing body called the Senatus Academicus chose to build a university, now known as The University of Georgia, and named its locale Athens, after the city in Greece (Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974; Reap, 1985; Thomas, 1992; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

The historical development of Athens as a town is so interrelated with the growth of the University that it is impossible to separate the two. Athens grew around the University establishment; housing and mercantile stores were built specifically for students attending the

School. Businesses developed around the University, such as various mills and the Georgia Railroad, which provided rail services from Athens to Augusta, Georgia. The rail service increased commerce and served to activate economic growth in Athens (Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974; Reap, 1985; Thomas, 1992; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

Slavery was considered intrinsic to the economic success of Athens due to the mills, railroad, and agricultural needs at the time. For example, the 1805 tax digest reported that 1,143 enslaved persons resided in Clarke County and this number grew to 4, 709 by 1830; at that time the enslaved composed almost half of the total population, which was 10,176 (Hynds, 1974). The town's economic growth was tied closely to the presence of The University of Georgia, manufacturing companies, mills, plantations, and the Georgia Railroad, all of whom benefitted economically from the institution of slavery (Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974; Reap, 1985; Thomas, 1992; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

The growth of the enslaved population gravely concerned white residents of Athens, and a variety of ordinances were therefore established in 1817 to regulate their behavior. For example, merchants were fined for providing liquor to the enslaved, constables were ordered to disperse gatherings of five or more enslaved persons outside of their masters' lots, and the enslaved would automatically receive ten lashes for disobeying any order given to them by a white person. Enslaved people were not permitted to engage in any form of educational activities, such as learning to read, or they would be punished. However, they were more often whipped than jailed so that they could continue working. (Coleman, 1968; Hynds, 1974).

Athenians in power exerted social control over the enslaved in order to maintain the growth of wealth within the community. Many of them strongly opposed abolition. Local newspapers would emphasize the "virtues" of slavery; one newspaper stated that "Negroes did

better personally and were certainly more productive when working as slaves" (Coleman, 1968, p. 16). Most Athenians were decidedly pro-slavery, supported the Southern secession from the United States, and participated in the Confederate government. Slavery remained in Athens throughout the Civil War, even after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 (Coleman, 1968; Thurmond & Hester, 2001). Athenians rallied in support for the Confederacy to maintain the town as an economic, transportation, and communication center (Coleman, 1968; Hynd, 1974; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

Social control of the enslaved increased exponentially during the Civil War. For example, those who were enslaved could not roam about town, hire horses or other forms of transportation, or travel any distance without specifying location and length of time, or else they faced 39 lashes; nor were they allowed to serve as a clerk or keep a grocery store (Coleman, 1968). Although many social restrictions were placed upon the enslaved, they often conjointly worked with European Americans at the manufacturing companies or at the railroad. However, their owners were paid for services provided. Enslaved persons were even forced to help the Confederacy in a variety of ways, such as by fortifying cities (Coleman, 1968; Hynd, 1974; Thomas, 1992).

After the end of the Civil War, many freed people congregated in shanty houses built along the outskirts of Athens, near the Oconee River. During the Reconstruction Era, freed people in Athens experienced a growth in civil rights and educational opportunities. For example, two freed men from Athens were elected to the Georgia legislature in 1868, but were quickly expelled by white Southern elitists. Southern politicians and the Klu Klux Klan briefly muted the political voice of freed people, until Madison Davis, a politician and former enslaved person, was appointed by President Chester A. Arthur as Athens' first African American

postmaster, from 1882-1886. Following him, Monroe B. Morton, better known as "Pink"

Morton, was appointed by President William McKinley as Athens' second African American

postmaster, from 1897-1902. Pink Morton was not only one of the wealthiest African Americans

in the South, he was also nationally recognized as a leader in the Republican Party until Jim

Crow Laws came into effect across the South, which again restricted political rights for African

Americans (Hester, 2012; Thomas, 1992; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

Although civil rights for freed people were rolled back at the end of the Reconstruction

Era, a flourishing African American community had already been established in Athens. Almost

immediately, freed slaves expressed a desire to be educated. Thurmond & Hester (2001). in "A

Story Untold," describe the educational development of African Americans in Athens since the

procurement of their freedom at the end of the Civil War. Athens, in the past, housed a multitude

of African American schools that sought to uplift the race. For example, Lucius Henry Holsey, a

freed man, founded Paine College and worked diligently to ensure African Americans' access to

education. He was not alone within the Athens community, and prior to the integration of

educational institutions in 1970, there were a variety of African American schools. These

schools included Heard University, the Methodist School, Jeruel Academy-Union Baptist

Church, Hyman Liana School and Home, Rosa Smith Normal School, several county schools,

Judia C. Jackson Harris School, and the city schools. An abundance of educational opportunities

existed for African American Athenians at the turn of the 20th century (Thomas, 1992; Thurmond

& Hester, 2001).

Additionally, a multitude of African American Athenians achieved success in a variety of

occupations during the early 1900s. There were African American Athenian physicians, such as

Drs. Donnarell Green and Blanche B.S. Thompson, who provided quality medical services to all

residents of Athens. Athens also produced a famous African American composer, Hall Johnson,

who achieved national acclaim for his musical talent. There were also prominent African

American journalists, Col. William Pledger and William Henry Heard, who published

newspapers targeting Athens' African American community (Thomas, 1992; Thurmond &

Hester, 2001).

African American Athenians had also established a commercial center in downtown

Athens, referred to as the "Hot Corner" (Thomas, 1992). Here stood the Morton building,

developed by prominent business owner and politician Pink Morton. The Morton Building was a

center for "black commercial, financial, professional, and social life," and it continues to

maintain an important historical and social role in the lives of African American Athenians today

(Thomas, 1992, p.163). The Morton Building housed the E.D. Harris Drug Store, run by Drs.

W.H. Harris and Blanche B.S. Thompson. This was a place where African Americans could

access medical services and pharmaceuticals. The Morton Building also contained a two-story

opera house where the likes of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington came to perform. Thus, a

thriving African American community existed in Athens until the passage of Jim Crow laws that

further rolled back civil and political rights, which negatively impacted the economic stability of

African American Athenians (Thomas, 1992; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

Approximately 26% of the total population in Athens makes less than $25,000.00 per

year. Poverty impacts the educational climate of young African American women attending one

of Athens-Clarke County's three high schools: Cedar Shoals High School, Clarke Central High

School, and Classic City High School. After a thorough review of data, it became evident that

the majority of students attending those schools are African Americans who are living in poverty

(U.S. News Week and World Report, 2016). According to U.S. News Week and World Report (2016), on average, 55% of all students identified as being African American, 20% identified as Hispanic, and 21% identified as European American. Thus, 75% of students who attended one of the three public high schools in Athens-Clarke County belonged to a racial minority group. According to U.S. News Week and World Report (2016), on average, 70% of Athens-Clarke County high school students identified as being "economically disadvantaged,"which may have impacted their college preparedness since only 19% of students district-wide, tested as college ready.

The Georgia Department of Education (2014) reported that 65% of African American Georgians graduate from high school compared to 80% of European Americans, 83% of Pacific Islanders, 83% of Asian Americans, 64% of Hispanics, and 67% of American Indians. Graduation rates for African Americans who resided in Athens were better than the state average for Clarke Central and Cedar Shoals, but outrageously low for Classic City High School (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

Cedar Shoals High School reported a 69% African American graduation rate compared to 66% for Hispanics and 71% for European Americans (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Clarke Central High reported a 68% graduation rate for African Americans, 67% for Hispanics, and 83% for European Americans (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Classic City High School reported a 59% graduation rate for European Americans, but only an 8% graduation rate for African Americans, who nonetheless compose 52% of students enrolled; graduation rates were unavailable for other racial groups. (Georgia Department of Education, 2014; U.S. News Week and World Report, 2015). Although educational outcomes for Hispanics are similar to those of African Americans in Athens, they were chosen to be excluded from this study due to

racial social antecedents, such as slavery, which continue to influence the racial dynamic of Athens today. It is uncertain exactly how many Athens-Clarke County public school graduates are African American women, but the current district-wide enrollment rate is 53% (U.S. News Week and World Report, 2016).

Although African American women have attained educational gains in recent years, national statistics report that on the high school level, they continue to fall behind women of all other races, except for American Indians (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). This may also be true of young African American women attending Athens-Clarke County public high schools. A college adviser at one of the three Athens-Clarke County high schools reported, based on his ground-work that a low number of young African American women go on to attend institutions of higher education. However, the school district does not collect data that might refute or support his claim. He also noted that the number is very low for those who go on to attend the University of Georgia based on his observations, efforts, and time spent preparing this population for college (D. Shelton, personal communication, August 24, 2015).

This college coach's view was verified by the University of Georgia's Office of Institutional Research (2015): their data showed that only 14 African American women who attended public high school in Athens-Clarke County in 2015 were enrolled as full-time freshman at the University of Georgia, compared to eight African American males, 57 European American males, and 55 European American women. The difference is staggering. However, the University of Georgia is a single case example of enrollment rates for young African American women, and does not represent all higher educational institutions due to the stringent acceptance standards set by this prestigious, Research I University. This study, instead, seeks to

explore participants' desire and efforts to attend any institution of higher education, including technical schools.

The University of Georgia provides one example of the racially unequal nature of many university systems and it highlights the disparities that exist within higher education. Thus, the purpose of this study is to describe the risk factors experienced by young African American women living in Athens, Georgia. Additionally, this research seeks to explore what factors lead to resilience in this population. Finally, an examination of risk and resilient factors, as they interact to affect higher educational aspiration, will be described.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

More scholarship is needed to address the unique challenges, including poverty, faced by young African American women living in an institutionally racist, sexist, and classist society as it pertains to their psychosocial and educational development. Currently, there is a lack of research and its associated scholarship that focuses on the juxtaposition of the varying forms of discriminations, and the experiential risks these factors create for young African American women attending public school (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Partee, 2015; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Nationally, graduation rates at the high school levels are lower for African American women than all other groups, except for American Indians (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). More specifically, African American women as a group perform poorly on college entrance exams, which hinders their admittance to institutions of higher education (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Also, within these public school environments, young African American women often encounter false stereotypes, such as the "loud mouth", "the jezebel", or "the pregnant teen", which leads to higher rates of disciplinary actions, such as suspensions or expulsion

(Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Smith-Evan et al., 2014).

The overrepresentation of African American Athenians living in poverty may act as a potential barrier for those young women wishing to attend institutions of higher education, as poverty is correlated with poor educational outcomes (HCM Strategists, 2010, Partee, 2015; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Young African American women living below the poverty line often attend failing public schools with poor facilities that employ uncertified teachers, use outdated textbooks, and have limited funds for extracurricular activities (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Kelly, 2015; Smith-Evan et al., 2014). Also, these public high schools are often informally segregated, causing some teachers to be influenced by pervasively "racist" and "sexist" stereotypes, negatively impacting their ability to adequately educate this population (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Kelly, 2015; Smith-Evan et al., 2014).

Additionally, a lack of literature exists reflecting the prevalence of poverty in Athens, Georgia and its impact on the community as a whole. In order to determine what studies, if any exist pertaining to this topic, a multi- search of 130 databases was conducted using the University of Georgia's (UGA) online library system. The search terms applied were "Athens, Georgia" and "poverty". Only one article was retrieved from search attempts that examined poverty in Athens, Georgia: it was written by Ockech et al. (2013) and entitled "Economic Recession and Coping with Poverty: A Case Study of Athens, Georgia". However, this study examined the impact of poverty on all racial groups in Athens, Georgia, and did not specifically address the experiences of African Americans (Okech et al., 2013). In order to elicit more literature, another multi-search was conducted using only the terms "Athens, Georgia". Each

article was pursued to see if any discussed poverty as it pertains to Athens, Georgia. This search failed to produce any further research and/or literature relevant to poverty in Athens, Georgia.

A search was then conducted on the Google Scholar website, using the terms "Athens, Georgia" and "poverty". This search failed to produce any research articles relevant to poverty and its implications on the socio-economic climate of Athens, Georgia. In addition to the lack of research relevant to poverty in Athens, it was also difficult to locate demographics that delineate poverty by race. In October 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau had statistics that demarcated poverty by race in Athens, Georgia, but that information disappeared when they updated their site in December, 2015. In order to obtain the needed statistics, this researcher contacted the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia; that source provided a link to their "Athens-Clarke County Guide", which includes a variety of racial demographics. However, after the researcher contacted multiple parties, including the Georgia Department of Labor, it became clear that no statistics are available to the public regarding the unemployment rate of African American Athenians.

Thus, this research intends to fill gaps that exist in the literature. First by providing a forum where young African American women could narrate their lived experiences of potential risk factors that exist within their homes, schools and communities. Secondly, this study will examine the juxtaposition of racism, classism, and sexism and their impact on the psychosocial and educational development of young African American women. Factors that promote resilience in this population will also be explored. Finally the interaction of these factors will be analyzed to assess their impact on higher educational aspiration of the population under study.

Through the implementation of this study, public school personnel might be encouraged to think critically about how they approach, teach, and help young African American women on

their educational journeys. The narratives shared by these young women might encourage Athens-Clarke County to better intervene positively with young African American women in efforts to ensure their educational success. As such, this study may serve to improve the educational experiences of students in similar circumstances as the study participants, while also helping to promote higher educational aspiration. See the section "Practice Implications" for further discussion on this topic.

Additionally, a clear gap exists in the number of studies that examine poverty, its prevalence and impact, in Athens, Georgia. That gap will be filled by adding to the almost non-existent literature related to this topic. More specifically, knowledge will be enhanced related to the influence of poverty, partnered with the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism on the lived experiences of young African American women. As of yet, no study has been done to examine the implications of poverty on African Americans living in Athens, Georgia. Finally narrative accounts from young African American women living in poverty will be described.

Research Questions

The goal of this research endeavor was to help develop a storied understanding of how family, community, and school risk and resilient factors impact this population's higher educational aspiration (or ambition). Co-relatively, the study aimed to highlight what factors promoted resilience for young black women. Three corresponding research questions were identified as: 1) What are the family, community, and school risk factors that impede higher educational aspiration of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town? 2) What are the identified factors that promote resilience in this population, and 3) How do both risk and resilience factors interact to impact individuals' higher educational aspiration?.

Practice Implications

The experiences of these young women might shed light on the impact of institutional and environmental risk factors, such as racism or poverty, and how they perceive those factors as impeding their academic success. This study can serve to positively impact the secondary educational climate of young African American women attending public school, by informing school social work interventions that buffer risk factors. In order to better serve youth, school social workers must acknowledge the existence of systematic risk factors when working with students in order to ameliorate their impact. According to Joseph et al. (2010) and Dinecola et al. (2015), school social workers have a duty to advocate on behalf of African American students attending "failing public schools". Social workers need to take on leadership roles, conduct thorough assessments of the school environment, and advocate for structural reform in schools by articulating a position in curriculum development and instruction. These social work-led reformations must occur to establish an environment that better meets the needs of African American students living in poverty (Ayasse & Stone, 2015; Dinecola et al., 2015; Joseph et al., 2010; Powers, 2010).

Research has also shown that the presence of social workers and their corresponding interventions are associated with positive educational outcomes. For example, research conducted by Sale and Kryah (2012), demonstrated that African American at-risk youth benefitted from an after-school program implemented by licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs). These students made educational gains and showed an increase in feelings of self-worth and positive behaviors after their participation in the program (Sale & Kryah, 2012). Additionally research indicated that the presence of school social workers is associated with higher graduation rates even after controlling for poverty. The presence of social workers

improved capacity building within schools and communities through social work's ecological approach to interventions and the broad range of services they provided (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Alvarez et al., 2013; McKay et al., 2011; Sale & Kryah, 2012: Tan et al., 2015).

Social workers possess a broad range of skills that can promote capacity building within educational environments and the communities where students live. School social workers often act as the bridge between the school and community. They also tend to approach students and their families through a strengths-based perspective, which helps enhance the educational experience of at-risk youth. Due to this bridge between schools and the community, school social workers are knowledgeable about available resources to assist families in need (Ayasse & Stone, 2010; McKay et al., 2010).

Social workers have also become keen advocates and intrinsic to the development and creation of a Response to Intervention (RIT) framework and its implementation, which is referred to as Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) and is now being implemented in schools throughout the nation. PBIS is a school-wide intervention, based upon evidenced-based practices. PBIS interventions are developed in a consistent manner, however, the interventions are specialized to the school choosing to utilize the program. PBIS identifies a five-step process to ensure interventions are catered to the school where they are implemented: 1) Collection of data and identification of the problem, 2) creation of intervention, 3) implementation of intervention, 4) monitoring of progress, and 5) review and revision of services. Schools then apply a three-tier interventional approach, which includes school-wide (tier 1), selective small group (tier 2), and individualized support (tier 3) (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010; Flannery et al., 2014; Sabatino et al., 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2003).

School social workers often engage in all five steps of the process and many times are tasked with the implementation of tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3 interventions. Social workers are also continually involved in evaluating these interventions and their effectiveness. Research showed that PBIS provides structure and support to ensure positive outcomes for youth. Netzel and Eber (2003) found that after an urban school district in Illinois implemented PBIS for one year, they experienced a 22% reduction in overall suspensions. Other schools saw a significant decrease in behavioral problems, an increase in positive youth behaviors, and improved interactions between schools and their communities (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010; Flannery et al., 2014; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Sabatino et al., 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2003).

Like past research, this study may support the usage of school social workers to address the systematic challenges experienced by youth of color living in poverty. Additionally, this study may encourage Athens-Clarke County School District to consider implementing PBIS in order to improve the educational climate of their schools. Information provided by this study, can inform the creation of PBIS interventions catered to the unique needs of students, and particularly young African American women, attending one of the Athens-Clarke County high schools. Lastly, this study will draw attention to the need for more school social workers to acknowledge and help mitigate the challenges created by an impoverished community here in Athens, Georgia.

Theoretical Foundation

This study will apply critical race feminism (CRF) as its primary, and contemporary risk and resilience theory as a secondary theoretical framework. The combining of CRF with contemporary risk and resilience theory was necessitated to account for adversity created by institutional discrimination. CRF grew from critical race theory (CRT) to address the gendered

limitations of that theory. Like CRT, CRF recognizes that racism is embedded into the social functioning of American society in a way that typically disadvantages people of color, while privileging European Americans. Therefore, CRF theorists emphasize the juxtaposition of race, class, and gender as institutional mechanisms that mire women of color at the bottom of the social stratosphere (Crenshaw, 2003; Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Houh & Kalsem; 2015; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Wing, 2003).

CRF suggests that women of color are marginalized more severely than any other groups. This is largely in part because racism, classism, and sexism intersect to legally and politically disenfranchise African American women. For example, African American women often lose civil court cases, as attention is focused on either gender or race, while not considering both variables simultaneously (Crenshaw, 2003; Childers-Mckee & Hytten, 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Houh & Kalsem, 2015; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Wing, 2003). One example is the civil case DeGraffenreid v. General Motors (1977), where the court ruled in favor of the defendant on the basis that although no African American women had been hired, General Motors had hired both European American women and African American males as employees; therefore it decided that no racial or gender discrimination had occurred (Crenshaw, 2003). CRF theory posits that African American women face daily encounters within a societal structure that disadvantages them due to the institutional juxtaposition of racism, classism, and sexism (Crenshaw, 2003; Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Houh & Kalsem, 2015; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Wing, 2003).

A theoretical combination was necessitated in order to fully account for the varying types of risk factors, including the intersection of institutional discrimination, existing in the lived experiences of young African American women. Contemporary risk and resilience theory recognizes that adversity, or risks, may exist as internal and external processes intrinsic to youth development, but does not account for social oppression, such as institutionalized racism (Masten, 2001: Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Rutter, 2012; Ungar et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2013). Resilience or a young person's ability to overcome risk factors that threaten their development is another relevant principle associated with this theory. Resilience is also viewed as a common phenomenon that can be achieved by any youth if given adequate support from functioning social systems (Masten, 2001; Masten, 2011; Masten, 2014). Additionally, contemporary risk and resilience theorists acknowledge that external systems within the immediate environment of youth may promote or hinder their ability to be resilient in the face of adversity. Thus, environments may enhance resilience and provide a mechanism for positive educational outcomes (Coll et al., 1996; Masten, 2001; Masten, 2011; Stanley, 2009; Ungar et al., 2013)

It was important to combine CRF with risk and resilience theory, in order to account for the institutional juxtaposition of race, class, and gender as risk factors intrinsic to the psychosocial and educational development of young African American women. Risk and resilience theory was also applied, as it acknowledges immediate risk factors within homes, communities, and schools, while also establishing a means to examine the resilient nature of young African American women.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The high prevalence of poverty in Athens, along with the overrepresentation of impoverished African American Athenians, creates a socio-economic structure that disadvantages young African American women. Poverty, arguably has an association with students' public high school functioning in Athens, since on average 70% of them identified as "economically disadvantaged" and only 19% tested as college ready (U.S. News Week and World Report, 2016). Per the University of Georgia (2015), approximately 36% of African Americans in Athens live below the poverty line, although they compose only 27.7% of the population. Young African American women in Athens, the subjects under study, often live in poverty and attend public high schools that fail to prepare them for college. This suggests that poverty's pervasiveness in Athens may have an impact on educational aspiration and economic mobility, as poverty tends to be cyclical and negatively correlated with attainment of a higher educational degree (HCM Strategists, 2010; Hollifield-Hoyle & Hammons, 2015; Partee, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to help provide narrative accounts that highlight environmental risk factors, such as poverty, experienced by young African American women living in Athens, Georgia. More specifically, this study will explore how those factors influence higher educational aspiration. This study will also focus on the resilient nature of these young women despite the hardships caused by poverty, racism, and sexism. To understand why and how these educational barriers came to exist, one must examine the historical and contemporary roots of oppression for African Americans and their families. This chapter will thus provide a

thorough review of pertinent literature to contextualize the impact of past and current racial persecution on the lived experiences of the study population.

In order to establish an in-depth understanding of how poverty came to be pervasive and ever so challenging for young African American women, this chapter will first examine national and local statistics that delineate poverty, income, unemployment, and education by race. Then, an appraisal of pertinent literature related to the social implications associated with the end of the Reconstruction Era, and how it led to a welfare system that perpetuates and feminizes poverty for African Americans, will be noted. There will also be a discussion of the present and past nature of African American families, and a description of African American women, including content relevant to their psychosocial and educational development from childhood to adulthood. Lastly, this chapter will conclude by offering a justification for critical race feminism (CRF) as the primary theoretical framework, while also describing why contemporary risk and resilience theory was chosen as a supplemental theory.

African Americans and Poverty

The social antecedents of this study, such as institutional slavery, the end of the Reconstruction Era, *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, Jim Crow laws, and racist social welfare policies are relevant today as their remnants maintain racial disparities for African Americans living in the United States. For example, per the U. S. Census Bureau (2015), a disparate number of African Americans live below the poverty line compared to European Americans. Approximately 14.8% of all Americans are impoverished; however, a disproportionate 26.2% of African Americans lived below the poverty line compared to 12.7% of European Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Except for American Indian and Alaskan Natives, African

Americans have the highest poverty rates in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), as shown in Table 2.1.

The income-to-poverty ratio categorizes poverty rates by showing the dollar amount by which a family or individual's income falls below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This income-to-poverty ratio specifies poverty into four categories: those whose income is 50%, 125%, 150%, and 200% below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). African Americans are over-represented in all four income-to-poverty ratio categories, suggesting that a disproportionate number of them live in poverty compared to all other racial groups. Additionally, 49.3% of African Americans were categorized in the 200% income-to-poverty ratio category, indicating that nearly half of them with incomes below the poverty line, live in severe poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Only one group, Hispanics, is lower as shown in Table 2.2.

Additionally, racial inequality characterizes median household income in the United States. The overall median income for all Americans is $54,462; however, this number is skewed by European American and Asian American households. For example, the median income for Asian Americans is $74,287 and for European Americans is $66,256. This number significantly decreases for Hispanic households, whose median income is $42,491, and more so for African Americans who have a median household income of $35,398. Based on these statistics, the average African American is making almost $30,000 less, or almost half of what the average European American earns (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), as seen in Table 2.3.

In December of 2015, African American unemployment rates were also disproportionately higher at 8.4%, than those of European Americans at 4.5% and Asian Americans at 4% (United States Department of Labor Bureau, 2015). Racial disparities also

exist regarding higher educational attainment. Per the U.S. Department of Education (2015),

22% of African Americans had obtained a bachelor's degree in 2014, compared to 41% of

European Americans, and 61% of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders. Disparities also exist

regarding graduate education, as only 4% of African Americans had obtained a master's degree

or higher compared to 9% of European Americans, and 18% of Asian Americans/Pacific

Islanders (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). As higher education is associated with

economic mobility, these disparate educational trends may suggest the perpetuation of higher

poverty rates for African Americans, and vice versa (Hout, 2012; Partee, 2015; Ravitch, 2013).

Table 2.1
National Poverty Rate

Percent of People Living Below the Poverty Line in the United States	
Total	14.8%
European Americans	12.7%
Asian Americans	12%
Hispanics	23.6%
African Americans	26. 2%

Note: Data retrieved from U.S. Census Bureau (2015)

Table 2.2
Percentage of People Living in Severe Poverty

Percentage of People living 200% Below the Poverty Line	
Total	33.4%
European Americans	30.5%
Asian Americans	27.8%
Hispanics	51.6%
African Americans	49. 3%

Note: Data retrieved from U.S. Census Bureau (2015)

Table 2.3
Median Income

Median Household Income in the United States	
Total	$54, 462
Asian Americans	$74, 287
European Americans	$66, 256
Hispanics	$42, 491
African Americans	$35, 398

Note: Data retrieved from U.S. Census Bureau (2015)

African Americans and Poverty in Athens, Georgia

Racial inequity exists in Athens, Georgia, and has a significant impact on its socioeconomic structure. Poverty, overall, is disproportionately higher for all groups living in Athens than both the national and state averages. Although Athens is the location of the state's flagship university, the University of Georgia, only three out of the 159 counties within Georgia have a higher percentage of people living in poverty. Approximately, 120,938 people live in Athens, Georgia, and of that number, 65.5% identify as European American, 27.7% as African American, 10.8% as Hispanic, and 4.4% as Asian Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Approximately 34.9% of the European American population lives below the poverty line, compared to 36% of African Americans (University of Georgia, 2015). Based upon population percentages, this would suggest that overall, a disproportionate number of African Americans are living in poverty compared to European American Athenians (University of Georgia, 2015).

After examining pertinent data, it became apparent that social disparities exist regarding median annual income. The yearly median overall income in Athens, GA is $33,846, with European Americans having the highest at $39,097 and African Americans having the lowest at $25,269. Per the University of Georgia (2015), overall, 19.7% of Athenian families make less than $10,000 per year. Specifically, only 17.6% of European American families make less than $10,000 per year compared to African American families, who have the highest rate at 24.9%.

This suggests that almost one-fourth of African American Athenian families live below the poverty line and experience severe poverty, as they make less than $10,000 per year.

Recent reports show that 31.6% of children aged 0-17 live below the poverty line in Athens, and approximately 19.2% of all families in Athens are impoverished. A closer examination of the data revealed that African American families, at 32.1%, are almost three times more likely to live in poverty than their European American counterparts, at 12.5%. These racial inequalities increased further for female-headed homes, as 29.4% of European American female-headed families live in poverty, compared to almost double that for African American female-headed homes, at 50.5%. This suggests that a higher percentage of African American children are being raised below the poverty line than European American Athenian children. Additionally, African American female-headed families have the highest poverty rate of all groups living in Athens, Georgia (University of Georgia, 2015).

As shown, high rates of poverty exist within Athens. Partee (2015) makes a distinction between relative and absolute poverty and suggests that absolute poverty has established an African American underclass. Those African Americans living in absolute poverty are extremely disadvantaged, overwhelmed, and forced to live on government assistance due to a lack of employable skills and/or availability of viable employment (Partee, 2015). Hopps et al. (1995) and Partee (2015) suggest that strategies, such as viewing overwhelmed clients as shareholders, creating jobs, increasing access to education, and engaging the entire community in policy reform are needed to elevate households out of poverty. Further, Hopps et al. (1995) stated that "the opportunity to participate in productive work environments stems from one's educational experience, which itself is highly influenced by one's parents' work, residence, and access to opportunity for achievement" (p. 30). As poverty is often cyclical and negatively

correlated with higher education attainment, these factors may have an impact on the psychosocial and educational development of young African American women living in Athens.

After the Reconstruction Era

It is important to consider historical antecedents to understand and contextualize why racial and income inequality exists in Athens, Georgia and throughout the United States. The history of the United States has established a racial climate and social structure that has disadvantaged certain racial minority members since the institution of slavery. Although, newly freed people's rights were expanded after the American Civil War and during the Reconstruction Era, this was quickly halted by Southern political elites through a variety of methods. Both violence and racially oppressive legislation were enacted to rollback liberties gained by freed people following the end of the Reconstruction Era (Foner, 2015; Graff, 2016; McAdam, 1999; Thurmond & Hester, 2001)

Due to the North's abandonment of the Reconstruction Era and failed efforts to establish Republican political clout in the South, control of the political realm was granted to a Southern Democratic party, determined to maintain white supremacy and hegemony through oppressive policies. Shortly after the Reconstruction Era ended, only a total of 1,027,675 African Americans lived in the northern portion of the United States. The number of African Americans living outside Southern borders failed to constitute an electorate with the capacity to establish a pro-black legislative agenda or combat white elitist sentiments. Thus, the end of the Reconstruction Era led to the disenfranchisement of African Americans throughout the United States, and particularly in the South, where violence and legislative measures were enacted to mute an African American political voice (Foner, 2015; Graff, 2016; McAdam, 1999; Tischauser, 2012; Vazzano, 2006).

Violence and brute force, such as lynching, effectively deterred African American political involvement in the South. Wells-Barnett (2002) documented over 10,000 acts of lynching during the 30 years following the Civil War. During this time, Southern governments also implemented Jim Crow laws that legally enacted *de jure* segregation. Southern political elites created Jim Crow laws to define, control, and impose social practices on both African Americans and European Americans. The ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and the passing of Jim Crow Laws provided legislative means for European Americans to oppress African Americans through discriminatory practices that segregated the population and disadvantaged African Americans under the pretense of "separate but equal". Thus, the end of the Reconstruction Era established a federal political environment that was decidedly against civil rights for its African American citizens (Edwards & Bennet, 2010; Finley, 2008; Graff, 2016; Johnson, 2010; Tischauser, 2012).

Discriminatory federal action that occurred between 1876 and 1930 initially led to African Americans feeling powerless and fearful of group action. However, Northern industrial entrepreneurs set the stage for insurgency when they bourgeoned African Americans to migrate north for the purposes of cheap labor, creating an urban African American class (Drake & Clayton, 1945). During the industrialization period, urban African Americans were exposed to many challenges, such as menial-waged jobs, legalized discrimination, violent attacks, and substandard work conditions. The continued discrimination faced by the African American urban class helped motivate and establish a desire for political clout, resources, and set the stage for insurgency during the period from 1931 to 1954 (Bowles et al., 2016; Bloom, 2015; Bloom & Martin, 2013; McAdam, 1999).

African American insurgency during this time can be attributed to a variety of factors: 1) Rising expectations caused by the economic and occupational improvements that occurred prior to the Civil Rights Movement, 2) relative deprivation or failure to obtain equitable financial gains experienced by European Americans, and 3) the J-curve, otherwise known as the "rise and drop" where increased benefits for African Americans were followed by a sharp reversal of gains. The mobilization of resources and the expansion of external supports through church groups, colleges, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), inspired the emergence of protest activity from African Americans across the country. Between the period of 1955-1960, a total of 487 protests, not including activities initiated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, or the Black Panther Party, were organized to ensure equal rights for African American citizens (McAdam, 1999; Bloom, 2015; Bloom & Martin, 2013).

However, Dr. Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party also played major roles in activating the fight for civil rights as they organized and inspired fellow African Americans. Individuals, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., helped to publicize protest strategies, such as marches, boycotts, and strikes. Variations existed between the leaders and organizations fighting for civil rights, but the movement gained national support, which placed pressure on politicians, and President Johnson to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bloom, 2015; Bloom & Martin, McAdam, 1999; Tischauser, 2012). Although African Americans have achieved gains in civil rights, the political climate has maintained a racially unjust federal social welfare system in the United States (Brown, 2013; Constance-Higgins, 2011; Piven & Cloward, 1971; Quadagno, 1996).

Social Welfare Policy and Racism

Some contend that socio-economic disparities for African Americans, such as high poverty and unemployment rates, are associated with educational factors; however, evidence suggests that inequalities are also a result of the structure and implementation of social welfare policies in the United States since their enactment. It has been suggested that welfare racism existed and persists even today because it establishes political, social, and economic clout for the European American population in general, but particularly for politicians and other elites. Many contend that racism has influenced the structural development of the United States welfare state and its implementation since its very onset (Constance-Higgins, 2011; Myrdal, 1962; Neuback &Cazenave, 2001; Quadagno, 1996; Reese,2001); Trattner, 1999).

The 'panic of 1893', leading to depression throughout the 1890s, was one of the most significant financial crises in the history of the United States. This depression was caused by wheat crop deprivation and the United States' dependency on foreign trade. As a result of the panic, stock prices declined, 500 banks closed, 15,000 businesses went under, and numerous farms ceased operation. The unemployment rate reached a high of 12.4%, leaving much of the population in destitution and without welfare assistance from the federal government (Dupont, 2009; Hoag, 2012; Pierce, 2007). The creation of a federal welfare state was spearheaded by 'the panic of 1893', along with the industrialization and urbanization of America. Piven and Cloward (1971) argue that industrialization led to a variety of hardships associated with immigration and migration, such as the dehumanization of work, dilution of skills, a fresh underprivileged class, class polarity, and cyclical recessions. They also contend that industrialization led to great profit-making for entrepreneurs, establishing inequality leading to pauperism. This set a stage for mass destitution during the Great Depression (Piven & Cloward, 1971; Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1965).

In the United States, social welfare policy and its associated relief, were first offered nationally during the Great Depression, as economic distress led to catastrophe throughout the nation, with the masses were starving, unemployed, and homeless. Additionally, many local governments that had provided relief to the poor went bankrupt, compelling the federal government to act. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President on a campaign platform that promised federal implementation of relief through governmental establishment and regulation of programs aimed at alleviating mass destitution. President Roosevelt and the Democratic Party fought to create The New Deal, a series of domestic programs, which included the signing of the Social Security Act, the Emergency Relief Act, and the creation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) (Day & Schiele, 2013; Piven & Cloward, 1971; Trattner, 1999; Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1965). This was the first time in United States history that the national government took responsibility for the appropriation of relief using federal funding for the entire nation.

Although the New Deal was a progressive shift in American politics, many of the policies created were considered to contain racist characteristics. Franklin Delano Roosevelt feigned fidelity to African Americans, but his allegiance was slim and was considered mostly symbolic in nature. Racial inequity was also interwoven throughout the New Deal Programs, including the Social Security Act of 1935, which provided old-age insurance and unemployment compensation for industrial workers. Agricultural and domestic workers, predominantly composed of African Americans, were excluded from receiving unemployment worker's compensation. These omissions to unemployment compensation were intentional, to appease Southern political elites into passing the Social Security Act, by ensuring federal cash assistance did not fall into the hands of poor Southern and African American laborers. This legislation forced many

agricultural workers, African American, European Americans, and others to labor at low wages (Brown, 2013; Fox 2012; Piven & Cloward, 1971; Quadagno, 1996; Trattner, 1999).

The Social Security Act also included two means-tested programs: 1) Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) and 2) Old-age assistance. These two social assistance programs required state expenditures to be matched by the federal government. Some contend that racism was entwined into the eligibility requirements and the amount of funds received through ADC, due to state discretion over this assistance program. For example, in 1939, Arkansas, a Southern state, provided $8.10 per month to needful families, while the Northern state of Massachusetts allocated $61.07 (Piven & Cloward, 1971, p. 116). Also, ADC enacted a rule of "no man in the house", which drove unemployed fathers away, in order for their families to receive necessary funds (Day & Schiele, 2013; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2000; Piven & Cloward, 1971; DiNitto & Cummins, 2007).

Racial and capitalistic attitudes were major determinants for which states would provide relief through ADC. A quantitative analysis of ADC dispersion found that "states were significantly more likely to restrict ADC eligibility where agricultural capitalism was an important part of the state's economy" (Reese, 2001, p. 99). That is, Southern states were more likely to cut ADC benefits due to gender and racial influences when faced with backlash than other states, due to their dependence upon cheap agricultural labor. States having a high population of African Americans were also more likely to restrict welfare eligibility than states with lower population numbers: "Nearly half of all U.S. states adopted various strict eligibility rules to purge the "undeserving poor" from their ADC rolls in the 1950s", including all states in the South (Reese, 2001, p. 66). This suggests that state dispersion of ADC benefits was

influenced by race, gender, location, and contingent upon agricultural needs for cheap labor. (Reese, 2001; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2000; Piven & Cloward, 1971).

Feminization of Welfare

Federal social welfare and its associated policies have been highly racialized in nature since they were first enacted during the Great Depression. The strict eligibility requirements of ADC, such as the "no-man-in-the-house" rule, have arguably influenced the feminization of poverty for African Americans and remains a contemporary social problem (Day & Schiele, 2013; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Piven & Cloward, 1971; Reese, 2001). The feminization of poverty for African American women has been a social issue since the onset of welfare provisions in the United States**.** Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) argue that children of African American women were often banned or removed from ADC polls based upon the notion that "suitable work" was available to "employable mothers" (pp. 57-58). African American mothers were temporarily made ineligible for ADC rolls and required to engage in seasonal agricultural work, most particularly during cotton-picking season. In the agricultural industry, the economic interests of European American famers were prioritized to prosper the white hegemony and force African Americans deeper into poverty (Constance-Higgins, 2011; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Reese, 2001).

In addition to agricultural influences, ADC benefits were restricted mostly for African Americans, but also other people of color, based upon pejorative moral and character judgements. These judgments reflected gendered racism and used controlling and damaging images to paint African American women as "undeserving poor" to deny them financial assistance, thus perpetuating poverty for African American women and their families. As Neubeck and Cazenave (2001)) point out, "children of color were less likely to be approved for

ADC by local welfare offices even when their families were as large or poor as families who were European American" (p.59). Gendered racism was interwoven into the dispersion of ADC by requiring African Americans, and other people of color, to labor for menial wages in place of welfare assistance (Constance-Higgins, 2011; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Reese, 2001).

In addition, families with an able-bodied father residing in the home were ineligible for ADC benefits. In some cases, unemployed fathers deserted their families when they were unable to gain employment to support them, so that their families might receive benefits. It is uncertain how many fathers deserted their families; nonetheless the reality was that families could not receive welfare if an able-bodied and unemployed man resided in the home. Households suspected of breaking this rule were subjected to surprise midnight raids by local social welfare workers, which were most often directed at African American families. Some researchers contend that ADC initiated the erosion of African American families and feminized poverty, as they were often targets of those raids, which in turn would cause the loss of necessary financial assistance (Constance-Higgins, 2001; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Reese, 2001).

By 1960, national ADC rolls had grown to more than three million people. The number of out-of-wedlock births exponentially increased following World War II, as did divorce and separation rates. Due to mounting caseloads and the growing belief that ADC discouraged marriage, the program was changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1962. AFDC included important modifications that were family-centered, such as extending coverage to married parents and allowing states to add unemployed parents to the rolls. However, these changes had little impact on family structure, as three-fourths of all applicants were either separated, divorced, or unmarried by 1971 (Day & Schiele, 2013; DiNitto & Cummins, 1997).

The structure of African American families became nationally topical, after Harvard professor and advisor to Lyndon B. Johnson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan published his controversial report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* Moynihan (1965) reported that the structure of African American families was crumbling due to high levels of unemployment for African American males and familial dependence on African American women's labor wages, which he referred to as a crisis. He found that African American males were 33% more likely to be unemployed than European American males. He also found that the number of African American broken homes increased as high unemployment rates for males trended upward (Moynihan, 1965). Although Moynihan brought national attention to the plight of African Americans, especially males, he did not highlight the impact racism had on employment, ADC eligibility, and its recently implemented reform, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (Bambara, 2005; Constance-Higgins, 2011).

AFDC, nevertheless, was a positive shift in welfare reform, as it eliminated the no-man-in-the-house rule and made families with one unemployed parent eligible for assistance. However, during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, federal regulations regarding AFDC were reduced, allowing states to become more restrictive in state distribution of welfare (Brown, 2013; Day & Schiele, 2013; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Partee, 2015; Reese, 2001). Welfare reform/legislation was once again enacted in 1996 through President Clinton's signing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA), which replaced AFDC, an entitlement program, with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a block grant to states. The shift from AFDC to TANF created a system of intergenerational poverty, rather than assisting those in need (Brown, 2013; Constance-Higgins, 2011; Day & Schiele, 2013; DiNitto & Cummings, 2007; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). TANF included a "family cap" that denied

further aid to recipients who had children while on welfare in an effort to prevent out-of-wedlock births. PRWORA also increased sanctions for recipients and limited who could receive government assistance. For example, pregnant teens, immigrants, and people refusing to work became ineligible to receive cash assistance under TANF (Brown, 2013; Constance-Higgins, 2011; Day & Schiele, 2013; DiNitto & Cummings, 2007; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001).

Several researchers contend that racism and sexism were embedded in the promotion and passing of PRWORA. Welfare critics made use of controlling stereotypical images that negatively depicted African American women as "Welfare Queens". Ronald Regan popularized the phrase, "welfare queen", during a 1976 campaign rally to garner support for his presidential election through the promotion of welfare reform (Black & Sprague, 2016; Reagan Foundation, 2010). Throughout his presidency, he utilized this controlling image to reinforce old racist sentiments, ensuring the restriction of welfare (Black & Sprague, 2016; Partee, 2015). Other politicians applied media outlets to paint African American women as lazy and not wanting to work; they also portrayed them as "jezebels", "mammies", and "hoochie-mommas" to garner support for welfare reform (Constance-Higgine, 2001; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Partee, 2015). Thus, many Americans were falsely led to believe that the typical welfare recipient was an "undeserving" African American woman.

In actuality, PRWORA restrictions served to perpetuate deep poverty for all those in need. For example, although the TANF caseload decreased by 63%, only half of "welfare leavers" were employed in 1999 and that fell to 42% in 2002 (DiNitto & Cummings, 2007, p. 63). This suggests that people leaving welfare remained impoverished as they were unable to procure work. Currently, African American women have the highest poverty rate of any group in the United States, at 26.5% (Center for American Progress, 2016).

African American Families

The psychological, physiological, and emotional impact of slavery had an everlasting impact on the development of the African American family. During the Middle Passage, and upon their arrival to America, enslaved people experienced severe brutality. Plantation owners enacted social control through varying degrees of vicious force, such as ear-cropping and beatings. Native Africans and their descendants were almost entirely severed from African culture by those that enslaved them. Additionally, marriage was predominantly illegal for the enslaved, although some plantation owners made exceptions. Thus, marriage during slavery was mostly outlawed and the notion of an enslaved family structure was discouraged by plantation owners. Those that did marry through secretive ceremonies, or who could obtain permission, were in constant risk of family dissolution since selling of the enslaved was a common practice and/or punishment used for social control (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Frazier, 1961; Millward, 2010; Moynihan, 1965; Wilkins et al., 2013).

During the 1960s, some scholars acknowledged that slavery has had a multigenerational and negative impact on the structure of African American families. However, this argument was used to attack African American families by portraying them as pathological. For example, some academics indicated that low-income African Americans failed to maintain a stable family structure due to the impact and remnants of slavery. African Americans were accused of being promiscuous, deviant, and lawless delinquents who have created a socio-economic problem through illegitimacy (Berger & Simon, 1974; Clark, 1989; Frazier, 1961; Moynihan, 1965; Rodman, 1968).

Opposition literature at that time, combatted the notion of African American families as "pathological." For example, Hill stated (1972), "In general, deviance among blacks is as

"abnormal" as it is among European Americans. The great majority of black families, for example, are not characterized by criminality, delinquency, drug addiction or desertion." (p.1). Some scholars suggested that the depiction of African American families as "disorganized" and/or "pathological" by writers and researchers focused on the minority, without acknowledging that most families were stable and functioning. Additionally, dominant mainstream values failed to reflect the African American experience, thus portraying African Americans as pathological (Aird, 2008; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1972; Hill, 1999; Stack, 1974; Wilkins et al., 2013).

To fully understand the African American family and its structure, one must account for its historical background, including its African roots that influence both culture and traditions. African families prior to slavery were highly stable and promoted functionality for the social betterment of the greater African community. The crippling and savage nature of slavery in the United States was highly destructive to African families. Thus, the nature of slavery in the United States manifested a different style of family for freed people at the end of slavery, since they carried with them the fragments of an inhumane past that fought against a stable African American family unit (Aird, 2008; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1972; Hill, 1999; Stack, 1974; Wilkins et al., 2013).

The legacy of slavery also created a social system that disadvantaged the African American family. Racism has been pervasive and systematic in every element of American society; both slavery and current discrimination must be accounted for when seeking to develop a true understanding of the African American family. Thus, the white hegemonic society is structured to disadvantage its African American members and their families, while also imposing white mainstream values. Despite challenges created by a racist society, African American

families have adapted through a highly organized set of patterned structures centered on co-habilitation, kinship, community-based sharing, elastic household boundaries, and life-long bonds to three-generational households (Aird, 2008; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Billingsley, 1968, Hill, 1972; Hill, 1999; Stack, 1974; Wilkins et al., 2013).

Thus, opposition scholars found African American families to be community-oriented, strong, stable, adaptable, equalitarian, and achievement-oriented. African American families also functioned as part of a complex social structure entrenched in a network of interdependent relationships that included kin, religious affiliation, and the wider community. African Americans in the past were highly functional and able to adapt despite the legacy of slavery and the racist nature of American society (Aird, 2008; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1972; Hill, 1999; Smith & Hattery, 2012; Stack, 1974; Wilkins et al., 2013).

Like in the past, African American families today continue to contend with false stereotypes and a structurally racist society that maintains social, economic, and political disadvantages. The current social structure of America is more complicated and challenging for African American families than in the past, as society has now adopted a "postracial" attitude, particularly since the election of the first African American, President Barack Obama. Smith and Hattery (2012) stated:

> A postracial society would be one which is devoid of racial preferences or discrimination. It does not mean that race would cease to exist or cease to have meaning. It would be characterized such that every decision we make as individuals and a society would be made without consideration of race (p. 168)

Currently in America, European Americans deny the impact of race, the privileges it creates for European Americans, and how racism and the denial of it negatively impacts

African American families. However, media coverage of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath in 2005, the unnecessary killings of African American males, and the under-representation of African Americans in the United States Senate would suggest anything but a postracial society (Boyd- Franklin, 2003; Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hill, 1999; Hollingsworth, 2013; Smith & Hattery, 2012).

African American families today, face a variety of issues created by the racially unjust structure of America's society and European America's denial of its existence. Boyd-Franklin (2003) posits that multigenerational encounters with a racially oppressive society have combined with African American racial and cultural heritage in a way that makes African American families unique from other families residing in the United States. The historical and current presence of a racially oppressive social structure in America has and continues to undermine the stability of African American families (Aird, 2008; Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hill, 1999; Smith & Hattery, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2013).

For example, African Americans in general have higher rates of out-of-wedlock births, incarceration, health problems, poverty, and youth involvement in child protective services and/or the juvenile justice system. Additionally, African American families tend to have lower household incomes and are more likely to be segregated despite socio-economic class than any other groups. African American children are also more likely to live in broken homes with higher rates of poverty and belong to a family whose income is considerably lower than other races. Additionally, African Americans experience higher rates of unemployment, low-wage jobs, and incarceration; all of which is interconnected with the racist social structure of the United States (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hill, 1999; Smith & Hattery, 2012).

These issues highlight the distressing impact of a multi-generational racially oppressive society that undercuts the stability of African American families. In essence, the challenges faced by African American families can be more accurately described as a problematic American social structure that intentionally hinders them, to maintain privileges for European Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hill, 1999; Hollingsworth, 2013; Smith & Hattery, 2012). Thus, society must change to support, rather than hinder the economic stability and mobility of African American families.

Many authors contend that the racially oppressive structure of society impacts all African American families, regardless of their income level. African American families, however, continue to demonstrate a multitude of strengths and high resiliency levels despite micro, mezzo, and macro discrimination. Low-income African American families show a strong academic orientation to elevate their status. African American families also demonstrate high aspirations for youth while promoting a strong racial identity, which helps to create harmony despite societal pressures. In addition, African American families possess flexible family roles that are strengthened by kinship bonds, spirituality, and connectedness to the larger community. In sum, African American families harbor qualities within the immediate family and their extended community that have allowed them to cope with and move beyond the many adversities established by a racist society (Aird, 2008; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Hill, 1999; Hollingsworth, 2013; Smith & Hattery, 2012).

Education of African Americans

As Lee (2005) states, "the quality of education for African- American students has been in a state of crisis since the close of the Civil War, when education of blacks became legal" (p. 46).

Slavery and white insurrection against the federal government's attempt to reconstruct the South

instituted educational barriers for African Americans immediately upon securing their freedom.

European Americans viewed educated African Americans, especially in the South, as a threat

and took special aims, sometimes violent in nature, to prevent their education. Following the end

of the Reconstruction Era, African American schools throughout the country often fell prey to

violent attacks against teachers, vandalism, scrutiny, lack of resources, and substandard facilities

(Moss, 2009; Rury & Hill, 2012; Thurmond & Hester, 2001).

Not until the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling, were schools forced to end *de*

jure segregation of schools. Prior to Brown v. Board of Education (1954), segregated schools

often deprived African American students of educational opportunities on par with European

American schools. However, the debilitation of this ruling centered on the emotional impact

segregation had on African American students and not the substandard facilities, lack of

resources, and/or dangers associated with attending African American schools. Thus, the

Supreme Court of the United States based its ruling on Brown v. Board of Education (1954) on

the psychological impact of segregation, informed by multiple studies conducted by Drs.

Kenneth and Mamie Clark, and not on the inequity that existed between African American and

European American schools (Kelly, 2012; Moss, 2009; Rury & Hill, 2012; Smith-Evans et al.,

2014).

Clark (1989) alluded to this reality in his influential piece *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of*

Social Power, originally published in 1965. He found that "school segregation in the South has,

for generations been supported by law; in the North, segregation has been supported by

community custom and indifference" (Clark, 1989, p.111). African American schools did not

receive the same federal financial support as European American schools, which led to inferior

quality of the education delivered in those schools (Clark, 1989; Moss, 2009; Rury & Hill, 2012). Clark (1989) suggested that the continuance of segregated schools would lead to "a school system of low academic standards and a second-class education for under-classed children" (p. 112).

As insinuated by Clark (1989) in 1965, segregated schools were found to be "separate, but unequal". The further African American students progressed in schools, the higher the discrepancy became between their education and that of European American students. Most students leaving African American high schools in urban areas were found to have inferior levels of achievement in both reading and mathematics. Lack of achievement was attributed, in part, to the judgmental and "racist" attitudes of educators, in addition to limited resources. Some European American teachers treated African American students as if they were uneducable, which led to a self-fulling prophecy. Thus, many African American students received a "second-rate" education from "racist" teachers in substandard environments, leading to their academic failures (Clark, 1989; Kelly, 2012; Monroe, 2016; Moss, 2009; Rury & Hill, 2012; Span, 2015).

In addition to Clark's influential research at the time, Coleman et al. (1966) conducted a study examining the educational outcomes of young African Americans. These researchers found that African American students were not benefitting from a public education. The longer they stayed in school, the further they fell behind other groups academically; this phenomenon was named the "cumulative deficit" (Coleman et al., 1966). The Coleman report (1966) initially made the claim that minority schools were not particularly unequal to their white counterparts, but this was refuted after extensive analysis of data by a group of Harvard professors, which was published in the book *On Equality of Education of Opportunity: Papers Deriving from the Faculty Seminar on the Coleman Report* (Mostseller & Moynihan, 1972).

Faculty at Harvard found that African American children did not sufficiently benefit from a public education and that the cumulative deficit was very much a reality, as African American students fell further behind as they progressed in public school. However, their findings suggested that the environment of minority schools was *the* contributing factor that led to educational failure. Within these environments, African American students felt as if they lacked control and were also highly impacted by European American teachers' affects, which were often influenced by racial attitudes. These school environments were decidedly unequal, which led to negative educational outcomes for African American youth during the 1960s and 1970s (Mosteseller & Moynihan, 1972).

Kenneth Clark (1989) originally conducted his research into segregated African American schools in 1954, but the educational climate he described could easily be applied today. "Historical and contemporary racism are symbolically linked to the institutions of schooling", and impact the quality of education received by African American students (Lee, 2005, p. 50). Most poor African American students continue to attend segregated public schools branded by disparities, including physical facilities, uncertified teachers, and limited funds. Racial inequality regarding education is too common; quality of public school education continues to correspond closely with skin color. *De facto* segregation has become the norm, and racial-minority public schools continue to lack equitable access to educational resources as do their European American counterparts (Kelly, 2012; Monroe, 2016; Span, 2015).

This is also the reality in Athens-Clarke County, where 75% of high school students belong to a minority compared to neighboring Oconee County High Schools, where 84% of students identify as European Americans (U.S. News Week, 2016). Tests scores showed that students attending Oconee County high schools had a higher average in math (2.9) and reading

(3.6) proficiency than Athens-Clarke County High School students, whose average score was 2.4 for math and 2.9 for reading (U.S. News Week, 2016). As suggested by many researchers, *de facto* segregation exists throughout the United States and in Athens-Clarke County, which is detrimental to students of color as they continue to receive unequal access to resources and educational opportunities (Kelly, 2012; Jackson et al, 2016; Kucsera et al., 2015; Monroe, 2016; Span, 2015)

Additionally, Gibson (2015) stated, "It has been well-documented that educational institutions have not been neutral sites when it comes to gender and racial socialization of students" (p. 199). Simpkins (2002) suggests that public schools tend to "give up" on their African American students (p. 1). These students are at risk for becoming "public school throwaway kids", or students that drop out of school or are expelled due to their schools' inability to educate them. Many teachers continue to exhibit the same "racist" attitudes toward African American students and treat them as uneducable to their disadvantage, as was noted in formative literature. Public schools also fail to account for the cultural, linguistic, and developmental differences apparent in African American students; nor do they consider the impact of adversity, poverty, or oppression. Research has suggested that society in general, and public schools specifically, fail to meet the needs of African American students (Brunious, 1998; Gibson, 2015; Jackson et al., 2016; Monroe, 2016; Simpkins, 2002).

African American Women

Women of color live differently than other females due to the influence of race, gender, and class identities, which directly impact their quality of life and social status. African American women, specifically, experience reality in a different way than European American women, due to the legacy of slavery and the intersection of race, class, and gender in the

structural organization of American society. African American women have been devalued by American society, since enslavement, and as a byproduct of the sexual exploitation that occurred during the years of slavery. European American males and females assigned enslaved women the role of accomplice, rather than admit that these women were being sexually assaulted and exploited. Sexual exploitation was utilized to meet the desires of white plantation owners, and also as a form of social control to terrorize women and encourage the breeding of more enslaved people (hooks, 1981; Frazier, 1966; Millward, 2010; Windsor et al., 2011).

It was during slavery that African American women were first labeled as sexually immoral and/or "prostitutes" by European American females, who viewed the enslaved as rivals. During this era, African American women were first branded as "jezebels", which has been maintained as a controlling image today to sustain their oppression. Thus, mass sexual exploitation of the enslaved initiated the devaluation of African American women, which was a deliberate maneuver by European Americans to sabotage their confidence, self-respect, and later financial stability (Bambara, 2005; Collins, 2000; Frazier, 1966; hooks, 1981; Millward, 2010; Neubeck &Cazenave, 2001; Windsor et al., 2011).

As mentioned previously, this devaluation was evident in the formulation of social welfare policies and their use of controlling images to portray African American women as "immoral" and "undeserving" of assistance. Controlling images of African American women continue today as a tactic to circumscribe their social, political, and economic mobility. As such, controlling images of African American women have been used since slavery and are still used today to provide ideological justification for race, class, and gender oppression through othering. These images also vary contingent upon the needs of white mainstream society. For example, the image of the "mammy" was created to justify the financial exploitation of African American

women through domestic labor. The mammy was then idealized as the perfect subservient African American who prioritized the needs of European American families. The "mammy" was also popularized to ensure cheap labor for European American households (Bambara, 2005; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Windsor et al., 2011).

Another controlling image commonly attributed to African American women is that of the matriarch, to suggest that they lack feminine qualities. This image was popularized by Moynihan's (1965) report, which suggested that African American women emasculated their males due to familial dependency on employment. This image has been utilized to support racial oppression by charging African American women, as the leading cause for the destabilization of African American families by discouraging males from leading the household. This image effectively diverted attention from an oppressively racist social system, by assigning blame to African American women for the high rates of unemployment of African American males (Bambara, 2005; Hill, 1999; Collins, 2000; Windsor et al., 2011).

A final controlling image attributed to African American women is that of the "Welfare Queen", which was initiated by President Ronald Reagan to institute social welfare reform (Black & Sprague, 2016; Regan Foundation, 2010). Per Collins (2000), the African American woman is "portrayed as being content to sit around and collect welfare, shunning on work and passing on her bad values to her offspring" (p.87). This image arose as African American women demanded equitable access to state services. It has also been effectively employed by politicians to garner support for the cutback of welfare expenditures by playing upon old racist attitudes. Politicians used the media to convey this negative stereotype of African American women to justify and pass welfare reform that ended AFDC and implemented the more restrictive TANF block program (Collins, 2000; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Neubeck &

Cazenave, 2001; Windsor et al., 2011). Thus, a variety of controlling images are attributed to African American women to actively maintain their oppression.

The usage of controlling images, historical antecedents (i.e., slavery), and the juxtaposition of racism and sexism in the United States have marginalized African American women differently and more severely than any other group. Racism and sexism are not mutually exclusive entities; they intersect in a way that mire women of color at the bottom of society. Mainstream America intentionally employs tactics, such as negative controlling images, to circumscribe African American women's ability to gain social and political power. Despite living in an intentionally derogatory society that intentionally seeks to disadvantage them intentionally, African American women demonstrate a high level of resilience and a multitude of strengths. For example, African American women are often self-supporting and able to maneuver through a racist society to ensure the survival of their children (Bambara, 2005; Collins, 2000; Isoke, 2013 Stack, 1974).

African American women demonstrate high levels of adaptability and apply a variety of strategies to ensure the survival of their families. Additionally, African American mothers routinely encourage their children and help them develop malleable skills to overcome oppression. African American women are also extremely oriented toward the elevation of the entire race. Walker (1983) referred to this in her womanist theory, which she described as African American women's ability to care for and work toward the survival of all African Americans. African American women in general provide support to other African Americans, not simply their immediate family, but the whole community through a variety of networks based upon reciprocity and caring, often placing communal needs in front of their own (Bambara, 2005; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Collins, 2000; Isoke, 2013; Stack, 1974; Walker, 1983).

In sum, African American women encounter the intersection of racism and sexism in a structurally unjust society every day. Society has often negatively portrayed African American women to justify and maintain their oppression. Despite the hostile social environment they confront daily, African American women demonstrate high levels of resiliency. They can adapt to harsh circumstances to ensure the survival of their families. African American women prioritize the needs of the entire community through incessant caring, organizational social networks, and application of resourcefulness.

Young African American Women

Erickson (1963) identifies eight stages that exist over a life span. The stage he associates with adolescence is called identity vs. role diffusion. During this stage, youth experience rapid physiological growth, which then calls into question the nature of their identity. Adolescents are then tasked with identity formation through accrued confidence; the danger at this stage is diffusion, or not finding an identity (Erickson, 1963). Adolescence is typically identified as a time when youth gradually separate from parents with the goal of becoming emotionally, socially, and economically independent. Many scholars, however, argue that young African American women develop differently and mature earlier due to poverty, racism, and sexism (Brunious, 1998; Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Ladner, 1971; Partee, 2015; Stevens, 2002).

In her ground-breaking work, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow,* Ladner (1971) was the first to examine what approaching womanhood meant to young African American women living in poverty. Ladner (1971) found that African American girls growing up in poverty are consciously socialized into womanhood around the age of seven or eight years old. Young African American women were often mature enough to understand and communicate their experiences of oppression and how those pressures impacted them, educationally and otherwise. They were

also able to develop adaptive behaviors to meet those challenges. Additionally, Ladner (1971) found that African American children are taught by adults early on that they live in a hostile and oppressive society in order to prepare and protect them. Thus, from an early age, African American women are treated by the adults raising them in a more mature manner than their European American counterparts by the adults raising them (Brown, 2013; Brunious, 1998; Ladner, 1971; Lewis, 1988).

Ladner's (1971) early findings suggested that in addition to family, peer group influences were highly important and more pervasive during adolescence. Young African American women displayed heightened awareness of sexuality toward young African American males early on in their development. Typically, these young women learned of the distinction between genders, and viewed males as sexual persons at a young age. This set the pace for early sexual interactions to occur. Additionally, young African American women living in poverty, viewed motherhood as a rite of passage into womanhood; this belief influenced girls to have babies early to reach the status of "woman" in the community. Thus, young African American women were often confronted with many conflicts and choices that impacted the rest of their lives, such as dropping out of high school or experiencing teenage pregnancy. Most often the peer group, influenced the direction of those choices. (Brown, 2013; Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Henry et al., 2015; Ladner, 1971).

Current research substantiates many of Ladner's (1971) pioneering findings on young African American women living in poverty. Current scholars suggest that these girls have had little of what is commonly referred to as a childhood, as they are often forced to assume adult responsibilities and their associated burdens at a young age. Young African American women living below the poverty line, typically reside in segregated communities characterized by high

unemployment, crime, violence, failing schools, and minimal governmental assistance. Many young African American women living in poverty are exposed to a multitude of racial inequalities in their everyday lives. They then assume adult roles to mitigate the impact of poverty and oppression, causing them to demonstrate higher levels of maturity than girls of other races (Aiyegbo-Ohadike, 2015; Brown, 2013; Brunious, 1998; Miller, 2008; Partee, 2015).

Current scholars suggest that the psychosocial development of young African American women is complex and branded by poverty and external societal pressures, such as violent communities, sexist depictions of African American women, and racism. Society's tendency to perpetuate sexist and pejorative myths about African American women also distort how these youth view themselves, making it difficult for them to negotiate and define a true sense of self. Often, young African American women must confront and come to terms with these negative stereotypes, such as the "pregnant-teen", "loud-mouth", or "jezebel", perpetuated by the dominant society. These negative stereotypes falsify the image of these young women and at times, expose those living in impoverished neighborhoods, to gendered violence (Brown, 2013; Brown & Gourdine, 2007; Brunois, 1998; Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Miller, 2008; Stevens, 2002).

Young and poor women are at higher risk for experiencing interracial gendered violence in their communities due to high rates of criminality, poverty, and unemployment. Moreover, gendered hierarchies tend to exist within poor African American communities, causing these young women to feel less respected and often confused about normative sexual behaviors within romantic relationships. This confusion causes young African American women to view sexual violence differently from their European American counterparts, preventing them from reporting instances of assault. These young women also tend to under-report interpersonal violence to

protect young African American males and prevent furthering society's portrayal of "the scary

black man". Researchers found that young African American women felt responsible for their

own safety, which also contributed to under-reporting as they often engaged in victim-blaming

for failing to secure their own safety (Brown, 2013; Henry et al., 2015; Miller, 2008).

Many young African American women must withstand racism, sexism, negative

stereotypes, and poverty, while also assuming adult-roles throughout their early development.

Young African American women living in poverty continue to demonstrate a heightened

cognizance of inequality and an ability to adapt and function despite a racist and sexist society.

Stevens (2002) stated "black female youth develop intersubjective attributes of assertion,

recognition, and self-efficacy to mediate at-risk environments" (p. xiii). Thus, impoverished

young African American women exhibit high levels of resilience despite external risk factors

(Brown, 2013; Brunious, 1998; Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Miller, 2008; Stevens, 2002).

Since Ladner's (1971) foundational research on young African American women, shifts

have occurred in how they interact with the opposite sex. Bryant (2015) found that teenage

pregnancy has continuously declined for young African American women since 1990; although,

the pregnancy rate remains much higher than that of their European American counterparts. This

would suggest that young African American women no longer view teenage pregnancy as a rite

of passage (Bryant, 2015).   Young African American women have also become more assertive

in defending themselves against verbal and physical aggression from men. They are now

leveling the playing field by firmly setting boundaries with young men, and seeking the

assistance of friends when they are made to feel uncomfortable (Brown, 2013; Cousins &

Mabrey, 2007; Henry et al., 2015).

Intrinsic to the resilient nature displayed by young African American women are their close ties with family and dynamic peer groups. Furthermore, young African American women tend to experience high levels of personal motivation, in addition to the care and consideration they display for their family and friends. Young African American women usually find their unique voice by existing in a choir of other strong African American women. Thus, family and peer influences still play a socializing and protective role for them (Brown, 2013; Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Henry et al., 2015; Stevens, 2002).

A variety of barriers exist that impede successful educational outcomes for young African American women. Historically, the segregation of schools prior to the Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) served to stem their development and impart negative perceptions of self-worth, which was verified in Kenneth and Mammie Clark's "Doll Test" (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Contemporary America also maintains negative stereotypes of women, which negatively affect their self-perceptions and self-esteem. Educators of young African American women are detrimentally influenced by these false stereotypes, which leads to setting lower academic expectations, higher rates of disciplinary action, and increased referrals to the juvenile justice system. Partly because of false stereotypes, young African American women report higher rates of trauma due to sexual harassment, assault, and abuse in addition to violence in their communities (Gibson, 2015; Henry et al., 2015; Miller, 2008; Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

Additionally, even after school integration, young African American women are still disproportionately enrolled in schools without access to equitable educational resources, credentialed teachers, extracurricular activities, and rigorous course offerings that prepare them for college-level courses. The lack of school resources directly impacts the curricula of the schools, limiting their access to the educational opportunities found in European American

schools. The combination of "second-class" public school education and teachers' negative perceptions, influenced by false stereotypes, act as barriers to the educational achievement of young African American women (Brown, 2013; Gibson, 2015; Pratt-Clark, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

In sum, young African American women living in poverty experience a variety of challenges within their social environment that impacts their higher educational aspiration. Educational disparities and segregation have been maintained in public schools, to the detriment of African American students. These young women also encounter the intersection of racism and sexism within their educational environments, creating another academic challenge. Currently, young African American women in high school, are the poorest performing female group in the United States, with the exception of American Indians (Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

Theoretical Foundation

The literature review of this chapter emphasized many social disparities that exist in American mainstream society due to its unequal institutional infrastructure, which has worked to disadvantage African Americans throughout the ages. Critical race feminism (CRF) was chosen as the driving theoretical framework for this research endeavor as it offers explanations of how the organization of American mainstream society creates challenges for young women of color. Thus, the literature review of this chapter greatly influenced the decision to establish CRF as the driving theoretical framework of this study. CRF was also chosen because of its emphasis on narrative story-telling to as a way to empower women to challenge oppression within society.

CRF posits that women of color uniquely encounter sexism and racism because they experience multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously, whereas European American women face only sexism and African American men solely racism; women of color experience

both concurrently (Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Wing, 2003). CRF grew from the original framework of critical race theory (CRT), both of which are rooted in legal academia and societal notions prescribed by conflict theory, such as "the desire to maintain one's privilege" (Limbert & Bullock, 2005, p. 256). Conflict theory explores the function of conflict within society; it suggests that conflict is an interactive process of socialization. Through conflict group members orient towards a specific group consciousness to establish boundaries between groups. Conflict then institutes societal structure through the separation and organization of people into within-group sameness and between-group differences (Coser, 1956).

CRT closely examines the function of conflict within American society. CRT assumes that conflict establishes institutional racism as *the* driving social structure in the United States. Racism is posited as normal and embedded in the social construction of American society. Racial conflict and its construction, have economic determinants centered on European American interests. Thus, CRT acknowledges that racism is pervasive and institutionally engrained in American society to allocate power to privileged European Americans. CRT emphasizes activism as a response to prevent legislative rollback of the advances established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its activist nature, challenges dominant ideologies of race neutrality and equal opportunity, suggesting that further law and policy reform must be enacted to change the oppressively racist social structure of America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

CRF grew from critical race theory (CRT) and its predecessor, conflict theory, to address the gendered limitations of CRT. Like CRT, CRF recognizes that racism is embedded into the social functioning of American society in a way that disadvantages African American women, while privileging the European American population. However, CRF theorists emphasize the

juxtaposition of race, class, and gender as an institutional mechanism that mires women of color at the bottom of the social stratosphere. This is largely in part because racism, classism, and sexism intersect in a way to disenfranchise African American women legally and politically (Crenshaw, 2003; Houh & Kalsem; 2015; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Wing, 2003).

CRF has many benefits and provides a realistic overview of how institutional factors work against the betterment of young African American women in mainstream America. CRF also aligns with the application of narrative inquiry as a research methodology due to its focus on narrative story-telling as a means to enact social change. However, a weakness of this theory, is its failure to account for and explain the resilient nature of the study's population despite living in hostile social environments.

Thus, contemporary risk and resilience theory will act as a supplementary theory to account for the resilience displayed by young African American women who encounter and overcome adversity daily, in their environments. Contemporary risk and resilience theory recognizes that adversity, or risks, exists as internal and external processes intrinsic to youth development. Resilience, or a youth's ability to overcome risk is a relevant principle associated with this theory. Resilience is also viewed as a common phenomenon that can be achieved by any youth if given adequate support from functioning social systems (Masten, 2001: Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Rutter, 2012; Ungar et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2013).

Additionally, contemporary risk and resilience theorists acknowledge that external systems within a youth's immediate environment may promote or hinder a youth's ability to be resilient in the face of adversity. Thus, the environments with which youth interact may enhance resilience and provide a mechanism for a positive youth trajectory (Coll et al., 1996; Masten, 2001; Masten, 2011; Stanley, 2009; Ungar et al., 2013). Contemporary risk and resilience theory

was chosen as a supplemental theory and not the primary theory as it fails to account for macro-system influences, such as institutional racism, as risks apparent in youth development. As this study aims to narrate the experiential nature of macro-level discriminations and their impact on the academic trajectory of young African American women, it was important to make CRF the driving theoretical framework, supplemented by contemporary risk and resilience theory.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to collaboratively narrate the unique strengths and

challenges of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town. The goal

of this research endeavor was to help develop a storied understanding of how family,

community, and school risk and resilient factors impact this population's higher educational

aspiration (or ambition). Moreover, the study aimed to describe what factors promoted resilience,

thereby highlighting participants' strengths. Three corresponding research questions were

identified as: 1) What are the family, community, and school risk factors that impede higher

educational aspiration of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town?

2) What are the identified factors that promote resilience in this population? and 3) How do both

risk and resilient factors interact to impact individuals' higher educational aspiration?

Qualitative Research Design and Rationale

The overrepresentation of African Americans living in poverty acts as a potential barrier

for a population of young women wishing to attend institutions of higher education, as poverty is

correlated with poor educational outcomes (HCM Strategists, 2010; Partee, 2015; Smith-Evans

et al., 2014). Nationally, at the high school level, young African American women fall behind all

other female groups, with the exception of American Indians, regarding academic performance

and achievement testing (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Specifically, young African American

women perform poorly on college entrance exams, which consequently has obstructs and

reduces their ability to be accepted to and attend institutions of higher education (Partee, 2015;

Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). These young women often attend segregated and

near-failing public schools that have been characterized by a lack of resources and inadequate

educational opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Gibson, 2015; Kelly, 2015; Smith-Evan et

al., 2014). It has been argued that public high school teachers in these segregated schools, often

lack certification and are influenced by pervasively racist and sexist stereotypes, negatively

impacting their ability to sufficiently educate young African American women (Cousins &

Mabrey, 2007; Gibson, 2015Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Smith-Evan et al., 2014).

In the County where the study occurred, an average 70% of students identified as

economically disadvantaged and only 19% tested as college ready (U.S. News Week and World

Report, 2016). Nevertheless, no qualitative studies have been conducted to examine what socio-

economic factors (such as poverty) inhibit young African American women living in this

Southeastern college town, from attending institutions of higher education. Although research

has been conducted nationally in other parts of the United States, most of these studies have

focused specifically on poverty, violence, racism, or sexism and not on the convergence of these

factors as they impact educational outcomes (Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2010;

Smith-Evans et al., 2014; Stevens, 2002). Furthermore, there is little evidence in existing studies

that offers suggestions on how to positively intervene with young African American women who

attend failing public school systems to enhance and ensure college-readiness and acceptance

(Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014; Stevens, 2002).

Qualitative research was chosen as the methodology for this dissertation, driven by the

intent to describe and understand what factors impact higher educational aspiration for young

African American women living in a Southeastern college town, from their own perspective.

The few qualitative studies examining psycho-social and academic development for young

African American women, have yet to explore how the convergence of institutional risk factors impact higher educational aspiration, acceptance, and attendance (Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014; Stevens, 20002). Qualitative methodology was thus deemed ideal for studying and describing the experiences of this group of young women by providing a forum where they could narrate their experiences.

This form of research seeks to describe the experiences of participants; researchers create a posteriori hypothesis, after data is collected and analyzed. Thus, *deductive* as opposed to *inductive* logic is applied during qualitative research. Qualitative researchers also privilege the *emic*, or the within-social-group perspective as opposed to the *etic*, or outsider's perspective. An emic perspective means that qualitative researchers seek to uncover the meanings people attribute to the world around them instead of imposing their own views on the subject matter under study. These meanings are often subjective, socially-constructed, and dynamic rather than fixed or objective (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Stake, 2010).

Qualitative research methods are then built around developing an understanding of participants' experiences using multimodal forms of data [interviews, observations, documents, etc.]. Data is often collected in natural settings, where participants live or experience the phenomenon under study as opposed to artificial environments, such as research labs. Thus, qualitative researchers immerse themselves in the day-to-day lives of their participants in order to establish a real-world orientation to data collection and analysis. Natural interaction acknowledges the subjectivity of participants as influenced and constructed by their real-life experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Stake, 2010).

As such, qualitative research seeks to interpret and describe the subjective understanding of participants in their natural settings in effort to harness participant meaning-making of the

phenomena under study. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of the entire research process; with some researchers even suggesting that analysis should start during the initial stages of data collection. Additionally, in qualitative methodology, researchers are treated as instruments; requiring that they practice reflexivity and transparency throughout the research endeavor (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Stake, 2010).

Various aspects of qualitative research lend themselves to studying the lived experiences of young African American women. For example, collecting data in the natural settings of the study participants allowed the researcher to witness firsthand some of the environmental challenges they faced daily. Interviewing participants face-to-face, or *in situ*, allowed for additional clues to unlock a widespread understanding of their experiences (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). This type of data collection also ensured a deeper exploration into participants' responses, their physical cues, and the environments in which they live. As qualitative data collection is emergent, this afforded participants the opportunity to provide detailed accounts of their stories, and correct any misinterpretations made by the researcher (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research thereby provided more extensive knowledge about the lived experiences of the population under study.

Qualitative research privileges the emic perspective of participants. Thus, this methodology acknowledged and permitted young African American women to make meaning of their experiential challenges and strengths by sharing their stories. Additionally, multimodal data yielded rich description of participants' subjective understanding. Deductive analytical strategies caused themes and stories to emerge from what was shared by these young African American women. That is, the themes were produced by the narratives shared by participants and informed by the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study.

Therefore, narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodological framework as opposed to other approaches because the research questions sought to develop an understanding of these young women's experiences. Narrative inquiry, as a method, seeks to describe the lived experiences of participants through storytelling. Reissman (1993) emphasizes that narrative inquiry differs from other methodologies because of its interpretive nature, as researchers interpret a story that has already been interpreted by the participant. Unlike other approaches to qualitative research, participants co-constructed their narrative accounts alongside the researcher, which privileged their role as participants and empowered them through participatory methods. As such, participants engaged in and co-constructed research alongside the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Reissman, 1993).

Finally, as an European American woman, the researcher felt it pertinent to choose a methodology where an alliance could be established with young African American women to guard against potential problems caused by racial differences. Participatory research was deemed necessary to mitigate any misunderstandings displayed by the researcher. This researcher also felt that it would be inappropriate to impose her views on the experiences of these young women due to differences that exist largely because of racial variables. Additionally, the researcher views African American women as equals and wanted to engage them in a study that promotes equality in the partnership between participants and the researcher. Narrative inquiry was thereby chosen as the framework of this study as it is the only qualitative methodology approach that provides a forum for a coalition between participants and the researcher, which then allows the women to be collaborators, rather than solely study participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Reissman, 2008).

Narrative Inquiry

Experience is an aspect of human existence that is made meaningful through human behavior, such as talking. The moment people learn to speak they tell stories in order to make meaning of their lives. People then live storied lives and use narration to make sense of and share what they experience as individuals. Oral, visual, and written narratives further reveal what people view as important when searching for meaning in life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Human life is also united by these narratives, which are the primary way people express to others what they know and who they are (Bold, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1988).

People also shape their lives and identities based upon the narrative accounts they tell and hear about themselves from others and society. Thus, narratives allow us to understand participants' multifaceted meaning of society, culture, and human interactions through the telling of their stories (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016). In other words, narrative inquiry is a method that draws together diverse experiences into an organized linguistic account. These experiences and their associated stories occur across three multidimensional commonplaces: 1) Temporality, 2) sociality, and 3) place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Temporality acknowledges that people's stories are influenced by their past, present, and future. People are constantly revising the narratives of their lives as they progress along their lifespan. *Sociality* considers the personal and social factors that influence the *temporal* experiences that establish narratives. For example, *sociality* acknowledges that people's narratives are shaped by their thoughts, feelings, and actions, which are influenced by culture, society, institutions, family, and language. Lastly, *place* refers to the concrete and physical

boundaries of a space or a sequence of spaces in which narrative stories develop (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). For example, homes, schools and churches constitute places where people create their stories. As such, personal narratives are multifaceted, socially-influenced, occur in places, and are temporal in nature.

Narrative inquiry is thus a research methodology that allows researchers to study and understand the complex nature and temporal experience of life as shared by participants through their narrative accounts. In simpler terms, narrative inquiry is a way to study people's experiences through the telling of their stories. Research questions that suggest the usage of narrative inquiry focus on: 1) Exploring and describing participants' experiences and 2) discovering meanings associated with these experiences. Narrative research questions might also be driven by personal, practical, or social justifications (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016).

Narrative inquiry, in general, honors lived experiences as a source of knowledge to develop an understanding of human lives, whether it be to create social action or simply tell a story. It considers the relational nature of living, requiring consideration of how participants relate to the researcher, the world, people, society, and events within their temporal existence. Thus, narrative inquiry is "people in relation studying people in relation" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). Due to the relational nature of this form of research, narrative inquiry allows for team work between the researcher and participants throughout the research process, within the many milieus of subjects' lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Four pertinent stages are associated with narrative inquiry: 1) Living, 2) telling, 3) retelling, and 4) reliving the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Participants *live* out stories that they later share with the researcher. Narrative

inquiry starts with the *telling* of stories, that is, the point when researchers first engage in conversations with their participants. The telling of stories, or narratives, is the most typical approach utilized in narrative inquiry. Following the living and telling of stories, narrative researchers enter participants' milieus and inquire into their lived and told stories to *retell* their narratives. Lastly, as researchers are influenced and changed by the research endeavor, they begin to *relive* stories, those of the participants and their own, during the final stages of writing the research report (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Through the retelling and reliving of stories, researchers establish a narrative context influenced by participants, their stories, the research setting, usage of theoretical frameworks, and the general world around them. Narrative inquiry insists on researchers' openness to the perceptions, selections, and reactions displayed by participants throughout the process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Kim, 2016). This makes it an apt approach to studying young, impoverished, and young African American women, as it encourages researcher attentiveness to the social disparities that exist within this population's environment by collecting data in natural settings. Additionally, narrative inquiry provides a mechanism for reflection upon the perceptions of and reactions to the sociopolitical climate where these young women live.

The collaborative and relational nature of narrative inquiry was a second reason for choosing this methodology. This form honors the relational nature of storytelling and encourages the researcher to empathetically listen to participants collaboratively construct their narrative accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The participatory nature of this approach appealed since it empowered these young African American women through the creation of their stories; they identified what information was important

enough to share with the masses. This was done by allowing them to skip interview questions, share stories unrelated to questions asked in the interview, and also by providing them with participant diaries. Due to the researcher's race, it was pertinent to choose an approach that would encourage collaboration to safeguard against potential problems caused by cross-racial research, such as emotional stress or strain.

A final reason for choosing narrative inquiry was because of its ability to ignite social change by exploring how institutional risk factors, such as racism, influence the lived experiences of this population (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This approach considered the impact that poverty, racism, and sexism have on the academic development of selected young African American women. The narratives shared by these young women produced personal and storied knowledge about the perceived injustices they faced daily, and how they adapted, confronted, or overcame oppression. For example, during the interview, participants were asked to share times that they had experienced a variety of challenges, such as racism (See APPENDIX D). Additionally, interview questions sought to elicit strategies employed by participants to overcome adversity by asking "How did you cope with that?" (See APPENDIX D). Also, many of the interview questions focused on higher educational aspiration, such as "Do you plan on going to college?" (See APPENDIX D). This form also corresponded well with the primary theoretical framework, CRF, which encourages an application of narrative story-telling as a mechanism to ignite social action.

Role of the Researcher

As youth of color and people living in poverty are identified as vulnerable populations by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), the researcher had to thoughtfully consider her role including the privileges accrued by being European American. Additionally, research has shown

that in general, interracial contact can induce stress and cause negative emotional, physical, and cognitive outcomes for people belonging to a minority racial group (Chang & Berk, 2009, Clark et al., 1999; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). African Americans and other people of color, often feel targeted and/or discriminated against by European Americans during cross-racial encounters (Chang & Berk, 2009, Clark et al., 1999; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Due to the potential threat of stress and/or other adverse effects caused by cross-racial interactions, this researcher had to carefully address any threats that might arise due to the race dimension.

As suggested by the literature, this researcher treated participants with respect and acknowledged the privileges allotted by her skin tone. She also communicated an understanding regarding the adverse impact racism has on society in general. The researcher was then dialogically directive about possible problems caused by differences in race during the research endeavor. For example, the researcher admitted in the first interview that she had never experienced the same form of racism as participants and therefore cannot fully understand how it feels to be a woman of color. The researcher then worked toward mitigating racial issues through empathetic nonverbal and verbal cues, such as nodding and allowing for extended silences when participants cried. Thus, a sympathetic contextual space was created through the admittance that only participants and other women of color, can fully understand the unique challenges associated with experiencing racism and sexism simultaneously (Chang & Berk, 2009; Collins, 2000; Manglitz et al., 2014; Richeson & Shelton, 2007).

Finally, an equal partnership between participants and the researcher was established, as participants were treated as collaborators who co-constructed their narratives. This was done by permitting participants to skip questions and allowing them to tell stories unrelated to the research questions. Participants also helped to identify and revise themes during the second

interview and member checks of final findings. For example, Marigold named the theme 'never giving up' to describe her approach to overcoming challenges she faced. Participants played a major role in identifying and revising themes and subthemes. Therefore, participants' understanding of the phenomenon was emphasized through participatory research and member-checking. Thus, the voices of these young African American women were privileged first and foremost by allowing them to share any thoughts and feelings they had, while also giving them a say in naming the findings. (Borer & Fontana, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007).

Furthermore, the researcher had to guard against her own biases as a practicing licensed clinical social worker who has worked with this population since 2008. Based upon almost a decade of work with oppressed people and the systems that serve them, this researcher acutely believes that racism, sexism, and classism are institutionally ingrained in the social construction of mainstream American culture. This researcher has witnessed how oppression and stigma disadvantage youth wishing to attend institutions of higher education, which no doubt influenced the design, implementation, and analysis of this study.

Not only did the researcher's years of practice experience establish a bias, it also created role conflict due to her training as a therapist. At times, it was difficult for the researcher not to address the participants' concerns and needs therapeutically while she was acting as a researcher. This conflict of roles was present and addressed throughout data collection and analysis. For example, all participants and their guardians were made aware that the researcher is a mandated reporter before they disclosed any information for the sake of this study. The researcher also told each participant at the beginning of each interview that she would be acting as a researcher and not as a therapist. Participants were not comforted when they cried or asked for advice; instead

they were reminded of the researcher's role as a person unable to provide counseling. They were then referred to a list of agencies that could provide services and given space to cry until they were ready to continue on with their interviews. The researcher also created memos in ATLAS.ti after each interview, to reflect upon this role conflict and the efforts she made to maintain her role as a researcher. As such, professional boundaries were set and maintained to distinguish the investigator as a social science researcher and not a practicing social worker.

Epistemological Stance of the Researcher

Due to the proximity between participants and researchers when conducting a qualitative study, researchers must acknowledge their subjective knowledge, or epistemological understanding of the world. The epistemological stance adopted by narrative researchers influences the type of power dynamic that exists between them and the participants, while also guiding the research process (Creswell, 2013; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). The epistemological stance adopted by this researcher is critical in nature, which was influenced by her own social work practice that exposed her to the negative effects associated with social oppression.

Critical epistemology is greatly influenced by Marxism and his critique of society as inherently oppressive in order to allocate wealth and power to its upper-class members (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Thus, a critical stance acknowledges that reality is influenced by exploitative social and political systems that privilege those in power, while oppressing all other groups (Creswell, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Clandinin, 2013; Grbich, 2013). This stance is beneficial as it sensitizes researchers to existing social inequalities that negatively impact the lived experiences of young women of color.

Researchers choosing to engage in critical narrative inquiry must recognize how individuals' experiences are influenced by oppressive macrosocial systems. Those taking this stance acknowledge the power they hold, engage in dialogues with participants to establish an equal partnership, and use their research to ignite social change. These techniques are employed to guard against any possible threats that are created by differences that exist due to race, class, and education. Thus, researchers who apply a critical epistemology to narrative inquiry, often justify the implementation of their research as means to protect participants and ignite social change through participatory methods that empower those being studied (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Grbich, 2007; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007).

Methodology

Sample Selection

In narrative inquiry, purposeful sampling is employed so that the researcher carefully reflects on whom should be sampled. The first step in determining a purposeful sample is deciding who will provide the most comprehensive information that will best answer the research questions of the study. After establishing criteria for selecting participants, purposeful sampling is then applied to identify which participants will be chosen. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to locate participants that meet the criteria "from people who know people" in the community (Creswell, 2013, p.158).

Criteria were chosen to reflect the specific factors that influence higher educational aspiration for the population under study. Thus, it was pertinent that participants identified as African American and female. Also, since this study hoped to describe risk and resilient factors that exist within the participants' environment, they had to attend one of the three public high schools in the County under study. Enrollment as a junior or senior in high school was required,

as these youth often engage in college preparedness activities, such as completion of college entrance exams. Finally, teen and/or pregnant mothers were excluded as child-rearing and bearing create a variety of separate challenges regarding higher educational aspiration.

A variety of criteria were then identified for the purposes of this study. The participants of this study had to identify as African American and not as biracial or belonging to another race. Participants also had to identify as cisgender female and not male or transgender. Participants were required to be enrolled in one of the three County public high schools as either a junior or a senior. Finally, participants could not have had children nor be pregnant at the time of the study. Refer to Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 for participant demographics.

Typically, the ideal sample size for narrative inquiry ranges from 6-12, provided that there is thematic redundancy after hearing six narrative accounts (Beitin, 2012; Kim, 2016). The goal for any sample size is to ensure thematic saturation of findings, which is sometimes achieved in smaller sample sizes (Beitin, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Kim, 2016). The maximum number of participants suggested for narrative inquiry was chosen to account for fluctuating experiences that exist between the three different schools. To ensure saturation of findings, this study achieved a sample size of 12 participants: four students from Lucille Clifton High School, four students from Alice Walker High School, and four students from Maya Angelou High School. Of this sample population, nine were enrolled as seniors and three were enrolled as juniors. Two of the juniors attended Maya Angelou and the third junior attended Lucille Clifton. All participants from Alice Walker, were enrolled as seniors. Both juniors and seniors were included since both groups of students engage in college-readiness activities, such as taking college entrance exams and touring universities.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Site Research

In order to make participants aware of the study, fliers were created and stationed at various communal locales known to be frequented by young African American women (see APPENDIX A). These locales included: 1) parks, 2) beauty salons, 3) libraries, 4) community centers, and 5) churches. Additionally, one nonprofit organization that serves the population under study, distributed fliers and assisted with recruitment. Furthermore, word-of-mouth was utilized to obtain participants for this study. For example, two social service providers in the community, shared fliers where they were employed. The researcher also attended a high school football game, and stood outside high school grounds at dismissal to recruit participants. Additionally, snowball sampling occurred, as many participants encouraged friends and family members to join in this study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then screened participants to ensure that they met eligibility requirements (see APPENDICES B1 & B2). Eligible participants and guardians signed consent or assent forms (see APPENDICES C1, C2, & C3).

Data Collection

During the data collection phase, researchers must negotiate inquiry spaces with participants, otherwise known as the field, since this type of research occurs in the natural setting of those being studied. The most commonly applied data collection methods for narrative inquiry are conversations, conversations as interviews, and informal observations that occur during these dialogues (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). It is also suggested that researchers and participants keep a diary as a form of data collection to encourage authenticity, self-reflection, and transparency throughout the research process (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016).

Dialogues. Dialogues, in the form of interviews and conversations are the most commonly utilized form of data collection in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Interviews help to compose participants' narratives by establishing a forum to share their experiences with the researcher. Typically, conversations or semi-structured interviews, are the preferred style of questioning utilized in narrative inquiry. These allow participants to guide the interview and determine which of their experiences hold the most importance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). At times, as was the case with this study, narrative inquirers will employ more structured interview methods, most particularly when they are new to research and have little experience conducting interviews (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Kim, 2016).

As such, two interviews guided by one structured interview protocol, were utilized in order to initiate dialogue, while also allowing room for conversations to occur. The interview protocol for this study was organized into five categories: 1) Self, 2) family, 3) community, 4) school, and 5) peer relationships (See APPENDIX D). These categories were chosen so that the participants would share stories about the many milieus that exist within their lives. Additionally, questions were designed that encouraged these young women to describe not only the challenges they faced as individuals but, also the strategies they employed to overcome adversity. For example, participants were asked "Tell me some challenges your family experiences or has experienced" and "How does your family cope with those challenges?" Although a structured interview protocol was utilized, participants were encouraged to speak their thoughts and share what they deemed as vital. For example, each participant was given the option to skip questions and also tell stories they felt were important after all interview questions were asked. As such,

the researcher privileged a semi-structured interview style, as preferred by most narrative inquirers, but also heavily relied on the structured interview protocol (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016).

The structured interview protocol was created to encourage story-telling by participants related to risk and resilient factors apparent in their families, communities, schools, and peer relationships. The interview questions were thereby designed to explore participants' multidimensional experiences in a variety of domains, and how these domains influence their psychosocial and academic development by asking questions related to their family communities, peers, and schools. The goal of this protocol was to comprehensively identify what risk factors, if any, exist regarding higher educational aspiration. Questions also sought to highlight the presence of factors that promote resilience. For example, this was done by asking "What challenges did you face?" and "How did you cope with those challenges?" across the categories of self, family, community, school, and peers (see APPENDIX D).

Two interviews were conducted with each participant- an initial interview and a follow-up interview. This was done so that participants did not get bored with one lengthy interview. Additionally, the usage of a second interview permitted the researcher to collect data that was missed during the first interview, while also allowing participants to member check preliminary findings. Initial interviews focused on self, family, and community domains, while follow-up interviews emphasized the areas of school and peer relationships. Participants were offered the option of not answering interview questions. Participants were also encouraged to share pertinent information that was not asked by the researcher. For example, each interview ended by asking participants "Is there anything you would like to share that was not asked?"

During initial interviews, participants were provided with all necessary information, such as a consent letter, a consent or assent form, a guardian consent form, a notebook, and an educational resource guide (see APPENDICES B, C, D, & E).   Each consent or assent form described risks associated with the study and how the researcher planned to guard against them. Participants received a $25.00 Walmart gift card to thank them for their participation. Initial questions asked during the first interview were broad in nature. As the interviews progressed, more specific inquiries, guided by the categories of self, family, and community were utilized, along with probing. On average, initial interviews were slightly over an hour in length.

During the follow-up interview, participants were given another $25.00 Walmart gift card to honor their continued participation. This second interview focused primarily on the domains of school and peer relationships; however, participants were provided time to share unrelated stories. As narrative inquiry aims to stimulate conversations between participants and the researcher, probing questions were also applied to elicit more information. Follow-up interviews, typically lasted around 40 minutes. Follow-up interviews ended by asking participants to member-check findings. Participants provided feedback, validated major themes, and helped to word, reword and/or add to the subthemes identified by the researcher. Subjects were then prepared to exit the study by addressing any concerns they had regarding their participation, such as confidentiality. During the final interview, a communication system was also established between participants and the researcher so that they could continue to engage in member-checking of findings or contact the researcher with concerns.

Out of the 24 interviews, 17 occurred in participants' homes, four in reserved areas at a local community center, two in private rooms at the library, and one in a secluded parking lot to ensure privacy. Two small and digital audio devices recorded all the interviews with permission

from the participants. Each audio recording was listened to multiple times, beginning within the first 24 hours of each interview, allowing for greater familiarization with the data prior to transcription. After listening to the audio recordings and taking notes, the researcher employed the verbatim transcription method using the computer software, Express Scribe. Transcriptions were then imported into ATLAS.ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CQDAS), for the purposes of data analysis. The audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer to protect participants' confidentiality.

Written Diaries. The usage of diaries in narrative inquiry can provide useful insights about how youth respond to the research process, since participants independently write stories without assistance from the researcher. This also helps to improve credibility of findings, as participants' choose what stories they will tell to the researcher. Participant diaries also provide a forum where youth engaged in the study can reflect upon and share their experiences outside of the research process. Additionally, participant diaries allow for the immediate recalling and telling of stories as they occur (Bold, 2012; Kim, 2016).

Each participant was given a notebook by the researcher to document her experiences during the time that lapsed between the initial and follow up interviews. Participants were asked to create accounts of their lives for approximately 2-3 weeks. Participants were told to use their pseudonym and change the names of friends, family members, and their schools to ensure confidentiality. They were provided with the option to write seven journal entries or poems, and were then asked to share their written diaries with the researcher during the follow-up interview. Each diary was destroyed after its transcription. Only five of the 12 participants chose to keep a participant journal. A few of the girls stated that they had lost their diaries, while other participants shared they were too busy to contribute to the study process through writing. Other

participants communicated that they had shared what they thought was important during the interview process. The five written diaries were transcribed and analyzed using ATLAS.ti.

  Researcher Journal. The usage of researcher journals as a form of data collection promotes transparency and establishes a better understanding of how interpretations were made during the research process. An ongoing record of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and reactions provides a location where the researcher can reflect on what occurred during the research process. A research journal also creates an audit trail for outside readers to understand the decision-making process (Bold, 2012; Clandinin, 2013; Paulus et al., 2014).

  The usage of a researcher journal is especially important in narrative inquiry due to the relational nature of this approach. This type of data collection allows the researcher to develop an understanding of who she/he is as a researcher, and who they become in relation to the participants under study. Thus, a research journal encourages self-reflection regarding the researcher's role, methods, and interactions with the participants; all of which shape the narrative accounts produced by the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013).

  As such, the researcher kept a researcher journal using the memo feature in ATLAS.ti. After each interview, the researcher wrote an informal observation field note to contextualize the interview. Following the field note memo, the researcher journaled her thoughts, reactions, and feelings related to information that was provided during the interview. The researcher journal provided a mechanism for the researcher to process difficult information.

  For example, after hearing participants' reactions to the sexual assault that occurred at Maya Angelou High School, the researcher was able to separate her own beliefs that diverged from the views expressed by participants. Additionally, the memo feature served as an outlet for the researcher, as she could not share information related to perceived racism experienced by

participants at Alice Walker High School from the "racist" college coach. Additionally, journaling helped the researcher to explore her own racial identity as different from participants as she had never experienced the same form of racism as participants.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Narrative analysis is how researchers choose to tell the stories told by participants and takes place throughout the entire research process (Reissman, 1993; 2008). The purpose of narrative analysis is to determine how respondents impose order on and make meaning of the flowing experiences that constitute their lived stories (Gribich 2013; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995; Reissman, 1993; 2008; Wertz et al., 2011). Thus, narrative analysis focuses on how events or experiences are organized by participants through the telling of their stories.

According to Reissman (1993), narrative analysis starts the second researchers hear the stories being told to them by participants. As such, initial analysis followed Reissman's (1993) five steps, or levels of representation, in narrative analysis. These include: 1) Attending, 2) telling, 3) transcribing, 4) analyzing, and 5) reading (see Figure 3.1). *Attending* requires that the researcher discern certain features in the realm of participants' consciousness, such as reflection, remembrance, and recollecting aspects of past experiences. Next comes the *telling*, or participants' performance of the narratives. The researcher then *transcribes* the narratives to *analyze* the information provided by subjects. Finally, the researcher *reads* the report to ensure coherency between the data and its interpretations (Reissman, 1993).

Figure 3.1. Reissman's (1993) Five Levels of Representation

Reading (5)

Analyzing (4)

Transcribing (3)

Telling (2)

Attending (1)
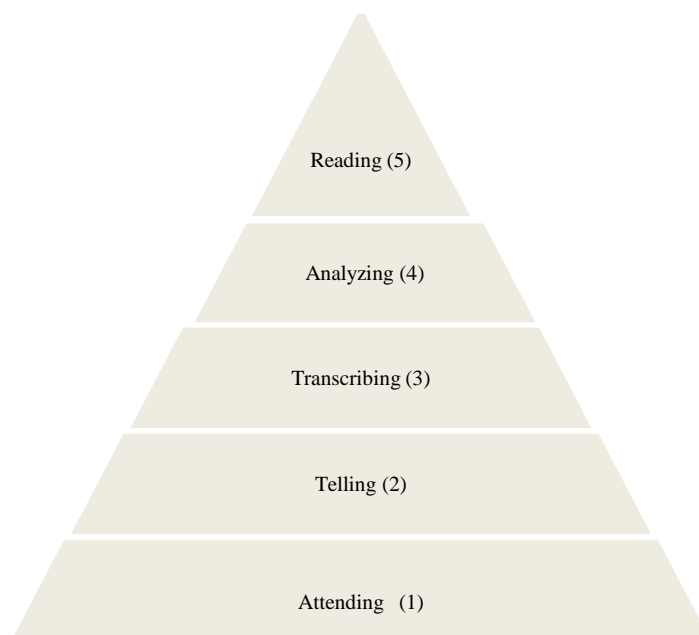
Figure 1. This figure depicts the five levels of representation to be applied when implementing narrative analysis as described by Reissman (1993).

This researcher chose to initiate her analysis using Reissman's (1993) narrative analysis approach, but then diverged from traditional forms of narrative analysis by employing theory-driven thematic analysis. This choice was made, due to her belief that researchers cannot be separated from their theoretical orientations throughout the creation, implementation, and analysis of their study as suggested by Boyatzis (1998). Thus, for analytical purposes, the researcher intentionally chose to identify codes, followed by themes and group findings based upon the two theories that underpin this study.

After following Reissman's initial guidelines for narrative analysis, the process of theory-driven thematic analysis, as described by Boyatzis (1998), was applied. Since there are varying forms of thematic analysis, it was important that one type was chosen for the purposes of clarity, transparency, and to establish a consistently structured way to conduct analysis. According to

Boyatzis (1998), theory-driven thematic analysis organizes "the themes on the basis of a theory or conceptual framework" (p.136). Theory-driven clusters may be created by identifying: 1) common characteristics, 2) an underlying construct, or 3) a developmental hierarchy (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, theory-driven thematic analysis, as outlined by Boyatzis (1998) was applied so that the analysis of themes could be grounded in the two theoretical frameworks shaping this study.

Theory-driven thematic analysis recognizes that researchers cannot be separated from their theoretical orientation, taking into account reflexivity and bias in the analytical process (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hayes, 1997). This approach also requires data analysis to be transparently driven by the researcher's theoretical framework(s) (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hayes, 1997). Thus, data must be compared, contrasted, and organized into themes guided by a theory or theories (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hayes, 1997).

Boyatzis (1998) suggests that all forms of thematic analysis begin with extensive coding to deduce common themes in data. Themes may be labeled as single words, phrases, and sentences that reflect the theoretical framework(s) (Boyatzis, 1998). Boyatzis (1998) suggests that theory-driven thematic analysis is an easy way for the researcher to identify patterns within the data as it arrays the themes in a theoretically familiar way to the researcher, thereby simplifying the analytical process (Boyatzis, 1998).

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) acted as the primary theoretical framework that drove the theory-driven analysis of this study, supplemented by contemporary risk and resilience. CRF grew from critical race theory (CRT) and its predecessor, conflict theory, to explore the function of conflict in American society as it benefits European Americans. Conflict theory explores the functionality of conflict suggesting that conflict is an interactive process of socialization. Through conflict group members orient toward a specific group cognizance to establish

boundaries between groups. Conflict thus institutes societal structure through the separation and organization of people into within-group sameness and between-group differences, with the purpose of creating and maintaining a privileged status in society for one group, while disadvantaging all other groups (Coser, 1956).

Critical race theory (CRT) closely examines the function of conflict within American society. CRT assumes that conflict establishes institutional racism as *the* driving social structure in the United States. Racism is viewed as normal and implanted in the social construction of American society. Racial conflict and its construction, have economic causes centered on privileging the financial status of European Americans. CRT thus recognizes that racism is pervasive and institutionally entrenched in American society to allocate power to privileged European Americans. CRT emphasizes activism as a response to challenge dominant ideologies of race neutrality and equal opportunity, suggesting that further law and policy reform must be enacted to change the oppressively racist social structure of America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

CRF was created to address gender limitations associated with CRT, as it recognizes that the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism is embedded into the social construction of American society to mire women of color at the bottom of the social stratosphere. This is largely in part because racism, classism, and sexism intersect in a way to disenfranchise African American women socially, legally, and politically. The juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism was then the main platform applied to explore how these co-occurring discriminations act as risk factors that impact higher educational aspiration for young African American women (Coser, 1956; Crenshaw, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Pratt-Clarke, 2010).

CRF acted as the primary theoretical framework for this study, as the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism were considered only as risk factors in the lived experiences of the population under study. However, CRF does not offer a mechanism to explore what makes these young women resilient, despite their encounters with intersecting and co-occurring forms of institutional discrimination. Risk and resilience theory thus supplemented CRF as a theoretical framework to examine the trickledown effect of the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism, while also allowing the researcher to examine how these young women adapted to the impact of these simultaneously prevailing and institutional risk factors.

Risk and resilience theory also established a means to analyze the dynamic interplay between risk and resilient factors present in home, communities, and schools as it recognizes that risks exist in the lives of youth as they develop into adulthood. Resilience, or a youth's ability to overcome adversity, is another relevant principle associated with this theory. (Masten, 2001: Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Rutter, 2012; Ungar et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2013). Through the consideration of conflict theory, critical race theory, critical race feminism, and resilience and resilience theory, the researcher was able to explore intuitional risk factors, along with those that exists in the homes, communities, and schools of participants as they impacted higher educational aspiration. Risk and resilience theory provided a way for the researcher to explore what resilient factors positively impacted higher educational aspiration. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the interplay between racism, sexism, and classism and its trickle-down effect into risk and resilience theory. An exploration of risk and resilient factors present in the homes, communities, and schools supplemented how all these elements combined to impact higher educational aspiration for young African American women.

Figure 3.2. Theory-driven Concept Map
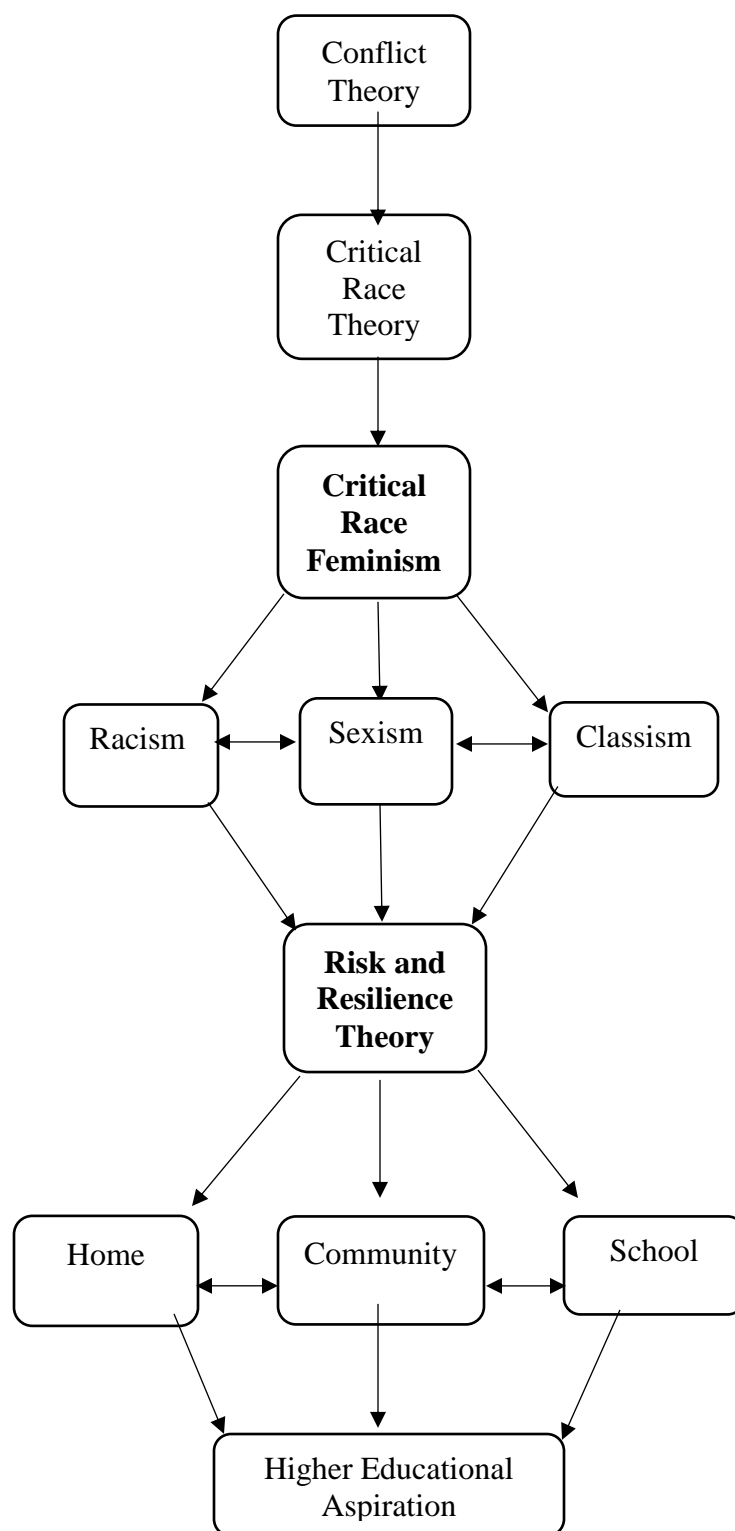
Figure 2. A theoretical concept map to show how the dynamic interplay between CRF and risk and resilience theory as they impact higher educational aspiration for young African American women.

Many researchers support the application of theory-driven thematic analysis for a variety of reasons. For example, theory-driven thematic analysis holds researchers accountable to matters of bias through the practice of reflexivity and transparency. Since analysis often involves complex cognitive processes of sometimes ill-defined domains, a theory-driven approach provides for clear-cut and organized illustration of themes. Additionally, the application of theories during analysis may serve to sensitize researchers to relevant social issues, such as social disparities, and their corresponding processes and interpretations. This type of analysis, typically constitutes a thicker description of data using applied theoretical frameworks as a mechanism to identify, group, and describe themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Karanasios et al., 2013; McFarlane & O'Reilly-de Brun, 2012). Thus, theory-driven thematic analysis was chosen to promote transparency, clarity, and familiarity with the data, which will be described further in the "Analytical Strategy" section of this chapter.

Analytical Strategy

Keeping in mind, Reissman's (1993) five levels of representation, the researcher first attended to the experiences told by participant while listening to each of the 24 audio recordings two times and wrote notes, documenting repetitive words and phrases. As recommended by Reissman (1993), the researcher then utilized Express Scribe, to transcribe each interview verbatim. Transcriptions of interviews, participants' diaries, and the researcher journal were imported and stored in ATLAS.ti for data analysis purposes. Interviews were also stored on Google Drive so that they could be reviewed on portable devices. As suggested by Reissman (1993), the researcher then read each transcription on multiple occasions before initiating analysis. As was the case with audio recordings, the researcher took notes as she examined

transcriptions, paying particular attention to duplicate words and phrases, shared by all 12 participants.

ATLAS.ti, one of the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CQDAS) programs, was employed to analyze data (Kuckartz, 2014). All data, including transcriptions, researcher diaries, field memos, and the researcher journal were reviewed multiple times in ATLAS.ti before coding to achieve full immersion. Coding was then initiated as it is identified as a first step by numerous qualitative scholars (Auberach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Bruan & Clarke, 2006). The researcher referred to the notes she had taken to initiate coding in ATLAS.ti. All data was compared and contrasted in ATLAS.ti to see if similarities could be clustered into codes. Words and phrases that were repeated by all participants and crosscut each data source were highlighted using the coding feature. Similar phrases were then assigned a code name, such as "family", "peers", or "grandmother". Preliminary codes and themes were member checked by participants during the second interview and peer reviewed by one of her committee members.

After initial coding, certain re-occurring words and phrases that reflected the theoretical frameworks and cross-cut all data sources, were identified as patterns (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). Following advice received from preliminary member checking and peer review, code names were changed and then condensed into color-coded themes and subthemes (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, common words and phrases that were value-laden were categorized into thematic patterns grounded in the theoretical frameworks of choice (Boyatzis, 1998; Bruan & Clarke, 2006; Hayes, 1997). Language derived from these theories was then applied to label major themes; subthemes were then labeled with the help of participants and committee members. The

classification of final themes and subthemes was a collaborative process, as the researcher asked

nine of the participants to share their views and then made changes based upon their suggestions.

For example, Rose also added to the subtheme, 'staying focused', by suggesting the

addition of future goals.   Rose shared that thinking about a better future is what helps her stay

focused on the present. Data and its corresponding analysis were reviewed following

conversations with participants, and their suggestions were validated by the narratives shared by

all 12 participants. Finally, themes and subthemes underwent peer review, and the subtheme

'grandma' was changed to 'grandma's support'.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality of this study, ethical standards were met throughout its duration.

Qualitative social work research endeavors must adhere to ethical codes, given the profession's

commitment to social justice and the enhancement of societal well-being (Mertens & Ginsberg,

2008; Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002). First, to ensure ethical adherence, social workers must

consider their ontological and epistemological stances as they relate to study participants. Social

work qualitative researchers must also question and justify why they are conducting their

research (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2008; Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002). As mentioned previously, the

researcher chose to conduct a critical narrative inquiry of young African American women living

in a Southeastern college town because of a sincere wish to ignite social change and action

within this community. Given this researcher's commitment to social justice and this population,

special consideration was given to ethical practices, ensuring no harm was done to study

participants.

Prior to submitting an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher

consulted at length with its Director, who helped to identify all risks associated with this study

and how to address those risks in the youth assent, parental permission, and consent forms. The director of IRB also reviewed and approved all materials, including the usage of two $25.00 Walmart gift cards as incentives. This amount was justified based upon the low federal minimum wage, as participants were expected to engage in interviews, taking up four hours of their time, while also devoting three hours to journaling.

After lengthy consultation with the University of Georgia's IRB board, the dissertation chair of this research endeavor, reviewed and approved all the necessary materials. An application was then proposed to the University of Georgia's (UGA) Institutional Review Board (IRB) that followed their guidelines, including the provision of all documents to be employed in the study, such as an interview protocol, a consent letter, a youth assent form, guardian or participant consent forms, a recruitment flier, and an educational resource guide developed by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher thoroughly described narrative methodology and her anticipated analytical strategy. Finally, a thorough description of participants, possible risks associated with the study, and methods to safeguard subjects were also submitted to IRB for approval.

In order to safeguard participants from potential risks, pseudonyms were utilized to secure their anonymity. All participants chose a flower name and all of the schools were named after famous African American women poets. All data obtained for the sake of this study is stored on the researcher's password protected computer. Additionally, besides the researcher, only committee members have access to the data. The researcher destroyed audio data for underage participants immediately following transcription, instead of obtaining adult consent for their participation. Finally, after final analysis was completed, all identifiable data (audio recordings) were destroyed. IRB granted approval for this study in mid-September, 2016.

Participants were given the choice to withdraw from this study at any time without any explanation, but all participants chose to complete the study.

Credibility

As qualitative researchers tend to conduct research in the natural setting of participants, credibility is considered a goal. The goal of credibility is to ensure that researchers' findings authentically mirror the beliefs, experiences, perceptions, and attitudes presented by the study participants (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013). In order to ensure credibility of findings this researcher thoroughly described why, how, and what research techniques were employed throughout the research process to promote transparency (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013). This was done by maintaining a researcher journal and rigorously describing the methods the researcher employed when writing up her report (Cope, 2014; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013).

This researcher also utilized member-checking and a peer-review process to safeguard for credibility. Peer-review of data and associated interpretations permitted an unbiased outsider to engage with and make comments about credibility. In addition, participants were asked if researchers' interpretation of data adequately represented their views, thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Participants were granted the opportunity to correct misinterpretations made by the researcher and also revised themes and subthemes during final member checking (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013).

Triangulation, or the usage of multimodal data, was another method employed by the researcher to create credible findings. Interviews, participants' diaries, informal observation, and a researcher journal were used to create a confluence of data conclusions that promote authenticity. The application of multimodal data for the purposes of triangulation, was a

systematic and complex process in order to yield comprehensive results. Triangulation then helped to ensure credibility of findings through wide-ranging forms of data (Creswell, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013).

Transferability

Transferability is another term used by qualitative researchers in place of generalizability or external validity. Qualitative research focuses on the *emic*, or subjective understanding of participants. Due to its subjective exploration of data, qualitative sample sizes are typically small, making it difficult to generalize findings to a larger population (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013). Transferability is achieved when individuals not associated with the study, find the results relatable to their own experiences. To achieve transferability, the researcher provided rich descriptions of data and their corresponding interpretations, including direct quotes from the participants. Transferability was attained through rigorous writing of research findings (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2013).

Dependability

Due to small sample sizes, qualitative researchers aim for dependability of findings, that is, the constancy of data across similar conditions. Dependability was achieved by this researcher through the creation of a decision-making research audit trail. This was to ensure that other researchers can replicate and/or make sense of the strategies employed throughout the research endeavor. Dependability also requires coherence between data collection and data interpretations. As such, the researcher supplied detailed study information so that readers might determine if findings are consistent with the data collected (Cope, 2014; Goldberg & Allen, 2015; Moon et al., 2015).

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Theory-driven thematic analysis as outlined by Boyatzis (1998) was applied to answer the three research questions driving this study: 1) What are the family, community, and school risk factors that impede higher educational aspiration of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town? 2) What are the identified factors that promote resilience in this population? and 3) How do both risk and resilient factors interact to impact higher educational aspiration?. The demographics of the research participants are displayed in Table 1.

Theory-driven analysis provided a mechanism for the researcher to establish pattern recognition, or the ability to take complex data and establish connections through the usage of theories. The goal of this analysis was to deduce conceptually meaningful labels, derived from the language utilized by the theories, while also capturing the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis, 1998; Karanasios et al., 2013; McFarlane & O'Reilly-de Brun, 2012).

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Name	Race	Age	Grade	High School	Employment
Daisy	African American	19	Senior	Alice Walker	Employed
Lily	African American	18	Senior	Alice Walker	Unemployed
Tansy	African American	18	Senior	Alice Walker	Employed
Marigold	African American	18	Senior	Alice Walker	Employed
Jasmine	African American	17	Senior	Maya Angelou	Employed
Azalea	African American	17	Junior	Maya Angelou	Unemployed
Dahlia	African American	17	Junior	Maya Angelou	Employed
Iris	African American	17	Senior	Maya Angelou	Employed
Rose	African American	17	Junior	Lucille Clifton	Employed
Lavender	African American	18	Senior	Lucille Clifton	Employed
Daffodil	African American	17	Senior	Lucille Clifton	Unemployed
Hibiscus	African American	17	Senior	Lucille Clifton	Employed

Note: This table was created by information provided by participants.

Theory-driven thematic analysis was then employed to reflect the crux of existing environmental risks, along with which factors promoted resilience in the population under study. In order to deduce themes, all data was analyzed, compared, and contrasted on multiple occasions using ATLAS.ti. For example, the researcher read each of the transcripts multiple times, while looking for words or phrases that were repeatedly utilized by participants. Codes, such as 'racism', 'sexism', and 'struggling' emerged from internal validation through extensive review of transcripts and their associated codes. Identified codes were then reread across data sources to ensure that they reflected the views of participants. These codes were then reviewed, revised, and condensed into three major themes and 11 subthemes based upon theoretical commonalities that crosscut all data. Themes were then worded using language derived from the two theoretical frameworks undergirding this research study (Boyatzis, 1998).

Theory-driven themes were identified that answered the first two research questions: 1) What are the family, community, and school risk factors that impede higher education aspiration of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town, and 2) What are the identified factors that promote resilience in this population?. This approach was taken in effort to display what risks exist on the macro level and within the immediate environments of the young women being studied. Participants described some factors as both potential risks and/or elements that promoted resilience. Further themes emerged from the data reflecting elements that solely encouraged resilience despite the varying risks. In answer to the third research question, findings showed that each of the 12 participants expressed a desire to pursue higher education, which will be further elaborated on in the "Higher Educational Aspiration" section of this chapter.

Table 4.2
Theory-Driven Thematic Analysis of Risk and Resilient Factors

Themes
Critical Race Feminism:
Racism
Sexism
Classism ("Struggling")
Risk and Resilient Factors:
Single Supportive Caregiver
Neighborhood
Peers
School
Resilient Factors:
Never Giving Up
Self-definition
Grandmother's Support
Staying focused on future goals

Note: Adapted from Boyatzis (1998)

Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) posits that unlike all other groups, women of color are significantly more marginalized due to the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism (Crenshaw, 2003; Houh & Kalsem; 2015; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Wing, 2003). CRF was identified as one of the three over-arching themes, owing to the fact that all 12 participants described times in their lives where they had directly experienced the perceived intersection of racism, sexism, and "struggling" financially or classism. Many times participants shared stories about how family members had also experienced these various forms of social inequality and how these factors had left a considerable impact on their own young lives. Racism, sexism, and classism were then identified as subthemes; however to reflect the language of study participants, classism was also labeled as "struggling".

Racism

Each of the 12 participants described instances in their lives where they perceived themselves as having experienced some form of racism, especially when they were predominantly surrounded by European Americans. For example, Hibiscus believed that she had encountered racism with her mentor, although she described their relationship as positive and influential in her decision to apply for college. She reported:

> Me and my mentor went to Starbucks and it was filled predominantly with white people.
>
> When I walked in they looked at me like I was weird. I felt out of place because I was
>
> the only African American; and my mentor, so instead of asking me what I wanted, she
>
> ordered for me.

Hibiscus went onto assert how she thinks European Americans view her: "Not only because I am a girl and an African American, I am always expected to be ignorant or not good at something.

I'm expected not to have any intellect. I'm expected to be stereotypical, loud, dumb, and ratchet". She viewed the intersection of racism and sexism as frustrating and a challenge that she and her family members must confront on a daily basis. As an example, Hibiscus attributed racism to male familial unemployment, which caused other family members to live in poverty. Hibiscus stated:

> My uncle, my mom's brother, um he had a lot of trouble trying to find a job because of his race. He looked intimidating and people didn't want to hire him so it was a problem for a long time because he had a family of his own he needed to support, and he was discriminated against. His name doesn't sound like it would be his, so when they see his name they think it's going to be this whole different person, like a person of Hispanic race, and they're like "you're just not who we are looking for the job".

When confronted by perceived racism, Hibiscus sought advice from family, friends, and school personnel. This allowed Hibiscus to externalize the effects of racism.

Like Hibiscus, other participants thought that they had experienced racism in a variety of environments. Jasmine, a talented dancer, was encouraged by her instructors to try-out for a summer fellowship at a prestigious studio; however her view was that she was denied acceptance explicitly based upon her race. Here is how she described the experience:

> One time I went to an audition for a dance company in the city. When I went there it was mostly Whites. Then when they sent my results back they told me that I couldn't be in it because most of the people that auditioned were White, and they didn't want a black dancer taking attention away from the white dancers.

Jasmine communicated a belief that racism is closely tied to segregation, both of which impact her emotions negatively. She disclosed:

> To be honest, my town is racist. It's specifically just one race that lives in a neighborhood. There is so much segregation and not enough diversity. I feel like it's like that everywhere here. I mean just like the girls I dance with, we are all black. There are no other races. I feel like there should be more diversity. Because like I said, I have a lot of friends from different races, but when it comes to getting groups of people together, it's always just one race in this town. I noticed that everywhere I go.

Jasmine expressed an appreciation for diversity and a belief that segregation contributed to racism on both sides and between the races.

Three of the 12 participants conveyed times where they had encountered perceived racism from European Americans at their places of employment. Marigold, who worked in a chain clothing store declared:

> Actually last week, this couple came into my job at the clothing store and the wife made comments towards me. She was being racist. She said, "Sorry, but we don't need your help" and "We got it." The husband asked me if he could get into the dressing room and she was like, "No let's go ask this lady over here instead of her".

Tansy, who worked in a grocery store, noted a time at work where she and other employees experienced what they believe to be perceived racism from a regular shopper. She disclosed, "There's a woman that comes in here that if you're black she won't let you bag her stuff." She described a time when this same woman accidentally entered a line with an African American bagger and started yelling at him to not touch any of her things.

Lavender also described encounters of perceived racism at work. She worked in a chain fast food restaurant in a nearby county:

> Most people that come to our store are older white people. It's just little stuff, like they won't put their money in my hand. They will slide it to me over the table. Or when I give them the money they won't want to take it from my hands. Or if I try to hand them a cup, they move their hand so that they won't touch my skin.

Lavender shared that she tried not to let perceived racism bother her, but she believed that she would not be treated that way if she were white. For example, she stated: "White people try not to make it a big deal, but I see it as racism since I'm the person that is taking their order". Data showed that places of employment are frequent sites where these young women experienced micro aggressions or perceived racism, mostly from white consumers.

Like the other participants, Rose communicated the belief that she had experienced negative interactions with European Americans due to race. However, she professed the belief that her father's experiences with racism had a more severe and lasting impact on her life.   Rose revealed that her father never graduated from high school and had difficulty finding employment that provided enough income for the family. Rose perceived racism as the main contributor to her father's decision to pursue a life of crime. She stated:

> My father had gone to prison, I love my daddy so much. He had sold drugs and selling drugs got turned into felonies. He said that dealing drugs was his only way of taking care of me and getting money because he couldn't get a job.

At the time of the study, Rose's father had another three years before he could become eligible for parole. Rose identified her father's imprisonment as one of the most challenging aspects of her life, due to the close relationship she had with him. It was her belief that her father would

not be imprisoned if racism had not prevented him from finishing high school or getting a well-paying job.

All 12 participants viewed racism as an almost normal aspect of their lived experiences, justifying it as a subtheme. Perceived racism occurred across locations, including jobs, dance studios, gatherings with friends from different backgrounds, restaurants, and coffee shops. All of the participants also shared stories about times they had experienced racism in their educational environments, which will be elaborated on in the "school" section of this chapter.

Sexism

Sexism, or being treated differently due to gender, was another challenge or risk depicted by each of the 12 participants. Similar to racism, these young women had encountered sexism with family, peers, teachers, and employers. The severity of this subtheme and its impact varied between participants. For example, a few participants communicated the opinion that people did not think they could do simple tasks because they were female. Dahlia stated: "Adults are always like we need a boy to come lift this." Dahlia, whose mother is a retired Veteran, declared that she can easily lift heavy objects although she is not a male.

Additionally, both Marigold and Lavender described the belief that they are treated differently by members of their family due to gender. However, both felt like their family's display of sexism was a form of protection. Marigold elaborated:

> My grandmother wouldn't let us walk up the street unless our brothers were with us. We couldn't go by ourselves because we are girls. I mean I guess that is a good thing, but probably at the end of the day we could have walked up there by ourselves.

Lavender noted similar treatment from her family members: "In my family the boys get to do what they want because they aren't the ones that bring home babies. Girls bring home the babies.

I guess that's the stereotype that the girls bring home the babies." Lavender recounted that she has a curfew, is not permitted to have a boyfriend, and can only spend time with certain friends because she is a young woman.

Some participants told of experiences when they felt significant others had treated them differently or expected things from them simply because of their gender. For example, Lily related a conversation she had with an ex-boyfriend. Lily said, "I was talking to a boy once and he felt like, you know how the old house wife used to be, how she catered to everything, and he just felt like I was supposed to do that." Lily ended her relationship with this boy because of his attitude toward women. Azalea also depicted a situation with her ex-boyfriend where she felt pressured because of gender:

My first actual boyfriend was in ninth grade and that was horrible. He is literally a piece of trash. And I don't just say that because we ended on bad terms. He is just a horrible person. He's borderline misogynist so that's not good. And he did a lot of things for attention, and he would always pressure me. Sometimes, if I didn't want to talk to him or something he would cry, which was really lame. He didn't like the word no and would threaten to kill himself when I would try to break up with him.

Azalea also reported that her ex tried to pressure her to do sexual acts as well, but she said "no". She eventually ended the relationship after encouragement from family and friends, who also helped her halt communication with this ex.

Outside of romantic relationships, other young women conveyed a fear of men because of perceived gender differences. For example, Daisy voiced, "I won't leave my house at night because I'm afraid. I know there are child molesters and dangerous people around that might hurt me." Daisy admitted that she keeps to herself in order to avoid being robbed or sexually

assaulted. She asserted that women are easy targets, since it is harder for them to fight back.

Marigold echoed Daisy's sentiments regarding men and narrated a serious one-on-one sexual

assault that was too painful for her to fully describe. She disclosed, "Umm actually we were in

the car and my cousin got out and I thought she was coming back, and she did not come back.

And he locked the doors and yeah. Actually it's happened twice to me".

As described by the participants, perceived sexism was a risk factor that they encountered

in their lived experiences as young women. Each subject had a story to share about being treated

differently in their homes and communities due to their gender. Sometimes sexism simply

manifested as an attitude or a belief that girls and women should act certain ways. For one

participant, sexism was demonstrated as brutal attacks that left her traumatized.

Classism ("Struggling")

All 12 study participants noted times in the past or currently when they, or family

members, had experienced classism; or as they worded it, "struggled" financially. The degree of

"struggling" ranged among the participants. For example, three participants had experienced

homelessness, while others described much less severe instances when they had to forego certain

amenities, like going out to eat or going to the movies. Due to the hard work of single

supportive caregivers, some participants and their families had recently benefitted by reaching a

higher socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, all participants had experienced economic hardships

at a certain point, for different lengths of time and at varying degrees of severity.

For example, Daffodil's family had recently obtained middle-class status after her mother

completed a master's degree in social work. However, she acknowledged that in the past, her

mother had struggled financially while working on her degree to meet the basic needs of the

family: "After my parents' divorce my mom struggled paying bills. My mom was never late on

her bills. We just asked help from our family. We stopped eating out. She started cooking. We were just very short on buying things." Daffodil voiced that now her mother can afford a variety of nice things, such as a new home, car, and frequent trips to the nail salon.

Jasmine and her family also worked their way out of poverty. In order to do so, Jasmine's mother worked two job simultaneously to support the family:

My mom, when she first had my sisters, she didn't have as good of a job as she does now, so it was three kids with one single mom. I saw her struggle a lot and I saw her cry a lot. We used to move a lot too. When I first started middle school, we had just moved into this house and then her job was doing cuts, and she ended up being one of the people that got cut. And so she was already struggling to pay all the bills by herself, and on top of that she didn't have a stable income. So we had to move into a lower-income neighborhood and we stayed there for about three or four years until she got back on her feet.

Jasmine shared that she lives in a much nicer house now, near her grandma. She admitted that she works to help her mom, but that they are now living comfortably.

Hibiscus also described a time that was especially difficult for her family due to finances:

It was probably half way through freshman year when my mom lost her job and we were trying to figure out what we were going to do for money. We were worried about where we were gonna stay. We were behind on rent for two months and things just kept piling up, my mom had health issues, and it was issue after issue. I felt like I had to go to work so I started babysitting and focused less on school and more on getting babysitting jobs. That was really challenging… I couldn't enjoy being a normal teenager like my friends. I had to be responsible.

Hibiscus' mom eventually located employment. However, she decided to work while going to school, to continue assisting her family financially.

Tansy's mom "struggled" and still experienced financial hardship at the time of this study. During the first interview, her family was packing and moving to her grandmother's house because the landlord had kicked them out. Tansy shared, "I work two jobs". This enabled Tansy to have her own money and help her mom when needed. Tansy communicated: "We lived in a lot of different places, we moved at least 4 or 5 times" and now owing to pressing financial circumstances, she was moving in with her grandmother again because there was no place else to go. Classism or "struggling" had a clear impact on Tansy's upbringing since she was forced to move multiple places throughout her life and worked two jobs as a high school senior to make ends meet for her family and herself.

At times, a few of the participants and their families had been homeless. Iris shared:

When I stayed with my father we were homeless sometimes. He had to sell a lot of stuff that we had and I don't know, the family used to get mad at him about it. We would find places to stay and ways to go to school, or get school clothes and shoes.

Iris related how, like Hibiscus, she had taken on adult roles because her family "struggled" with money:

And it's kind of hard, because even though my dad was there, he was in the house and stuff, it was kind of on me to take care of the rest of my sisters and brothers. I didn't really get a childhood. Now it's like I'm trying to scrape up every bit of childhood I have left before I'm grown. That's a struggle too.

Iris explained that she and her siblings became creative and artistic with clothing to hide their poor living conditions. For example, she and her siblings painted old shoes, made cut-outs in shirts, and found other ways to make donated or old clothes look new and stylish.

Lily had also experienced homelessness at one point in her life.   Lily recounted "being homeless and not having anything to eat sometimes" as a challenge she had experienced in life and that she "was going back and forth between my aunts and my cousins and my friends' houses". Lily disclosed:

> Uhh for a period of time we stayed with our aunt, then it was my dad and all of his kids.
> It was very stressful, living in a two bedroom, with six of us in one room and three were
> in the other room. We had one bathroom that was really small and one kitchen.

Lily expounded: "At the age of 14 or 15 I had to get out and I had to find a job and be able to support myself and get food and to live and be able to survive." She asserted that although her father tried very hard to care for her and her siblings, they had ended up in foster care because he could not support them.

Daisy also experienced a period of homelessness, after the bank foreclosed on her grandmother's home. She stated:

> I used to live in a house with my grandma and we lost our house and I had to find
> somewhere fast to stay. It was devastating to me. She didn't tell us until two weeks before
> we had to move and then she told us. We had to get our stuff together quick and move out
> of the house. It was hard to pack up all of our stuff and then we had to leave some stuff
> behind because we couldn't take it with us. So we had to leave things behind.

Later, Daisy moved in with her older sister in the town where this study took place, since there was nowhere else to go. Daisy related that she works to help her sister and also to pay her own

bills, while attending high school. She voiced that work became more of a priority so that she can financially aid her grandmother, who became ill with cancer.

Classism or "struggling" financially, clearly impacted all participants in varying degrees at some point, which justified it as a macro-level risk factor. Many of these young women had undergone challenges due to poverty, caused by familial unemployment or underemployment. Some families of participants worked diligently to reach a higher socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, all of the participants were either directly or indirectly subjected to challenges caused by the prevalence of limited financial resources within their homes.

Although each of the participants had experienced poverty to varying degrees in their lives, all the young women in this study displayed resilience and an ability to adapt to their circumstances through a variety of methods. Most of the participants were employed to mitigate issues associated with poverty. These young women assumed adult roles, worked, and sought out assistance from family, friends, and community members in the form of money, housing, food, and clothing in order to survive. Despite the many hardships connected to "struggling" economically, all participants were able to remain in high school and many of them were actively engaging in pursuits toward higher educational attainment.

In sum, Rose best illustrated how the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism affects higher educational aspiration for the participants:

Being a young African American woman in this town is not easy. It's a lot of us young black women who haven't been able to graduate. It's mostly us black women here with multiple kids, without jobs, and depending on the government. I want to better myself by staying in school and graduating to become something in life. I see all these generations before mine not making this town better. It makes me want to grind and focus more.

Rose expressed the view that African American women in this town feel disproportionately marginalized due to their race and gender, which often leads to financial hardships. Hibiscus echoed this belief, further demonstrating how the perceived intersection of racism, sexism, and classism negatively impacted the lived experiences of young African American women. Therefore, data implied that the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism was present across domains and acted as a potential barrier to higher educational aspiration, as these young women had to adapt to and deal with these risk factors.

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Risk and Resilient Factors

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Risk and resilience theory suggests that adverse risks exist as internal and external processes intrinsic to youth development. Additionally, external systems within a youth's immediate environment may heighten or hinder a youth's ability to be resilient in the face of adversity. Thus, youth environments may serve to enhance resilience or may create barriers that have a negative impact on higher educational aspiration (Coll et al., 1996; Masten, 2001; Masten, 2011; Stanley, 2009; Ungar et al., 2013). Aligning with risk and resilience theory, all study subjects revealed aspects of their immediate environment that they considered as both risks and attributes that promoted their own resilience. The following subthemes: 1) Single-supportive caregiver, 2) neighborhood, 3) school, and 4) peers were identified as both risk and resilient factors.

Single Supportive Caregiver

All 12 of the participants were raised by solely by a single supportive caregiver. Seven of the subjects were parented by single mothers, three by single dads, and two by their grandmothers. Each of the young women noted ways in which their single supportive caregiver had promoted their own resilience or ability to overcome adversity. However, having an absent

parent and/or parents was identified as a risk factor. For example, many of the participants described some form of emotional stress caused by the absence of their parent(s).

Risk Factor.   The most pervasive risk factor associated with having a single supportive caregiver was the emotional damage caused by the absence of one or both parents. For example, Iris described the death of her mother as incredibly painful:

> They told me she died the day before the funeral, but it didn't really click. She's gone and she's not ever coming back. But it didn't really click until I went to the funeral home and I saw her in the box and she was dead. She wasn't moving and she wasn't saying "I love you" and she wasn't moving. No matter how much I talked to her, she wouldn't get up you know. That's when it clicked and I was crying and I was crying. For a whole week, I was just crying. I really didn't communicate with nobody.

Iris professed that she has never gotten over this loss, and no matter how hard her dad tried, he simply could not be her mom. Lily also depicted the absence of her mother as challenging:

> My mom was locked up most of my life. She got out of jail, and then she got married and moved to out west. Stuff like going to school was challenging, like mom's day, we couldn't go or our dad would come, and kids would ask "Where's your mom at?"

Lily disclosed that her dad could not fill the role of a mother, and there were times when she had no one to talk to concerning women's issues. Although Lily's mom had spent most of her daughter's life in jail, Lily defined their relationship as positive. She chose to remain in this town, rather than live with her mother in the Southwest. Lily seemed to understand that her mother's drug addiction was no fault of her own and that she needed to move away to maintain her recovery.

Unlike Lily, Azalea and Jasmine communicated animosity toward their fathers. Azalea's father left shortly after she was born and she shared, "My dad tried to befriend me on Facebook about two years ago. I was thinking, you don't know anything about me. So why are you trying if you were just gone for so long"? She chose not to befriend her father on Facebook and has ignored his attempts to reach out to her. Jasmine also expressed harsh feelings toward her father:

> I mean it bothers me because I have a bunch of siblings and he pays attention to them. I mean I have older sisters and they all got pregnant in high school and they didn't graduate and they didn't go to college or anything. And it's like I'm the one child that you have that's actually doing something with life, and he doesn't pay me any attention. Even if he was to try to be in my life now it would be kind of too late.

Both Azalea and Jasmine resented their fathers for leaving them as babies. Neither of them had plans to establish a relationship with their fathers in the future.

Tansy also felt resentment toward her father. She had been very close to her father, until he got married. Tansy shared, "I don't really have problems with family members besides my dad. I'm not talking to my dad at the moment. The last time I tried to talk to him, I called him to tell him happy birthday, but he didn't answer the phone". Since her father's marriage, Tansy has had an on-again/off-again relationship with him, which has left her with a sense of anger.

Other participants struggled with their parent's or parents' absenteeism, more out of concern than anger or resentment. For example, both Lavender and Daisy stated that their parents suffer from severe mental illness, making it impossible for them to parent. Daisy shared, "My mother is in the "nuthouse" because she hears voices. She had been using drugs all this time because she was hearing voices and wanted them to stop." Daisy defined her mom as her

"heart" and has worried about her since childhood. She also conveyed concerned about her mom as opposed to anger or resentment

Lavender also frequently worried about her absent father, who is diagnosed with bipolar I disorder. She specified:

My dad has bipolar disorder. I grew up with my dad and my mom. We lived in South Carolina. I was the first-born, he was fine. I guess he always had it, but when I was younger, I didn't really pay attention because you're young and you're little. When we moved to Georgia that's when it really started getting bad. He moved out of the house and my mom and dad broke up. He still loves us, but he has this disorder that makes him do totally crazy things...his actions don't match up with his feelings. It makes him seem like he don't care at all. It's like he pushed himself away from us and I don't know why. He thinks that nobody loves him and he moved far away because of that, because of his illness.

Lavender asserted that she wants her dad to return home so that the family can care for him. She voiced concern about his well-being since he lives alone and far away from both sides of the family, in a different state.

The narratives of these young women revealed that the absence of one or both parents led to emotional problems with which they still struggle with on an ongoing basis. Participants' views and feelings toward their absent parent(s) varied, but each young woman depicted having a void that could not be filled, which acted as a risk factor for all participants. However, as discussed in the following section, a single-supportive caregiver helped to ameliorate some of this emotional strain.

Resilient Factor. All participants declared love and appreciation for their single-supportive caregiver despite the financial and emotional hardships the circumstances caused. Many of the young women described their single supportive caregiver as a motivating factor in their own lives to achieve success, but for different reasons. Each of the young women claimed to have a close relationship with their caregiver, whether that was a mother, father, or grandmother. For example, Dahlia proclaimed:

> My mom… she is pretty cool. I wouldn't say that she isn't strict, but she doesn't…shelter me or anything like that. If you do shelter…kids, all it does is make them… sneaky. If your kid does something bad or… something that could potentially hurt them, and parents don't say anything then that means that they don't care. And if you do something that could potentially mess you up and parents do something, then that means they care. My mom cares.

Dahlia's father died from cancer when she was two. She expressed that his death did not affect her as much as it could have, because of the relationship she has with her strong and supportive mother. Dahlia recognized that her mother made sacrifices before and after her birth, so that she could give Dahlia and her brother stability in their home.

Jasmine also depicted her mother as someone who made a lot of sacrifices for her sake:

> My mom struggled as a single mom, but she's always been the type that even if she didn't have, she still would make sure that me and my sisters got what we needed. She sacrificed a lot for us. My dad doesn't help my mom do anything. She has to work two jobs to make sure that we kids are taken care of. There's nothing I don't like because she works hard and I mean I can't really complain about anything.

Jasmine further defined the relationship she has with her mother:

> So we have a bond where if something were to come up I feel like I could tell her instead of just make up a lie, saying I'm going this place when I'm actually go another. I just like how we all can talk to each other about anything and we don't feel like we have to hide stuff.

Daffodil also communicated an understanding that her mother had made sacrifices, such as returning to get a master's degree as an adult. Daffodil shared that her family lives more comfortably now because of her mother's efforts. More important to Daffodil than the sacrifices her mother made, however, was the unrelenting personal support she received from her mother. Daffodil has experienced medical issues since she was a child, including some more recently. Daffodil detailed how her mother's assistance last year had helped her overcome depression:

> Two summers ago, I was…going through a depression and… it was weird for my mom because I was crying and I would go downstairs to her room and she would [say] "What's wrong?". I would tell her that I felt like I was going to die. I was scared that I had breast cancer. I was crying myself to sleep and I told my mom so she took me to the doctor.

Daffodil did not have breast cancer, but she did need surgery to correct breast abnormalities caused by a birth defect. She commented that her mother was there for her throughout all her medical and emotional issues. Hibiscus also attributed much of her own emotional stability to her mother:

> We are so close-knit that we are always there for each other. It's just like she inspires me and motivates me to be a better person and look for the good for myself, you know trying to build a future for myself. She's just loving and always supportive of whatever I want to do.

She conveyed a sincere and deep love for her mother. Hibiscus credited the support she receives from her mother as a protective factor that has helped her withstand hardships, such as bullying. Thinking to the future, she voiced that the hardest part of going away to college will be feeling homesick and really missing her mother.

Just as the other young women in this study described a close bond with their single mothers, Marigold, Lily, and Iris conveyed sincere love for their father. Marigold stated: "I'd say my dad is strong and he motivates us all. He's never left us once, not by choice. He's never left us. And he's not giving up." Lily also narrated how her father never gave up and would keep trying, despite the circumstances:

> My dad had a lot of hardships being a single father to girls. There's certain stuff a man can't get that a woman can. Like housing authority will put a woman before a man because she had kids. There were just certain hardships he had to deal with being a single father with kids. Like he couldn't get us into a homeless shelter because he was a male. We literally had to go to court to get one homeless shelter to let us in. When we did get accepted, there wasn't enough beds for all of us. So we couldn't even go there.

Lily clarified that even though it was stressful growing up with her dad, his determination to try to support them, proved his love. Rather than blaming her father for not being able to support the family, she focused on how hard he tried to care for 12 children. Lily asserted that her father is one of the best people she knows.

Iris also defined the relationship she has with her father as deep. She communicated that her father had been trying to teach her self-reliance since a very young age. Iris declared that she could survive any situation because of the street smarts and skills imparted overtime by her father.

She illustrated a favorite memory:

> It was my birthday and I had totally forgotten that it was my birthday. My dad made me this giant breakfast, and… you know how when you are little you can't pour your own cereal or you can't make your own food, or you can't do certain things you want to do because you're not big enough. He said," Since it's your birthday, I'll let you put the jelly on your own toast". I don't know why, but it made me so happy. I thought, "I'm a big girl now, and I get to put jelly on my own toast"".

Iris labeled this as her happiest memory because it was the first of many times that her father treated her like she was a grownup. Iris valued her father's efforts to work hard and keep the whole family together. She expressed gratitude for all that he taught her and the other siblings.

The narratives shared by this group of young African American women suggest that supportive caregivers may help them promote or develop resilient behaviors. Moreover, they also recognized the personal sacrifices of these often single parent or grandparent caregivers as influential in their lives. Each also expressed the view that their caregiver was highly supportive, caring, and loving. Despite their lived economic and emotional adversities, the prevailing attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by these caregivers seem to have enhanced participants' interpersonal skills and likely also helped their social functioning, self-efficacy, and self-confidence.

Neighborhood

Participants lived in diverse neighborhoods across the town. Depending on their residence, some participants were exposed to a variety of risks, such as crime and drugs. Other participants lived in what they referred to as "quiet" and "safe" neighborhoods without the threat of violence and crime. Those who lived in crime-ridden neighborhoods, described their

residence as a risk factor that they must navigate through on a daily basis. These neighborhoods in particular, seemed to pose danger, sometimes deadly, to the lives of participants increasing their exposure to risks.

Risk Factor. Crime was highly prevalent in some of the neighborhoods where these young women lived. Those who lived in crime-ridden neighborhoods declared a desire to see their communities become free of violence and drugs. Jasmine shared, "I can't say that my neighborhood is good because there are some rough things that happen." Jasmine narrated a time where she was almost killed:

> This one time someone shot through our house. They were shooting at someone that didn't even live here. So I feel like you're in a neighborhood where you don't live and you are putting me and my sisters' lives in danger. They shot through my room and that's the scariest thing I have ever experienced. And so I'm in the room and I'm lying on my bed and I just hear something go over my head. If I had been sitting up, I would have got shot. And that does kind of scare me.

After the incident, Jasmine's family chose to stay in their home due to the close relationships they have with their neighbors and their proximity to her grandmother's house. Additionally, her mom felt like it was an isolated incident, since the gang was targeting a boy, and not their family. Daisy also described crime in her neighborhood:

> There was a high-speed car chase in front of my apartment. The criminal got out of the car and hid somewhere in the community. The police were everywhere and still couldn't find him. That's really scary because the police were right behind this man and then couldn't find him. It's like the police can't even keep you safe.

Daisy asserted feeling fearful in her neighborhood: "It's like every man or woman for themselves." She revealed that she often remains in her apartment to stay safe.

Lily also defined her neighborhood as very dangerous due to crime and violence caused by the presence of gangs:

> It's a gated community, but the gates are torn off. Around the community it's dirty. The apartments are decent for the most part. You have gang members outside, drugs, guns. There is a church around the corner and a health center at the bottom. Just a couple weeks ago there was a shooting. Me and my dad were upstairs, we had literally just walked across the street into our home and 30 minutes after we got home, gun shots were going. A couple years ago they found a whole bunch of guns and maybe a body, buried up under the playground where the kids play. Any kid could have been digging in the sand and found those guns.

Lily has seen a lot of violence throughout her lifetime. For example, she told a very sad story about how gang violence has impacted her on a personal level:

> My friend got shot by one of the gangs and bullets went through our house. We all were just sitting there when it happened. Five minutes before he was shot, he was sitting in our house. He was asking my aunt for a cigarette and my aunt was like "Boy, I ain't gonna give you no cigarette. I don't condone young ones smoking." And he said, "You know I'm old enough to smoke." She said, "No go buy your own cigarettes." And then he sat in the chair with us for a little while and then he went outside and......

Lily paused for a long time after she recounted that her friend was shot to death immediately upon leaving her home. She shared that due to her friend's proximity to the house, the bullets

that killed him had entered her home. She then uttered a wish, for the gangs and crime to go away forever.

Hibiscus and Rose, who lived in the same community, also labeled their neighborhood as crime-ridden. Hibiscus defined her neighborhood as "filled with drugs and gang violence". She expounded:

> They're selling drugs. They're throwing up their gang signs against the other ones. I don't know how to describe it. You can tell who is in what gang because they are either wearing their gang's color or throwing up their gang's signs. There was this one time that I was trying to sleep and I could hear the people that sell drugs walking around, being loud and blasting music. It was a terrible experience.

Like Hibiscus, Rose also portrayed their neighborhood similarly, "All the kids, like 13 and up, around here smoke weed. The kids are bad, they all have knives now. People do bad things out here, like sell drugs. Sometimes there are police riding around".   She talked about a particularly dangerous time:

> There was a criminal that killed a cop, hiding out here in the upper apartments. I had to stay inside, kids were told not to leave their house because anything could happen at any time. I didn't like that he was right here in our neighborhood, across the street.

Both Hibiscus and Rose communicated a desire for crime to leave their communities so that they could feel safe. Both young women conveyed care and a positive affinity for their neighborhoods and affirmed that despite the crime, this was their home.

Here, the data showed that crime-ridden neighborhoods created risks for some of the participants who lived in those areas. The narratives of these young women revealed that gang presence actually threatened the lives of participants, along with their family members, friends,

and neighbors. One participant was shot at and might even have been killed, while another lost a best friend. Violence, including drugs and gun-related crime in certain neighborhoods presented as an identified risk factor to participants.

Resilient Factor. Although some discussed menacing violence, other participants defined their neighborhoods as safe and almost serene places in which to live. Although Tansy was being evicted from her home, she expressed true love for the neighborhood she was leaving. She had lived there for a few years during middle school and for the past three years. Tansy defined her neighborhood as:

> It's quiet and we have a little lake and its peaceful back there. It's dirty, but it's still peaceful to go back there. And we have geese. We like seeing them. Even though they walk through the street, we still like seeing them. It's quiet and it's a trustful neighborhood. We can leave the house and leave the door unlocked. That's one of my favorite parts that at least we can leave the door unlocked. If I don't have my key and I need to leave my door unlocked, I can do that.

Tansy expressed sadness related to moving because her neighborhood brought her great joy. Whether it was from watching the geese grow quickly or sitting by the lake, she felt like her neighborhood was a sanctuary and the perfect place to call home.

Like Tansy, Marigold found her old neighborhood to be calming. Marigold depicted her neighborhood as:

> It's kind of secluded, it's just behind a bunch of trees. It's really quiet out there, but it was really nice. It was just apartments, they were kind of hidden by trees. I mostly liked the quietness. It just gave a calm feeling and there's a creek we used to go to and that was nice. It was just calm and relaxing.

Marigold clarified that she had moved a lot and that this particular neighborhood felt most like home to her. She admitted that neighbors kept to themselves, but she liked that and found the atmosphere to be soothing. Marigold had moved to a nicer part of town with her aunts, but she expressed preference for her old neighborhood, owing to the natural beauty of those surroundings.

Daffodil also described her neighborhood as serene. She said, "It's quiet. I mean it's not really quiet because the train tracks are right there and we are right in the middle of everything. But it's very peaceful". Daffodil communicated that her family had recently moved to this neighborhood and although it is very safe, she liked her old neighborhood better. Daffodil defined the old neighborhood where she grew up as friendly:

> The place I grew up… people would have these get togethers and everybody would just go and have fun. And you would meet people you didn't know that lived in the neighborhood. We lived in a cul-de-sac. So there were three other houses and there was a big get together and everybody came. We ate. We talked. I liked playing with my friends. I feel like living there was fun for me.

Daffodil admitted that her family had relocated to a very nice area of town. However, she shared that she misses the people from her old neighborhood. Like Daffodil, Dahlia also lived in a nice and quiet neighborhood:

> My neighborhood is really quiet, honestly if there were no cars, you would probably think that nobody lived in this neighborhood because you never see anybody outside. We don't like talk to our neighbors. I think talking to your neighbors [in this community] is kind of weird.

Dahlia found her neighborhood to be peaceful, and was not bothered by the lack of community, unlike Daffodil. She defined her home as comfortable and safe, unlike other parts of the town under study.

After a thorough review of the data, it became clear that safe neighborhoods protected participants from the threat of violence, harm, or even death. The girls who lived in "peaceful" or "quiet" neighborhoods had not experienced the hardships associated with exposure to drugs, crime, and violence as described above. They could also roam about their neighborhoods without fear of gang violence or crime, unlike other crime-ridden parts of town where the study took place.

Peers

The young women who participated in this study shared that their peer groups could either be supportive or detrimental to their well-being. Some of the participants chose to end friendships when they were being mistreated or pressured into doing "bad" things. Other participants described their friends as highly motivating and unwavering in their support. Additionally, boyfriends either acted as a potential risk or resilient factor. Some boyfriends caused emotional abuse to a few of the participants, while others encouraged them to pursue higher education. Therefore, peers could act either as a risk factor or a promotor of resilience for participants.

Risk Factor. Both Rose and Lavender depicted times when they were mistreated by their friends, which caused them to feel isolated and angry. Rose voiced: "Well I don't really have friends. Well I have friends but they're not real friends because they all be fake. To be honest in high school you really don't know who is real and who is fake."

Rose described a situation with her former best friend:

> People turn their back on you a lot. I did have a best friend since kindergarten, we got into it recently, so I went off on her. She talked bad about me on Instagram a couple weeks ago over a boy or something. Because she thought that I liked someone that she messed around with. In the past, we connected and we both knew where each other came from, like she knew so much about me and she was there. And now I feel like she's not there and she feels like she is better than me since she doesn't stay in the projects anymore, she stays in a house. So she feels like she is better than me.

Rose conveyed distrust for all peers since her best friend turned on her. She also professed feeling very isolated from and not supported by her peer group.

> Lavender disclosed a similar situation when her best friends had treated her badly, which caused her to feel lonely and also to mistrust friends:

> My boyfriend cheated on me with this girl, and my friends were friends with this girl and me. They went back and told her everything I told them about the situation. They were two-faced. They still are my friends, but I don't trust them. I have friends and I'll say one thing and they will switch it up and go and say another. I kind of think I don't know if they're just not true friends to me, or if they are just my friend because I'm good to them. I mean I let them ride in my car. I bought them food before. I don't know if they're using me or something else. It's like I have friends and then I don't have friends and I'm just alone. This one friend, she was two-faced to me last year because she started a rumor about me. We are really good friends now. I get over stuff so I just dropped it, but last year she made up this rumor that I had sex with this one boy. I don't understand them.

Lavender insisted that she has a lot of acquaintances, but not friends. She communicated that she cannot reveal her true thoughts and feelings about life with peers, without being judged or mistreated. For Lavender, peers presented as a risk since they judged her and have also allegedly spread rumors about her.

Like other participants, Marigold also revealed that she preferred her sisters over friends due to similar "trust" issues:

I wouldn't say that I have friends. I'm close to people, but I wouldn't consider most people my friends. I mean we are cool and I'll be there for you, but I'm not that social because some people are sneaky. It's not that I don't like them, it's just about trust. It's like if you sit and observe what's going on and see how they treat people that they call their friends, I wouldn't let you do that to me. So I'm cool with people, I'll talk to you, but I won't hang out with or spend time with you during the day, talk to you on the phone, or invite you to my house.

Marigold felt isolated from peers and viewed them as a source of stress, rather than as a means to promote her own resilience.

Other participants recounted ending friendships when they felt pressured to act against their morals or engage in unlawful activities. For example, Jasmine related a story about a former friend:

She tried to make me smoke weed with her, but I wouldn't do it. I'm not fixng to get in trouble with my momma. I just said no and left. That's why we aren't friends anymore. I haven't talked to her in six months because of that.

She felt it was important to end this particular friendship to remove a negative influence from her life.

Iris also ended friendships that she believed were leading her down a bad path in life:

> I used to get in trouble and stuff with my old friends because of the things we used to do. Like all the stuff I did in 9th grade and the life that I was caught up in. When I went to the bathroom, we threw tissue everywhere and we put water on the walls. We stuck the tissue to the walls.

Iris revealed that she avoided these friends that convinced her to do certain types of activities, pranks, or "bad things" when she was younger. Now, she has decided it is more important for her to focus on school instead.

In addition to friendships, significant others also presented as a risk factor for three participants. For example, Tansy reported that the most difficult situation for her, was when an ex-boyfriend ended their relationship. She wrote in her diary:

> I met a boy. His name was Jake. We started talking and hanging out after school. He would always want to walk with me home and we'd sit outside at our secret spot and just cuddle and talk. One day he walked me home and he had to leave. Before he left, he kissed me and I fell in love right then and there and ever since that day me and him dated on and off for 3 long years. When we broke up the last time I started cutting myself. I'm okay now.

During her first interview, Tansy revealed that she had experienced significant depression and had to see a counselor after her boyfriend broke up with her for another girl. She admitted that although she felt heart-broken, therapy was helpful.

Lavender had a significant other who frequently jeopardized her emotional well-being. Lavender described her relationship as follows:

We got together the day after my birthday, so you can say our anniversary is the day after my birthday. We were young. He is still young. You know how girls' mental states develop faster than boys. That's exactly how it is with me and him. He just does little stuff… stuff that you shouldn't do in a relationship. Being with him I'm always accused. He's always like "Where are you at?". He needs to know my location. I'm happy we broke up. I'm not so worried now. And then I made a whole bunch of decisions based on him. I got in trouble for him. My religion, it is against my religion to be with him, to do stuff with him that I'm not supposed to do in my heart. And then it's like he don't care. It seemed like he never really cared. I don't know why I've been doing it for so long.

Lavender recently ended this relationship due to the emotional damage it had caused her. She also felt like she was in a different place than her ex and needed to let him go, in order to move forward and toward reaching her future academic goals.

Marigold also communicated that choices made with her significant other had negatively impacted her ability to achieve academic success for a short time. For example, she revealed:

We lost our first child last year around January. I can handle it, but sometimes when I'm alone I can't just really let it go. It's not something I can really let go of. I don't know if I'm really coping with it. I'm trying not to cry all the time and try not to think about it.

Marigold disclosed her miscarriage is something that continued to cause her emotional distress until recently. However, she communicated that she had moved on with her life, and she also recognized that a baby would have prevented her from attending college and working toward a career.

Thus, significant others and friendships presented as a possible risk that threatened the emotional stability of a few participants. Some of the young women lacked trust in friends and were often bullied by them. A few participants chose to end friendships when they were pressured to engage in negative behaviors, such as smoking cannabis, skipping class, and pulling pranks at school as noted above. Significant others who pressured participants to engage in certain behaviors constituted a risk, and particularly so when the relationships caused them to experience emotional turmoil.

Resilient Factor. Other participants described their peers as both supportive and instrumental in ensuring their psychosocial wellbeing and educational success. For example, Daisy, who self-admitted to being very shy, told that a peer whom she had met at school helped her "re-open to people". She elaborated, "It was hard because, I didn't know anyone when I came up here and since I'm a shy person I didn't talk to nobody. I was by myself for a long time and then I met a friend, he talked to me and then I just got out of my shell." She went onto to describe this friend as "a very fun person and loud. He goes and talks to everybody". Daisy noted that there were times that she struggled in school, but that he always motivated her to stay on task and finish school.

Hibiscus also asserted that her friends are necessities, as they have helped her overcome a variety of hardships:

My friends have been there with me through everything. I consider them my sisters. They're the people I turn to all the time, even more than my sisters whether it's over something stupid I saw today or if there is something I really need to tell them. They're my family.

She went on to say, "I have thought about ending it all and my friends talked me out of it. I thank God for them. I really do because they have been there with me through everything. They have helped me so much." Hibiscus explained that the support she had received from her friends helped her achieve emotional stability. Additionally, Hibiscus' friends encouraged and motivated her to pursue higher education.

Lily also defined her friends as caring and concerned individuals who promoted wellness in her life. She confided that has three really close friends that uplift her:

I like how they are genuine and loyal. I have never had any problems with them even with the ones I've known since elementary school. I've known them since second grade. They've just always been my friends, even when we moved away and moved schools, we always stayed friends. Even if I lost contact with them, we still stayed friends. One girl, she just got back from New Jersey, and she texted me right when she got back to hang out.

Lily shared that throughout all the difficulties she experienced in life, her friends offered unwavering support that kept her going despite hardships.

Azalea and Dahlia, two best friends, also described their peers as supportive, accepting, and caring. Azalea claimed that she belongs to two peer groups, and that each group meets different needs. She shared, "Both groups are supportive, really cool and supportive. Dahlia is especially supportive. They are always there for me if I need them. I just like all of them. They're independent. They don't copy other people, they're just themselves." Azalea shared that these friendships have given her the freedom to stay true to herself.

Dahlia also described her friendship with Azalea as something she cherishes, along with their other friends.

Dahlia portrayed her friends as follows:

> They're nice people. Like they're nice to me, which is all that matters. They're
> supportive and I can be honest with them. Even if they wearing an ugly shirt, I still tell
> them that it's ugly, but if they like it they can still wear it. And they can tell me the same
> thing, but I'm still going to wear my shirt even if they think it's ugly.

Dahlia labeled humor as a very important aspect of her friendships. Like Azalea, she recognized that her friends accept her unconditionally. Both Dahlia and Azalea claimed that they often talk about going to college with their friends. Their friendship was described as a motivating force for higher educational aspiration.

Like other participants, Daffodil defined her peer group as understanding and influential regarding her decision to pursue higher education:

> Sometimes I come to school feeling a little down, and they'll be the first people to notice
> and sometimes they'll ask me "What's wrong?", and I'll just tell them and they give me
> advice on what I should do. Or they tell me that they are always there for me. We've
> been talking about where we want to go to college and what we want to major in. And all
> the different people we are going to see. And we do talk about how we still want to stay
> close as friends, while we go off. We don't want to lose contact.

Daffodil has worked on college applications with her friends and described them as motivational and helpful in her pursuit of higher education.

Significant others were also found to be identified factors that helped facilitate resilience. Three of the study subjects voiced that their boyfriends positively impacted their higher educational aspiration.

For example, Iris recounted how her boyfriend inspired her:

> He kind of motivates me go to college because, even if we did have a future together, at some point we are going to have a family and we are going to have to be able to support it. And basically, we have to go to school so we can make money.

Iris desired to pursue higher education, like her boyfriend, so that they can secure financial stability before starting a family together.

Hibiscus also depicted her boyfriend as instrumental in her decision to pursue higher education:

> He is always pushing me about how college is so important and that I should not give that up because it's going to be a good experience. College is a must, especially if you are building a future life, like a career and all that. If I don't do anything I should go to college. He says, "If anything, go to college."

Hibiscus reported that her boyfriend plans to join the military; his dedication to service, unrelenting support, and advice have positively influenced her decision to apply to college.

Finally, Jasmine's boyfriend, who is in his second year of college, encouraged her to seek higher education. She revealed that her boyfriend's experiences in college have further driven her interest:

> College looks exciting, and he tells me all this stuff that goes on about living in the dorms. He tells me how you have freedom, but then it's up to you to control it and make sure you go to class. And then he's on the honor roll list. So when I go to college I want to make sure I'm on the honor roll list too. I don't know he's doing pretty well so I guess it's kind of an inspiration.

As Jasmine described it, her boyfriend's experiences at college have inspired her, giving her confidence that she will also do well in college.

Data analysis showed that peers also operated as a factor that promoted resilience for the youth under study. Some friends provided emotional support and engaged in college preparation activities with participants, such as completing college applications together. Three boyfriends also had a significant and positive impact on higher educational aspiration through their encouragement of the young women to move forward and study hard for a brighter future.

School

All participants portrayed their school environments as characterized by both risks and resilient factors. There were slight variations across schools, in the degree of severity regarding certain risk factors   For example, a gang rape occurred last school year in Maya Angelou High School's building during school hours, which was also reported on the local news. Incidents of perceived sexism were more pervasive for the participants enrolled in this particular high school than at the other two schools, namely in response to the sexual assault that had occurred on school premises. Perceived racism was noted as prevalent at all three schools, but was explicated as more severe at Alice Walker High School, due to the employment of a graduation coach, who was described as "racist". Gang violence was another identified risk factor that existed within and across all three school facilities.

Although subjects identified the risk factors that were present within their schools, all of the young women also acknowledged the presence of resilient factors, such as caring school personnel, extracurricular activities, tutoring, and diversity. The support they received from certain teachers, counselors, school social workers, and librarians promoted resilience within this population, and the participants were positive about this reality in their lives. Additionally,

participants viewed diversity and the presence of other students of color as a positive aspect present in their schools. Finally, all participants recognized that their school made some efforts to provide educational assistance and/or extracurricular activities to promote the well-being of their students, including tutoring on Saturdays and after-school.

Risk Factor. Perceived sexism was a risk factor identified by participants across all three schools where these subjects were enrolled. However, the degree of sexism varied. For example, a gang rape had occurred in Maya Angelou High school during school hours, which significantly impacted how young women were treated in their school environment. For example, Dahlia, a junior at this school, stated:

> I'm not trying to blame the girl or whatever, but you shouldn't go with three boys into an empty area at our school. I don't know why she would trust them in the first place. But also they shouldn't have done it either. And security, I don't think that security has gotten tighter.

Dahlia communicated the belief that female students must avoid being alone with groups of boys in her school, and stressed the need for tightened security measures. Dahlia also felt like administration could have handled the situation more transparently. She stated:

> They had an assembly, but they didn't talk about it directly. They were just saying stay with your friends. But it was common sense stuff, but they didn't tell us what it was all about. We found out from the news.

Azalea, also a junior at Maya Angelou, believed that the gang rape was an isolated incident. She, like Dahlia, echoed the belief that young women are charged with the task of remaining safe at school and also expressed frustration over how the administration dealt with

the situation. Azalea, no doubt, felt strongly that the new rules implemented after the assault

were sexist and blamed the victim:

> But as far as the rape thing goes, they wanted to crack down on the dress code. One of
>
> the rules is we aren't allowed to wear leggings, but everyone wears leggings. Boys can't
>
> wear tank tops, but boys aren't going to wear tank tops in the winter. Girls wear leggings
>
> year round.

Azalea thought it unfair that she is no longer allowed to wear leggings at school and that security

typically targeted females regarding the dress code, but said nothing to male students.

Iris, a senior at Maya Angelou, also expressed the belief that her school environment is

highly sexist. She too discussed the assault as scary, and echoed the belief that young women

should not be alone in this environment. Separate from the assault, Iris had directly experienced

sexism at school. For example, Iris, a self-proclaimed tomboy, relayed the following situation:

> I'm a big tomboy because I grew up around eight brothers and I grew up with my dad.
>
> I'm a big football fan and a big basketball fan. So at school I tell everybody that I'm
>
> going to try out for football. People said, "Oh you can't do that because you're a girl".
>
> And then they would not let me do it.

Iris challenged gender discrimination in her school by trying out for the all-male wrestling team.

Here she illustrated how her efforts changed gender misconceptions:

> So I decided when I go up there I'm going to try my best, it doesn't matter that I'm a girl.
>
> It doesn't matter what happens. So I went out there and whatever, and I got the biggest
>
> dude there, and we were wrestling. And I had just learned the moves. I had lost, but it
>
> wasn't by much. It was because I hadn't learned to pin yet. Even when it was going on,
>
> first the boys were cheering for him and then they switched over and they cheered for me.

Regarding sexism as a problem at her school, Iris, like the other two participants, asserted that it is the responsibility of female students to overcome perceived sexism independently, like she did.

Participants in other schools, also detailed instances where they had experienced what they viewed as sexism in their school environment. For example, Rose who attended Lucille Clifton, attributed sexism as the major cause of her academic failure in math. She specified:

> With my math teacher, he's the football coach, so he always makes sure that the football players are on top and they're passing his class. But if I was to ask for help, I couldn't get the help… [He said] "Oh, I can't help you I got football practice". When one of his football players aren't passing he won't even have them playing, he'll be there teaching them. But I feel like if he can stay and teach them he should be able to teach us too.

Rose believed that she would be passing math right now if it was not for her gender.

Hibiscus, who also attended Lucille Clifton, felt targeted for being a young African American woman:

> Some of our teachers look at us as African American females, they see a statistic of the teen that's probably going to end up pregnant or in government housing with that being their future. And just going on generation to generation to generation. And that's what they see, another statistic. So yeah that's what I feel like the judgement is. People going off stereotypes and not the person themselves at my school.

Hibiscus commented that she often feels like her teachers are negatively influenced by racist and sexist stereotypes, which has negatively impacted her educational experiences.

Daisy, a senior at Alice Walker, described experiences related to perceived sexism at her school. She declared, "I would change my school from being an open campus to a closed campus

for our security sake. Because we have grown men going in there trying to talk to us and I don't feel safe." Daisy also described an incident at her school where a female student got in trouble at school for behaving inappropriately with a male student, but the male experienced no repercussions. Unlike the subjects who attended Maya Angelou high school, Daisy claimed that schools were primarily responsible for female students' safety.

Like sexism, perceived racism presented across all schools as a risk factor; however, it was more impactful at Alice Walker High School. For example, Marigold proclaimed, "I wish that the graduation coach wasn't so racist and didn't have this animosity towards some students. She has some favorites. It hurts some students' feelings. I know it made some people drop out of school." Marigold clarified that she knows a number of African American students that dropped out of high school because the "racist" graduation coach told them they should.

Daisy and Lily, who also attended Alice Walker High School, echoed Marigold's sentiments. Daisy disclosed:

Like my school makes you want to drop out of school. You have a bunch of teachers that want to help, but then you have to worry about the college coach. She don't like black people. There's this one white girl that never comes to school and she will do everything to help her, but she won't do that for black students. I mean she sets you up for failure. We need to do something about her for real because she will tell black kids to drop out of school. She told two of my friends to drop out.

Daisy admitted that due to interactions with the graduation coach, she has considered dropping out of school, but some of her teachers and friends encouraged her to stay in school.

Lily had a similar experience with the graduation coach at Alice Walker High School:

> It's like I've worked so hard to try to get my high school diploma with all the stuff that's
>
> happened to me, and then to hear the graduation coach, the person in charge of me
>
> graduating, tell me that she doesn't think I will graduate, just makes me want to give up.
>
> But I really want a high school diploma.

Lily acknowledged her own intelligence and ability to finish school, but found interactions with

the graduation coach to be very discouraging.

Similar to the students at Alice Walker High School, other study subjects also related

times where they encountered perceived racism within their educational environments. Rose, a

junior at Lucille Clifton also voiced a belief that she had encountered racism at her school. Rose

said, "People will say at school, "Y'all will help these white people, but you won't help us black

people". "Y'all always acting like it's the black people doing stuff, but it's the white people

too"". Rose believed that European Americans at her school received more assistance than

African American students. She also asserted the belief that African American students are

disciplined more frequently than European American students.

Hibiscus narrated a particular instance of explicit racism that bothered her severely at

Lucille Clifton High School:

> A friend of mine came into class wearing a Black Lives Matter t-shirt and our teacher
>
> asked her to leave because her shirt was offensive. And when she asked our teacher why
>
> she had to leave because it was offensive, our teacher started getting angry. She called
>
> security and said that my friend was cussing at her and being disrespectful and refusing to
>
> leave because of her offensive shirt. And she got in trouble for that.

Hibiscus claimed this situation as her least favorite memory at school because of the unfairness associated with racism. She believed that all African American students should be allowed to wear t-shirts showing pride in their race without being punished.

Jasmine, who attended Maya Angelou High School, shared:

I know once I had a teacher that I felt like she acted different toward me. She's racist. If a white person asked a question, she would answer it with no problem, but if a black person was asking the question then she would have something smart to say. Or she wouldn't just answer the question, she would have something to say about it. She copped an attitude, "Well I just talked about this, but I guess I have to repeat myself". It would just be smart stuff like that so I just dropped out of her class.

In order to get a passing grade for this course, Jasmine was forced to change teachers, rather than allow experiences with what she viewed as racism to negatively impact her grade. Iris, who also attended Maya Angelou High School, professed the belief that racism had an overwhelming presence in her school environment. She, however, explicated a different view of racism:

Wow racism is everywhere… in class and kids at school. Even black kids will be racist and they won't even know that they are being racist toward another black person. I feel like racism isn't just a color. Stereotyping is racism to me, you know. So I feel like it's not just the color, it's who you are and how people feel toward that. So that's basically how racism started, the whole black and white thing. Somebody had to see the color black and be like, "I don't like it because you're black, I don't want to be around you" and "Oh you have nappy hair so I don't want to be around you because you have nappy hair." It's not just about the color, that's how I feel about it.

Iris claimed that any type of stigma toward another person was a form of racism, except that with racism people decided to assign color. She declared a wish that people would be more accepting of others, despite differences.

The last risk factor identified across all three high schools was the presence of gang violence and also how it was handled. For example, Daffodil described a gang fight at her school:

> All I remember was that there was a group of people fighting. Because someone had recorded it so I saw it on their phone. So it was just a big group of people fighting. It was two boys fighting, but then I guess everybody else started jumping in. That's what made the altercation so big.

Lavender, who attended the same school as Daffodil, shared:

> It was a humongous brawl that was right outside my classroom. I mean there were other people that came in from outside of school that weren't supposed to be there at all, but they came and they started fighting all these little kids. They just fought each other. It was gang-related and I was looking outside the window, but I stayed in class. I thought, "I'm not fixing to get in trouble trying to look at the fight". It was really bad. Two people got arrested and our school we don't play, so if you fight at school you get arrested. It wasn't good. Someone had a knife on them and it was a big fight.

Rose, who also attended Lucille Clifton High School, labeled gang violence as a major problem at her school. She stated, "There were two gangs that got into it and they got into a big fight and people were just doing too much. Like a lot of people got expelled and everything". Daffodil, Lavender, and Rose relayed measures they take to ensure their own safety, such as staying in designated areas and near adults when there is news that a fight might occur.

As with the students at Lucille Clifton, the presence of gangs functioned as a risk at Alice Walker High School. Marigold expounded:

Umm, some boys came up to the school, not just boys, but actually grown men came up there. One man came up to us and he was asking us if we are a part of a gang. Everybody was like no, and then he walked up to another boy, who is my best friend's brother. And he said to him, "Are you in the gang?" and he said, "No". The man said, "I heard your brother is" and then the man hit him.

Daisy also described a similar situation at Alice Walker High School:

Our school is real close to another high school and when there is beef with people at our school, they'll come up to our school. Our school is a mixture of the Eastside and the Westside and they don't get along. So for example, since my school is an open campus one boy came up from the other high school and jumped a boy at my school. Some old guy came up to a group of us eating lunch and was like "I'm going to shoot shit up".

The four participants who attended Alice Walker High School reported that there is greater risk for violence at their school since the campus is open and anyone can enter. All four participants expressed concern regarding their safety amidst the presence of gangs.

As with the other two schools, all four participants from Maya Angelou High School had witnessed or had been directly impacted by gang fighting within their school. As mentioned previously, the young women who attended Maya Angelou believed that security measures should be increased. For example, Azalea detailed a time that she was physically hurt by fighting. She stated, "There had been a fight and they pepper sprayed to stop it and it got in my eyes. And I was coughing."

Iris, who also attended Maya Angelou, recounted:

> My least favorite story about school is the day that everybody, the whole school got in trouble. I didn't do anything. I just walked into the school and the first thing I see is one fight breaks out and then another fight breaks out. It was around 15 fights and the officers, didn't know who to grab and I'm trying to get to class because I don't know what's going on. There's really no where I can go because everybody is just fighting and I'm not understanding why. And so I got pulled into in-school suspension along with everybody else and I felt like that wasn't fair. I mean I just walked through the door. I just wanted to go to class.

In sum, sexism, racism, and gang violence were explicated by participants as risk factors that impact higher educational aspiration within schools. These young women encountered adversity during designated learning times, due to the existence of these three factors. Data revealed that young women mostly adapted to these circumstances, but they expressed frustration toward their schools.

Resilient Factor. Although participants claimed that a combination of risk factors existed within their educational environments, they also identified a variety of factors that promoted their own resilience. For example, all participants acknowledged various school personnel they could turn to for assistance. Additionally, each of these young women detailed efforts made by their school to help ensure their academic success.

Certain school personnel, whether it was teachers, counselors, coaches, or librarians were recognized as supportive figures within the varying educational environments. For example, Tansy, who attended Alice Walker, shared, "The teachers are nice and everybody is trying to help us graduate. They are always there for us if we need it." Marigold also depicted her teacher

in a similar manner, "My teacher always helps me. If I need anything, if I need someone to talk to because I have a problem or if I have questions, she is always there for me." Lily echoed the same sentiments, "The teachers are dedicated and one teacher stayed after school for six hours one night so that a student could graduate the next day." Like the others, Daisy portrayed her favorite teacher as caring: "Ms. K is the best person. She would stay after school until 9 pm to help a student graduate. If you need something she would go above and beyond to help people. She will always help with anything." All four of the participants who attended Alice Walker High School viewed their teachers as sincerely caring and willing to go the extra mile for students.

The young women who attended Maya Angelou High also had positive things to say about school personnel. For example, Dahlia detailed:

I really like my journalism teacher and his class. He's really chill and open-minded. For example, if you have a certain article idea in mind and he doesn't like it, he won't [say], "no you can't do it". He will still let you do it, and he'll help you try to make it good.

Dahlia frequently went to this teacher for advice and help. She viewed him as an ally who encouraged self-expression. Azalea also relayed a positive experience she had with a teacher at her school:

Umm well there's this one teacher, I had for science last year, and she's a really good teacher. And she also has a really good spirit, and whenever there is a sports event going on, or even band, she would always make it a point to put up posters for them. And umm get her students when they had free time, to make posters. And she would make goody bags for people and she was just really nice.

She voiced that this this teacher in particular, made learning fun. Azalea could tell that her teacher had put a lot of effort into educating students.

Iris, who also attended Maya Angelou, believed that her teachers genuinely care about her. She specified:

> There are teachers that actually motivated me to change and actually told me to keep trying. So they motivated me more than just to learn because they know my story, they motivated me to keep going in life. Even though we don't have those classes that teach you how to write checks and stuff like that, there are teachers that will tell me that stuff on the side. I'll go ask them, "Oh Coach how do I do this?" and he'll [say] "You need to go do this, this, this, and that". He'll teach me life skills that the school doesn't.

Iris attributed her change in attitude toward academics and higher education, largely to the support that she received from teachers at her school. Iris admitted that she had been going down a bad path in life due to all the difficulties she had experienced, but these teachers and their unwavering belief in her that brought her back on track with school.

Unlike other participants, those who attended Lucille Clifton High, found counselors, librarians, and school social workers to be more supportive than teachers. For example, Rose shared this about her counselor, "She'll find a way for me to work out whatever I'm going through. Like with my grades, she told me how to sign up for Saturday school, she told me about another teacher that can help me." Daffodil also reported that she had received assistance from the counseling department at school. She stated, "There's a college advisor at my school and she helps all the students. And she helped me apply to college. She gave me a list of scholarships too." Daffodil noted that in addition to college advisement, her counselor had also helped her emotionally, when she was having medical problems.

Hibiscus also communicated that she had received support from various school personnel, which significantly helped her to stay motivated, despite issues she had with teachers:

> Our school librarians, I like them. There are people that are always there to support us, like the counselors and the social workers, and the librarians. That's what I like about the school. There are people there that like their job and they pick that job for that reason, because it is what they like to do. And they never make me feel bad about anything or never make me uncomfortable. When they give their opinion, it's not to push mine down. It's just actually them stating their opinion and how they feel and not making me feel bad about mine. That's the only part I like about school. I feel like it's a safety net and a supportive group, overall great people.

Hibiscus relayed a time when a teacher gave her a bad grade for no reason, and she received help from the librarians and her counselor:

> They give me emotional support or they give me advice on things. If I'm upset about something, they give me advice on how to handle it or to calm myself about it or how to go about handling it. When I told them about how my teacher took off 20 points because of how I numbered the paper, they [said] "Calm down, see if you can go back and fix it and see if you can get those points back." Which he would not let me do, but they were there to help me through it and calm me down. It made me feel better about the situation because they [said] "You did the right thing, nothing you did was wrong. It's just not how he wanted the criteria to be." They always give me advice or they help me understand that what I did wasn't wrong. It's just the whole situation itself wasn't the way the person wanted it to be.

Hibiscus disclosed that their support helped her work harder and made her feel more positive about people, despite her teacher's negative attitude.

In addition to supportive school personnel, the young women also recognized that their schools were providing them with educational opportunities and extracurricular activities outside of the classroom, which enhanced their learning. For example, both Dahlia and Azalea, had positive things to say about the extracurricular activities offered at Maya Angelou High School. Dahlia detailed:

Umm, we have a lot of choices at our school, even though some of them aren't as big as other ones. The big ones are chorus, dance, band, and drama. We do have orchestra and art too, but I really like marching band. I look forward to it, but I don't really look forward to band camp. I like marching band practice and football games.

Dahlia expressed that her ability to participate in dance, drama, and marching band were favorite aspects of her school.

Azalea was also a member of the marching band. Azalea recounted a time when both she and Dahlia had gone on a school trip to Chicago with the marching band:

We went to Chicago last year and we marched in a parade that was on TV, but it didn't make me feel good or anything. I thought it was cool. Umm it wasn't as cold as I thought it was going to be and the buildings were really pretty. We stayed in a nice hotel.

Azalea, like Dahlia, enjoyed taking part in marching band and professed pride that her school was asked to participate in a nationally syndicated parade.

Daffodil, Lavender, and Jasmine also participated in extracurricular activities as cheerleaders and declared pride in their corresponding schools. Lavender recounted, "My cheerleading team, we had to do a dance for the school and we were playing our rival team. We

did the dance, it was crazy. People [said], "You go girl." I love stuff like that." Daffodil

disclosed that being a cheerleader is something that gives her a sense of belonging. She claimed,

"There's a lot of school spirit in Lucille Clifton. A lot of us wear shirts or a letterman jacket.

And everyone comes out and supports every football game". Jasmine also cheered, but at Maya

Angelou.   She explicated, "There's nothing but black people and I feel like we should have more

diversity". Jasmine, like Daffodil, felt that the cheerleading team promoted school spirit,

however she wished that people from other races would also join the squad.

In addition to extracurricular activities, all three schools provided educational supports

outside of the classroom. For example, Rose shared, "Recently, when I was upset about my

grade, my counselor told me to sign up for Saturday school." Rose also specified that there is

after-school tutoring, which she attended in addition to Saturday school, in order to maintain

good grades. Like Rose, Iris also went to Saturday school. Iris stated, "Teachers are there on

Saturdays even if they don't get paid that much for it. I appreciate those teachers." She revealed

that Saturday school had helped her catch up on schoolwork and improve her grades.

These young women also defined ways in which their schools helped prepare them for

higher education. For example, Hibiscus stated:

Friday was our college fair and our counselors took the time out to call colleges to get

them to come to our school and talk to us all, about what college is like on their campus

and what we need to do to get to that point. That was nice because they didn't have to do

that, but they did it because they care about our future. And we should always be grateful

and appreciative of people like that. Because, to be completely honest, they didn't have

to do that. But they took the time out to gather information on colleges nearby that could

come see us and talk to us. I thought that was great.

Other subjects related times that their school had taken them on college tours. For example, both Tansy and Daisy who attended Alice Walker High School, reported that their school takes students to a nearby technical school in order to view the campus and get a glimpse of life after high school. Students at Maya Angelou and Lucille Clifton High Schools are also encouraged to participate on tours of nearby colleges as an optional field trip. Marigold recounted other ways her school has prepared her for college:

> We get fee waivers for our tests and we go on field trip to colleges, that's what the
> graduation coach is for and the counselor. They're supposed to help us figure out next
> steps and how we can go about filling out applications. They help with all of that.

After reviewing the data, it became clear that each of the three schools offered additional educational supports outside of the classroom. All three schools have established after-school and Saturday tutoring sessions. Each school also had available college entrance exam and application fee waivers. Additionally, participants could find college application help when needed through their teachers, college advisors, or high school counselors. Typically students at Maya Angelou and Alice Walker High Schools turned to educators for assistance, while students at Lucille Clifton High School sought the help of counselors. Finally, each of the 12 young women found caring adults who supported them both emotionally and academically at school.

Clearly, the role of some of these wonderful teachers, social workers, counselors and other staff played a significant role in enhancing resilience for participants of this study. School personnel and staff were described as caring adults who not only assisted these young women academically, but also worked to enhance self-worth and self-efficacy. As detailed by the participants, the support they received from these adults in their school environments helped them to overcome a variety of challenges, such as negative interactions with other school

personnel and emotional issues. As such, the presence of dedicated teachers, social workers, counselors, and librarians increased resilience, while also providing educational supports that promoted higher educational aspiration.

<center>**Resilient Factors**</center>

Resilience is a common phenomenon that can be achieved by any youth if given adequate support. Risk and resilience theory suggests that youth are capable of bouncing back from adversity, despite prevalence or severity (Masten, 2001; Masten, 2011). Each of the study's subjects described elements that promoted resilience in their own lives, regardless of past adversity and the variety of risks they had encountered. The following subthemes highlighted what factors these young woman described as promoting their own resilience: 1) 'Never giving up', 2) self-definition, 3) grandmother's support, and 4) 'staying focused on future goals'.

Never giving up

'Never giving up' was an attitude identified by the researcher that expressed the stance taken by all of the participants, especially when faced with challenges. All of the subjects noted that not giving up, was an important part of reaching goals. Participants illustrated different situations where they were forced to keep working, despite difficulty, in order to achieve personal success. For example, Dahlia attributed 'never giving up' as intrinsic to her academic success. Dahlia shared, "With my grades I keep trying. I just keep trying. If I fail then I try again until I get it." Iris also applied 'never giving up' at school: "I keep trying. I stay after school so I can see my grades where I'll get up to a 100." Both Dahlia and Iris never gave up on their school work and kept trying in order to maintain good grades.

Azalea also utilized the attitude of 'never giving up' at school. She detailed challenges she had faced in an Advanced Placement World History class:

> Last year I was failing AP world history, umm I just couldn't retain the knowledge so I had to teach it to myself. I know I'm going to have to do that a lot in the future. It was just like nothing, he wasn't giving us anything. I stayed in the class, but the last week of school I literally was working my butt off to bring my grade up. I redid assignments. I worked really hard on my final project. I had a partner, she didn't really do anything. It was all me.

Azalea's efforts and determination to not give up, paid off. Not only was her final grade a B, but she also conveyed a heightened sense of confidence in her ability to tackle educational challenges at the college level.

Daffodil, like the others, also told a story about how she had triumphed over a challenge in her dance class by 'not giving up':

> One day when I was in practice, there was a part that I was trying to get so I could be that part in the dance, and for some reason I just couldn't get it that day. So I went home really upset about it and then the next time I went to dance practice and they showed the part again, I still couldn't do it. So I was even more upset. Then I practiced at home, but I still couldn't get it. So then the next time I had practice I practiced it again and I was kind of catching on from practicing at home until I got it.

Daffodil also employed this approach outside of dance. Daffodil has found that 'never giving up' helps her be a better person, student, cheerleader, and dancer.

Outside of school Tansy, Marigold, and Lily have applied the attitude of 'never giving up' to many aspects of their lives. Tansy claimed, "Even though you go through what you go

through, you can always work through it." She proclaimed that people must keep going no matter what. Tansy alleged that 'never giving up' played an important part in sustaining the relationships she has developed over her lifespan. Marigold echoed Tansy's sentiments, "I push myself even if I feel like I can't do it. I still push myself. I never give up." She experienced an array of traumatic events throughout her life, and it was her decision to 'never give up' that has helped her arrive to a place where she will be able to pursue her dreams of higher education.

Lily also witnessed a conglomeration of traumatic events. She voiced, "If something happened I just stuffed my problems in my back pocket. I couldn't really do anything about the situation I was in, I just kind of made a positive situation out of it and kept going." Lily emphasized her need to 'never give up' and focus on the positives as a means to overcome the many hardships that have challenged her, such as homelessness. Lily labeled 'never giving up' as necessary to find happiness and meaning in her life.

Data revealed that 'Never giving up' was an important resilient factor employed by all the participants. Each of them had employed this technique when faced with a challenge. Many of them applied 'never giving up' at school to ensure academic achievement. 'Never giving up' was conveyed as a necessary stance to overcome adversity.

Self-definition

Each of the 12 participants discussed the notion of self-definition during their interviews. However, the level of 'self-definition' varied across participants. Some of the participants have already self-defined and challenged false stereotypes attributed to them as African American females. Other participants viewed 'self-definition' as a goal that they were working toward. Data revealed that all participants perceived 'self-definition' as important to their emotional well-being; however, some participants felt they needed to make more progress in this area.

For example, Lavender admitted that others have influenced her emotional well-being to her own detriment:

> I have self-esteem problems. I would say I'm an emotional person. But then sometimes I am very confident, but then someone will say something and I'll go into this mode where I think I am horrible or that I'm ugly or this or that. Like I'm not pretty enough, but then I have those times where I know that I am worth something. I been learning to work on that.

Lavender connected low self-esteem to negative interactions she has with those around her. Lavender regarded building a sense of self-worth, or self-defining, as a goal that she must work toward. Lavender expressed self-awareness regarding her need to be more comfortable with who she is, despite social pressures.

Like Lavender, 'self-definition' has been a work in progress for Iris, who admitted that she worries too much about what others think. Iris attributed her family makeup as the most significant factor leading to problems with 'self-definition'. Iris grew up with her father's side of the family, but now lives with maternal relatives. Iris found it difficult to please both sides of her family and is trying to figure out who she is, despite what different family members expect:

> It's really hard trying to fit in with both sides. Both sides are different, so both sides want me to be a different way. So when I come with this side of the family I act a certain way, but if I go to the other side and act a certain way then they reject me. If I act like the other side when I'm with my dad's side, then they're going to reject me too. So it's kind of like I have to play two different personalities. I can't really just be me.

Iris revealed that she is working on trying to figure out who she really is despite family influences and stated, "If I could I would change the part of me that always doubts or worries, you know that part that worries about what other people think. Or this might not go right, or just the doubtful attitude about me." Iris perceived 'self-definition' as a goal that she hoped to achieve in the near future.

Daisy also struggled with 'self-definition' and even expressed feeling fearful of others. She, however, showed self-awareness that this attitude was not beneficial. Daisy disclosed, "It's just I am a very quiet person. I keep to myself and I want to change myself. Like be able to go up to people and talk to them or be less quiet and not keep to myself." She dreaded that others might hurt her physically or emotionally, which is one of the reasons she chose to isolate herself. Daisy, like the other two, defined this attitude as a problem. She demonstrated a desire to achieve 'self-definition' and to be able to interact with others without anxiety.

Rose worked on 'self-definition' since a young age. She clarified that she was subjected to bullying as a child due to her weight. When younger, she had engaged in physical fights with others due to feelings of low self-worth. Rose voiced, "People were calling me fat all the time and I was insecure about my weight. Sometimes I didn't want to live because I felt like I wasn't good enough." Unlike the previous three participants, she has made a lot of progress toward self-definition. Rose went onto to say, "I matured a lot of ways, like the way I talk to people. The way that I react to people. And just the way that I carry myself. Now I don't care what people think about my weight."   Rose asserted that she has self-defined and would not change a thing about herself. Through many years of effort, she has accomplished 'self-definition'.

Tansy also had achieved self-definition: "I'm weird and one of the silliest people ever. Being silly and weird makes me not get sad because I have had a lot of stuff happen to me. I

would never change me, my attitude or self-confidence". She relayed acceptance of self and her ability to be "weird" and "silly" as powerful coping mechanisms. It was 'self-definition', including finding laughter in pain that helped Tansy overcome struggles in her own life. Jasmine, like Tansy, expressed self-worth. She stated, "I feel like I have a pretty good personality and I get along with people pretty easily. I am willing to meet new people and make new friends. I don't really discriminate against people or anything like that." She demonstrated high levels of self-confidence, which made her comfortable around diverse populations. Jasmine conveyed an ability to self-define, which caused her to value all people regardless of their race, class, or gender.

Although all participants touched upon challenges they faced due to racism, classism, or sexism, Hibiscus was the most vocal about how these intersecting oppressions are wrong and ill-conceived. She explicitly acknowledged the many negative stereotypes ascribed to African American women, and how these false judgements caused her frustration. However, she refused to allow society or its members to impact her view of self. Hibiscus declared, "Regardless of where people may classify me that's not who I am. I am a capable person and not all these stereotypes, and I don't let them define me. It's not me." Hibiscus achieved 'self-definition', an identified resilient factor that helped her overcome adversity in her life.

Thus, self-definition was found to be a resilient factor present across all 12 participants. Although some participants had yet to self-define, all of them recognized this as a necessity to achieve happiness. These young women communicated a desire to self-define and be confident with who they are, regardless of social pressures to be something different. 'Self-definition' was then viewed as highly important to establish a sense of overall wellbeing, while also enhancing one's ability to engage positively with people.

Grandmother's Support

Each of the young women in this study described their grandmothers as supportive, motivational, and encouraging. Two of the participants were raised by their grandmothers, as neither of their parents were capable of parenting. Daisy, who is now considered an adult, lived with her grandmother until she became ill with cancer, which caused financial strain that led to home foreclosure. Daisy recounted, "I used to live in a house with my grandma and we lost our house and we had to find somewhere fast to stay for us to live" and "My grandma is like the peacemaker in our family and she tries to get everyone to come together." She disclosed that her grandmother is probably not going to get better. Daisy said, "I call my grandma, her voice soothes me even though I know she is lying when she says she is okay." She revealed that she likes thinking about the memories of the past, living with her grandma, and how much fun they all had together. Daisy perceived her grandmother as an emotional support despite her illness. Like Daisy, Azalea was also raised by her grandmother. Azalea stated:

> Well my mom was really young, she was 19, when she had me. She had trouble taking care of me because I had allergies and other stuff. I don't, know my grandma just had more experience with children. My grandma is my best friend and the first person I go to when I need something.

Azalea maintained a good relationship with her mother, but implied that her grandmother was in a better position to raise her. She defined the relationship she has with her grandmother as close: "My grandma is nice. She doesn't shelter me and does everything she can for me." Azalea expressed feeling happy that she was raised by her grandmother.

Other participants received both emotional and financial support from their grandmothers, although they were raised by a single parent. For example, Lily detailed a story about when her grandmother went out of her way to help her:

> Well, I know my grandma is always there for me no matter what. I went out west to live with my mom because my mom moved me down there. So I tried to live with her and I got homesick so I wanted to come home. I called my grandma and she called my aunt to pay for my ticket. She told me, "I'll find you a way home". And she brought me home.

Lily's mother was in prison most of her life, and she portrayed her grandmother as the one person who attempted to take on the role of her mother. For example, it was her grandmother who would attend mother's day at school with her. Her grandmother also provided shelter during times when she was homeless and offered financial support when she had the resources.

Daffodil's grandmother also assisted financially. She stated, "My grandma helps us all out a lot. She gives us money." She clarified that in the past her grandmother helped the family with finances during her parents' divorce, but that this support is no longer needed. Daffodil related that her grandmother helped take care of her during the times when she was ill. She expressed a belief that she could reach out to her grandmother whenever she needed something.

Tansy's great grandmother also provided both emotional and financial support. Tansy and her family received assistance from her great grandmother throughout her life:

> Sometimes we have financial problems, and my great grandma works. She is basically a nurse, she takes care of older people, but she is old herself. Um there was a time, like right now, we were kicked out and we stayed with her for a couple of years. We just got kicked out again. That's why you see us moving now. And we are going to stay with my great grandma again.

She portrayed her great grandmother as the backbone of the family. Tansy said, "We stay focused on my great grandma. Our life surrounds her, because she is 85. We just try to make sure that she is comfortable, happy and that she is taken care of because she helps us too." In addition to the financial support, she claimed to enjoy the time she gets to spend with her great grandmother as they laugh a lot together.

Hibiscus also expressed a sincere love and gratitude for her grandmother who acted as a muse throughout her life due to the struggles she faced as an African American woman living during the time of Jim Crow. Hibiscus revealed:

> I know when my grandmother was growing up she grew up where segregation was very prominent. She remembers having to go to separate schools and getting hand-me-down textbooks. Then she remembered when they integrated the schools and how uncomfortable and crazy that was. And she told me about the march with Martin Luther King. She experienced a lot.

Due to her grandmother's history, she displayed a deep understanding of racism and a desire to challenge societal injustices in her life. She articulated a deep closeness to her grandmother:

> My favorite memories are when I get to see my grandmother. Every time I see her we always joke and laugh and just talk about everything under the sun and that really makes me happy. I don't really have a specific story, it's just every time I see my grandmother, because she usually brightens up my day and she makes me feel good about myself and the world.

Hibiscus implied that her grandmother taught her a lot about life and how to be a good person. She frequently turned to her grandmother when she was distressed and in need of emotional support.

Grandmother's support was thus found to be a factor that promoted resilience for all of the young African American women under study. Two of the grandmothers took on parental roles for participants. Other grandmothers assisted economically when participants and their families struggled with finances. Grandmothers were also defined as emotionally supportive. All of these young women turned to their grandmas for financial help or advice during times of need. Grandmothers thus helped participants overcome adversity by enhancing their ability to be resilient.

Staying Focused on Future Goals

All of the young women under study, communicated that 'staying focused on future goals' aided them in overcoming barriers to their success. Ten of the participants will be first-generation college students, and the struggles experienced by their parents became motivators toward attaining higher education. Many of these young women expressed the view that higher education will help break the cycle of poverty within their families. As such, all of them set and maintained focus on future goals, so that in the future they can live comfortably.

Rose is one of those participants who wished to break the cycle of poverty in her family. She disclosed, "Neither of my parents graduated and neither of them did anything with life. So I like want to break the cycle". Rose conveyed, during her interviews that she wanted to make a better life for herself and her family, which is something she thought about frequently. When struggling in school, she focused on future goals, such as going to college so she could get a successful job in the future. Rose proclaimed a deep desire to live independently and without assistance from the government in the future, which is another goal that helped her to maintain focus on academics.

Marigold, also experienced familial financial problems throughout her life, leading to a foster care placement; this instilled a desire to break the cycle of poverty in her family. In addition to financial stability, Marigold also desired to obtain a profession that will bring her peace:

> I want to be a massage therapist. I'll keep working hard, and won't let things falls apart. I'm not going to slip. I'm going to keep going. Even if I have to work two jobs, it's not like I'm going to die from it. It's just what I got to do. It'll be a pretty good job. I just feel like it will help me calm my nerves a little. Sometimes I get real tense, but I just need something that will calm me down.

Marigold maintained focus on the goal of becoming a massage therapist because she believed that it will be a job that provides her with financial and emotional stability. Marigold defined her perfect future as, "Just a job, a nice house, my own family, and just peace." Marigold would like to make enough money one day to also support her younger siblings as well.

Iris' family also heavily influenced the goals she has set for her future, which helped sustain her academic focus:

> My perfect future is not only seeing me reach my goals and get to where I need to be, but also motivating my sisters too. Like my sisters and brothers…I want all of them to get there too. Because they were with me when I was going through this stuff and tried to cheer me up. So I might as well return the favor and encourage them, or be a role model to them. So if I reach my goals it'll make them want to reach their goals.

Iris admitted that at times she lacked motivation to attend college: "I don't want to be in school forever, but you have to go to college or school today to at least survive. I'm scared that I'm going to lose that motivation."

She, however, continued 'staying focused on her future goals':

> I've instilled in my head that if I'm going to get through high school, I can make it
>
> through two or four years more. And that basically when I get older, I might have a
>
> family and that I have to be able to provide for them and myself. So I kind of need it, I
>
> don't really have a choice you know, but to keep going.

Thus, Iris' ability to 'stay focused on future goals' acted as a motivational force and fueled her efforts to achieve academic success in high school.

Dahlia also 'stayed focused on future goals' and perceived higher education as the only means to procuring a successful job that will provide her with financial stability:

> Most jobs require a college education so even if you are someone that doesn't want to go,
>
> you should go unless you want to be poor. Because most jobs, require a college
>
> education, unless you want to work somewhere that pays like $10.00 an hour or
>
> something like that.

Dahlia asserted that she would like to major in computer science because that profession pays well and will provide her with job security. Dahlia voiced, "I don't really expect much. I want to have a house, food, and stuff. I don't need a big house or anything like that. Just that I'm not struggling". Dahlia retained academic success by focusing on her desire to obtain a high-paying job to prevent future financial struggling.

Jasmine also 'focused on future goals' as a method to keep herself motivated in school even when she is bored or tired. Jasmine hoped to become a nurse and specified that she wants to help people, while making a living. Jasmine claimed: "I'll get to help people, make sure they're healthy and take care of them. I'll be doing something I love, but I'll also be helping

people too". Jasmine's goal of becoming a nurse was something she focused on to remove distractions that prevent her from achieving academically:

> I try to stay on task, like put school first and stuff. I'm going to have a lot of responsibilities as far as taking care of myself. Sometimes I procrastinate and I don't want to do my homework, but I keep in mind getting a good job and making good money, that's my goal. That's how I stay on track and I don't get distracted from anything.

Lavender, like the others, set high-achieving goals for herself, which inspired her to take college courses at the local community college in addition to her high school load. Lavender would like to transfer to Bambara and earn a business degree. Lavender expounded on 'staying focused on future goals':

> I mentally get in my head, "What is the main focus? What am I doing and what am I here for?" I'm not here to party. I'm here to have fun, but not stuff that's going to mess up my future. The main thing I'm going to do is think about my future and how successful I'm going to be. I know I'm going to be successful, that's my dream. I know I'm going to be successful so I think about putting those things first.

Lavender dropped out of cheerleading this year to improve her grade point average. She often thought about her perfect future when she felt overwhelmed by work, school, and college courses. Lavender has sustained her academic success through 'staying focused on future goals', despite being overburdened by her many responsibilities.

As eloquently stated by Lily, "If I could tell you one thing, it would be today's hopes turn into tomorrow's dreams, and yesterday's dreams turn into future realities". As such, 'staying focused on future goals' was found to be a motivating force that inspired all participants to work hard in school and life. The young women under study set future goals for themselves, and

conveyed thoughts about how to achieve future success. Many of these goals included attending

college, securing careers, and being able to assist family members. Thus, 'staying focused on

future goals' buffered adversity and helped study subjects achieve academic success.

Higher Educational Aspiration

As detailed earlier in this chapter, participants experienced a variety of risk factors, both

on the macro level and within their immediate environments. On the macro level, as described

beforehand by participants, each had encountered what they had perceived to be the intersection

of racism, sexism, and classism. As noted by Hibiscus, "I am not a statistic," which was how she

believed others viewed her in society. Other participants expressed a similar belief and a desire

to not allow the perceptions of other to dictate the circumstances of their lives, including future

directions, such as higher education. In fact, having experienced financial struggle, or classism

growing up served to motivate participants toward higher educational aspirations.

Participants also experienced a variety of risk factors within their homes, communities,

and schools. For example, all participants had experienced emotional pain caused by the absence

of one or both parents. Most of the participants described interpersonal problems within their

peer group that also led to emotive strain. Within communities and schools, these young women

were also subjected to crime and gang violence. However, the presence of resilient factors, such

as a single-supportive caregiver, caring friends and boyfriends, and dedicated school personnel

positively impacted this population's desire to pursue higher education.

In fact, many of the participants communicated that their peer group not only encouraged

them to work toward higher education, but also helped them prepare for college entrance exams

and applications. Quite often, participants shared that they had engaged in conversations about

college with their friends or significant others. Some of the participants also attributed higher

educational aspiration to the support they received from dedicated school personnel and staff. One counselor had even helped a participant identify and apply to her school of choice. The majority of the participants depicted aspects of a school environment that positively influenced their decision to pursue higher education, whether it was through academic, behavioral, and/or emotional advice. Schools also exposed participants to college preparedness activities, such as college fairs and tours.

What seemed to be the most prevailing factor that led to higher educational aspiration for these young women was the strength they displayed as individuals. All participants asserted the attitude of 'never giving up', which was buttressed by their 'focus on future goals', such as obtaining a higher educational degree. Grandmother's support and the ability or desire to self-define, acted as resilient factors that promoted confidence in future endeavors. Despite the many challenges experienced by the young women who were studied, each of the 12 expressed higher educational aspiration.

For example, five of the 12 participants had already taken college entrance exams and applied to schools. Two of the three juniors were preparing to take their college entrance exams, and had already identified to which universities they will apply in the fall. Four of the 12 subjects had applied and been accepted to their schools of choice during the final member checking phase of this study. The other five participants also expressed a desire to pursue higher education, but wanted to focus on high school completion first due to both academic and employment obligations.

Some participants had a clear idea of where they wanted to attend school or were accepted to their programs of study, while others simply communicated an aspiration for higher education.

For example, Rose wrote:

> I feel like I have to do everything on my own. I work and go to school. It's hard, but I
> don't wanna be living off the government for the rest of my life. So I choose to better
> myself by staying in school and try to become something in life. Neither of my parents
> went to college and I want to stop the continuous cycle by showing them I can make a
> change.

Rose, a junior in high school, has not yet developed clear plans for college and wants to take her education one step at a time until she reaches her senior year.

Tansy also professed higher educational aspiration, mainly because she wanted to better her life circumstances:

> I think it will change my life because if I have a degree in something, nobody can't ever
> say that I didn't go to college. Nobody can't say that I didn't get the right type of
> education that I need. And nobody can't say I didn't try to be something in life.

Tansy felt unsure about where she will eventually attend school, but communicated a desire to major in business. At this moment, she identified working two jobs and finishing her senior year of high school, as her top priorities.

Daisy, as well, was too occupied with work and cannot devote time to college preparedness activities. However, she also conveyed higher educational aspiration. Daisy said, "I want to go to college because I want to be a nurse. I've always wanted to be one, but I don't know if I want to do it in the army or outside of the army. But I definitely want to go to school to be a nurse." Daisy implied that she will explore higher educational opportunities upon completion of high school.

Other participants have definitively decided on a choice institution of higher education, but have yet to take college entrance exams or apply. For example, Lily stated, "I want to go to Gwendolyn Brooks College of Art for abstract painting." Iris also knew exactly where she wanted to attend college and had created a five-year plan:

I want to go to community college. I thought that I like making stuff and I like putting stuff together, so I thought about being a mechanic for cars, you know. They make good money, decent money, but I thought about why not go bigger because it's basically the same training, you know just a little more you have to do, so why not work on diesel trucks, you know. And then I can make it into my own business and can make a lot of money. I figured if I went to Zora Technical School it can be quicker because I don't have to take any of the unnecessary classes that I don't really need. And it would probably be a lot cheaper and I can get it done quicker and start the process of making my own business because that was my plan.

Dahlia also disclosed where she plans to attend and what she will major in, "I probably want to go to Phyllis Wheatley State for computer science and game development." Dahlia had not taken college entrance exams yet because she is a junior. Azalea, another junior, stated: "I want to go to Toni Morrison State, but I'm not sure what I want to go for yet." Each of these young women asserted that attending an institution of higher education would give them a career, provide them with enough financial stability to own a home, and travel if they would like.

Five of the participants already applied to institutions of higher education during the time of the study and four had been admitted before member checking of final themes. Marigold was accepted to Zora Technical School back in December. Marigold contacted the researcher and shared, "I changed my mind about moving to California. I broke up with my boyfriend and want

be near my family. I just got accepted to Zora Technical School and I'm really excited." Marigold claimed that she still would like to become a massage therapist.

Jasmine proclaimed in her first interview, "My top choices are Neale Southern and Phyllis Wheatley State and I want to major in nursing. More specifically I want to become a pediatric nurse. I've always loved babies and I really want to work with them." During the second interview, Jasmine arrived excitedly and announced, "I got accepted to my top choice for college. I started crying when I found out, I was excited." Like Jasmine, Daffodil knew where she wanted to attend college during her first interview, "I want to go to June Jordan University in Alabama and I really want to be in a sorority. I want to be a Delta." During the last member checking of findings, Daffodil shared that she had been accepted to all three schools where she had applied and plans to attend June Jordan University this fall, one of the most prestigious private universities in the South.

Hibiscus identified her top choice during the college fair at her school and later applied to that university:

> I want to go to Anne Spencer University. We had a college fair in the gym and there were colleges from everywhere. As we are going around tables, nothing really caught my eye until I got to the table for Anne Spencer University. I want to go into business for accounting and they have a great business program. It's not too far from home, but far enough that I won't have family popping in. And the campus is beautiful, the people are just so nice. It just really pulled me in. They offer what I want to do and it's affordable and it's more affordable than some of the other colleges I saw.

Hibiscus was unavailable for final member checking of findings, and the researcher is uncertain whether she was accepted to her university of choice. However, it is clear that Hibiscus planned to pursue higher education and obtain a degree in business.

Like Hibiscus, Lavender voiced a desire to obtain a bachelor's degree in business. However, due to finances, Lavender started coursework at Zora Technical School and is currently dual enrolled as a high school senior and college student. She would like to transfer to one of the most prestigious private universities in the South, world-renowned for its business program. She stated:

> I want to transfer into Bambara because they have a great business program and Bambara is expensive and I know that. I know that if I do all the scholarships and then make sure that I get the Faith scholarship, it will help me go there.

Lavender described her perfect future:

> The perfect future for me... being realistic, I want to be making six figures. I'm going to have me a marriage, but I don't want to get married too fast. I want to be settled some place. You know I want to have a cute little apartment. I want to live in the city. I love cities. So I'll be living in a big city, working as a business marketer, selling things to different businesses. I'll be wearing my black suit and my black purse. That's what I think would be the perfect life.

Lavender and the other participants, viewed higher education as a means to achieve personal goals. For example Daisy and Jasmine wanted to be nurses because they love helping people; while Hibiscus and Lavender want fast-paced and exciting business jobs. Each of the 12 young women displayed higher educational aspiration, and viewed it as a means to elevate their economic status and to achieve sought-after financial stability.

Summary

In conclusion, a multitude of risk and resilient factors are present in the lived experiences of the young African American women under study, living in a Southeastern college town. Critical Race Feminism was identified as an over-arching theme with three subthemes: racism, sexism, and classism as these forms of social injustice were prevalent and intersecting risks that participants faced daily. Within their immediate environment, some elements either contributed to adversity and/or promoted resilience for this population. Certain aspects of these young women's lives either hindered or enhanced positive academic trajectories.

Four subthemes were identified as both risk and resilient factors that influenced higher educational aspiration for all 12 participants: 1) Single-supportive caregiver, 2) neighborhood, 3) peers, and 4) school. The young women described these areas of their lives as both positive and negative. Variance existed between participants regarding neighborhoods: crime-ridden neighborhoods acted as a risk factor that increased participants' exposure to threats that were not present in other neighborhoods. For example, those who lived in crime-ridden neighborhoods were exposed to crime, drugs, and violence. The three other risk and resilient subthemes, were consistently found to hold both adverse and protective components in the lived experiences of participants.

The young women under study identified four factors that increased their own resilience. Four subthemes were ascribed: 1) 'Never giving up', 2) self-definition, 3) grandmother's support, and 4) 'staying focused on future goals'. Each of the 12 participants adopted an attitude of 'never giving up' in order to overcome challenges and work through problems. Participants who had yet to self-define, were making efforts to work toward that goal and viewed it as necessary to maintain their own happiness. Grandmothers played a very important role in

enhancing resilience in this population, as they often gave useful advice to participants in addition to offering emotional and financial support. Finally, each of the young women who participated in this study, 'focused on future goals' as a motivational mechanism and to buffer risk factors within their own environments.

Despite the variety of risks present in the lived experiences and due to the resilient nature of the young African American women under study, each of the participants expressed higher educational aspiration. More than half of the participants were preparing for college admittance and attendance. Five subjects had applied to institutions of higher education during the interview phase of the study. During final member-checking of findings, four had been admitted to their schools of choice. Unfortunately, Hibiscus could not be reached and it is uncertain whether she too had been admitted. Three other participants, two juniors and one senior, have been preparing to take their college entrance exams. Many of those who are not currently working toward higher educational admittance, have already identified majors and places where they would like to attend school in the future.

In sum, despite an assortment of risk factors that exist on the macro level and within their immediate environments, all of the young women being studied expressed a sincere desire to attend institutions of higher education. Participants applied a variety of strategies to overcome adversity, such as 'focusing on future goals' and 'never giving up'. Participants also challenged these risks by seeking assistance from others, whether it be their single-supportive caregiver, grandmother, teachers, and counselors. Thus, these young women found strength within as well as through the help of others, leading to higher educational aspiration.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to describe how home, community, and school risk and resilient factors impact higher educational aspiration of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town. This study applied critical narrative inquiry to help develop a storied understanding of how these young women perceived challenges on an institutional level and within their immediate environments. Additionally, narrative inquiry provided a forum for these women to tell their stories of strength, or resilience, despite the risks they experienced. Three corresponding research questions identified for this study were: 1) What are the family, community, and school risk factors that impede higher educational aspiration of young African American women living in a Southeastern college town? 2) What are the identified factors that promote resilience in this population? and 3) How do both risk and resilient factors interact to impact higher educational aspiration?

Twelve young African American women were purposefully selected for this study. All participants participated in two interviews that lasted from 40 to 75 minutes. Five of the study's participants provided diaries detailing their lived experiences as young African American women. The memo feature in ATLAS.ti was utilized to record informal observations. Additionally, a researcher journal was kept to record the research process using electronic memos throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Thus, data collected for the sake of this study consisted of: 1) 24 interviews, 2) five participant diaries, 3) 24 informal observations, and 4) a researcher journal.

Summary of Findings

Theory-driven themes emerged from data analysis, addressing two of the three research questions. First, the over-arching theme, 'critical race feminism', was deduced from the data to reflect the existence of perceived institutional and intersecting forms of oppression that acted solely as risks for the population under study. Racism, sexism, and classism or "struggling" financially, as referred to by participants, were three corresponding subthemes relevant to 'critical race feminism'. 'Risk and resilient factors' was identified as a second major theme, as the young women under study recounted aspects of their lives that either promoted resilience and/or created adversity. Four identified subthemes associated with 'risk and resilience factors' were: 1) Single supportive caregiver, 2) neighborhood, 3) peers, and 4) school. 'Resilient factors' emerged as a third dominant theme, along with the four congruent subthemes: 1) 'Never giving up', 2) self-definition, 3) grandma's support, and 4) 'staying focused on future goals' that reflected ways in which young women overcame risk factors within their environment.

In answer to the third research question, data revealed that despite the variety of risk factors that exist within the lived experiences of the study's participants, each of the young women expressed higher educational aspiration. In fact, five of the participants had already applied to institutions of higher education during data collection. By the final member-checking phase of the study, four out of five participants had been admitted to their schools of choice. Additionally, one senior and two juniors were actively studying for college entrance exams and preparing for the application process. The other four participants had also identified programs of study and corresponding educational institutions where they would like to attend in the future. As such, each of the study's subjects, voiced a desire to pursue higher education at the associate and/or baccalaureate levels.

This chapter will present the conclusions drawn from the study and discuss relevant literature related to critical race feminism and risk and resilience theory as they pertain to the psychosocial development of young African American women. Additionally, an overview of practice implications will be provided. Finally, recommendations for future research will be identified and outlined.

Conclusions and Discussion

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism (CRF) was utilized as the primary theory to analyze this study as it privileges the experiences, and narratives of women of color in the center of analysis. CRF acknowledges that women of color are uniquely positioned to simultaneously experience intersecting forms of discrimination. Due to the co-occurring interchange of racism, sexism, and classism, women of color are generally more severely marginalized than any other group. CRF blends multiple fields of study due to the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism and its prevalence across domains in the lives of racial minority women (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Houh & Kalsem; 2015; Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Wing, 2003).

Recent research that applied CRF to analyze the educational environment of young women of color has solely explored the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism as it negatively impacted secondary achievement, but did not examine how these factors influence higher educational aspiration (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Joseph et al., 2016; Pratt-Clarke, 2010). Contrary to other research, this study utilized CRF as a platform to analyze how the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism might affect higher educational aspiration, making these findings unique. Additionally, CRF was utilized to explore the lived experiences of young African American women outside of their school environment.

This study revealed that the perceived and real juncture of racism, sexism, and classism acted not only as a risk factor in the schools, but also in the communities where these young women reside. Finally, higher educational aspiration was expressed by participants despite their co-ocurring experiences with varying forms of oppression.

Each of the 12 young women narrated times when they had experienced what they had perceived or real racism, sexism, or classism to their detriment. To them, instances of racism most often occurred in places of employment, schools, or in the community when there was an increased presence of European Americans. For example, Daffodil told of an experience she had at a restaurant:

> We were at Applebee's. There was me, my mom, my sister, and my grandma and we had sat down and we had got seated and everything. And this white male was supposed to be our waiter. He wouldn't come over to us because we were colored people so he asked someone else to do it.

Each of the 12 participants reported that they had encountered what they had perceived to be racism, throughout their lives in a variety of places, such as stores, coffee shops, places of employment, and schools. Each of the young women expressed the view that they had been treated differently, multiple times throughout their lives, because of their race.

Perceived and real sexism was also pervasive in a variety of areas, including their own homes. All of the subjects communicated a belief that they were treated differently because of their gender. The degree of sexism experienced varied from minimal to severe, among participants. Hibiscus recounted a less severe account: "So if a girl rejects a guy, you know he starts rumors that she is a slut. After that gets around, people automatically assume that she's a slut." Hibiscus and the others, felt stereotyped to be a certain way or do certain things because

they are female. Perceived or real sexism often presented as a barrier to higher educational aspiration since these young women expressed that they had to defend themselves against rumors, stereotypes, prejudices, and assaults.

Classism was also evident in the lives of participants. Each of the young women had experienced economic hardship at some point in their lives; however, a few participants and their families had achieved middle-class status in the past few years. The degree of classism ranged among participants; some had been homeless at one point in their lives, while other families refrained from unnecessary expenses, such as going out to eat or the movies. "Struggling" was a term utilized frequently by all subjects, to denote times of financial need or challenge. For example, Marigold said: "Umm the most challenging time in my life was just when we were homeless and we had to stay with our aunt. And it was just everything went and everyone just kind of went their own way." Although Marigold's father had made strong efforts on behalf of his children to keep the family intact, due to economic hardships associated with classism, he was unable to financially support Marigold and all of her siblings, causing homelessness.

As insinuated from the data that emerged from this study, the perceived and/or real juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism acted as a major risk factor that impacted higher educational aspiration. Racism, whether it was real or perceived, was the most pervasive risk, however, participants were able to rise above the challenges created by social oppression as all 12 expressed higher educational aspiration. In fact, the presence of these risks, served as motivation for participants to continue their educational pursuits after high school in order to improve their own life circumstances. Many of the participants communicated a desire to challenge and change misconceptions attributed to young African American women. Moreover, many of the participants communicated the belief that obtainment of a higher educational degree

would elevate their current economic status and prevent them from 'struggling' financially in the future.

Risk and Resilient Factors

A second conclusion revealed by the study was the existence of factors that both hindered or enhanced higher educational aspiration for participants. Four areas were identified as both risk and resilient factors: 1) Single-supportive caregiver, 2) neighborhood, 3) peers, and 4) schools. This study utilized risk and resilience theory in order to analyze the dynamic interplay between environmental factors and personality traits that promote resilience, despite the presence of risks. Ongoing stressors, such as poverty, community violence, dysfunctional relationships, harassment and/or bullying constituted potential risk factors (Chesmore et al, 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Southwick et al., 2014, Wright, et al., 2013).

Often, African American youth are more likely to encounter risk factors in their communities and schools than are European Americans, which limits or reduces positive educational outcomes. For example, impoverished and African American youth frequently live in crime-ridden communities bringing them in contact with violence and drugs (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016). Recent research showed that despite increased exposure to a variety of risk factors, African American youth receiving positive social support, displayed adaptable strategies leading to resilience (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Masten, 2011; Woodland, 2016; Wright et al., 2013).

The findings of this study substantiated that African American youth are resilient despite increased exposure to risk (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Perlow, 2015; Woodland, 2016). The resilience of the young women under study was apparent throughout data collection and analysis. Similar to other studies' findings- schools, neighborhoods, and social supports were

found to act as risks or factors that promoted resilience for youth of all colors (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Maring & Koblinsky, 2013; Southwick et al., 2014; Woodland, 2016). Contrary to other research, the findings of this study revealed that factors were not dichotomized by risk and resilient. Rather, there was a push and pull between some factors, making them both risks and elements that promoted resilience. As mentioned previously, four domains (single-supportive caregiver, neighborhood, peers, and school) were defined as both adverse and protective features.

Each of the young women who participated in this study were raised by a single-supportive caregiver, which was found to have both a positive and negative influence on their upbringing. For example, Lily disclosed, "My dad had a lot of hardships being a single dad. It was really stressful and he was the only one working. We all ended up in foster care." Lily expressed sincere appreciation for her father's efforts to keep the family intact. However, due to the many adversities they encountered as a family, and the absence of a mother to help emotionally and financially, Lily and her siblings were placed in foster care.

Typically, the single-supportive caregiver tasked with raising participants, was conveyed as a motivating person who increased self-efficacy and confidence. The young women recounted the unwavering assistance they received from their caregivers and pinpointed sacrifices that were made on their behalf. For example, Lavender asserted that her mother motivated her to stay out of trouble, "My mom is my best friend and I don't want to hurt her. I don't want her to feel any disappointment." Lavender elaborated that the absence of her father caused the family to "struggle" financially and severely worry about his well-being. Narrative accounts from other participants revealed that although their single-supportive caregiver provided unrelenting support and care, the absence of a parent or both parents caused emotional

and financial strain. Four participants had to delay higher education due to lack of financial support. Thus, based on data from this study, the presence of a single-supportive caregiver was identified as both a risk and resilient factor.

Neighborhoods constituted another interactive domain characterized by both threats and factors that promoted resilience. Similar to other research exploring risk and resilience, the findings of this study showed that youth of color living in communities characterized by crime, were more likely to encounter risks, or threats to their well-being (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016). Unique to this study was the finding that neighborhoods could not be dichotomized into separate factors. Instead, there were both positive attributes and drawbacks to each type of neighborhood. Hibiscus, who lived in one of the crime-infested neighborhoods, discussed this point:

> I think that there are some pros and cons to my neighborhood. I guess I would describe it as a mixture of good and bad. Like a yin and yang where you have people who are nice and just staying out of trouble and doing the right thing. And then you have the drugs and the violence and the gang bangers in the other category.

Hibiscus conveyed her neighborhood as having an abundance of threats, such as gangs, guns, and drugs. She also revealed that within this environment, there are people her family turned to when they needed food or financial assistance. Her neighborhood often posed threats to her safety, but within that dangerous environment, there were also supportive people.

Other participants lived in "quieter" parts of town. Their neighborhoods were portrayed as safe. Unlike the young women residing in crime-ridden communities, participants who lived in "quieter" areas expressed detachment from their neighbors as they had never developed close relationships with them. Azalea demonstrated this point further, "Like when I was little I wasn't

able to play with kids or have the neighborhood experience I guess because no one was around."

These young women revealed that there was no sense of community in the quiet neighborhoods.

As such, findings suggested that although some neighborhoods consisted mostly of threats, a

community was nonetheless established that provided needed and welcomed support. Different

from other research findings, this study showed that safe neighborhoods offered participants'

minimal social support since little to no interactions had occurred between participants and their

neighbors (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016).

Peers constituted another area where an interaction between risk and resilient factors

occurred. Other researchers grouped peer influences as either risk or resilient factors, but not

both (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Masten, 2011; Southwick et al., 2014;

Woodland, 2016). This study concluded that peers both hindered and enhanced educational

aspiration. For example, Marigold described her boyfriend as a motivating factor for higher

educational aspiration. However, she admitted that she preferred family over friends, and often

chose not to develop friendships due to feeling distrustful of others. Lavender also described her

peers both positively and negatively. For example, Lavender's friends allegedly spread rumors

about her across school. However, this young woman asserted that these same peers positively

impacted her desire to pursue higher education:

> We always have conversations about going to college. We talk about studying for the
>
> SATs the ACTs. We talk about our life in the future. They're also another reason I want
>
> to go. I don't have a talent so I need an education to get me somewhere in life, but my
>
> friends are the type of people that influence me to go. Because they continuously talk
>
> about it so it makes me talk about it. So I was like "I need to go", "You're right". They
>
> are positive about college.

Thus, participants identified their peers as both supporters and distractors relative to their desire to pursue opportunities in higher education.

Schools constituted another place where risk and resilient factors intertwined to the benefit or detriment of participants. Past research suggested that a positive school environment promoted resilience; schools characterized by gang violence and poor social supports posed threats to the educational success of students (Chesmore et al., 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Masten, 2011; Southwick et al., 2014; Stanley, 2009: Woodland, 2016). Findings unique to this study showed that there was a push and pull between risk and resilient factors within educational environments.

A variety of risk factors existed in the school where these young women were enrolled. For example, participants were exposed to gang violence within the school and they were also harmed by the schools' attempts to control violence, such as through the usage of pepper spray. These young women also communicated the belief that they were targeted at school due to their race. Participants expressed the view that they received inaccurate grades, disciplinary action, and were intellectually degraded by people they labelled as "racist" school personnel.

Finally, sexism was also described as a risk factor to varying degrees. One girl was severely physically assaulted by three males at Maya Angelou High School during school hours. This one situation led to the creation and implementation of a new dress code that restricted the type of clothing female students could wear, but did not place similar restrictions on males. As indicated by the findings of this study, risks were present throughout the educational environments where these young women matriculated; however, resilient factors also existed that buffered the impact of adversity.

For example, all the young women identified adults within their schools who provided them with both academic and emotional aid. Iris even asserted that the encouragement she received from a few supportive teachers helped her get back on track with life. Jasmine also viewed school personnel as influential in her ability to pursue higher education:

> My college advisor was a lot of help. She's basically the reason why I'm so far ahead with the application process for all the schools I wanted to go to. And we all have a counselor, depending on your last name. So I think that the counselors are helpful. You have meetings with them at least once a year and they check on you and make sure that everything is okay at home.

Each of the three high schools also provided resources to students wishing to improve their grades, such as after-school and Saturday academic tutoring. All three of the schools noted in the study took students on college tours, organized college fairs, and gave college application vouchers to students pursuing higher education. Therefore, this study concluded that schools cannot be dichotomized into risk or resilient factors. Rather, schools demonstrated the capacity to simultaneously impede or promote higher educational aspiration for the young women who participated in this study.

Resilient Factors

Data from this study substantiated other research related to risk and resilience theory. For example, earlier research identified factors that promoted resilience in African American youth, which included the application of problem-solving strategies, supportive adults, and self-definition or having a positive view of one's self (Chesmore et al., 2016; Clonan-Roy, 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016). Religious affiliation and involvement in a church community have also been found to promote resilience in young African American women

(Adams, 2010; Battle-Fisher, 2009; Smith, 2011; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008).

Unique to this study, was the finding that participation in a religious organization had no impact on resilience. Lavender, a Jehovah's Witness, was the only one to profess faith as having a positive influence in her life; the other 11 had not communicated any religious affiliation. Other differences exist between past research on resilient factors and the findings of this study. For example, most studies simply reported that experiences with positive adults at home or in school led to resilience, but they did not specify the supportive individual. In contrast to other research, "grandma" was repeatedly identified, by all 12 participants of this study, as *the* supportive adult who helped them withstand adversity (Adams, 2010; Chesmore et al., 2016; Clonan-Roy, 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016). Each of the 12 young women who engaged in this study, shared stories about how their grandmothers assisted both financially and emotionally. For example, Jasmine relayed:

> I would say my grandma is pretty much a best friend to me. Anytime I get mad or frustrated, because she lives next door, I just walk to her house anytime I'm upset about something. And I pretty much can tell her anything.

Grandma was singled out as an adult who worked diligently to support the emotional, educational, and physical well-being of participants. This individual shared financial resources, emotional strength, wisdom, and above all, sincere care for participants.

Additionally, although other studies have identified the application of problem-solving strategies as a factor that promoted resilience, they did not particularize the type of tactics employed by youth (Adams, 2010; Chesmore et al., 2016; Clonan-Roy, 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016). Those studies did not specify themes such as, "never giving up" or

"staying focused on future goals" as two approaches applied by African American youth to overcome adversity in their environments. Each of the study's 12 subjects conveyed a need to 'never give up' and 'stay focused on future goals' in effort to overcome challenges and distractions within their environments. For example, Lily reported "Even though I'm behind in school, I don't give up and keep working hard because I want that high school diploma." For Tansy, staying focused on future goals kept her motivated: "Hopefully going to college will help me get better jobs and make more money and help me get a better house or apartment." Therefore, unlike previous research studies done by Adams (2010), Chesmore et al. (2016), Clonan-Roy (2016), and more, these findings specified exactly which coping strategies were employed to promote resilience (Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Woodland, 2016).

Finally, similar to studies done by Chesmore et al. (2016), Clonan-Roy (2016), Ernetus and Prelow (2015) and Woodland (2016), self-definition was found to be a factor that enhanced resilience for African American youth. Those who could navigate through oppression by self-defining, and who viewed themselves positively despite external societal pressures, showed higher levels of resilience (Adams, 2010; Battle-Fisher, 2009; Smith, 2011; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008). Although some of the young women under study were working on self-defining, all of them viewed confidence and self-love as a goal they were working toward. Participants identified self-love, despite externalities, as a pertinent ongoing process in order to be happy in life.

Impact on Higher Educational Aspiration

A finding unique to this study was that all participants communicated a desire to pursue higher education. Studies implemented in the past have examined the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, classism and its impact on the education of youth of color (Bains, 2014; Bankhead,

2014; Battle-Fisher, 2009; Childers-Mckee & Hytten, 2015; Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Jospeh et al., 2016; Pratt-Clarke, 2010). Other studies have explored risk and resilient factors as they related to secondary educational achievement (Adams, 2010; Chesmore et al., 2016; Clonan-Roy, 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Woodland, 2016). Absent from previous research, but explored here was how the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism interacted with risks in the home, communities, and schools of these young women, in ways that impacted higher educational aspiration.

Findings of this study revealed that all 12 participants were impacted by risk factors that exist institutionally, as well as within their immediate environments. However, these young women overcame adversity due to the presence of resilient factors and problem-solving strategies they employed, to withstand challenges. Thus, all of the young women who participated in this study, expressed a desire to pursue higher education, despite the manifestation of risks in their environments.

<div align="center">

Practical Implications for Social Work

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Micro Social Work Practice Implications

As shown by this study and other research, it is imperative for young African American women to positively 'self-define' in order to promote resilience (Chesmore et al., 2016; Clonan-Roy, 2016; Ernetus & Prelow, 2015; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008; Woodland, 2016). As such, access to individual and group counseling that is culturally sensitive and acknowledges the unique experiences of African American women, might be of significant benefit to the population under study. Therapeutic services that addresses racial and gender issues may help to externalize negative stereotypes, such as the

"jezebel" or "loud-mouth" attributed to African American womanhood, while also easing any psychological distress caused by societal oppressions. Finally, any form of therapeutic counseling that provides a safe space for young African American women to explore their thoughts and feelings, will in turn promote the usage of coping skills that enhance emotional regulation and functioning (Boyd-Franklin, 2002; Jones & Guy, 2015, Jones & Warner, 2011; Stuart & Tuason, 2008).

Although none of the 12 research participants manifested the need for therapeutic services at the time of the study, four had received counseling in the past and found it beneficial. For example, Tansy disclosed:

> I used to cut myself. I stopped cutting myself after I went to therapy and my auntie and my best friend helped with that. I didn't really have nobody to talk to I guess when I was cutting myself, but after I had someone to talk to I kind of felt better and I stopped. So I would tell people if they feel alone go find someone to talk to, even if you don't want to go to a therapist, it can really help.

Tansy's narrative demonstrated the utility of therapeutic services, as her engagement in treatment helped her halt self-harming behaviors, while also improving her depressed mood. Thus, a recommendation of this study is to make sure that therapeutic services are readily available for young African American women in need. Additionally, therapists providing services to young women of color should be educated to recognize the legacy of systematic barriers created by oppression and apply strengths-based and empowerment approaches to treatment (Bains, 2014; Bankhead, 2015; Boyd-Franklin, 2002; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Harris, 2015; Jones & Guy, 2015, Jones & Warner, 2011; Stuart & Tuason, 2008; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008).

Mezzo Social Work Practice Implications

The findings of this study, along with other research, showed that some teachers continue to approach African American students, and particularly females, in a derogatory manner (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Joseph et al., 2016; Pratt-Clarke, 2010). Participants of this study even perceived one college coach to be "racist" and reported the view that this same college coach had encouraged many African American students to drop out of high school. This was a strong and active perception of several students and was stated by participants multiple times. As school social workers dynamically interact with school personnel, the community, and parents, they are uniquely positioned to make colleagues aware of pejorative behaviors while also providing them knowledge about successful programs, training, and educational materials to enhance positive interactions with students of color. This is especially important during high school, a time when many students are engaging in college preparedness activities, such as touring universities, studying for and taking college entrance exams, and applying to college (Aiyegbo-Ohadike, 2015; Chesmore et al., 2016; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Dinecola et al., 2015; Joseph et al., 2016; Knight & Marciano, 2013).

Due to the racially disparate nature of public school education, culturally sensitive and evidence-based training of teachers, counselors, librarians, health care professionals, and other school personnel is needed in order to improve interactions with youth of color and their family members. This is an area where school social workers, in particular, can positively help reform educational environments as they often act as the bridge between the school, families, and communities (Allen-Meares et al. 2013; Ayasse & Stone, 2015; Dinecola et al., 2015; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Powers, 2010).

Research also showed that the presence of school social workers is associated with fewer disciplinary actions and higher graduation rates even after controlling for poverty (Alvarez et al., 2013; Ayasse & Stone, 2015). The presence of social workers, therefore, improves capacity building within schools and communities through the broad range of services they provide. For example, school social workers are knowledgeable about community resources, relationship building, advocacy, and empowerment approaches. Social workers in schools then possess an array of skills that helps them to connect families with financial aid, implement after-school programs, and collaborate closely with agencies that provide services to youth and their families. (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Ayasse & Stone, 2010; Dinecola et al., 2015; Joseph et al., 2010; McKay et al., 2010; Powers, 2010). Given the findings of this study, schools may benefit from an increased presence and hiring of social workers to help students and families in need.

As made evident by the results of this study, gang membership and its associated violence is a growing problem, both within the community where the study took place, and across the country. Interventions geared toward gang prevention and/or lessening the emotional and negative impact established by gang violence, is another domain requiring social work interventions within homes, schools, and communities. Recent research showed that gang initiation often begins during youth (Gebo & Cameous, 2016; Hennigan et al., 2015; Koffman et al., 2015; Merrin at al., 2015). The creation of gang prevention programs that include a variety of stakeholders within the community, including parents, social workers, politicians, police, and school may lessen the impact of this risk factor.

School social workers, in particular, should intervene with students prior to the high school years, during middle school or earlier, and provide them with education about gang recruitment involvement. Additionally, school social workers can connect youth with positive

alternative resources, such as youth development organizations, after-school activities, and mentorship programs. Social workers can offer more assistance by engaging youth, their parents, and schools in the development of programs geared at preventing gang involvement (Gebo & Cameous, 2016; Hennigan et al., 2015; Hopps & Pinderhughes, 1999; Koffman et al., 2015; Merrin at al., 2015; Sharkey, 2010; Washington & Avant, 2001).

Finally, social workers have become keen promoters of and intrinsic to the development and creation of a Response to Intervention (RIT) framework and its implementation, which is referred to as Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS), now being implemented in schools throughout the nation. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, PBIS is a school-wide intervention, based upon evidenced-based practices that applies a three-tier interventional approach after thorough assessment of students' needs: school-wide (tier 1), selective small group (tier 2), and individualized support (tier 3) (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010; Flannery et al., 2014; Sabatino et al., 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2003).

Social workers in schools are also continually involved in implementing and evaluating interventions and their effectiveness at all levels. Past research showed that PBIS provided structure and support to students, which in turn caused a significant decrease in behavioral problems, an increase in positive youth behaviors, and improved interactions between schools and their communities (Anderson-Ketchmark & Alvarez, 2010; Flannery et al., 2014; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Sabatino et al., 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2003). Given the outcomes of this study, social workers employed at the three schools where participants attended, could help to develop, implement, and evaluate PBIS strategies that increase culturally sensitive interactions among students and school personnel, address gang violence, and increase college preparedness.

Macro Social Work Practice Implications

On the macro level, social workers could lead advocacy efforts to ensure that youth of color attending informally segregated public schools, receive equitable funding and resources to enhance their educational success. Social workers can do so by promoting policy changes that impact African American youth and their families, based on research that has identified factors that will promote resilience in youth of color. These include the development and enforcement of polices that promote culturally competent practices in communities and schools.

De facto segregation has become the norm and minority public schools continue to lack equitable access to educational resources as their European American counterparts (Kelly, 2012; Monroe, 2016; Sawhill, 2016; Sawhill & McLanahan, 2006; Span, 2015). Too often, African American students living below the poverty line, continue to attend *de facto* segregated public schools branded by disparities, including physical facilities, uncertified teachers, outdated textbooks, and over-crowded classrooms. The quality of public school education continues to correspond closely with skin color (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Gibson, 2015; Kelly, 2012; Monroe, 2016; Span, 2015).

Education reform is needed that reallocates necessary funds and resources to typically segregated and poor school districts across the country (Childers-Mckee & Hytten, 2015; Gibson, 2015; Hopps et al., 1995; Kelly, 2012; Monroe, 2016; Span, 2015). African American families should also be viewed as stakeholders, while taking on the role of consultants to policy makers regarding their children's education. Moreover, teachers and other school personnel should be required to pursue education and undergo training that enhances cultural sensitivity that will equip them with necessary tools to effectively educate students of color, such as application of a strengths-based approach, setting high academic expectations, and reducing

disciplinary actions (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Hopps et al. 1995, 2007; Joseph et al., 2016; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008).

Policies must also be developed and implemented that address the unique needs of young African American women who are often targeted due to the intersection of race, class, and gender. Within public school environments, young African American women are treated differently due to pejorative views of African American women held by some of their educators, which leads to higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Chesmore et al., 2016; Cousins & Mabrey, 2007; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Partee, 2015; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evan et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). For example, in the 2011-2012 school year, 12% of African American girls were expelled from school nationally, compared to 6% of Hispanic females and 2% of European American females; (Crenshaw et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

These statistics are alarming, justifying the need for educational reform to ensure equitable treatment of young African American women within their educational environments. Policies must be enacted so that young African American women are not unfairly and disproportionately disciplined in their schools. Therefore, policy reform is needed so that women of color are not unwarrantedly given criminal sanctions based on simple misconduct at school, such as skipping class (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a growing need for the development of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research, in schools and communities, to address the multifaceted ways in which race,

gender, and class influence higher educational aspiration of young African American women. Currently there is a lack of research and its associated scholarship that focuses on the juxtaposition of the varying forms of discrimination, and the experiential risks that these factors create for young African American women attending public schools (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winter, 2010; Gibson, 2015; Partee, 2015; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). To date, the studies that have employed CRF as a platform to explore academic achievement of young African American women, focused solely on the educational environments, failing to account for how the juxtaposition of racism, sexism, and classism affects them outside of school (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winter, 2010; Gibson, 2015; Partee, 2015; Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). To advance knowledge that will increase higher educational aspiration and attainment for young African American women, further research and conceptual development is needed that applies CRF as a means to examine the lived experiences of young African American women across the domains, systems, and people they encounter on a daily basis.

Research has shown that young African American women's encounters with intersecting forms of oppression significantly undermines their ability to perform well academically (Adams, 2010; Chesmore et al., 2016; Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gibson, 2015; Partee, 2015 Pratt-Clarke, 2010; Smith-Evans et al., 2014; Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008). Also, within these public high schools some teachers were found to be influenced by pervasively "racist" and "sexist" stereotypes, which negatively influenced their interactions with students (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Kelly, 2015; Smith-Evan et al., 2014). Findings of this study supported past

research, as racial and gender oppression were reported as risk factors present in the educational environments of participants.

Multiple studies implemented by Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the early 1950s concluded that discrimination, oppression, and prejudice caused African American students to feel inferior, which damaged their self-esteem. The Supreme Court of the United States' ruling on Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was based upon the psychological impact of segregation, and not the educational inequities that existed between African American and European American schools (Kelly, 2012; Moss, 2009; Rury & Hill, 2012; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Prior to the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling, it was found that African American schools did not receive the same federal financial support as European American schools, which led to inferior quality of the education delivered in those schools. Additionally, African American students felt as if they lacked control and were also highly impacted by European American teachers' affects, which were often influenced by racial attitudes. These school environments were decidedly unequal, which led to negative educational outcomes for African American youth during the 1960s and 1970s (Clark, 1989; Moss, 2009; Mostseller & Moynihan, 1972; Rury & Hill, 2012).

More current research suggests that not much has changed since the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling, more than 60 years ago. Both historical and contemporary racism influence institutions of elementary and secondary schooling, which negatively impacts the quality of education received by African American students. Most poor African American students continue to attend segregated public schools branded by disparities, including physical facilities, uncertified teachers, and limited funds. The quality of public school education continues to correspond closely with skin color, to the detriment of students of color. (Kelly,

2012; Monroe, 2016; Sawhill, 2016; Sawhill & McLanahan, 2006; Span, 2015). As such, more

research is needed to inform policies that will change the racially disparate nature of public

school education in the United States.

Additionally, a lack of literature exists that explores the causality of poverty's high

prevalence in Athens, Georgia and its impact on secondary education. Quite a few online

communities, such as 'Online Athens', 'One Athens', 'Athens-Clark County by the Numbers',

and 'Athens for Everyone' report on the pervasiveness of poverty in this town. However, not

one of those webhosts, discussed poverty's bearing on the education of youth attending public

schools in this county.   In fact, after this researcher completed a multi- search of 130 databases,

applying the search terms "Athens, Georgia", "poverty" and "education", using the University of

Georgia (UGA) online library system, it was revealed that as of yet, no literature exists regarding

poverty's impact on secondary education in Athens, Georgia.

Another multi-search was attempted on the website 'Google', using only the terms

"Athens, Georgia", "poverty", and "education". This search failed to produce any further

research and/or literature relevant to poverty and secondary education in Athens, Georgia. After

combing various websites, it became apparent that there are forums, panels, and Facebook

groups consisting of various stakeholders who are having discussions about how to help those in

need, such as through charitable donations.

However, there is no current research that examines poverty's impact on public schooling

in this community. This study suggests that more research related to this topic must be executed

in Athens, Georgia. To date, no studies have been found that explore causes of poverty's

pervasiveness in Athens, Georgia. Nor does any literature examine its bearing on elementary or

secondary education in Athens-Clarke County. Finally, more knowledge is needed, specifically

regarding how the intersection of poverty, race, and gender impact higher educational aspiration for young women of color in this town, and elsewhere.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to collaboratively narrate risk and resilient factors experienced by young African American women living in a Southeastern college town. The goal of this research endeavor was to create a storied understanding of how environmental risks impact this population's higher educational aspiration. Additionally, this study aimed to highlight what factors promoted resilience for the population understudy. Twenty-four in-depth interviews were completed with 12 participants. In addition to interviews, five participants provided diaries, informal observations were recorded, and a researcher journal was kept to ensure saturation of findings. Theory-driven thematic analysis was employed to deduce findings from the two theories that undergirded this study.

Conclusions were then derived from the standpoint of critical race feminism and risk and resilience theory. Findings of this study suggested that young women of color, experience the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism on a daily basis within their school, homes, and communities. More research is needed to examine the juxtaposition of race, class, and gender in schools and communities as it pertains to higher educational aspiration for young women of color. Additionally, this study showed that some factors cannot be dichotomized as either a risk or resilient factor. For example, schools were identified as containing both risk and resilient factors that either enhanced or impeded resilience. Unlike other research findings, "grandma" was specified as *the* supportive adult who promoted resilience and higher educational aspiration for the subjects of this study. Finally, subjects specified which problem-solving strategies they

employed in order to overcome adversity, such as 'staying focused on future goals' and 'never giving up'.

Suggestions were then given to inform micro, mezzo, and macro social work practices. These included access to culturally sensitive therapeutic services, increasing the presence of social workers in schools, and specific policy reformations. Practically, this study provides social work scholars, students, and practitioners with evidence-based strategies on how to effectively intervene with and/or engage with young women of color. More importantly, this study asks the future of social work to re-examine the social construction of America and the disservice it pays to young women of color. In essence, the stories of strength that were shared by participants, challenged society in general, and this locale in particular, to explore ways in which resilience may be promoted in this population that has already been fortified by adversity.

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APPENDIX A

Stories of Strength:
A Study of Young African American Females
Living in Athens, Georgia

You are invited to participate in a research study where you tell your story about what it is like

being a young African American female living in Athens, Georgia and how that impacts your

desire or ability to attend college or technical school. You will be asked to share your

experiences in two audio-taped interviews. You will also be asked to keep a written diary and a

notebook will be given to you by the researcher. If you participate in this study, you will receive

two $25.00 Walmart gift cards to compensate for your time. Additionally, you will have the

satisfaction in knowing that your story may help other young African American females living in

your community.

Participation is confidential; your name will not be used in connection with this study.

Who can participate?

*Must be between the ages of 16-19
*Must be African American and not biracial or belonging to another race
*Be female and not male or transgender
*Be a junior or senior in Cedar Shoals, Clarke Central, or Classic City High School.
*Cannot have children or be pregnant at the time of the study.

Please contact Jessica Nobile at storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com or 706-254-2098 to participate in this study.

APPENDIX B1

Stories of Strength Eligibility Screening Form

1. Do you identify as African American or black?   _____
2. Do you identify as belonging to more than one race?   _____
3. Do you identify as any race other than African American?   _____
4. Do you identify as a female?   _____
5. Do you identify as transgender?   _____
6. Do you identify as male?   _____
7. Are you between the ages of 16 and 19?   _____
8. Are you enrolled as a junior or senior in either Cedar Shoals, Clarke Central, or Classic City High school?   _____
9. Do you have children?   _____
10. Are you pregnant?   _____

APPENDIX B2

Stories of Strength Telephone Eligibility Screening

Thank you for calling to find out more about my research study. My name is Jessica Nobile and I am a researcher at the University of Georgia's School of Social work.

The purpose of this study is to create and share stories about what it is like being a young African American female living in Athens, Georgia. This study, *Stories of Strength*, wants to discover what challenges, if any, are in Athens that make it hard for young black females to go college or technical school. This study also wants to show how strong young African American females are by describing how they deal with problems in their community. Do you think you might be interested in participating in this study?

{If No}: Thank you for your time.

{If Yes}: But before enrolling people in this study, I need to ask you some questions to see if you are eligible. And now I would like to ask some questions about you. This should only take about 10 minutes of your time.

There is a chance that these questions may make you feel uncomfortable or upset; if so please let me know. You don't have to answer questions if you don't want to.

All information that I receive from you during this phone interview, including your name and any other information that can possibly identify you, will be kept strictly confidential under lock and key or saved on my password protected computer. Remember, you don't have to participate in this study if you don't want to. You can refuse to answer any questions, or stop this phone interview at any time without negative consequences or a loss of benefits you are otherwise entitled. At the end of this interview, I will tell you if you are able to participate in this study. If you don't qualify, then I will destroy all of your information immediately. If you do qualify then we will set up a time to meet for the first interview. If you are a youth under 18, you must ask your parent or guardian to be present the first time we meet so that both of you can get more information about this study and sign forms.

Do I have permission to ask you these questions?

1. Are you African American?   _____
2. Do you belong to more than one race?   _____
3. Are you female?   _____
4. Are you transgender?   _____
5. Are you between the ages of 16 and 19?   _____

6. Are you enrolled as a junior or senior in either Cedar Shoals, Clarke Central, or Classic City High school?   _____
7. Do you have children?   _____
8. Are you pregnant?   _____

Thank you. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at 706-254-2098 or storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Hopps, at 706-542-7002 or hoppsjg@aol.com. Questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed at Institutional Review Board, 609 Boyd GSRC, Athens, GA 30602-7411; telephone 706-542-3199; email address is irb@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C1

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
STORIES OF STRENGTH

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: June G. Hopps
                                                    Professor, School of Social Work
                                                    University of Georgia
                                                    hoppsbjg@aol.com

Co-Investigator: Jessica Nobile
                                            School of Social Work
                                            storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com
                                            706-254-2098

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to create and share stories about what it is like being a young African American female living in Athens, Georgia. This study, *Stories of Strength*, wants to discover what challenges, if any, are in Athens that make it hard for young black females to go college or technical school. This study also wants to show how strong young African American females are by describing how they deal with problems in their community.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …
- Complete two face-to-face interviews with the researcher. You get to decide the location of these interviews. You are encouraged to pick locations where you feel most comfortable being interviewed and where you think your identity can be kept confidential.
- Both interviews should last about two hours, but you may choose to end the interviews early if you feel uncomfortable. The second and final interview will happen 2-3 weeks after the first interview. This study will last for a total of three weeks, but you will only have to spend four hours talking to the researcher for interviews.
- You will also be asked to write in a dairy and a notebook will be provided to you by the researcher. You should make entries in your diary 2-3 times per week and this should take

up around three hours of your time. You should have at least seven entries made in your dairy before your schedule the final interview with the researcher

- The researcher will use a guide to ask you questions during the interview. These questions will ask you to talk about yourself, your family, your community, your school, and your peers. You don't have to answer the questions asked by the researcher if you don't want to. Instead, you should tell me what you think is important for people to know about your life.
- Audio recordings of interviews will be written up in a computer document and used only for analysis. All the information you share will be destroyed after initial analysis is completed. If you are under 18, all identifiable information will be destroyed the day before your 18th birthday.

Risks and discomforts

There are some minimal risks or discomforts associated with this research. For example, the researcher is a licensed clinical social worker, which makes her a mandated reporter by law. This means if you tell me that you are experiencing abuse, the researcher will have to contact child protective services. This researcher must also report any criminal or dangerous activity. This means that the researcher will have to tell the authorities if you tell her about any criminal activity, such as gang involvement or the selling of drugs. Plus, if you share that you are planning to hurt yourself or someone else, the researcher has to inform the police. The researcher has provided you with a list of resources at the end of this form to use if you feel like you are in danger or need some extra help.

Being a participant puts your confidentiality at risk. This means that you might be treated badly at school if teachers or other personnel find out who you are and not like or agree with the information that you share. To protect you from this risk, the researcher will disguise the location of this study by calling it a college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The researcher will also not interview you at school. The researcher encourages you to keep your participation in this study confidential.

Keeping a dairy for this study also puts your confidentiality at risk. The researcher will write a fake name on your journal, which she will use to hide your identity on all the information you give her. Please use the fake name given to you by the researcher when you are writing about yourself. Also be careful not to write any identifying information in your dairy, like using real names when talking about friends or family members. The researcher encourages you to make up names when talking about your school, teachers, friends, community, etc. when writing about them in your diary.

No other risks have been identified for this study.

Benefits

- You may also benefit because you get to share your story with others. Sharing your story might help you see all your positive qualities and realize how strong you are.
- Your participation in this study might help make changes in Athens that will help other young African America females. Since you will describe your challenges and how you cope those challenges, you might teach other teens how to deal with their own problems. The information you share might also inspire community leaders to make changes in the

community so it is easier for students, like yourself, to apply for college or technical successfully.

Incentives for participation
- You might benefit from participating in this study because you will be given an educational guide to help you apply to college or technical school. This guide gives you tips on how to apply to college or technical school. It also has a list of apps and websites so you can practice college entrance exams before you take them. This guide tells you what resources are available to you in your school. This guide also tells you how to apply for financial aid and gives you a list of scholarships available for young African American females that want to go to college.
- Participants will receive two $25.00 Walmart gift cards, one at the first interview and the other during the second interview. Interviews will take up a total of four hours of your time. Plus you should spend about three hours making your diaries.

Audio/Video Recording
An audio recording device will be used to record interviews so that the researcher can review and analyze information you provide at a later date. Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed after transcription and initial analysis are completed. If you are under 18, your audio information will be destroyed the day before your 18th birthday.

Privacy/Confidentiality
In order to ensure your privacy, you will be given a fake name to protect your identity. Your fake name will be used to identify all information you provide to me, such as recorded interviews and diaries. Please make sure you are also using your fake name when you write about yourself in the dairy I give you. I will store audio recordings of interviews and diaries on my password protected computer to protect your confidentiality. If you are under 18, your audio information will be destroyed the day before your 18t birthday. If you are older than 18, your audio information will be destroyed after I finish initial analysis. Also to protect your confidentiality, only I and my three advising professors will have access to your information. I will also keep your dairy in a locked box and destroy it after I type it up on my computer.

Your confidentiality is at risk as a research participant. This means that interviews will take place outside of your school to keep your participation confidential from school personnel and other students. You are also encouraged not to share your participation in this study with others. Additionally, the researcher will disguise the location of this study and call it a college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any information that identifies you will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Finally, the researcher will not release any identifiable information of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in the study or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as

part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Jessica Nobile, a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Jessica Nobile at storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com or at 706-254-2098. You can also contact my advising professor, Dr. Hopps, at 706-542-7002 or hoppsbjg@aol.com. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Resource List:
1. **911**
2. **GA Crisis and Access Line**: If you are thinking of harming yourself you can call this hotline for assistance at 1-800-715-4225.
3. **United Way of Northeast Georgia:** Dial 211 to reach them and they can help you find services in Athens if you need help.
4. **Advantage Behavioral Health**: They offer mental health services to people in need, even if you don't have health insurance. Their number is   1-855-333-9544.
5. **Family Counseling Services Incorporated**: They also offer mental health services to people in need. You can reach them at 706-549-7755.
6. **Mercy Health Clinic:** They offer medical and dental services at low-cost. You can reach them at   706-425-9445.
7. **The Cottage:** They provide services for survivors of sexual assault. If you have been assaulted you can call their hotline at 1-800-715-4225.
8. **Project Safe:** They provide services for people in domestic violence relationships. You can call their hotline at 706-543-3331

APPENDIX C2

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
PARENTAL PERMISSION CONSENT FORM
STORIES OF STRENGTH

Researcher's Statement
I am asking your child to take part in a research study. Before you decide if your child may participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether your child should to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want your child to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: June G. Hopps
                                         Professor, School of Social Work
                                         University of Georgia
                                         hoppsbjg@aol.com

Co-Investigator: Jessica Nobile
                                     School of Social Work
                                     storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com
                                     706-254-2098

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to create and share stories about what it is like being a young African American female living in Athens, Georgia. This study, *Stories of Strength*, wants to discover what challenges, if any, are in Athens that make it hard for young black females to go college or technical school. This study also wants to show how strong young African American females are by describing how they deal with problems in their community.

Study Procedures
If you agree to have your child participate, she will be asked to …
- Complete two face-to-face interviews with the researcher. She will be able to decide the location of these interviews. She will be encouraged to pick locations where she feels most comfortable being interviewed and where she thinks her identity can be kept confidential.
- Both interviews should last about two hours, but your child may choose to end the interviews early if she feels uncomfortable. The second and final interview will happen 2-3 weeks after the first interview. This study will last for a total of three weeks, but your child will only have to spend four hours talking to the researcher for interviews.
- Your child will also asked be asked to write in a dairy and a notebook that will be provided to her by the researcher. She should make entries in her diary 2-3 times per week and this

should take up around three hours of her time. She should have at least seven entries made in her dairy before she schedules the final interview with the researcher.

- The researcher will use a guide to ask your child questions during the interview. These questions will ask your child to talk about her life, her family, her community, her school, and her peers. Your child doesn't have to answer the questions asked by the researcher if she doesn't want to. Instead, she should tell me what she thinks is important for people to know about her life. You are welcome to receive a copy of the interview questions before I interview your child.

- Audio recordings of interviews will be written up in a computer document and used solely for the sake of analysis. All the information your child shares will be destroyed after initial analysis is completed. All identifiable information of youth participants will be destroyed the day before their18th birthdays.

Risks and discomforts
There are some minimal risks or discomforts associated with this research. For example, the researcher is a licensed clinical social worker, which makes her a mandated reporter by law. This means if your child tells me that she is experiencing abuse, the researcher will have to contact child protective services. This researcher must also report any criminal or dangerous activity. This means that the researcher will have to tell the authorities if your child tells her about any criminal activity, such as gang involvement or the selling of drugs. Plus, if your child shares that she is planning to hurt herself or someone else, the researcher has to inform the police. The researcher has provided you with a list of resources at the end of this form to use if you feel like you or your child are in danger or need some extra help.

Being a participant puts your child's confidentiality at risk. This means that your child might be treated badly at school if teachers or other personnel find out who she is and not like or agree with the information that your child shares. To protect her from this risk, the researcher will disguise the location of this study by calling it a college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The researcher will also not interview your child at school. The researcher encourages you and your child to keep her participation in this study confidential.

Keeping a dairy for this study also puts your child's confidentiality at risk. The researcher will write a fake name on your child's journal, which she will use to hide your identity on all the information your child gives her. Please encourage your child to use the fake name given by the researcher when she writes about herself. Also encourage her to be careful not to write any identifying information in her dairy, like using real names when talking about her friends or family members. The researcher encourages your child to make up names when talking about your school, teachers, friends, community, etc. when she writes about them in her diary.

No other risks have been identified.

Benefits
- Your child may also benefit because she gets to share her story with others. Sharing her story might help her see all her positive qualities and realize how strong she is.
- Your child's participation in this study might help make changes in Athens that will help other young African America females. Since she will describe her challenges and how she

copes with those challenges, she might teach other teens how to deal with their own problems. The information she shares might also inspire community leaders to make changes in the community so it is easier for students, like your daughter, to apply for college or technical school successfully.

Incentives for participation

- Your child might benefit from participating in this study because she will be given an educational guide to help her apply to college or technical school. This guide gives her tips on how to apply to college or technical school. It also has a list of apps and websites so she can practice college entrance exams before she takes them. This guide tells you and your child what resources are available in her school. This guide also tells your child how to apply for financial aid and gives her a list of scholarships available for young African American females that want to go to college.
- Participants will receive two $25.00 Walmart gift cards, one at the first interview and the other during the second interview. Interviews will take up a total of four hours. Plus your child should spend about three hours making her diary.

Audio/Video Recording

An audio recording device will be used to record interviews so that the researcher can review and analyze information your child provides at a later date. Audio recordings of interview will be destroyed after transcription and initial analysis are completed. If your child is under 18, her audio information will be destroyed the day before her 18th birthday.

Privacy/Confidentiality

In order to ensure your child's privacy, she will be given a fake name to protect her identity. Her fake name will be used to identify all information she provides to me, such as recorded interviews and diaries. Please encourage your child to use fake names when she is writing in her diary. I will store audio recordings of interviews and diaries on my password protected computer to protect your child's confidentiality. Audio information of youth under the age of 18 will be destroyed the day before their 18t birthday. Also to protect your child's confidentiality, only I and my three advising professors will have access to her information. I will also keep your child's diary in a locked box and destroy it after I type it up on my computer.

Your child's confidentiality is at risk as a research participant. This means that interviews must take place outside of your child's school to keep her participation confidential from school personnel and other students. You and your child are not to tell people that she is participating in this study in order to protect her confidentially. Additionally, the researcher will disguise the location of this study and call it a college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name or any information that identifies her will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Finally, the researcher will not release any identifiable information of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your child's involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose for her not to participate in the study or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw your child from the study, the information that can identify your child will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Jessica Nobile, a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Jessica Nobile at storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com or at 706-254-2098. You can also contact my advising professor, Dr. Hopps, at 706-542-7002 or hoppsbjg@aol.com. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Parental Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree that your child takes part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.
Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily allow your child to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire Parental Permission Form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Your Child's Name: _____

Your Signature: _____ Date _____

Your Printed Name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Researcher: _____

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
Resource List:
   1. **911**
   2. **GA Crisis and Access Line**: If you are thinking of harming yourself you can call this hotline for assistance at 1-800-715-4225.

3. **United Way of Northeast Georgia:** Dial 211 to reach them and they can help you find services in Athens if you need help.
4. **Advantage Behavioral Health**: They offer mental health services to people in need, even if you don't have health insurance. Their number is   1-855-333-9544.
5. **Family Counseling Services Incorporated**: They also offer mental health services to people in need. You can reach them at 706-549-7755.
6. **Mercy Health Clinic:** They offer medical and dental services at low-cost. You can reach them at   706-425-9445.
7. **The Cottage:** They provide services for survivors of sexual assault. If you have been assaulted you can call their hotline at 1-800-715-4225.
8. **Project Safe:** They provide services for people in domestic violence relationships. You can call their hotline at 706-543-3331.
9. **Sparrow's Nest:** They have a support group for teen girls. They also give out free food and other assistance to families in need. You can reach them at 706-543-3331. Sometimes it is easier to get a hold of someone by showing up to their building located at 745 Prince Avenue.

APPENDIX C3

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
YOUTH ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION
STORIES OF STRENGTH

Researcher's Statement
     I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is made to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that you don't understand or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you. You do not have to say "yes" if you don't want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say "no" now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent's permission to do this. Even if your parent says "yes," you can still say "no." Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. You will not be affected in any way whether you say "yes" or "no."

Principal Investigator: June G. Hopps
     Professor, School of Social Work
     University of Georgia
     hoppsbjg@aol.com

Co-Investigator: Jessica Nobile
     School of Social Work
     storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com
     706-254-2098

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to create and share stories about what it is like being a young African American female living in Athens, Georgia. This study, *Stories of Strength*, wants to discover what challenges, if any, are in Athens that make it hard for young black females to go college or technical school. This study also wants to show how strong young African American females are by describing how they deal with problems in their community.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …
- Complete two face-to-face interviews with the researcher. You get to decide the location of these interviews. You are encouraged to pick locations where you feel most comfortable being interviewed and where you think your identity can be kept confidential.

- Both interviews should last about two hours, but you may choose to end the interviews early if you feel uncomfortable. The second and final interview will happen 2-3 weeks after the first interview. This study will last for a total of three weeks, but you will only have to spend four hours talking to the researcher for interviews.
- You will also be asked to write in a dairy and a notebook will be provided to you by the researcher. You should make entries in your diary 2-3 times per week and this should take up around three hours of your time. You should have at least seven entries made in your dairy before your schedule the final interview with the researcher
- The researcher will use a guide to ask you questions during the interview. These questions will ask you to talk about yourself, your family, your community, your school, and your peers. You don't have to answer the questions asked by the researcher if you don't want to. Instead, you should tell me what you think is important for people to know about your life.
- Audio recordings of interviews will be written up in a computer document and used only for analysis. All the information you share will be destroyed after initial analysis is completed. If you are under 18, all identifiable information will be destroyed the day before your 18th birthday.

Risks and discomforts

There are some minimal risks or discomforts associated with this research. For example, the researcher is a licensed clinical social worker, which makes her a mandated reporter by law. This means if you tell me that you are experiencing abuse, the researcher will have to contact child protective services. This researcher must also report any criminal or dangerous activity. This means that the researcher will have to tell the authorities if you tell her about any criminal activity, such as gang involvement or the selling of drugs. Plus, if you share that you are planning to hurt yourself or someone else, the researcher has to inform the police. The researcher has provided you with a list of resources at the end of this form to use if you feel like you are in danger or need some extra help.

Being a participant puts your confidentiality at risk. This means that you might be treated badly at school if teachers or other personnel find out who you are and not like or agree with the information that you share. To protect you from this risk, the researcher will disguise the location of this study by calling it a college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The researcher will also not interview you at school. The researcher encourages you to keep your participation in this study confidential.

Keeping a dairy for this study also puts your confidentiality at risk. The researcher will write a fake name on your journal, which she will use to hide your identity on all the information you give her. Please use the fake name given to you by the researcher when you are writing about yourself. Also be careful not to write any identifying information in your dairy, like using real names when talking about friends or family members. The researcher encourages you to make up names when talking about your school, teachers, friends, community, etc. when writing about them in your diary.

No other risks have been identified for this study.

Benefits
- You may also benefit because you get to share your story with others. Sharing your story might help you see all your positive qualities and realize how strong you are.
- Your participation in this study might help make changes in Athens that will help other young African America females. Since you will describe your challenges and how you cope those challenges, you might teach other teens how to deal with their own problems. The information you share might also inspire community leaders to make changes in the community so it is easier for students, like yourself, to apply for college or technical successfully.

Incentives for participation
- You might benefit from participating in this study because you will be given an educational guide to help you apply to college or technical school. This guide gives you tips on how to apply to college or technical school. It also has a list of apps and websites so you can practice college entrance exams before you take them. This guide tells you what resources are available to you in your school. This guide also tells you how to apply for financial aid and gives you a list of scholarships available for young African American females that want to go to college.
- Participants will receive two $25.00 Walmart gift cards, one at the first interview and the other during the second interview. Interviews will take up a total of four hours of your time. Plus you should spend about three hours making your diaries.

Audio/Video Recording
An audio recording device will be used to record interviews so that the researcher can review and analyze information you provide at a later date. Audio recordings of interview and diaries will be destroyed after transcription and initial analysis are completed. If you are under 18, your audio information will be destroyed the day before your 18th birthday.

Privacy/Confidentiality
In order to ensure your privacy, you will be given a fake name to protect your identity. Your fake name will be used to identify all information you provide to me, such as recorded interviews and diaries. Please make sure you are also using your fake name when you write about yourself in the dairy I give you. I will store audio recordings of interviews and diaries on my password protected computer to protect your confidentiality. If you are under 18, your audio information will be destroyed the day before your 18t birthday. If you are older than 18, your audio information will be destroyed after I finish initial analysis. Also to protect your confidentiality, only I and my three advising professors will have access to your information. I will also keep your diary in a locked box and destroy it after I type it up on my computer.

Your confidentiality is at risk as a research participant. This means that interviews will take place outside of your school to keep your participation confidential from school personnel and other students. You are also encouraged not to share your participation in this study with others. Additionally, the researcher will disguise the location of this study and call it a college town in the Southeastern part of the United States. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any information that identifies you will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Finally, the researcher will not release any

identifiable information of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in the study or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Jessica Nobile, a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Jessica Nobile at storiesofstrengthstudy@gmail.com or at 706-254-2098. You can also contact my advising professor, Dr. Hopps, at 706-542-7002 or hoppsbjg@aol.com. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Youth's Assent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below shows that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Name of Child: _____ **Parental Permission on File:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

(For Written Assent) **Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.**

Signature of Child: _____   Date: _____

(For Verbal Assent) **Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation:** ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Signature of Researcher: _____   Date: _____
Resource List:
   1. **911**
   2. **GA Crisis and Access Line**: If you are thinking of harming yourself you can call this hotline for assistance at 1-800-715-4225.

3. **United Way of Northeast Georgia:** Dial 211 to reach them and they can help you find services in Athens if you need help.
4. **Advantage Behavioral Health**: They offer mental health services to people in need, even if you don't have health insurance. Their number is   1-855-333-9544.
5. **Family Counseling Services Incorporated**: They also offer mental health services to people in need. You can reach them at 706-549-7755.
6. **Mercy Health Clinic:** They offer medical and dental services at low-cost. You can reach them at   706-425-9445.
7. **The Cottage:** They provide services for survivors of sexual assault. If you have been assaulted you can call their hotline at 1-800-715-4225.
8. **Project Safe:** They provide services for people in domestic violence relationships. You can call their hotline at 706-543-3331.
9. **Sparrow's Nest:** They have a support group for teen girls. They also give out free food and other assistance to families in need. You can reach them at 706-543-3331. Sometimes it is easier to get a hold of someone by showing up to their building located at 745 Prince Avenue.

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

Demographic Questions

Date of Birth_____
Grade Level_____
High School Attending_____
GPA_____
Have you ever repeated a grade (If yes how many times?)_____
Employment Status_____

Questions to build rapport and create self-narratives:
1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Create a timeline of your life (I'll give them paper and pen).

    A. Put dots on your timeline where you feel like important things happened in

    your life and tell me the stories that go along with them.

3. If you were to write a book about your life, tell me how you would describe yourself.
4. Tell me something you would change about yourself if you could.
5. Tell me something you would never change about yourself.
6. Tell me a story that would have to go in your book.
7. Tell me a story you would have trouble including in your book.
8. Tell me some challenges you have experienced.
9. Tell me how you coped with those challenges?
10. Tell me a story about the most challenging time you had in your life.

    A. Tell me how you coped with that challenge?

11. Tell me your favorite story about your life.
12. Tell me a story about your life that you think could help others.
13. Would you like to attend college or another institution of higher education? Tell me why or why not.

    If yes,

    A. Tell me what challenges you think you will face.
    B. Tell me how you think you would overcome those challenges.
    C. Tell me how attending an institute of higher education might impact your life.

    Or

    If No,

    A. Tell me what you think prevents you from wanting to attend college.

14. Tell me what the perfect future looks like for you.

Questions about family:
1. Tell me a little bit about your family.
    A. What do you like most?
    B. What don't you like?
2. Tell me about your family's history.
    A. How did they end up living in this town?
3. If you were to write a book about your life, tell me how you would describe your family.
4. Tell me a story about your family that you would definitely have to include in your book.
5. Tell me a story about your family you would have trouble including in your book.
6. Who are your closest family members?
    A. Tell me a favorite story about them.
    B. Tell me your least favorite story about each of them.
8. Tell me some stories about family members you have had some problems with.
    A. Tell me about those problems.
    B. Tell me a favorite story about each of them.
    C. Tell me your least favorite story about each of them.
9. Tell me about some challenges you have experienced with your family.
10. Tell me how you coped with those challenges.
11. Tell me how your family helps you.
12. Tell me, what are some challenges your family experiences or has experienced.
13. Tell me how your family copes with those challenges.
14. Tell me something you would change about your family if you could.
15. Tell me something that you would never change about your family.
16. Tell me a story about the most challenging experience your family has had.
    A. How did your family cope with that challenge?
17. Tell me your favorite story about your family?
18. Tell me a story about your family that you think could help others.
19. Have any or do any of your family members attend college or technical school?
    If yes,

    A. Tell me about their experiences.
        Or
    B. If no, tell me what you think prevented family members from going to college or technical school.

Questions about community:
1. Tell me how you would describe a community.
2. Tell me about your community.
    A. Who is in your community (friends, neighbors, etc.)?
    B. What is in your community (churches, community centers, playgrounds)?
    C. What do you like most?
    D. What do you like least?
3. Tell me about the history of your community.

4. If you were to write a book about your life, tell me how you would describe your community.

5. Tell me a story about your community that you would definitely have to include in your book.

6. Tell me a story about your community you would have trouble including in your book.

7. Tell me one thing you would change about your community.

8. Tell me something you would never change about your community.

9. Tell me about some of the challenges you experience in your community.
   A. Tell me how you cope with those challenges.

10. Tell me what types of help you receive in your community.

11. Tell me some challenges your community faces.

12. Tell me how your community copes with those challenges.

13. What are some strengths or positives about your community?

14. Tell me a story about the worst experience you've had in your community?
   A. Tell me how you coped?

15. Tell me your favorite story about your community.

16. Tell me a story about your community that you think could help others.

20. Do you know of anyone in your community that attends or has attended institutes of higher education?
   If yes,
   A. Tell me about their experiences.
      Or
      If no,
   A. Tell me what you think prevented community members from attending institutes of higher education.

Questions about school:
1. Tell me about your school.
   A. What do you like most?
   B. What don't you like?
   C. Tell me a favorite story about your school.
   D. Tell me a least favorite story about you school.

2. Tell me about your school.

3. If you were to write a book about your life, tell me how you would describe your school.

4. Tell me a story about your school that you would definitely have to include in your book.

5. Tell me a story about your school you would have trouble including in your book.

6. Tell me one thing you would change about your school.

7. Tell me something you would never change about your school.

8. Tell me about what subjects you like the most at school.
   A. Why?

9. Tell me about the subjects you like the least at school.
   A. Why?

10. Tell me about some challenges you experience at school.
    A. Tell me how you cope with those challenges.

11. Tell me about some challenges you think other students experience at your school.
12. Tell me what some strengths or positives about your school.
13. Tell me about where you go when you need help at school.
    A. Describe the kind of help you get at school.
14. Tell me a story about a time you were helped at school.
15. Tell me a story about the worst experience you've had at your school?
    A. Tell me how you coped with that experience.

16. Tell me what is the worst thing that has ever happened at your school?
        A. Tell me how your school handled that problem.
17. Tell me a story about your school that you think could help others.
18. Tell me how your school prepares you to go to college or technical school.
19. Tell me what needs improving at your school.

Questions about peer relationships:
1. Tell me about your friends.
    A. How long have you been friends with them?
    B. Tell me what do you like best about your friends.
    C. Tell me what you don't like about your friends.
2. If you were to write a book about your life, tell me how you would describe your friends.
3. Tell me a story about your friends that you would definitely have to include in your book.
4. Tell me a story about your friends you would have trouble including in your book.
5. Who are your closest friends?
    A. Tell me a favorite story about each of them.
    B. Tell me your least favorite story about each of them.
6. Have you ever had a significant other?
   If yes,
    A. Tell me about him/her.
    B. Tell me what you liked.
    C. Tell me what you didn't like.
7. Do you have a significant other now?
   If yes,
    A. Tell me about him/her.
    B. Tell me about your relationship.
    C. Tell me what you like.
    D. Tell me what you don't like.
    E. Tell me about some challenges you have in your relationship.
    F. Tell me how you cope with those challenges.
    F. Tell me what type of future, if any, you see with your significant other.
    G. Tell me how your relationship influences how you feel about college.
8. Tell me about some challenges you experienced with friends.
9. Tell me how you cope with those challenges.

10. Tell me a story about a time your friends or significant other made you do something you didn't want to do.

11. Tell me a story about your friends or significant other that you think could help others.

12. Do you talk to your friends or significant other about attending institutes of higher education?

    If yes,

    A. Tell me about those conversations.

13. Do your friends or significant other want to attend college or technical school?

    If yes,

        A. Tell me why they want to go.

        B. Tell me what challenges you think they will face.

        C. Tell me how you think they will overcome those challenges.

        D. Tell me how technical school or college might change their lives.

        Or

    A. If no, tell me what you think prevents your friends or significant other from wanting to attend.

APPENDIX E

College Preparation Educational Guide

Getting ready for college can be a very challenging experience for juniors and seniors in high school. Considerate activity is involved, such as studying for and taking college entrance exams, applying for scholarships, setting up college tours, applying for financial aid, and more. This guide was created to help students learn more about college preparation.

Things you need to know:

1. College can be very expensive. Going to college in Georgia is cheaper than going to college out-of-state. Students who have a GPA above a 3.0 can qualify for Georgia's Hope Scholarship, but it doesn't cover the whole cost of school and students must go to school in Georgia. For example, books can be very expensive and students are required to buy them at most schools.
2. Students can save money by going to technical college. If students decide to enroll in a certificate program in one of Georgia's technical colleges, the HOPE grant (different from the HOPE scholarship) will pay the cost of tuition if the student has a GPA above a 2.0. Many technical schools, including the local Technical College, have a loaning library, where students can borrow instead of purchasing books. Students that attend technical college will have to transfer to another institution to get their bachelor's degree. However, going to technical college first can eliminate two years of college debt.
3. All students need to take and pass college entrance exams to attend institutes of higher education, including technical college. In Georgia, students can take the SAT, ACT, or COMPASS Placement Test.
4. All students must apply for financial aid through the federal government if they want assistance paying for school, including getting free tuition from the HOPE grant. The HOPE scholarship covers 75% of tuition and you must still apply for financial aid. Students should apply for financial aid before July 1 to make sure they get money for the fall. Students can apply for financial aid at: https://fafsa.ed.gov/.
5. All students must apply and be accepted to their higher education institution of choice before registering and starting classes.
6. There are many scholarships available that will also help with the cost of school. College coaches or guidance counselors at your high school might also help you find scholarships.

Resources at your high school:

1. Spend time with your guidance counselor and college coach at your school. They have a ton of resources and can help you get ready for college.
2. Your County high schools offer practice college-entrance exams on Saturdays, but you must speak to your guidance counselor or college coach to sign up.

3. Your school also provides you with four 4 vouchers to pay for the cost of taking college entrance exams. It is better that you start taking the tests early, so you have time to improve your score on these exams. Especially since the first four tests are of no cost to you, the applicant. Again you have to speak to your guidance counselor to get vouchers

4. Your school will also provide you with 8 free college application waivers, making the application process entirely free if you only apply to eight colleges. This means, you should choose carefully when applying.

5. Your County high schools also provide students with opportunities to tour Georgia colleges. Make sure you connect with the college coach and go on some of these tours.

6. Spend some time on /www.gacollege411.org. You can use this website to get information about colleges, apply to schools, send transcripts, and more. This website gives you most of the information you need to know about Georgia colleges.

7. Speak to your guidance counselor or college coach to get some help applying for financial aid if you are accepted to college before you graduate. You can even set up a meeting between you, your parents, and school personnel to help you fill out financial aid forms online.

Free phone apps found on any smartphone that can help you study and practice for college entrance exams:
   1. Prep4SAT
   2. Daily Practice SAT
   3. SAT UP
   4. Play2prep: ACT, SAT prep
   5. Prep4ACT
   6. SAT: Practice Prep Flashcards
   7. ACT UP
   8. ACT: Practice Prep Flashcards
   9. ACT Test
   10. Khan Academy

Free websites that can help you study and practice for college entrance exams:

   1. **https://www.powerscore.com/sat/help/content_practice_tests.cfm**
   2. **http://blog.prepscholar.com/complete-official-act-practice-tests-free-links**
   3. **http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation.html**
   4. **http://www.mhpracticeplus.com/act.php**
   5. **https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice/full-length-practice-tests**
   6. **https://www.4tests.com/**
   7. **https://www.khanacademy.org/sat**
   8. **http://blog.prepscholar.com/complete-official-sat-practice-tests-free-links**
   9. **http://www.mometrix.com/academy/compass-test/**
   10. **http://www.mycompasstest.com/**

Scholarships for African American Women:

In addition to the Georgia's HOPE Scholarship or making use of the HOPE grant by attending one of Georgia's Technical Colleges, there are a lot of scholarships available that will help pay for the cost of college. Here are some websites that will provide you with lists of scholarships and give you tips on how to apply. Make sure you start applying for scholarships early so that you can get advice and help from teachers or guidance counselors.

1. http://www.collegegrant.net/grants-for-black-women/
2. http://www.scholarshipsforwomen.net/african-american/
3. http://blackstudents.blacknews.com/
4. http://www.blackexcel.org/200-Scholarships.html
5. http://www.scholarshipsandgrants.us/scholarships-for-women/scholarships-for-african-american-women.html
6. https://kathmanduk2.wordpress.com/2009/04/28/scholarships-for-black-women/
7. https://www.mycollegeoptions.org/GA/0/Georgia/search-results-scholarship-search-by-location.aspx
8. http://4blackyouth.com/scholarships.aspx
9. http://hbculifestyle.com/101-minority-scholarships/
10. http://www.caes.uga.edu/UNIT/diversity/scholarships/index.html#african