Peer Involvement and Resiliency: Comparing Inner City and Suburban Adolescents

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Abstract

Inner city adolescents are often labeled ‘at-risk’ due to their economic status, school status, family atmosphere, or delinquent behavior. Due to this label, it could be assumed that these adolescents are less resilient. In addition, the protective and risk factors and definitions of resiliency that are found within research often indirectly place inner city adolescents in the less resilient label. The primary purpose of this paper is to challenge what research has stated is needed for resiliency and how resiliency is defined. Adolescent development is reviewed, research on sense of belonging and sense of isolation and inner city neighborhood characteristics (low-SES) and suburban neighborhood characteristics (high-SES) are compared, and an Adlerian interpretation on resiliency and goals of misbehavior is provided. A few key findings are, despite the drastic difference in neighborhood characteristics, both sets of adolescents are displaying similar delinquent behaviors, however inner city adolescent appear to have a more socially interested view of their future compared to suburban adolescents.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................. 2

Table of Contents .............................................................................................. 3

Introduction ......................................................................................................... 4

Adolescence ......................................................................................................... 7

Involvement with Peers ....................................................................................... 9

Sense of Belonging ............................................................................................. 10

Sense of Isolation ............................................................................................... 12

Resiliency ............................................................................................................ 14

Suburban Characteristics .................................................................................... 14

Inner City Characteristics .................................................................................... 18

Summary and Conclusion ................................................................................... 22

Summary ............................................................................................................. 22

Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 25

References ........................................................................................................... 29

Appendix ............................................................................................................. 32

Appendix 1: Presentation to MERC ................................................................. 32

Appendix 2: MERC Power Point ...................................................................... 35

Appendix 3: Evaluation of MERC Presentation ............................................... 36
Peer Involvement and Resiliency: Comparing Inner City and Suburban Adolescents

Imagine living in an environment where every day you are fighting to survive. In this environment, niceness is mistaken for weakness and if you are nice, you can be robbed, jumped, or shot. In order to eat dinner, you hoard food given to you by your school. In order to afford a roof over your head, you drop out of school and work to just barely make rent payments. In order to feel safety, significance, and a sense of belonging you join a gang. These examples are just scratching the surface of the complexities that come along with living in an inner city. Each example provides a glimpse into the lives of students the writer works with at her internship in an alternative high school in Minneapolis. Although some may be more resilient than another, the writer believes all these students are resilient. The writer set out to see if research is showing a correlation between peer involvement and resiliency in inner city adolescents.

For the purpose of this paper, adolescence, involvement with peers, and resiliency are broken down into subcategories. First, adolescence is defined to be the ages between fifteen and eighteen. Second, involvement with peers is broken down into two subcategories, a sense of belonging and sense of isolation. The writer will review what literature is saying on the importance of belonging and the consequences of isolation in order to see if involvement with peers (delinquent or non-delinquent) can create resiliency in inner city adolescents. Last, resiliency is broken down into two subcategories: coping in a suburban community and an inner city. The purpose is to compare research on the two neighborhoods and see if they are significantly different in the interaction of belonging and resiliency.

Inner city neighborhood and suburban neighborhoods have different structures, particularly socioeconomic status (SES). Socioeconomic status is divided into two categories: low-SES and high-SES, “because the presence of poor and affluent neighbors may have
differential associations with child and adolescent outcomes” (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p. 28). For the purpose of this paper, inner city and suburban neighborhoods are broken down into these two categories; inner city neighborhoods as low-SES and suburban neighborhoods as high-SES. A more detailed definition is provided for each neighborhood under their section within this paper.

Adolescence is a complex period of development. It is a time of growth, transition, and change. One primary transition during adolescence is the shift from family influence to peer influence. To belong to a peer group is necessary for healthy development. Newman, Lohman, and Newman (2007) stated, “Group belonging provides young people with a sense of definition, purpose, meaning, worth, and social control, all of which contribute to positive mental health” (p. 259). The authors emphasized how powerful peers are during adolescence. They can provide a foundation for an adolescent during a time of growth and change. Furthermore, Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, and Neumark-Sztainer (2007) stated, “[Adolescence] is a time characterized by a strong desire for independence combined with an increased need for social support from peers” (p. 265). Amongst the changes and transitions that go on during adolescence, a sense of belonging can be a source of safety, significance, and belonging.

Within the research reviewed for this paper, resiliency had similar definitions. The congruency provides reliability for research however, could cause other potential resiliency factors to be overlooked. Masten (2001) stated, “Resilience refers to a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228). The author asserts that resiliency is an experience for an individual that helps in manifesting good outcomes and occurs when an individual’s development is being challenged in a negative way. Tiet, Huizinga, and Byrnes (2010) stated, “Resilience has been defined as having
good outcomes despite the exposure to risk” (p. 361). These two definitions are similar, especially with the end goal being good outcomes. The term good outcomes could be viewed as subjective for many reasons, but especially on what neighborhood you live in (i.e. inner city vs. suburban neighborhood) and it leaves open the definition of ‘good outcomes.’ It could be that good outcomes are different for one individual than it is for another.

Protective and risk factors are also common themes in the research on resiliency. Protective factors such as, high self-esteem, school achievements, involvement in extracurricular activities and psychosocial functioning, strong relationship bonds with family, teachers, or community, low or no involvement with delinquent peers and activities, low adverse life events, and low parental discord (Tiet et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2000). Common risk factors for resiliency are: low socioeconomic status or chronic poverty, parental psychopathology, divorce, low birth weight or perinatal stress, abuse and/or neglect, community trauma or violent communities, marginalization or minority status, amount of adverse life events, and delinquency or gang involvement (Tiet et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2000; Masten, 2001). Many of these factors can be common occurrences for some adolescents and the writer argues that possessing some of these factors does not equal a less or non-resilient adolescent.

A core assumption in Adlerian theory is that all humans have a goal to feel safe, significant, and a sense of belonging and this goal becomes a motivation for movement that will ensure that they are being are met (Dinkmeyer & Sperry, 2000). The way an individual chooses to move, or meet their goal, can show the degree in which they are resilient. However, children are good observers but bad interpreters which can produce misperceptions and oversimplifications and cause the development of mistaken goals about the way in which safety, significance, and belonging can be met (Shulman & Mosak, 1995). These mistaken goals fall
under four categories: attention-getting, power, revenge, and assumed inadequacy. An individual can develop the mistaken belief that for their goal to be met they must be the center of attention, must have power of self, environment or other, must give revenge if they feel they had been done wrong, or become so discouraged they just give up. Adlerian principles could define resiliency as the ability to continue positive movement toward the goals of safety, securing, and belonging and the writer suggests research could provide data that supports inner city adolescents’ behavior as goal-directed.

**Adolescence**

Adolescence is a time of change, adjustment, and new experiences. It can be difficult to adjust and cope with all the biological and psychosocial changes, especially if they feel a sense of isolation from their community. To better understand the adolescence stage research on adolescence, ages 15-17, is reviewed and discussed in this section.

Because adolescence is such a dynamic stage of social, emotional, physical and mental development, it is often broken down into subcategories. Meschke, Peter, and Bartholomae (2012) reviewed literature on developmentally appropriate practices of healthy adolescent development. The authors broke the adolescent period into four stages: young early (9-11 years), early (12-14 years), middle (15-17 years), and late (18-19 years) (Meschke et al., 2010). For the purpose of this review, the writer focused on ages 15-17, middle adolescent years.

There are neurological changes occurring during the adolescent stage. During middle adolescents, the brain is decreasing in grey matter because of the pruning of synapse (Meschke et al., 2012). Adolescents are able to “generalize and think abstractly” (p. 98), and are able to think and plan for the future (Meschke et al., 2012). This makes sense because middle adolescence is
the time when most adolescents are beginning to think of their future plans such as, college, jobs, and living independently.

Although there are increases in cognitive skills during middle adolescence, there are also areas that have not fully matured (Meschke et al., 2012). For example, the white matter is increasing during the middle stage and adolescents are lacking in decision-making skills, particularly risk taking and emotional decision-making. Adolescents may “focus on short-term benefits of risk behaviors rather than long-term rewards of risk avoidance when engaged in decision making” (Meschke, 2012, p. 98). It is a paradox within this stage; cognitively adolescents are able to think and plan for the future, but are limited in the ability to make sound decision because of increased impulsivity and the lack of emotional regulation.

Another paradox is found during the adolescent stage. In terms of social development, Meschke et al. (2010) stated by middle adolescent, peer influence is on the decline, however it is still more influential than family. Emotionally, peers are more supportive during this stage, however adolescents are beginning to distance themselves from peer influence and are becoming more autonomous (Meschke et al., 2012). Middle adolescence appears to be time of limbo. During this stage, they are neither autonomous nor dependent from peers and family. Nonetheless, peers still play a significant role in decision making. By ages 15-17, social skills are solid, and focus tends to shift from friendships to romantic relationships (Meschke et al., 2012). Whether it is involvement with friends or a romantic relationship, peer involvement has a strong correlation with adolescent development.

Clark (1992) defined adolescence as “a period of rapid psychosocial and biological growth between childhood and adulthood. During the process, many teenagers have difficulty coping effectively in our rapidly changing social climate” (p. 283). The adolescent period is
stressful on its own, but when your external environment is lacking in social and emotional support, adolescence is even more difficult. Clark (1992) continued to discuss the impact of greater society has on adolescents. She stated, “American society is an important influence on adolescents’ development, relationships, adjustment, and behavior” (p. 283). In addition, Clark (1992) stated that adolescents who feel isolated from this society can have negative consequences. Between families, communities, music, television, and social media, adolescents’ identity, morals, and ethics are being influenced.

Adolescence is full of paradoxes and metaphors. Elkin and Westley (1955) discussed adolescence in a metaphorical and existential fashion. The authors stated, adolescence “is an age-grade period characterized by ‘storm and stress’ and participation in a ‘youth culture’” (p. 680). This ‘storm and stress’ period arises from sexual frustration, occupational choices, transition away from family, changes with those who they deem as authoritative, increased conflict with society, and a break from societal norms (Elkin and Westley, 1955). As adolescents are developing autonomy and planning their future, they are overcome with stress, frustrations, and change.

**Involvement with Peers**

Despite Meschke et al. (2012)’s findings on adolescent decreasing the amount of peer involvement in order to develop autonomy, a sense of belonging is essential to healthy development. In this section, involvement with peers will be discussed by looking at two subcategories: the importance and impact of having a sense of belonging and isolation. While part of this section will focus on Adlerian theory’s interpretation of belonging, research from a variety of orientations and assumptions will be included.
Sense of Belonging

Adlerian theory assumes that an individual’s mental health is determined by the degree in which they are socially interested (Shifron, 2010). Sense of belonging and social interest are intertwined. Mosak & Maniacci (1999) discussed social interest as expanding one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors beyond self and into the greater community. Community feeling is a key ingredient to social interest. “Community feeling is the empathetic, emotional bond we have with each other and our world… Social interest is an action based upon the feeling of community, of a sense of belonging” (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999, p. 113). When an individual has a sense of belonging, feeling as if they count and are connected within their community, they are better able to move through life in a socially interested matter.

Shifron (2010) discussed case studies that show the correlation between social interest, belonging, and mental health. The author discussed the importance of feeling a sense of belonging to one’s life tasks (work/school, community/peers, and love). “Feeling a sense of belonging to these groups is the primary universal issue of mental health” (p. 10). Looking at a sense of belonging as a whole, Shifron (2010) stated:

A sense of belonging is essential in order for one to feel that he or she is an actively contributing part of the larger whole. This feeling, that one belongs and that one has a place in the larger systems, is achieved when one is encouraged and appreciated for one’s special talents and creative abilities. An individual who feels belonging feels valued and significant, and the person will contribute his or her best to society. (p. 11)

When individuals are recognized for their skills and abilities, they feel better connected to the larger society, they feel they belong. It could be assumed then, if you feel you belong, you are better equipped to show resiliency when faced with the tasks to life.
Two authors provided a review of data on belonging that could be viewed as supporting Adlerian theory’s belief that every individual strives for the goals of safety, significance and belonging. Gere and MacDonald (2010) reviewed current literature on belonging and stated, “It has become increasingly clear that belonging may indeed be a fundamental need” (p. 110). More notably, the authors stated, “It has become clear that the need to belong has strong effects on people’s cognition, emotions, and behaviors, and a chronically unmet need has many negative consequences that can profoundly affect an individual’s life” (Gere & MacDonald, 2010, p. 110). This highlights the innate need and momentous effects of belonging and the negative impacts of isolation.

More specifically, belonging with a peer group has shown to be a crucial part of development, especially during adolescence. Hall-Lande et al. (2007) concluded from their study on social isolation, psychological health, and protective factors in adolescents that:

Adolescence… is a time in which individuals draw increased strength and support from the peer group. Because of the developmental importance of peer relationships during adolescence, psychological risk may be significantly more pronounced for adolescents who do not experience the protective benefit of close and meaningful social relationships with peers. (p. 270)

Hall-Lande et al. (2007) conclusion acknowledges the having a sense of belonging to a peer group is a protective factor during adolescents and without it, or having a sense of isolation, an adolescent can be more susceptible to psychological issues.

Gonzales (2000) took Cesar Chavez’s story to provide a real life example of how ‘at-risk’ adolescents can show resiliency. In her article she provides a review of literature on Resiliency theory which is a developmental psychological perspective that focuses on skills sets and support
as factors of resilience. The author provided the three variables needed in order for an adolescent to be considered resilient. They are risk factors, protective factors, and “resilient child.” The characteristics that make up the protective factors are, “strong family support, a relationship with the community, church, a mentor, and a strong sense of self” (p. 4). These characteristics indirectly emphasize a sense of belonging is a protective factor for resiliency and could be viewed as positively correlating with the Adlerian terms of community feeling and social interest. It could be assumed that a sense of belonging is a key characteristic to resiliency.

**Sense of Isolation**

It is common knowledge that humans are social creatures and if that is a part of who we are, it can be assumed that isolation could have negative consequences on development. The consequences of isolation are discussed throughout Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) article. The authors stated, “A lack of belongingness should constitute severe deprivation and cause a variety of ill effects” (p. 497). The authors were able to support their statement with research. They found, “People who lack belongingness suffer higher levels of mental and physical illness and are relatively highly prone to a broad range of behavioral problems, ranging from traffic accidents to criminality to suicide” (p. 511). In regards to adolescents and sense of isolation, it could be a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense that if an adolescent feels as if they don’t belong with their communities, they might as well engage in behaviors that keep them isolated.

Sense of isolation has been compared to physical pain and threats to safety. MacDonald & Leary (2005) argue that individuals can feel physical pain from social exclusion and hypothesized that, “Because inclusion in social groups has been a key to survival for social animals deep into the past, we proposed that threats to one’s social connections are processed at a basic level as a severe threat to one’s safety” (p. 202). The authors found that the real or
metaphorical pain individuals feel from social exclusion appears to be a reorganization response to a “loss of vitally important personal assets-physical and social integrity, respectively” (p. 209). It can be viewed that when one is excluded from their community, they could have a perceived threat to safety and literally and figuratively feel pain. MacDonald & Leary’s (2005) correlation between belonging and safety compliments Adlerian theory’s belief that every human has the goal to feel safe, significant, and a sense of belonging.

Specific to adolescents, finding have been shown that isolation can cause mental health issues. Hall-Lande et al. (2007) found that compared to adolescents with social supports, isolated adolescents “had elevated odds of suicide attempts, higher depressive symptoms, and lower levels of self-esteem” (p. 277). The authors continued and stated they found that, “Even after accounting for protective factors, social isolation remained significantly associated with symptoms of depressive and lower levels of self-esteem” (P. 277). Social isolation appears to have negative effects on an adolescent’s mental health and can correlate with diagnosable mental health disorders.

Clark (1992) discussed the adolescent stage of development and how subcultures can be developed. The author stated that when adolescents are marginalized from their communities they are at significant risk of unhealthy psychosocial development. She found that adolescents who are isolated from their communities can “feel alienated and unattached [and] they may not internalize basic societal norms and resort to deviance and nonconformity…Youth who feel alienated may succumb to depression, cynicism, delinquency, and substance abuse, and may choose to align with deviant subculture” (Clark, 1995, p. 283). Clark states that isolation from one’s community is detrimental to adolescent development and can bring out mental illness or problem behaviors. Clark’s findings could be viewed as supporting Adlerian theory’s and Gere
and MacDonald’s (2010) belief that belonging is a human need and without it healthy development could be impeded.

**Resiliency**

Neighborhood characteristics can play a key role in adolescent development. Neighborhoods are most often defined based from the community’s socioeconomic status (SES), racial mix and resident instability (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In this section of the paper, a review of literature on neighborhood characteristics in relation to SES (i.e. income, safety, resources) within an inner city and suburban neighborhood will be provided. The purpose of the section is to see if there are significant differences between the two settings and explore the possibility of the potential differences impacting an adolescent’s resiliency.

**Suburban Characteristics**

Suburban neighborhoods can have a variety of definitions. However, common characteristics of suburban neighborhoods are they are located on the outskirts of metropolitan areas, have mostly single family homes with yards, residents who commute into the city to work, higher educated residents, and more professional services (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; “Suburb”, n.d.).

Elkin and Westley (1955) had assumptions of life for suburban adolescents. They cited Hollingshead’s study which gathered data from adolescents living in a suburban neighborhood. Elkin and Westley (1995) stated Hollingshead found:

- Upper middle-class adolescent spends much of [their] time in supervised extra-curricular activities; that parents know the families of their children’s associates and bring pressure to bear on their children to drop ‘undesirable’ friends; the children are taught to be polite and refined in their speech and behavior and to repress aggressive tendencies. (p. 683)
In the 1950s, adolescents were strongly encouraged to be a part of extra-curricular activities, parents were strongly influential in their adolescent’s choice of friends, and manners and self-control were ideals. Today is not much different. Adolescents in high-SES, suburban neighborhoods are encouraged, and for some expected, to be involved in extra-curricular activities, be good at school, be involved with the ‘right’ peers; the message can be heard as ‘you must be perfect’ (Luthar, 2013).

During a stage of developing autonomy and peer/romantic relationships, could such degrees of parental involvement and self-control have negative, unintentional consequences? Luthar, Shoum, and Brown (2006) set out to investigate whether the over involvement of suburban parents and extracurricular activities can actually be hurtful on adolescent psychological development. The authors cited research that has shown suburban adolescents, “Can show higher symptom levels in several areas, notably substance use, anxiety, and depression” (p. 583). The authors hypothesized it could be because over involved parents are interfering in the development of autonomy. When autonomy is not being met, suburban adolescents could feel discouraged and their discouragement could turn inward and manifest into substance use, anxiety, or depression. However, the author’s findings were limited. “Results from this study yielded limited support for speculations that over scheduling [and parental over involvement] of high-SES youth creates undue pressures and thus high psychopathology” (Luthar et al., 2006, p. 592).

Roughly seven years after this publication, Luthar (2013) wrote an article in Psychology Today about suburban adolescents and psychopathology. She discussed the pressures to be perfect from parents, teachers, and peers as contributing to the “high rates substance abuse, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, cheating, and stealing” (p. 62) and that adolescents in high-
SES neighborhoods are worse off than previous generations (Luthar, 2013). According to the author, by the time these individuals reach adolescents and begin thinking of their futures, they have a skewed idea of what goals to make. The adolescent growing up in a high-SES neighborhood focuses their future on money, prestige, or status opposed to developing goals around who they are and what unique interests they possess (Luthar, 2013). Such adolescents appear to be at one end of the pendulum and can prove that too much of anything can have negative consequences that could impact the suburban adolescent’s resiliency.

**Impact of Moving to High-SES Neighborhoods**

In addition to mental health, problem behaviors have been studied in suburban adolescents. Racz, McMahon, and Luthar (2011) felt suburban adolescents have been overlooked because they are considered ‘low risk’. The authors wanted to see if the application of Problem Behavior Theory could extend to suburban adolescents. Problem Behavior Theory is a model developed to address the “strong intercorrelations between multiple youth problem behaviors-including drug use, heavy alcohol use, early sexual intercourse, general deviance (e.g. aggression and delinquency), and low academic motivation and achievement” (p. 120). The authors collected data from a questionnaire from 1,147 high school students living in an affluent, suburban community. Problem behaviors were classified as: high rates of substance abuse, significant emotional and behavioral problems, and poor school adjustment. The data supported problem behaviors in suburban youth. “2.5% of the youth in this sample reported engaging in high levels of all the problem behaviors which is similar to findings reported… in a high risk, community sample [of inner city adolescents]” (p. 126). In addition, the authors found a subset of suburban adolescents who display many problem behaviors and “experience sever, negative outcome” (Racz et al., 2011, p. 126). The authors finding suggest that despite the difference in
neighborhood characteristics, suburban adolescents engage in similar problem behaviors as do inner city adolescents.

Research has found that adolescent who moved from a low-SES neighborhood to a higher-SES neighborhood showed improvements in psychosocial development. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2003) provided a review of experimental studies on the effects of neighborhoods on development. The authors first reviewed the Gautreaux Program which developed from a court order to desegregate Chicago’s public housing. Certain families were randomly assigned to move to higher-SES neighborhoods and 10 years later data found that the adolescents who moved to suburban neighborhoods “fared better academically then youth who moved to poor urban neighborhoods” (p. 29). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development noticed the positive findings and in 1994 implemented the Moving to Opportunity Program which took the same idea across five cities nationally. This program produced similar data as did the Gautreaux Program. It found that the adolescent who moved to higher-SES neighborhoods did better academically, improved their physical and mental health, and male adolescents had lower crime rates compared to their peers who stayed in the inner city (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These finding suggest that suburban neighborhood characteristics are significantly different enough to inner city neighborhood and can have a restorative effect on inner city adolescents and improve a variety of psychosocial tasks that are necessary for this stage of development.

**Inner City Characteristics**

Webster Dictionary defines inner city as, “The usually older, poorer, and more densely populated central section of a city” (“Webster definition”, n.d.). These smaller cities are typically low in income, high in crime and violence, higher in homogeneity (typically African
American and Latino), high in residential instability, high in female headed households, and are often lacking in external and internal resources (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Gonzales, 2000).

Living in an inner city is not always easy. Violence, crime, drug use and abuse, poverty, and abuse and neglect can be considered norms. D’Imperio, Dubow, and Ippolito (2000) studied adolescents at an inner city school in Northeastern United States and found:

Approximately half the sample reported being upset by family arguments (59%), having to care for others in the family (56%), that a family member became seriously ill (54%), that a family member got married (52%), and that a family member or friend died (49%)… More than a third of the sample reported (a) having seen someone beaten, shot, or really hurt by someone (54%); (b) that a close family member was arrested or jailed (52%); (c) that someone they knew other than a family member was beaten, attacked, or really hurt (44%); and (d) having seen or been around people shooting guns (43%). (pp. 133-134)

More inner city adolescents have witness someone being beat up, shot, or really hurt than they have seen family member get married. They have seen the same amount of marriages as they have seen family member go to jail or prison. It appears inner city neighborhood characteristics can pose a threat to one’s safety (physical and emotional) and can be a great source of grief and loss.

Other authors have found similar results in regards to neighborhood characteristics. Gorman-Smith, Henry, and Tolan (2004) studied the effects of inner city life on adolescents and found half of their participant’s “reported seeing someone beaten up, and between 14% and 20% reported seeing someone shot or killed” (p. 444). Gorman-Smith et al. (2004) and Racz et al.
(2011) found similar findings in percentages of crime and violence within inner cities. Schiavone (2009) found an even higher percentage. She cited authors that studied inner city adolescents and found “93-100% have witnessed violence at some time in their lives” (p. 99). No matter which author’s data is considered, all findings are high in threats to safety, significance and belonging to self and others.

Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) stated, “The presence of risk at the neighborhood level, particularly, danger, violence, and crime, as well as illegal or harmful substances, also may influence child and adolescent development” (p. 327). Neighborhoods can have a significant impact on development. Some inner city adolescents are developing in a neighborhood that can threaten and discourage healthy psychosocial development. For example, the authors found that, “Residence in low-income neighborhoods was associated with adverse mental health, criminal and delinquent behavior, and unfavorable sexual and fertility outcomes for adolescents” (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p. 29). This cannot be a surprise given the environments in which they are growing up in. It could be that inner city adolescents have to adopt different resiliency traits in order to survive in a different environment.

Qualitative data was gathered from inner city adolescents and themes and patterns were found from their responses. Schiavone (2009) interviewed male and female adolescents, ages 12-18, and asked them to share their personal stories about living in an inner city. They found themes within the participants’ stories such as coping, perceptions, morals, and future thinking. In regards to coping with inner city neighborhoods, the author found, “The stories revealed a pattern of disbelief and confusion. A sense of vulnerability and fear is evident” (p. 101). The amount of violence and crime is hard to process and adolescents can become fearful yet desensitized to their neighborhood characteristics (Schiavone, 2009). During a time of
developing autonomy, such dissonance could be impacting what an adolescent perceives as resilient assets.

In addition to disbelief and confusion, inner city adolescents can find it difficult to trust anyone. Schiavone (2009) found, “Distrust was pervasive” (p. 102) within inner city adolescent culture. The author mentioned that distrust was not just focused on one group (i.e. peers), it extended to all groups. Relationships are a time to be vulnerable, and in an inner city, vulnerability can open the door for perceived and real physical and psychological harm. “They felt they had to face the world alone. The environment failed to provide security, safety, and support necessary for healthy development” (Schiavone, 2009, p. 103). This research suggests another paradox for inner city adolescents. They feel alone and isolated, yet often cannot trust someone enough to help decrease their sense of isolation. It also can suggest that inner city adolescents do not feel as if they are able to meet their goal of safety, significance, and belonging and other means may need to be taken in order to reach that goal.

Normal developmental markers of adolescence have been lacking for some inner city adolescents. Schiavone (2009) discussed how the neighborhood atmosphere of violence and crime interferes with development. “The amount of violence in the community impeded the adolescents from engaging in developmental activities that are generally assumed of youth: school attendance and activities, social activities, and play. Recreational activities or play were generally avoided” (p. 102). School, peers, and recreation are central to the adolescent stage and to be avoiding them is to be avoiding healthy development. In addition, this data represents a clear difference between what research is stating for suburban and inner city adolescents in regard to recreational or extracurricular activities. Whereas some suburban adolescents are
overly-involved in extracurricular activities, some inner city adolescents are completely avoiding the activities.

As discussed in the adolescence section of this paper, adolescents in the middle stage are able to think and plan for the future. Despite the violence and crime, adolescents from Schiavone’s (2009) article display resilience because “each story included a goal or goals for the future that would support being a productive member of society” (p. 103). Inner city adolescents appear to develop future goals, despite their neighborhood characteristics, that promote development of self and include the community. This finding is the opposite of what Luthar (2013) found for suburban adolescents whose goals were more about status and less about self-development.

Despite the differences in neighborhood characteristics, inner city and suburban adolescents appear to have similar problem behaviors. From 1995 to 2002, The Manhattan Institute (2004) collected data from urban and suburban adolescents in order to compare data on the two groups in regards to delinquent behavior. The findings showed that inner city and suburban adolescents partake in similar amounts and types of delinquent behaviors. The main findings showed the two groups were nearly the same in sexual activity, high rates of pregnancy, similar rates of smoking, drinking and drug use, and nearly equal amounts of delinquent behaviors (Manhattan Institute, 2004). These finding support other research provided earlier in this paper that suggest although the neighborhoods characteristics and perceptions of the future are vastly different, inner city and suburban adolescents are engaging in similar problem behaviors.
Final Summary and Conclusions

In this section of the paper, a summary of the research and a conclusion of how the research is connected are provided. In the final section of this paper, the limitations of this paper will be discussed.

Summary

Research stated that adolescents are shifting away from peers to develop their own sense of self, however peer involvement is still a key characteristic of this stage. They are able to think more abstractly, however are limited in their decision-making skills particularly with risk taking (Meschke et al., 2012). Despite Meschke et al.’s (2012) findings, Clark (1992), Elkin and Westley (1955), and Hall-Lande et al. (2007) discussed the importance of peer relationships during this stage of development. Peer involvement offer a sense of belonging and much needed support as adolescents cope with all the biological and psychosocial changes. Adolescence is a time of confusion, frustration and stress and although they are beginning to develop autonomy, peer relationships are essential for healthy development.

Research supports the writer’s believe that a sense of belonging helps adolescents be resilient. Mosak and Maniacci (1999) and Shifron (2010) highlighted the importance of feeling connected to one’s community in order to feel a sense of belonging. In addition, Gere and MacDonald (2010) discussed belonging as a need in order for healthy development. The authors stated there is a strong correlation between this need not being met and developmental concerns.

Similarly, research was consistent in their findings on isolation. Baumeister and Leary (1995), Hall-Lande et al. (2007), and Clark (1992) found those who feel a sense of isolation have shown greater mental health concerns such as behavioral problems (delinquency, traffic accidents, suicide), higher depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, substance use, and cynicism.
These findings show a strong correlation between a sense of isolation and negative psychosocial development.

A sense of isolation was also suggested to be perceived as a threat to one’s safety. MacDonald and Leary (2005) discussed inclusion is a key to survival that has been a part of existence even before humans were on the Earth. The authors suggested that individuals can literally feel pain when they have a sense of isolation and this pain is serving as a way to let the individual know that something is not right and their safety may be in jeopardy. MacDonald and Leary (2005) and Gere and MacDonald (2010) highlight belonging is a need in order to survive and thrive.

Protective and risk factors were addressed in the introduction of this paper. There were common protective and risk factors found in research. Protective factors such as: community connectedness, family bonding, strong peer relationships were found (Tiet et al., 2010; Masten, 2001; Gonzales, 2000). Within these factors, a theme of having a sense of belonging can be found. It could be argued that a sense of belonging is a strong protective factor for resiliency.

Research discussed the different neighborhood characteristics between a low-SES and high-SES neighborhood. Elkin and Westley (1955) discussed suburban adolescents as encouraged to be involved in extracurricular activities and suburban parents as involved and influencing their adolescent’s activities and peer relationships. Luthar (2013) and Racz et al. (2011) found similar characteristics of today’s high-SES, suburban neighborhoods and discussed that such high levels of parental involvement and extracurricular activities, along with the pressure to succeed has produced a generation of suburban adolescents with high drug use, depression, anxiety, and delinquent behavior.
Interestingly, these authors found that the suburban adolescents have similar delinquent behavior as inner city adolescents. The Manhattan Institute (2004) supported these findings and stated despite the difference in neighborhood characteristics, both sets of adolescents display similar, and at times exact, rates of alcohol and drug use, smoking, sexual activity and pregnancies, and delinquent behavior.

Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2003) provided an interesting review of two programs that were designed to desegregate some U.S. inner cities. The Gautreaux Program and the Moving to Opportunity Program randomly assigned some inner city families to move from their low-SES neighborhoods to higher-SES neighborhoods and their results are intriguing. The programs found that compared to adolescents who stayed within the inner city, those who moved to higher-SES neighborhoods improved in school performance and physical and mental health and decrease the amount of delinquent behavior. These findings provide a strong correlation between neighborhood characteristics and resiliency factors that will be addressed further in the conclusion of this paper.

Research on inner city neighborhoods has similar findings in regards to adolescents’ physical and emotional safety. D’Imperio et al. (2000), Gorman-Smith et al. (2004), Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000), and Schiavone (2009) all discussed inner city neighborhood characteristics involved delinquent behavior, violence, crime, drug use, and sexual activity. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) and Schiavone (2009) found correlations between such neighborhood characteristics and negative impact on healthy adolescent development. Due to the lack of safety and significance, Schiavone (2009) stated inner city adolescents feel a sense of isolation and have a difficult time trusting anyone. Despite these findings, Schiavone (2009) found that many inner city adolescents are able to remain goal-directed and their future goals
involved ways to be productive members of society. In other words, inner city adolescents can show their future plans contain social interest.

**Conclusion**

There are key points to address based off the research reviewed in this paper. In this section of the paper, the writer will provide connections between sense of belonging, neighborhood characteristics, and resiliency factors and how each set of adolescents are goal-directed despite their problem behaviors.

One purpose of this paper was to see if there are significant enough difference between a suburban neighborhood and an inner city neighborhood. The writer argues that research was able to prove a significant difference. Unlike inner city neighborhoods, there was no discussion of violence, crime and threats to safety in suburban neighborhoods. In addition, unlike suburban neighborhoods, there was no discussion in the research on over involved parents or activity in extracurricular activities. In fact, Schiavone (2009) found that due to the sense of isolation they feel, some inner city adolescents are avoiding extracurricular activities.

Furthermore, many of the protective factors for resiliency support suburban neighborhood characteristics (bonding to family, involvement in extracurricular activities, fewer adverse life events, and relationship with community) and risk factors support inner city neighborhood characteristics (adverse life events, community trauma/violent communities, marginalization/minority status, and low-SES/chronic poverty). Based off the difference in neighborhood characteristics and resiliency factors, it could be assumed that high-SES, suburban adolescents are more resilient than inner city adolescents.

Regardless of the glaring differences in neighborhood characteristics, similar problem behaviors were found in both sets of adolescents. These are interesting findings and more
research could be done to explore further the meaning behind the similarities. It could be a reflection of the time (i.e. ability to be connected via social media) and stage of development. Nonetheless, these findings challenge the idea that certain factors make an adolescent more or less resilient. If some high-SES, suburban adolescents are provided more protective factors for resiliency, then why are they displaying similar behavior to low-SES, inner city adolescents who may be provided more risk factors? Perception of one’s experiences is a key factor that was not addressed much in the research reviewed for this paper and could be explored further to provide more accurate research on this topic.

There is a strong correlation between resiliency protective factors and a sense of belonging. It could be argued that a sense of belonging and social interest have something to do with all the protective factors. To have social interest (feel connected to one’s community and think beyond oneself to others) and feel a sense of belonging, an adolescent, to one degree or another, would feel bonded to family and teacher, be more willing to be involved in extracurricular activities, have a strong relationship with their community and develop a strong sense of self. Could it be that just by feeling a sense of belonging, an adolescent is able to be more resilient? Maybe resiliency factors do not need to be reviewed because they are biased against adolescents living in low-SES, inner city neighborhoods, but because they could better represent resiliency when they look at how one belongs and fits into their community.

In regards to goal-directed behavior, both suburban and inner city adolescents displayed similar mistaken goals such as attention, power and revenge. Both groups were shown to be involved in delinquent behaviors (i.e. drug use, sexual activity, stealing, and cheating). It appears, through an Adlerian lens, that adolescents in general are lacking in social interest and have misperceptions in the way in which they can belong.
Despite this similarity in goal-directed behavior, it was shown in the research that high-SES, suburban adolescents can have a more difficult time than low-SES, inner city adolescents in future planning. Suburban adolescents were found to struggle with making plans for their future and the plans that were made often focused on self and status. Inner city adolescents were found, despite the neighborhood characteristics, to have an easier time planning their future and their plans included their community and greater society. It could be suggested that some inner-city adolescents have greater social interest than some suburban adolescents. More research would be needed in order to provide an accurate reason for the difference.

Based off the finding on goal-directed behavior and future planning, it could be argued that re-defining resiliency based off how an adolescent is meeting the goal of safety, significance, and belonging would not be an accurate representation of resiliency since both sets of adolescents have similar mistaken beliefs of how to meet these goals. However, further research could be done in regards of socially interested future planning and how that could be an accurate representation of resiliency in adolescents.

A limitation a writer found is in regards to the term good outcomes. Research consistently used the term good outcomes in the definition of resiliency. Masten (2001) and Tiet et al. (2010) discussed good outcomes as an indicator for resiliency. Although the authors clearly defined predictors of resiliency, they did not provide a clear meaning for good outcomes. Could good outcomes differ in meaning from neighborhood to neighborhood or individual to individual? Living in a low-SES, inner city neighborhood where there is a lack of safety, security, and belonging good outcomes can have a different meaning compared to individuals living in a high-SES, suburban neighborhood. This ambiguity for the meaning of good outcomes is one way in which current research appears to be misrepresenting resiliency for certain groups.
of adolescents. A good outcome for some inner city adolescents may be the fact that they got to school, ate some food, and made it home safely.

Another limitation is this paper is the time and research limits. The writer had a deadline on the due date and was limited to research that is available in Ebsco and the library at Adler Graduate School in Richfield, MN. These two limitations significantly impacted what research was reviewed and the time given to each source. It must be noted that this paper is not a representation of all suburban or inner city adolescents. It is a representation of a small sample of adolescents that were looked at in the research that was reviewed.
References


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Appendix One: Presentation to MERC

I spent the 2012-2013 school year interning at an alternative high school in Minneapolis by developing a counseling program that included individual therapy and support groups. Students arrived at MERC alternative high school for reasons ranging from having a learning style that is best evoked in smaller class sizes and more one-on-one instruction to truancy and drug use. I heard personal stories from some students that involved small and big traumas and I saw and heard how their safety, significance, and belonging were tested every day. Despite the delinquent behavior I saw in the students, I knew their family atmosphere and mistaken beliefs. This put the adolescents in context, it gave a total picture of them. Within that full picture, I saw adolescents who were resilient and they inspired me to learn more about resiliency in inner city adolescents.

Since the students at MERC inspired my thesis topic, it was natural for me to choose MERC staff as my audience for my presentation. I have been proud of the relationship between teacher and student at MERC. During my year internship I had seen many opportunities for power struggles to ensue, but MERC staff stayed firm to their rules and put responsibility of choice on the student. Despite their effective style, I saw room for growth by understanding Dreikur’s goals of misbehavior. MERC is a school that has many discouraged students and to better understand their purpose of movement will better equip the staff when interacting with students.

Before working on my presentation, I spent time considering what I want for my objectives and goal. My objective was to provide a different way to view misbehavior. In order for this objective to be met I made goals. The first goal was to provide clear, simple information
on the goals of misbehavior. The second goal was to make my presentation relatable. The final, third goal was to encourage the staff enough so they would be willing to try some techniques.

When I started working on my presentation, my first step was to go back to the basics. In other words, I went to the first books I was assigned at Adler. For example, the two main resources I used were, A Primer of Adlerian Psychology and Dinkmeyer and Sperry’s Counseling and Psychotherapy. Although it was not assigned for class, I also got a lot of my information from Dreikurs’s The Approach to Discipline. Within each book, I found text on the goals of misbehavior and had a re-education of basic Adlerian principles. My next step involved finding sources that had already developed a PowerPoint on goals of misbehavior. I used these as template ideas to follow and make a foundation for my presentation.

My outline was to start with introductory information on Individual Psychology and its key figures and then begin the discussion on goals of misbehavior. I felt in order to have a better understanding of the topic, the audience needed a quick lecture on Adler, Dreikurs and their philosophy of human nature, specifically the belief that behavior is goal directed and purposeful. In addition, I added slides on current research on resiliency in adolescents.

My presentation went well and the feedback was receptive. The teachers were encouraged to participate throughout and use real life situations they have had with their students. There was a relaxed feel and teachers asked questions as they came up. The main messages I wanted the staff to have from the presentation were, look at misbehavior and ask yourself, "how is this student trying to belong?", and pay attention to how you feel because that will help you decide how to respond, not react.

The teachers were given a feedback sheet consisting of rating questions (scale 1-5) and open-ended questions for their personal thoughts. On average, they rated a four on the
information provided was understandable and their plans to use this information in the future. All the teachers rated a five on my competence on the subject and their overall satisfaction with the presentation. Strengths of the presenter were provided such as, ability to connect the topic with their real life situation and knowledge in the subject. No one listed areas of improvement. Finally, the teachers stated encouragement and focus on their feeling as concepts they plan to use in the future.

My experiential thesis was a journey with many hills and valleys. There were times I felt lost and discouraged, however I found my resiliency and continued on. By the end of this experience, I have learned a lot and feel empowered by the whole process.
Goals of Misbehavior & Resiliency in Adolescents

Thesis Presentation by Julie Jackson
Adler Graduate School

Double click slide to see whole presentation.
Appendix Three: Evaluation of MERC Presentation

FEEDBACK
Julie Jackson – Resiliency & Goals of Misbehavior Presentation
Please rate the following questions on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (yes, always)

1. The information presented was understandable
   1  2  3  4  5

2. Julie displayed competence on the presentation
   1  2  3  4  5

3. I will use information I learned from this presentation
   1  2  3  4  5

4. Overall, my satisfaction of the presentation is
   1  2  3  4  5

5. Please list strengths of Julie or the presentation
  _________________________________________________________________________
  _________________________________________________________________________

6. Please list things Julie or the presentation need improvement on.
  _________________________________________________________________________
  _________________________________________________________________________
  _________________________________________________________________________

7. What are something’s you learned, or could apply, from this presentation?
  _________________________________________________________________________
  _________________________________________________________________________
  _________________________________________________________________________