



Finding their Way: Perceptions of risk, resilience, and positive youth development among adolescents and young adults from public housing neighborhoods



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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of the risk and protective factors associated with problem behavior and the application of principles consistent with positive youth development have led to significant advances in understanding why some young people develop behavioral and social problems while others display resilience in the face of adversity. Qualitative research methods were used to identify principles of risk, protection, resilience, and positive youth development in a sample of 17 adolescents and young adults (ages 14–20) who participated in afterschool programs located in 4 urban public housing neighborhoods. Template analysis in conjunction with constant comparative analysis revealed 7 themes identified as challenges, resources that support development, coping, caring and compassion, aspirations and well-being, competence and confidence, and wisdom and advice. The discussion considers how these themes are congruent with key constructs of risk, protection, resilience, and positive youth development. Implications for promoting positive behavior in adolescents and young adults are noted.

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I overcame it [a difficult childhood and adolescence] and you can do it too. It just takes a lot of effort and work and you have to want it. And it really depends on what scenario it is, like what they need help with...I know the best advice I could give them is like life isn't easy but you can overcome anything you set your mind to, and it's not going to be easy. It could be hard, it's harder for others...and other people have other outlets they can go through but everything is possible, everything you set your mind to is possible. (Young Adult Study Participant)

1. Introduction

Knowledge of the risk and protective factors associated with social and behavioral problems experienced by children, adolescents, and young adults has increased exponentially in the past several decades. Awareness of the factors that place young people at risk, or protect them from developing behaviors like juvenile delinquency, aggression, substance use, and school dropout, is now used widely to guide preventive interventions in school, family, and community settings (Jenson & Fraser, 2016). In many cases, principles of positive youth development (PYD) that define the core elements of healthy development have also

been applied to programs that seek to prevent problem behavior in young people (Jenson, Alter, Nicotera, Anthony, & Forrest-Bank, 2013). Knowledge accrued from investigations of risk and protective factors and PYD constructs has been systematically applied to a range of interventions aimed at preventing common child problem behaviors. Reviews of such interventions indicate that many risk- and PYD-based programs for young people are effective (Jenson & Bender, 2014).

Advances in understanding the risk and protective mechanisms associated with the onset of problem behavior and evidence supporting the efficacy of risk- and PYD-based programs for children and youth are encouraging. Yet evidence suggests that gains made during childhood are not always maintained during the later years of adolescence and the early years of adulthood. For example, recent data reveals disturbing increases in adverse physical, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes among adults between 18 and 25 years old (Committee on Improving the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Young Adults, 2015). These trends are partially attributed to the economic downturn of 2007 which has created increasingly difficult challenges for young people to establish careers and find stable employment as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Committee on Improving the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Young Adults, 2015). Young adults from disadvantaged childhoods and marginalized racial and ethnic populations face especially difficult times (Committee on Improving the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Young Adults, 2015; Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005). This evidence suggests that studies are

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needed to better understand how risk and protective mechanisms affect older adolescents and young adults.

Efforts to understand mechanisms of risk, protection, and PYD in young people's lives have been largely directed at children in elementary and middle school. Few studies, particularly studies that employ qualitative designs, have examined the way in which risk and protective factors and PYD constructs operate in the daily lives of older adolescents and young adults. There is a need for accurate and current understandings of how adolescents and young adults experience risk and protection, resilience, and positive development to better inform prevention and intervention efforts targeted at improving well-being for young adults. In this study, we examined key constructs of risk, protection, resilience, and PYD in a sample of older adolescents and young adults living in 4 urban public housing neighborhoods.

1.1. Risk, protection, and resilience

Principles of risk, protection, and resilience have become cornerstones in understanding and preventing behaviors like substance use, delinquency, aggression, and school drop-out in recent years (Catalano, 2007; Woolf, 2008). Risk factors are individual, school, peer, family, and community influences that increase the likelihood that a young person will experience a social or health problem (Jenson & Fraser, 2016). The initial work of identifying risk factors for problem behavior dates to the 1970s when researchers began placing greater importance on identifying the specific factors that were consistently associated with the occurrence of mental health and behavior problems (Rutter, 1979). This approach, adapted from public health efforts to identify risk factors associated with problems such as smoking and heart disease, led to the use of "risk-based" strategies to prevent child and adolescent problems in the 1990s (e.g., Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). We use the term "at-risk youth" cautiously, yet intentionally, in this paper to refer explicitly to youth who have been exposed to numerous empirically-identified risk factors.

Over time, researchers noticed that some at-risk youth never participated in problem behaviors as they matured and became young adults. Indeed studies showed that many of these youth were "protected" from

risk as young adults (Werner & Smith, 1992). That is, these young adults seemed to have personal resources that helped them prevail over adversities. These resources came to be called protective factors. There is on-going debate about the exact definition of protection as well as how to put knowledge about protective factors into practice (Jenson & Fraser, 2016). Regardless, most investigators and practitioners agree that protective factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that, when present, lower the probability of an undesirable outcome in young people. Fig. 1 shows risk and protective factors for problem behavior in young people by domains of influence that reflect the social ecology in which children interact (Jenson & Fraser, 2016).

Closely linked to principles of risk and protection is the concept of resilience, which is the ability to overcome adverse conditions and to function normatively despite exposure to risk. In other words, resilience represents successful adaptation in the presence of risk or adversity (Luthar, 2003; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). In circumstances when the risk level is high, protective factors exert their influence on developmental outcomes; however, in circumstances in which the risk level is low, protective factors are more likely to have a neutral or relatively benign effect. Many youth display resilience by avoiding negative pathways despite exposure to traumatic events and negative influences. In addition, there are numerous examples of resilient young people whose negative life experiences led them to take steps toward negative trajectories involving delinquency and/or substance abuse, but were able to overcome the odds and find their way back to more healthy and prosocial pathways (Vigil, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1992).

1.2. The positive youth development model

As noted above, the application of risk and resilience frameworks to the developmental periods of childhood and early adolescence has led to significant advances in understanding, preventing, and treating social and behavioral problems experienced by young people. Yet many practitioners and investigators note that an over-emphasis on individual deficits in these models often limits their capacity to acknowledge the strengths and assets in a young person's life. Youth advocates,

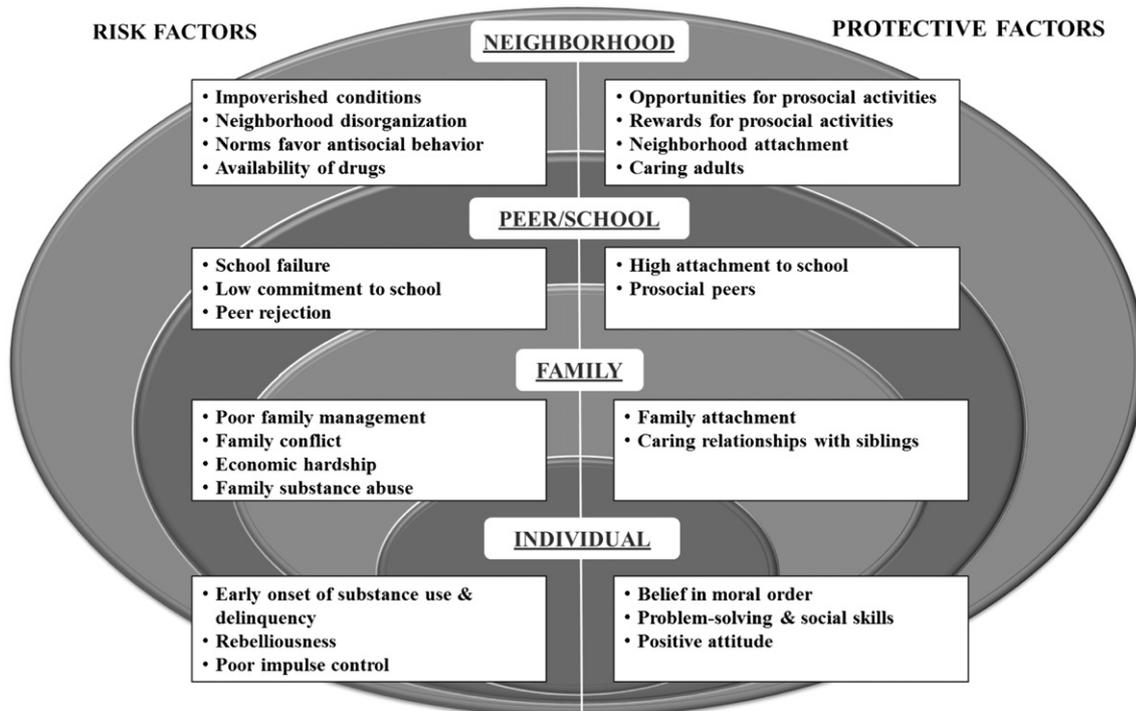


Fig. 1. Risk and protective factors in the context of child and adolescent social ecology. (Jenson et al., 2013; Jenson & Fraser, 2016).

practitioners, and scholars have become increasingly aware of the relationship between young people's strengths, assets, and resources and their capacity to live healthy and productive lives (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Indeed, evidence indicate that children and youth who possess individual strengths and social and community resources are less likely than other youth to participate in problem behaviors like delinquency and substance use (Lerner et al., 2003). Strengths and resources held by young people have also been identified as important change agents in interventions targeting at-risk children and youth (Catalano et al., 2002; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998).

At its most basic level, PYD reframes existing risk-based explanations of childhood and adolescent behavior by focusing on the positive traits and resources in a young person's life. In doing so, PYD emphasizes the healthy and adaptive development of children and adolescents. Advocates of the model advance the notion that all young people not only *have* resources but that they *are* resources—to themselves, their families, and to others in society. They further suggest that healthy development is characterized by a sense of responsibility, connectedness, and positive values. The perspective stands in stark contrast to the early *storm and stress* viewpoints of adolescence (Freud, 1969) in which young people were thought to be in need of psychological intervention because of developmental conflicts that are now seen as quite normal during adolescence (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). From a PYD perspective, all youth possess, and indeed are, resources that should be developed rather than liabilities or problems to be handled (Roth et al., 1998).

Consistent with the social ecological framework shown in Fig. 1, PYD is centered in a relational and developmental systems perspective. In this sense, PYD advocates believe that child and adolescent development occurs as a result of interactive processes between an individual and her or his broader environment (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). It follows that PYD intervention efforts aim to optimize human potential and quality of life by enhancing the mutually influential relationships that occur within the social ecological framework of young people (Lerner et al., 2015).

Lerner operationalized principles of PYD through what are now commonly known as the 5 Cs (*Competence, Connection, Character, Confidence, and Caring/Compassion*). The principles represent the characteristics or attributes associated with adolescent thriving (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth et al., 1998). A sixth C, *Contribution*, was subsequently added to reflect actions and behaviors resulting from the 5 Cs (Lerner et al., 2005). A model of PYD that includes these key constructs is shown in Fig. 2.

Competence refers to having a positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational settings. A young person with cognitive abilities and social and behavioral

skills exhibits competence. *Connection* refers to positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship. Positive bonds with adults and others involved in the young person's life, as well as connections to institutions, represent experiences of connection. *Character* reflects respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity. Children with character know how to assess the functioning of the social world and make wise decisions about their own conduct in relationship to these rules and norms. *Confidence* is an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one's global self-regard, as opposed to the domain-specific beliefs. When a young person is confident, s/he feels good about her/himself and the ability to accomplish tasks. A confident young person will acknowledge limitations, in addition to strengths, and can therefore assert her/himself with assurance. *Caring and Compassion* connote a sense of sympathy and empathy for others, the ability to see outside one's self. A caring and compassionate child can share the experience of suffering with others and relate to the basic human experience. Finally, *contribution* suggests that all healthy children and adolescents have a capacity and responsibility to give back to others in their individual, social, and environment settings. Contributions to self, family, and to the institutions of a civil society are ultimately what young adults who have developed adaptively will exhibit (Lerner et al., 2005). Collectively, the 6 Cs offer a framework for understanding and operationalizing key constructs of PYD.

1.3. Summary

Frameworks based on understanding risk, protection, resilience, and principles of PYD have helped investigators, policymakers, and practitioners understand the mechanisms that promote, or inhibit, healthy development in children and youth. However, few studies have examined how principles of risk, protection, resilience, and PYD operate in the lives of older adolescents and young adults. Investigations aimed at understanding how childhood constructs of risk protection, resilience, and PYD affect young people during adolescence and young adulthood are needed to better understand the initiation and persistence of problem behaviors and to guide interventions during these critical developmental phases.

1.4. The current study

This qualitative study focus groups and in-depth interviews to explore the lived experiences of risk, protection, resilience, and PYD in a sample of 17 older adolescents and young adults who participated in an urban afterschool program located in 4 public housing communities. A combination of qualitative strategies involving template analysis (King, 2012) and

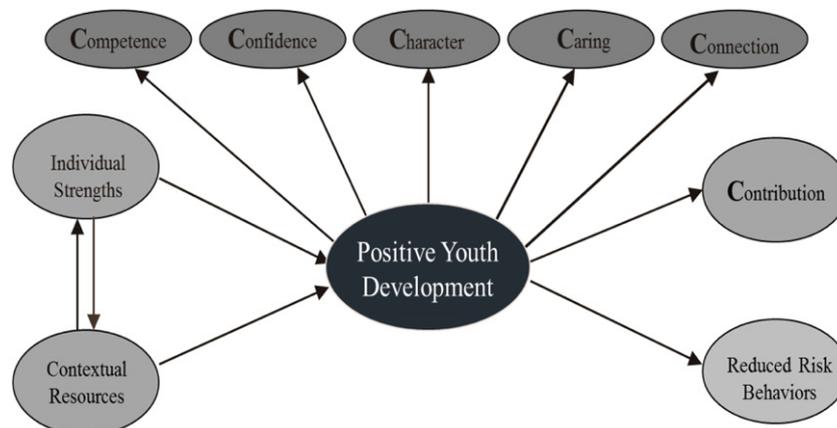


Fig. 2. A conceptual model of positive youth development. Note: Adapted from (Lerner, Lerner, Phelps, & Colleagues, 2008).

grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) were used. We approached the analysis with a priori themes denoting principles of risk, protection, and resilience, and an interpretive lens informed by a PYD framework. The analysis applied a template from a previous investigation with a younger sample of participants who grew up in the same public housing neighborhoods (Forrest-Bank, Nicotera, Anthony, Gonzales, & Jensen, 2014) in conjunction with grounded theory methodology. In the current study, the voices of older adolescent and young adult participants provide new perspective for understanding risk, protective, resilience, and PYD.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

A sample of 17 adolescents and young adults participated in qualitative interviews. All participants lived in public housing communities and were involved in a risk- and PYD-based afterschool program in sites located in their neighborhoods. The program provides academic and social supports to children and young adults in the form of literacy, science, and math education, tutoring, social and emotional learning, and technology training.

Ten of the 17 study participants were inclusive of all of the adolescents who were current members of the agency's technology team. This number reflects the average number of students who participate in the technology team each year. Members of the technology team are trained by agency staff to teach computer skills to younger children who attend the program. The 10 high school-aged participants ranged in ages from 14 to 18, with an average age of 16, and included 6 girls and 4 boys. Four of the participants were Latino/a, 3 were African-American, 2 were Iraqi and 1 was White. The remaining 7 subjects were randomly selected from the roster of young adults who were receiving college scholarship funding from the program. Young adult members of the college scholarship program received ongoing academic and social support from the agency. In addition, the college scholarship recipients provided tutoring services for younger youth attendees at the agency. The average age of the 7 college age participants was 20 with a range of 18–20 years; 3 were college freshman, one was a sophomore, one was a junior, and 2 were seniors. Two of these youth were male, and 5 were female; 3 were Asian-American, 2 were Latino/a, 1 was Iraqi, and 1 was African. The adolescents and young adults in the study sample all received academic support and tutoring services during their enrollment in the program as children and adolescents. They also participated in social and emotional learning groups aimed at improving social, cognitive, and behavioral skills. The inclusive and random selection methodologies helped control for differential exposure to program activities and improve generalizability of study findings.

2.2. Procedures

All study procedures were approved by the IRB and informed consent and assent were obtained from all participants (parents for those under the age of 18). Two focus groups with 5 high school youth in each group were conducted by 2 facilitators; the lead author and a research assistant). The lead author had extensive clinical interviewing skills and practice with group facilitation with adolescents, and provided orientation and training to the co-facilitator in preparation for the focus groups. The participants were told at the beginning of the group discussions that there were no wrong responses. Throughout the discussions they were encouraged to bring their unique experiences into the discussion by asking if there was anything different or further anyone would like to add, and by making a point of offering each participant a chance to share. This methodology offered the least intrusive approach for the agency and participants. In addition, congruent with previous scholarship on focus groups with adolescents, the participants seemed to open up in the relaxed and informal context and described a broad range of personal experiences (Hughes & DuMont, 2002; Morgan &

Krueger, 1993). The 7 college student participants were all interviewed individually by the lead author. All focus groups and individual interviews were audio-recorded. Focus groups were held in a classroom on the campus where the high school youth were attending a week long training related to their role as technology skills instructors. The individual interviews with the college age youth were held either at a program site or alternative agreed upon location such as a local public library. Focus groups lasted for 50 minutes each and individual interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes each.

2.3. Measures

The interview protocol was developed to assess constructs inherent in risk, protection, resilience, and PYD frameworks. To this end, focus group questions included content about neighborhood, school, and family factors and about interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal factors. Participants were asked to reflect on how the skills they learned in elementary and middle school were helpful in their current efforts to teach and support young children. In addition, participants responded to questions about what they wanted to be when they grew up and what kind of advice they would offer to youth growing up in their neighborhoods. The same interview protocol was used for the college age participants but it also included additional questions relevant to their age/development. These additional questions queried participants about positive and negative choices that they made and about supportive relationships in their lives.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and loaded into Atlas-ti for analysis (Scientific Software Development, 2012). Template analysis (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King, 1998, 2012) was used in the initial phase of analysis. This method is applicable to a wide range of epistemologies and involves a series of analytic steps through which the researcher codes data and develops a series of templates (King, 2012). The initial template can either be developed from a priori codes derived from the study's research questions, theory or from the data itself via the process of in-vivo coding (King, 2012). Our initial template was developed from a priori codes and was further derived as subsequent transcripts were analyzed until a revised set of themes was reached. We used this approach in conjunction with the next phase of our analysis in which we applied constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to assess for differences and similarities across transcripts as well as identify negative cases in the data (Glaser, 2002). Our final layer of analysis was based on axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to examine the relationships among the themes, which resulted in some further modifications to the themes. The analytic methodology is more thoroughly explained next. Although there were iterative, circular processes involved in the analysis, we lay it out in the series of steps that were generally followed in order.

3.1.1. Analytic step 1

The first step was to analyze the data by applying an a priori template to the interview data. The initial template was developed from themes derived from a previous study in which younger public housing neighborhood youth from similar neighborhoods as the current sample responded to a similar interview protocol (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2014). Thus, transcripts were initially examined for data segments (quotes) that mirrored each of 5 themes (challenges, coping, aspirations, health, and connection). These coded data segments were then scrutinized to ensure that: 1) the themes were not artificially forced onto the data and 2) the themes existed consistently across the data and not just for 1 or 2 participants. In addition, at the end of this step revisions were made to the template as the data was examined for positive youth

development constructs, revealing dimensions in the data that were not captured by the initial template.

3.1.2. Analytic step 2

In step two of the analytic process we applied the constant comparative method to further develop the template that resulted from our first analytic step. This process was essential for identifying themes that were unique to the current data, and allowed for including the protective, positive dimensions that surfaced during step 1. At the conclusion of this second step the resulting codes and linked data segments were examined for commonalities and grouped by similar thematic content. They were also compared to the a priori themes retained in step 1 to assess for redundancy and merge redundant themes. Then the data were analyzed to ensure that the thematic content was consistent across the transcripts and were not merely an artifact of 1 or 2 participants' perspectives.

3.1.3. Analytic steps 3 and 4

Continuing with our interplay between deductive and inductive analytic strategies, we next applied axial coding to consider possible causal processes in the data based on the risk, resilience and positive youth development frameworks that guided the study. This resulted in our final themes and conceptualization of how they related to one another. In the fourth and final step of the analysis we conducted inter-rater reliability checks to ensure consistent interpretation of how the quotes fit into the themes. In addition, we searched the data for negative cases (Creswell & Miller, 2000), e.g., data segments or quotes that could refute or contradict each theme, and adjusted themes until they were inclusive (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Finally, we examined our findings with the original transcripts to make sure our interpretations remained true to the voices of the participants.

3.2. Themes

The analysis resulted in 7 themes: 1) challenges, 2) resources that support development; 3) coping; 4) caring and compassion, 5) aspirations and well-being, 6) competence/confidence, and 7) wisdom and advice. We define the themes and subthemes and describe their dimensions, using examples from the data. Additionally, Table 1 presents the definitions of the themes and subthemes illustrated with specific quotes for each.

3.2.1. Challenges

The theme challenges represents quotes that involve descriptions of difficult or negative experiences participants had faced in their lives. The subthemes, neighborhood challenges, family challenges, peer challenges, and individual challenges, denote the domains of the social ecology in which the challenges occurred. The theme and subthemes of challenges are closely linked to the construct of risk factors and the social ecological model, consistent with the risk and resilience framework. However, rather than looking for specific known risk factors in the data, the quotes in this theme represent what the participants perceived as negative and challenging aspects of their lives.

3.2.1.1. Neighborhood challenges. This subtheme included a number of quotes about the presence of “drunks”, particularly those who hang out at the park, as well as concerns about drug addicts and drug pushing, graffiti, fights, gangs, and loud noises late at night. Additionally, youth talked about the absence of positive peers in the neighborhood. Two participants also described exposure to political and wartime violence in the communities they lived in before immigrating to the US and living in the public housing neighborhoods.

3.2.1.2. Family challenges. This subtheme represents an array of family issues. Some participants talked about negative parenting while others talked about lacking parental support in general. Several quotes in this

subtheme were related to parents who were not able to help their children with schoolwork due to their own lack of education.

3.2.1.3. Peer challenges. One aspect of this subtheme included difficulty making enough friends, either because there were not many kids in their neighborhood who were their age or who were positive influences, or because it was hard for them to make friends. Other youth experienced friends moving away. The issue of gangs occurred in the peer domain as well. Usually this issue was discussed as a need to avoid peers in gangs or pressure to be involved in gangs, and one participant talked about the real possibility of being jumped into a gang. Other challenges in this subtheme were about the pressure to be cool, and/or getting into or being faced with physically aggressive conflict with peers. Lastly, there were also quotes about conflict within friendships or break-ups occurring within intimate relationships.

3.2.1.4. Individual challenges. The individual challenges subtheme primarily involved quotes that talked about academic challenges. There were many quotes, for example, about the difficulty of school work as well as concerns with learning disabilities. Several participants talked about the difficulty in adjusting to changes in school, which included attending U.S. schools after immigration, and higher demands in the coursework after transferring from a public school to a private school, or from high school to college. Many quotes referred to the challenges of adjusting to college and decisions participants face regarding what they want to do with their careers and the academic route toward accomplishing those objectives. For example, one young adult said, “... for my education, finish school I don't know if I want to go to grad school, I, I hope I do but some people at first they say no but then they change their mind later, I hope that as of right now I don't want to but hopefully later I will and I think I think that way because last semester last year was really easy but this semester is really, really hard for me...” Participants also mentioned financial stresses and the practical obstacle that lack of funds for further schooling played in developing their career plans.

Several quotes included in this subtheme describe the challenges participants faced due to repercussions of past substance abuse and criminal behavior involvement. Although the quotes overlap with other layers of the social ecology, such as families and peers, they are included in the individual subtheme because they seem to be more about intrapersonal struggles and therefore fit best in this category.

Consistent with definitions of “at-risk” youth, the study participants were exposed to numerous challenges and influences beyond what is developmentally normative. Many of the specific challenges they described reflect risk factors typically associated with growing up in public housing neighborhoods, such as the prevalence of violence and substance abuse, and the pressure to be involved with gangs. Importantly, although many of the challenges the participants faced are known risk factors for developing negative behaviors, exposure to challenges also presented opportunities to cope with them and develop confidence and competence along the way. Particularly interesting to this developmental age is the data from participants with behavioral and/or substance abuse problems. These maladaptive behaviors were likely a result of risk the participants endured, and now are challenges in themselves as they are entering the transition to adulthood. As they grapple with the new challenges they face in adulthood, they maintain vulnerability due to the ones they cannot leave behind. Additionally, problems within intimate relationships presented challenges mentioned by some participants that often emerge for the first time during this developmental period.

3.2.2. Resources that support development

This theme, similar to the construct of protective factors, includes data defining what the youth perceive as helpful, positive influences toward their development. Assessing this theme involved not just identifying the factors themselves, but confirming that the participants

Table 1
Definitions and examples of themes and subthemes.

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Challenges Difficult or negative experiences participants have faced in their lives. The subthemes represent the domain of the social ecology in which they occurred. | |
| <i>Neighborhood challenges</i> | "... Crips and Bloods and stuff...gangs...gang things...And people get drunk and they fight...and they come to the neighborhood and all night like 12 to all night...they fight and some stuff. I don't like it over there." |
| <i>Family challenges</i> | "There's some unhealthy people that are just like...they've lived the bad life too and they don't care about their kids and they're still doing it. So they're learning from their parents. They're following the parents and getting into trouble". |
| <i>Peer challenges</i> | "...Too shy to make friends." |
| <i>Individual challenges</i> | "I thought it was cool or whatever...but then I got into a lot of trouble cause I'm still caught up in the court system and stuff....so...my mom sent me to this kind of like a group home thing about like gang violence." |
| Resources that support development Neighborhood and community factors that participants identified as having positive impact in their lives. | |
| <i>Positive neighborhood/ community factors</i> | "I think what makes our neighborhood unique is that even though they do call it the "projects" it's more of like a community to us because you can...like when my mom drives around the corner to go to the house...we can wave at so many people...and they're so nice but yet...it feels so like just comfortable and safe." |
| <i>Interpersonal connections</i> | "My mom said like she'll support me with whatever I choose...if I choose to go to college, she'll help me find scholarships and all that cause we don't have any money for all that and she said she'll try to help me as much as she can" |
| Coping What the participant did, said, or felt in response to challenges they faced. | |
| <i>Enduring</i> | "...and I get a little bit scared sometimes." |
| <i>Harnessing resources</i> | "I got a tutor for the stuff that I was struggling with and now I just like go to my teachers more and ask questions [about] things I don't get." |
| <i>Staying out of trouble</i> | "...The one kid once asked me to fight with him...but I just stayed there [and] after school I just went straight to my bus stop and I didn't even say goodbye to my friends." |
| <i>Adapt and change</i> | Oh yeah I want to go out. I don't know it's kind of like everything has to change you know? Don't hang out with the same people anymore..." |
| Caring and compassion Statements about the intention or action of doing something for someone else or expressing concern about someone else. | |
| <i>Concern for others.</i> | "I'm always wondering about my little... my 12 year old sister, like if I leave I'm going to leave her in that house...and like...she's not gonna stay there by herself. So like if I leave she'll end up doing some stupid stuff like I did..." |
| <i>Contribution</i> | "Well, just I guess I got older and I got like working with [the afterschool program]...then I got to work with little kids and kind of help them and then I guess...I went through my own little change within my life...and then I realized that I can help other kids like...who might have gone through my problem...and so...I just figured I wanted to [be] a psychologist." |
| Competence and confidence Any description of positive view of one's action where they describe their own skill, capability, proficiency. | |
| | "I have such a mixed set of skills it makes me really versatile, everything I do, I am pretty good with computers and now I know business I can really combine that and make something really extraordinary." |
| Aspirations and well-being Expressions of ambitions, goals, desires, and quotes that reveal the understandings participants' have about what it means to be happy, healthy, and successful. | |
| <i>Academic and career pathways</i> | "I really wanted to go to school...that's when I went back to [names home country]... I knew that I really needed an education so I moved ... to my uncle and my little brother and I started going to school again" |
| <i>The right path</i> | "I could have stayed and fought with him [a classmate]...but I chose...Well I never got in trouble in school...and really trying to keep that all the way to college." |
| <i>Have a better life</i> | "Well my dad he's like kind of like kind of strict on things...he's like "well, if you don't be successful...you're going to be like me...living off your mom...and stuff like that...so, I try to...you know ...I get what he's saying, so I try to like...use his words as to...motivate me...try not to be like him." |
| <i>Adult roles</i> | "...eventually get[ting] married and have[ing] kids and have a happy family a happy life." |
| <i>Physical and emotional wellness</i> | "I think if you live like in fear all the time, you're not healthy...then if you're always relaxed and happy then you know you're safe and healthy." |
| Wisdom and advice Expressions about life philosophy or theory, observed patterns or general rules to live by. | |
| | "Don't ever quit...always try to reach your goals and do better for yourself and your family." |

perceived them to be beneficial influences. This is an important distinction to make since perspectives of what were positive resources differed considerably from the theoretical construct of protective factors in some instances.

3.2.2.1. Positive neighborhood/community factors. Data were included in this subtheme when youth described factors about their neighborhoods that had a positive influence in their lives or communities. The participants identified a range of positive neighborhood resources, supportive services, and characteristics about their neighborhoods. For example, participants stated that the neighborhood pool and several parks were places they liked to play and meet up with friends. Participants also talked about a range of civic organizations that served as resources such as the youth services program that all of the youth participants attended. Participants mentioned other youth programs as well and specific resources that provided meals, entertainment, social opportunities and skills training, as well as academic and social support. The

police, fire department, and private, charter, and neighborhood schools were all noted as resources in the community. One of the participants talked about a refugee assistance organization that was helpful to the participant's family, and another described accessing English language learning at a technical school. Another neighborhood characteristic that many participants described illustrates the concept of neighborhood cohesion. In other words, quotes in this subtheme relayed a perception from youth that there is a sense of cohesion with their neighbors, as well as a value in the neighborhood of caring about the children who live there. This theme comes through when a participant described taking the younger children to the park: "Even though there's like drunks that are always at the park and all that they try to keep it safe for like the little kids if they're playing and all that...so like whenever we take the kids to the park during the summer or during the fall... like we know we'll be safe because they like respect that the kids are in the [afterschool] program and they're not going to turn out to be a drunk like them...". Even in the presence of the negative challenge of

“drunks”, the youth can feel safe –from the participant’s perspective, even protected- because the “drunks” are acculturated to the neighborhood norms that support the role and mission of the afterschool program.

3.2.2.2. Interpersonal connections. This subtheme includes data in which the participants refer to specific personal relationships with individuals who they perceived to have important positive roles and influences in their lives. Participants mentioned supportive, encouraging, motivating, and instructive relationships that had a positive impact or influence. Some of the time interpersonal connections quotes simply mentioned people who were available as a resource. Tutors, mentors, and a special education teacher were among those mentioned. Moreover, participants explicitly described positive benefits or healthy things that were gained as a result of these relationships. Many participants talked about acquired or improved academic skills due to their interpersonal connections in civic organizations. There were also a number of quotes about friendships, parents, and role models were also mentioned as shaping their understandings of morality and values. Many participants described how they determined their aspirations through their relationships with the people they admired or were role models to them. Many also talked about being motivated or encouraged to stay on track.

Not surprising, family members, especially mothers, but fathers, older and younger siblings, cousins, and grandparents, as well, were mentioned often as interpersonal resources for the participants. Many of the participants talked about their parents wanting a better life for their children. Many participants talked about the importance of their role as an older sibling to their younger siblings (and cousins). There were also numerous mentions of older siblings as role models and supports.

Many interpersonal connections occurred within civic organizations. Relationships with tutors and mentors and program staff were frequently described as having important influence and contribution in the participants’ lives. For example, one participant talked about how a staff member in the youth services program was a role model and inspired the participant’s desire to want to pursue a career in social work. “So seeing what they do makes me, and also working with kids throughout all those years, like I really have a passion for kids and then seeing what they do and seeing what influence they have on children makes me, has always made me look up to them I guess, I think that’s what has made me want to do it more than anything.”

Part of the youth services program for the participants involves working with younger program participants, and many of the participants talked about those interpersonal relationships. Many described themselves as the interpersonal connection resource to children in the program. However, there was reciprocity integral to these relationships as well that was frequently evident. For example, one participant relayed a sense of respect that he received from the relationships he developed through teaching younger kids. Another dimension of interpersonal connections that came up repeatedly was about the importance of positive peers, i.e. “...friends who don’t do drugs.” One participant also mentioned coworkers who he enjoyed seeing at his job. On a different note, although clearly the presence of gang activities in the lives of these youth poses substantial risk, from one participant’s perspective, the gang offers some protective benefits as well. Although relaying fear and aversion toward the idea of being jumped into a gang, the participant also talked about a gang-involved friend as a resource for information about positive aspects of gang membership, and the gang as potential protection.

The data in this theme suggest that youth find a wealth of positive resources in their lives regardless of the negative influences they may also endure. In fact, the neighborhood itself was a source of pride and protection in many ways. Many of the positive influences arise in response to, or at least in the context of, negative ones, illustrative of the concept of resilience. An understanding of the inter-relatedness of resilience and positive youth development emerge from assessing this

theme. For example, participants would not receive academic help through interpersonal resources in agencies if the need had not been identified. Nor would they have the subsequent experiences of confidence and competence characteristic of PYD had they not received those services and interpersonal connections. Interestingly, indications of contribution also emerged in this analysis in the context of interpersonal resources. Although the concept of contribution is defined in the literature as a consequence of the other PYD attributes, clearly many participants in the current study perceive their relationships in which they are making contributions as resources as well.

3.2.3. Coping

Having identified the challenges and resources that the participants indicated were impacting them as they developed, we turn next to present the evidence in the data that suggests how the youth coped with challenges and how they enlisted resources to help them cope.

3.2.3.1. Enduring. This subtheme includes quotes in which participants describe how they managed to get through, or endure, the challenges they experienced. Strategies that were mentioned as being employed in hard times included praying, singing, and playing sports. Some participants talked about being plain scared in response to the negative factors in the neighborhood. For example, one participant described noise people made in the middle of the night outside the house that scared him and made it hard for him to sleep.

3.2.3.2. Harnessing resources. Participants frequently explained that they responded to the challenges they faced by harnessing resources. This mostly had to do with academic difficulties, although participants also talked about turning to interpersonal connections for needed advice and support. Some quotes reported seeking assistance from people they already knew such as their mothers, siblings, mentors, and tutors. There were also many instances in the data in which participants talked about establishing new contacts with civic organizations.

3.2.3.3. Staying out of trouble. Many of the participants talked about making decisions to stay out of trouble in response to the challenges they encountered. Their situations ranged from avoiding involvement with negative behaviors to trying to stay on the right path after developing substantial problems. Many quotes in this theme were about staying away from negative peers and/or choosing positive peers. Other quotes described avoiding conflict with peers.

3.2.3.4. Adapt and change. Some of the coping responses to challenges involved participants realizing that they may need to modify their plans or behaviors. Several quotes in this subtheme referred to getting focused on academic work when they were not doing well. For example, “I just had to set better goals for me...like to get out of being...stop procrastinating so much.” In addition, there were several quotes in which the youth had to reassess and change plans due to financial limitations to buy books or pay for school, or other obstacles to academic achievement. For example, one youth described difficulty adjusting to academic demands as a result of the transition from a different country to the U.S and made a change to a different academic major as a result of recognizing much of what the participant had learned had been forgotten. Other quotes in this theme expressed the need to adapt in the face of uncertainty about *how* to adapt. For example, one participant expressed did not know what to do to cope with a friend moving out of the country.

There were also quotes in this subtheme from those participants who were coping with behavioral or substance abuse problems. For example, one participant talked about deciding to engage in treatment and make changes when faced with the challenge of system involvement. Other participants linked drinking and partying during high school to current struggles to manage college academic work and expressed the commitment to behavioral changes.

This theme of coping seems to illustrate the process of developing resilience as harnessing community and interpersonal resources and was frequently found in the data as a response to challenges; therefore, the theme demonstrates how resources interacted with challenges in shaping how the participants responded to challenges. The theme also reveals that PYD characteristics influence the process of developing coping responses. The principle of character is reflected in the coping responses in that the participants seem to have a clear sense of prosocial norms that are integral to how they contemplate and cope with challenges, for example, when participants talked about avoiding conflict with peers and staying on track in school. The principles of competence and connection are also illuminated by participants' coping strategies when they describe turning to interpersonal connections and community resources for support and assistance. Confidence seems amply present in this theme as well since participants tended to identify a sense of self-worth and efficacy in their specific strategies and resources for coping. Another interesting dimension in this theme was that there were many examples in which participants were experiencing some failure, like realizing they were not performing well in their academic area. However, their responses were to adapt their plans in the face of those obstacles without losing sight of their pro-social aspirations.

3.2.4. *Caring and compassion*

The theme caring/compassion represents participants' descriptions about doing things for others, giving to others, and their expressed compassion or concern for others. All of the dimensions of this quality were directly connected to exposure to the challenges and/or resources participants had experienced themselves.

3.2.4.1. *Concern for others.* Many of the participants demonstrated the quality of caring through the expression of concern for others. Some of the sentiments had to do with being concerned about safety. Others expressed concern about younger children being exposed to or impacted by negative influences. Quotes in this subtheme came up primarily as participants expressed concern for how younger children might be impacted by negative neighborhood influences. For example, "If you just go to the park you're going to see those kids standing around...smoking around and doing all types of ...and those kids are going to watch them...and they all doing the same thing...some not even go to school they just...they might probably end up doing the same thing." Other quotes, such as the one in [Table 1](#) were about family influences on well-being.

3.2.4.2. *Contribution.* This subtheme includes quotes in which participants talked about wanting to help others through their careers as a result of difficult experiences they had and/or support they had received. Some participants talked about feeling compelled to help others such as nursing an ill parent or obligation to help out the family. Others expressed more impassioned internal motivation to make a difference, alleviate need, and contribute through their careers. One quote seems to capture the essence of contribution particularly well: "I think it is good for me. It's like a way of giving back and...just [the afterschool program] always helps me so try to help [them] in a little bit."

This theme links the principle of caring with connection and illustrates how they are integral to the 6th "C", the PYD principle of contribution. Congruent with the definition of contribution, which is essentially the developmental product of the 5 Cs, there is evidence of influence of all of the 5 Cs in the data in this theme. Participants developed concern for others in their roles as resources to others, and competence and confidence through their own experiences of practicing coping with similar challenges to those they observe younger youth facing. The subtheme contribution in this theme is about the desire and intent to engage in future careers where they can actively care for others as they have experienced or observed. All of the dimensions of this theme are directly connected to exposure to the challenges and/or resources participants have experienced themselves, suggesting also

that resilience is part of this interactive process developing simultaneously with PYD characteristics while both constructs influence their ongoing growth.

3.2.5. *Competence and confidence*

The theme of confidence/competence consists of quotes in which the youth identify something they are good at/able to do or that reflects having a positive view of their own actions, skills, capabilities, or proficiencies. Many of the general confidence/competence quotes make reference to skills and attitudes the youth learned when they were younger that helped them work with the children in their roles as technology skills instructors in the youth services program. Many quotes expressed a sense of having developed specific strategies to work with the younger children such as being patient, bending down to their eye level, not putting too much pressure on them, or showing them respect like in the following quote, "...talk to them...switch their minds when they're like refusing to do something...there's some like students that don't give the respect...but all the students that give me respect... cause I give them respect...they listen to me." Sometimes, the participants conveyed a sense of pride and confidence in their skills and competencies like in the quote above. Other quotes in this subtheme reflected more of a sense of self-awareness, as though they understood something about themselves. For example, "Because I'm older than everybody they think...I'm gifted and talented...like I am smarter than everybody else...but I'm not...I'm right where I'm supposed to be." Much of the content in this theme was about recognizing particular academic strengths or strategies.

This theme overlaid conceptually with the PYD principles that mirror the theme's label. The theme represented the capabilities or competence of the participants, but also their self-assured view or confidence in their abilities to apply the skills they described. For example, they described how they could be patient with the younger children they tutored as well as how their versatile skill sets would support them in gaining employment. As the youth were developing resilience through coping, they were also developing competence and self-awareness as part of their identities in managing challenges and navigating their lives.

3.2.6. *Aspirations and well-being*

The theme aspirations and well-being presents findings that identify the participants' views on indicators of success and well-being. The theme included quotes in which participants expressed their goals and revealed their understanding about what it means to be happy, healthy, or successful. Sometimes quotes in this theme explicitly described participants' own hopes and goals for the future, but other times they reflected a perspective on what it means in general to have positive well-being. Most of the time the quotes provide positive examples of well-being; however, quotes portraying negative well-being were also included in this theme since they still relay information about participants' views on what constitutes well-being.

3.2.6.1. *Academic and career pathways.* This subtheme includes quotes that described specific goals as well as some that loosely expressed sentiments of wanting to succeed, such as, "...just get a good job and be happy." However most quotes involved participants contemplating or identifying of specific career goals. The specific interests mentioned spanned a broad range of career options. They included: joining the National Guard, becoming a pediatrician, nurse, pharmacist, lawyer, accountant, massage therapist, community organizer, psychologist, social worker, soccer player, business man, designer, veterinarian, chemical engineer, basketball player, scouting leader, gym teacher, math teacher, scientist, cop, human services professional, and mechanic. Several participants also described the aspiration to own their own businesses.

Some quotes in this theme described school engagement and/or achievement either in connection to career pursuits or as goals in themselves, i.e., going to school every day, showing up to classes every day,

struggling through school work, finishing school, earning a high GPA, and applying to graduate school. Most of the participants talked about a process of figuring out their academic and career ambitions, weighing options, and/or changing their minds. Many of the participants explained that learning something about the career, or themselves, or their aptitude for the academic material required for a certain career influenced their choices as well as made them reconsider or change their minds. In addition, several participants noted financial barriers to pursuing academic goals. Some also described how their personal experiences had led them to choose certain paths. For example, one youth was driven to become a nurse as a result of having witnessed a shortage of nurses in the home country during a time of dire need for them.

3.2.6.2. The right path. Many of the participants relayed an understanding of, and intention to maintain or adopt positive behaviors as a means toward accomplishing success and well-being. Sometimes this subtheme overlapped with the academic and careers subtheme since participants referred to the importance of staying in school. Other quotes expressed the importance of knowing the difference between right and wrong, and not doing drugs. Another dimension of this subtheme reflected how youth had changed negative behaviors or attitudes to become more positive, either academically, behaviorally, or in navigating social relationships.

3.2.6.3. Have a better life. Quotes in this subtheme included intentions participants had and/or messages they received to do better for themselves, either in comparison to their parents' lives or their own earlier experiences. Moreover, the quotes in this theme reflected messages youth had received from their parents to learn from their hardships and/or mistakes.

3.2.6.4. Adult roles. Many participants talked about aspirations to establish adult roles and responsibilities such as living on their own, purchasing a home, achieving financial stability, helping support their families of origin, and starting families of their own. Quotes in this subtheme occurred almost exclusively in the college age data, with one exception that one of the quotes about supporting family of origin occurred in the high school participant data. There were also several quotes in this subtheme that described an aspiration to a particular lifestyle such as wanting to have a lot of money, or the desire to travel.

3.2.6.5. Physical and emotional wellness. This subtheme included participant reports of their health and well-being and reveals how the participants defined wellness along the dimensions of physical and emotional health. References to physical health were abundant and reflected "being healthy," "sick," or "not sick." Well-being also included quotes about nutrition or about lack of nutrition. Other quotes illustrate what participants perceive as emotional wellness. For example one youth talked about staying in the present, while others mentioned "being happy" or the quality of "being positive." Quotes about "feeling safe" were also included in the wellness subtheme and these arose in relationship to challenges that compromised the youth's sense of safety as well as in reference to neighborhood cohesion that made them feel safe. Other quotes revealed that fear was not congruent with positive well-being.

Aspirations and well-being seems to reflect a culminating of the 5 Cs toward accomplishing contribution. If/when they accomplish their aspirations, they will be realizing the incorporation of the 5 Cs, and thus contribution. The principle of character is especially apparent in this theme. The ideas expressed in the quotes suggest a sense of adhering to cultural norms and attaining expectations. Participants seem clear about moral right and wrong, and an integral desire to do what will support their own health and well-being. Their aspirations are clearly influenced by interpersonal connections and striving to maintain these objectives becomes a protective influence, as does their sense of agency

(derived from competence and competence) within their own developmental trajectories.

3.2.7. Wisdom and advice

This final theme represents quotes in which participants expressed some life philosophy or theory, observed patterns, or offered general rules to live by. Many of these quotes include messages about not quitting or giving up. Some of the youth expressed advice to stay focused on one's own needs, such as, "Make yourself happy...because everything is about me...it's not about them... It's about my life...it's about making myself happy...making myself better...so those people are helping you to encourage you...you need to do it..." Several quotes in this theme referenced their own experiences as inspiration or role models for others. For example, "...what I tried to do show them that oh I am in college I graduated from college you should do the same, and uh that would be my message by graduating from college I am showing you that yeah I used to live around here just like you guys but it's definitely possible especially with the [afterschool program] and all the resources." The importance of encouragement came up in this theme as well, such as advice to encourage and talk to youth about staying on the right path. Another aspect of this subtheme occurred in several quotes suggesting strategies for helping children, such as listening to, and acknowledging individual and unique struggles.

This theme gives us direct insight into what these young adult participants believe is needed to thrive despite adversities faced growing up in the same environments they did and exposed to similar-risks and resources. The strongest messages seem to be instilling a sense that it is possible to succeed, the importance of maintaining the pathway of doing the right thing, and providing support and encouragement for each individual through their own unique struggles. Essentially this theme seems to be about being resilient through incorporating the 5 Cs, with the goal of the 6th C of contribution.

3.3. Integrated model of risk, protection, resilience, and PYD

Fig. 3 portrays an integrated risk, protection, resilience, and PYD model which includes the themes found in our analyses. Included in this figure is our conceptualization of how principles of risk, protection, and PYD interact and foster resilience. The themes *challenges* and *resources that support development* are congruent to a large extent with the constructs of risk and protection and the *coping* theme is depicted in the combining of these constructs in the process of developing resilience. This process funnels into the development of the 5 Cs of PYD (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring), which develop into the 6th C (contribution). Our findings suggest that the theme of *competence and confidence* is most closely reflective of the PYD constructs with the same names. *Caring and compassion* links the PYD principles of connection and caring with contribution. *Aspirations and well-being* is shown as closely related to the PYD construct character, and also as intermediate in the development between the 5 Cs PYDs toward becoming the 6th C, contribution. The PYD constructs are in circle that is porous to represent that they are constantly influenced by factors in the social ecology. As the 5 Cs develop, they become protective influences and thus the double arrow at the bottom of the figure depicts the entire dynamic processes of the developing PYD characteristics as feeding back into the processes that are involved in resilience. At the same time, exposure to new and ongoing risk and protective factors are likely to have direct influence on the 5 Cs.

We note "opportunities to contribute" at the intersection of risk and protection because our findings suggest that when young people are placed in roles or circumstances in which they have the opportunity to be contributing, responsible, resources themselves, they are apt to develop resilience and PYD characteristics, regardless of whether the opportunity arose from a difficult challenge such as taking care of younger siblings, or through a positive resource like a youth services program.

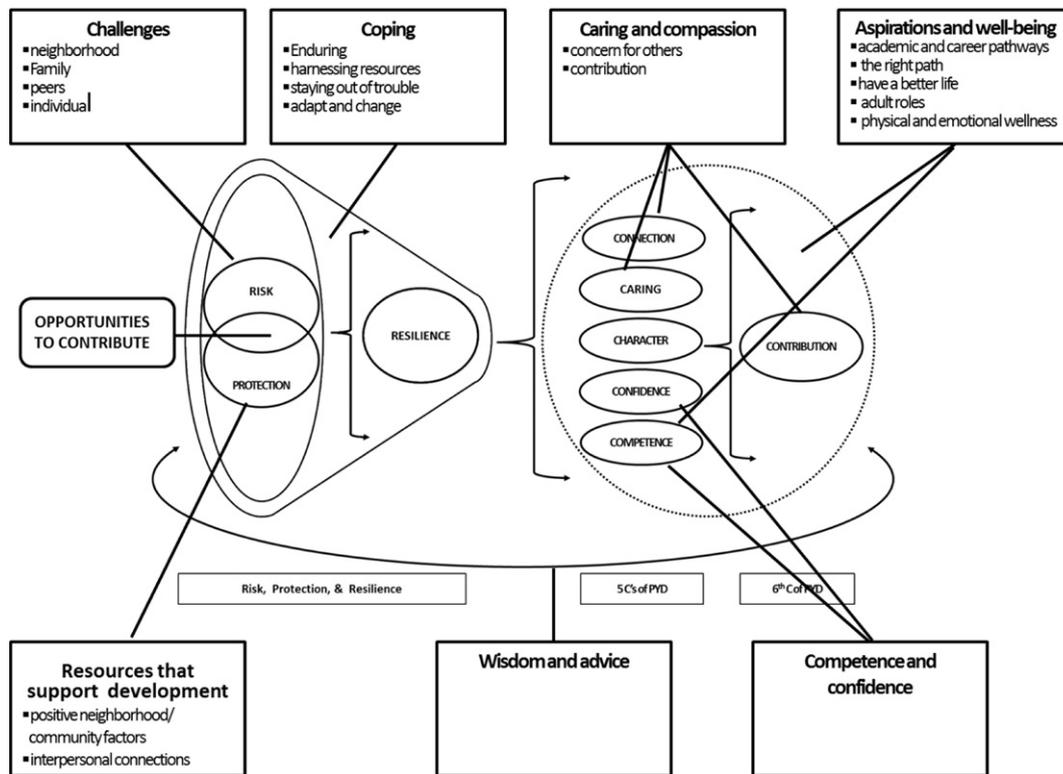


Fig. 3. Integrated model of risk, protection, resilience, and PYD.

4. Discussion

This study used a PYD perspective to examine elements of risk, protection, and resilience in a sample of older adolescents and young adults who were exposed to elevated levels of risk as children. We arrived at seven themes that demonstrate congruence with constructs of risk, protection, resilience, and PYD. We defined the themes and subthemes in the data and discussed how our themes reflected these constructs and explored how the inter-relationships among these constructs manifest in the lived experiences of adolescents and young adults in our sample.

Study findings offer initial evidence to support the integration of the theoretical frameworks of risk, protection and resilience, and PYD. Results also support the need to recognize both risk and positive influences in the lives of young people. PYD aims to enhance positive characteristics and factors in youth and young adults. However, our findings suggest that it is also important for interventions and community-based programs to acknowledge the very real risk factors and structural disadvantages facing young people who grow up in poverty. Considering risk factors—in tandem with protective influences and PYD constructs—validates the experiences of young people and offers important targets for prevention and intervention efforts. Thus, it is imperative that practitioners and policymakers recognize both risk and adversity and positive attributes and influences in young people's lives as they strive to implement PYD principles and programs in community settings.

Findings emphasize the value of providing opportunities for young people to contribute to others and to their social environments before they enter late adolescence and young adulthood. It is interesting to note that in the PYD literature the 6th C of *contribution* is hypothesized to be a product or result of young people achieving some level of proficiency in the 5 Cs. However, our findings suggest that the act of contributing and the relationships fostered through what Lerner et al. (2005) identify as *contribution* tend to actually promote proficiency in the other Cs and in related PYD characteristics. For example, young people in our sample were frequently placed in a position that required them

to make significant contributions to others; to illustrate, the participants were teaching or tutoring in the youth services program, and some were caring for siblings or ailing parents at a young age. It is very likely that these opportunities helped foster PYD characteristics in participants. From this perspective it appears that creating opportunities to contribute is likely to be a key to fostering PYD characteristics and resilience in young adults. Interventions that create opportunities for civic engagement such as volunteer work and political advocacy may be particularly valuable, particularly for young adults whose roles in the broader political society are forming. Unfortunately, opportunities for civic engagement are often lacking for young people with limited wealth; regardless, increasing involvement in activism for marginalized youth is one means of promoting positive development among young people (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

This finding may hold part of the key to effective interventions for youth from disadvantage as they transition to adulthood. For instance, part of living through frightening or painful early childhood experiences is likely to involve a feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to exercise control. Such experiences might threaten adolescents from developing a strong sense of autonomy and competence. In addition, with limited employment options there are fewer opportunities for them to be integral, contributing members of society and community, making it even harder for young people in transition to adulthood even less likely to continue to develop the PYD attributes necessary to thrive when they need them the most. Young people who have had opportunities to contribute in real ways are likely to develop the 5 Cs and may be more likely to be tenacious and able to harness community and interpersonal resources toward finding a successful pathway.

4.1. Limitations

The current analysis did not facilitate assessing developmental differences between adolescents and young adults even though shifts in social ecologies and maturation were certainly occurring with our participants and an obvious change had occurred from high school to

college for the young adult participants. None of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis could be delineated by age group. We discussed a few instances in the data that may have been developmental differences but ultimately felt we could not distinguish between the adolescent and young adult data beyond a few superficial observations that could easily be attributed to being in college versus being in high school (i.e. concerns about choosing academic majors versus other academic struggles). A far stronger observation was made that the lines between the age groups were unclear. This observation is congruent with research that has found that many young adults themselves are unsure of where they stand with regard to their status as an adolescent or adult (Arnett, 2000). Future research that aims to understand developmental differences between adolescence and young adulthood might apply a lens of developmental theories to analyze the data might yield important knowledge.

Adolescent (high school) participants in this study completed an agreement with a local youth services program to provide technology skills and support to younger youth during the course of the study. Some of these same youth are offered tuition scholarships to attend college after they graduate from high school. Hence, the participants in our study gained substantial rewards that could have influenced how they responded to the qualitative interview questions. In addition, even though our sampling method helped control for differential exposure to program activities, there are likely to be differences in the dosage and specific agency program components the participants received that could lend differential influence on how the constructs manifest among the participants.

This study employed 2 types of data collection, individual interviews with the college student participants and focus groups with the high school participants. Although there are obvious qualitative differences between the data collected in these methods, we did not discern any differences in the quality of the data between the two types of transcripts, i.e., the richness and authenticity of the stories. The individual interviews benefitted from the privacy, individualized dialogue, and undivided attention they offer. On the other hand, participants in the focus groups seemed to enjoy the dynamic of the group discussion and to build on each other's thoughts. There might have also been differences in the data that we were not able to observe. For example, in focus groups "the dialogue that takes place among participants from similar sociocultural backgrounds may be more textured, less formal, and less regulated than that between an interviewer and [an individual] respondent" (Hughes & DuMont, 2002, p. 284). The similarity of cultural background among focus group members can also promote disclosures that would not be shared in a one-to-one interview setting (Hughes & DuMont).

Another important note is that the researchers were interested in understanding what it was like for the participants to grow up in their neighborhoods and therefore the data is heavy on this content. Future studies might want to place more explicit focus on other domains of the social ecology such as the family and school experiences.

Finally, the sample is small and unique to the specific cultural context and should not be generalized beyond the participants involved in the study. Because the sample was small and extremely diverse, we knew that if we provided any demographic information with the quotes that we risked violating the participants' confidentiality. In addition our sample size did not allow for any reasonable comparisons to be made about gender or any other demographics. Future research is needed to see how the template of themes is congruent or not with the experiences of other samples of emerging adults, particularly those who grew up within the same context and challenges but did not have access to the same resources.

5. Conclusion

Constructs of risk, protection, and resilience are present in the lives of all adolescents and young adults. These constructs take on special

meaning in the lives of young people who grow up in conditions of poverty. Principles of PYD offer a practical way to view elements of risk, protection, and resilience in vulnerable adolescents and young adults. Our findings provide qualitative evidence aimed at increasing current knowledge of how risk, protection, resilience, and PYD constructs interact in the lives of young people living in poverty. These findings should be considered in the design and evaluation of preventive interventions aimed at reducing poverty and improving outcomes for adolescents and young adults.

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