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Abstract

Syracuse, NY has a long history of poverty, crime, and low academic performance, especially in communities that Black residents call home. *A Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of Black Participants and Their Life Satisfaction in Relation to Living in Syracuse* is an exploratory study that examines the life satisfaction of Black residents of Syracuse, NY, as well as what aspects of their lives most affect--and are most affected by--their overall life satisfaction. The theory that guided this research is the bottom-up life satisfaction theory, which states that overall life satisfaction is dependent upon how an individual weighs their own satisfaction with different domains of their lives. Nine participants signed up and met the criteria to participate in a semi-structured focus group that involved discussions relating to life satisfaction, adolescent experiences, relationships, government, community resources, and more. The voiced experiences and perspectives of participants led to over 60 pages of audio transcriptions. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of this study revealed three main themes: Community Connectedness, Residential Environment, and Adolescent Experiences. Within these main themes, eight subthemes were identified. The results of the analysis are discussed further in the paper.

A Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of Black Participants and Their Life Satisfaction in
Relation to Living in Syracuse

By

Shalyce Wilson

B.S. Syracuse University, 2022

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Pan
African Studies

Syracuse University

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem

Syracuse, NY, a mid-sized city in the heart of New York State with about 148,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), has a history of poverty, crime, and poor academic performance. Census data from 2020 shows that Syracuse ranked 4th in overall poverty among US cities with at least 100,000 people and 14th among cities with at least 50,000 residents, as there are over 38,000 people living below the poverty line, or 30.3% of the population (Tampone, 2022).

Regarding criminal activity in Syracuse, violent crime [e.g. robbery, sexual assault, assault, and murder (National Institute of Justice, n.d.)] is the most common crime committed (Eisenstadt & Dowty, 2022). In 2021, the United States had a murder rate of 6.52 per 100,000 residents, while Syracuse had about three times that rate in the same year at 19.85 per 100,000 residents (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022).

Furthermore, standardized test scores have been significantly low for students in the Syracuse City School District compared to other districts in New York State (Doran & Tampone, 2023; Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). For the 2022-23 school year, 52% of 3rd through 8th grade students in New York State were proficient in math and 48% were proficient in English language arts (ELA) (Doran & Tampone, 2023). For students in the same year and grades in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD), 8.3% were proficient in math and 17.2% were proficient in ELA (Doran & Tampone, 2023).

In this introduction, I will discuss Syracuse's crime and poverty reduction programs and initiatives, as well as its efforts to improve academic performance among students; present the objective of this research; and discuss the overarching theoretical framework guiding this

research. I will also discuss the methodology used to conduct this research and why the chosen analysis strategy was most appropriate.

Programs & Initiatives

Recently, there have been attempts to reduce crime and poverty and increase academic performance among the residents of Syracuse. In 2019, Syracuse was given \$1.7 million from New York State's Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative, which The United Way of Central New York distributed between 10 organizations on behalf of Greater Syracuse Hope. These organizations were Coordinated Care Services; Street Addiction Institute; PEACE Inc.; Home HeadQuarters, Inc.; Syracuse Northeast Community Center; Good Life Youth Foundation; SUNY Educational Opportunity Center; Syracuse Model Neighborhood Facility; Jubilee Homes of Syracuse; and The Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County (Eisenstadt, 2019; WHCU Radio, 2019). All of these organizations are dedicated to helping community members and the majority of them are nonprofit. They serve the Syracuse community in areas of health support (e.g. mental, physical, sexual, behavioral), housing support (e.g. homeownership education, providing affordable housing), socioeconomic support (e.g. job search, tutoring, academic advice), and legal support.

The organizations used the money from New York State's Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative to strengthen existing programs or implement new ones to provide community members with job readiness support, financial literacy and counseling, workforce re-entry support, career planning, mentoring, employment-related transportation, and small-business counseling (Eisenstadt, 2019; WHCU Radio, 2019). The organizations also implemented or strengthened programs to improve academic performance with this state funded

money, including dropout prevention, mentoring and networking, promoting school attendance, and increasing family involvement in students' lives (Eisenstadt, 2019; WHCU Radio, 2019). The money from New York State was useful and much needed to help the poverty and poor academic performance in Syracuse.

The City of Syracuse has also implemented some programs of their own to help those who live in poverty. One is the Syracuse Build Pathways to Apprenticeship Program, which is a program that provides participants with construction education and skills while also providing them with a stipend (Moore, 2022). The participants learn skills that may lead to various jobs in the construction field or apprenticeship programs to further their education in the field (City of Syracuse Public Information Officer, 2022; Moore, 2022). The 11-week pre-apprenticeship program is open to everyone but is targeted for women, people of color, and veterans (City of Syracuse Public Information Officer, 2022). The program has proved successful in its first year with multiple cohorts of graduates and many of them continuing to work in construction or entering an apprenticeship program (City of Syracuse Public Information Officer, 2022). In further efforts, in 2022 the City of Syracuse designated \$11 million toward housing development and \$4 million to lead removal for safe and affordable housing, as well as funding summer youth employment programs.

Crime reduction efforts have been very prominent in recent years. One program that has proved to be successful is the Syracuse Gun Buyback program, an event first hosted in 2021 by the Office of the New York State Attorney General and Syracuse Police Department in an effort to reduce gun violence and make the city safer. People who return firearms are given a money incentive and will not be asked questions or have charges filed against them by law enforcement (Hatch, 2023), in hopes that it will encourage those who committed crimes in the past or want to

remove themselves from gangs to turn guns in without worrying about their freedom. According to the Office of the New York State Attorney General (2023), over a span of two years (2021-2023) 582 guns were returned to Syracuse's buyback program. City and state officials say that this program keeps guns from falling into the hands of those who would use them for criminal acts, helps remove unwanted and unmonitored guns from homes, and overall reduces gun violence in the community (Office of the New York State Attorney General, 2023).

A less favored program implemented by the Syracuse Common Council is the Syracuse Safer Streets program. This program aims to create a safer community and improve the lives of gang members by getting them off the streets and into the workforce by providing physical, mental and emotional support (e.g. conflict management, mentoring, job and educational opportunities, and therapy) (Walsh, 2023; Newcomb, 2023). When the program was first introduced in the beginning of 2023, it received a lot of negative feedback from city officials and community members. They did not agree with the initial plan to pay program participants \$100 each week for up to four months for staying out of trouble because the participants would have been gang members or troubled young adults (Newcomb, 2023; Walsh, 2023). The program was revised and approved in August 2023 to only pay the participants once they enter the workforce or are on a solid track to do so (Newcomb, 2023). The Syracuse Safer Streets program will use its \$1 million funding to support 50 young adults ages 18-24 on their path to a better life (Newcomb, 2023). Since the program is new, there is no solid evidence of whether it has been effective in reducing gun violence in Syracuse and helping gang members get on a better life path.

These programs and initiatives implemented by both the City of Syracuse and New York State are just a few of many efforts to reduce poverty and crime and improve academic

performance in Syracuse. They aim to create long-term solutions for the residents of Syracuse, such as providing job training and financial literacy counseling, rather than temporary solutions. The programs target the Black and Latinx community who are most affected by poverty and crime and focus on creating an impact to make Syracuse a better place for current residents and future generations. While they have good intentions and appear to be helpful to the community, the issues seem to get worse rather than improve as the years go on, which will be discussed further in this paper.

Research Objective

With my research, I aimed to take a person-centered approach to explore how Black participants from Syracuse perceive their own life satisfaction in different domains of their lives. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine (1) life satisfaction in Black participants from Syracuse, NY; (2) the role of adolescent experiences on the current life satisfaction of these participants; (3) and the relationship between participants' life satisfaction and their social connectedness. The questions that guided my research are: (1) "what factors play a role in the life satisfaction of Black participants in Syracuse, NY?" and (2) "what effect do these factors have on them and their community?" It is clear that the City of Syracuse is concerned about crime, poverty, and low academic performance, but I was interested in hearing the perspectives and experiences of those who are most directly affected by it and are exposed to it daily. By examining their life satisfaction, I was able to assess the participants' satisfactions and dissatisfactions with living in and being raised in Syracuse, which may be impacted by poverty and crime, as well as contribute to it. I was also able to examine what they believe needs

to be done to reduce the crime and poverty rates and increase academic performance in Syracuse, as well as overall improve the lives of Black Syracuse residents.

Theoretical Framework

Life satisfaction, also known as subjective well-being, is an important and growing topic in positive psychology, which is the study of the positive aspects of individuals' lives and plays a significant role in mental health and well-being (Eid & Larson, 2008). The theoretical framework guiding this thesis is the "bottom-up" life satisfaction theory, which argues that overall life satisfaction is dependent on how satisfied an individual is with different life domains. This means that individuals first assess contentment with different aspects of their lives before considering their overall life satisfaction (Lucas, 2014). However, their overall contentment with life is also dependent on how they weigh each life domain (Lucas, 2014). For example, if a person is satisfied with their family life and job environment but dissatisfied with the amount of income they receive, they may have perceived low life satisfaction if they weigh income more than the other two domains. The alternative model to this approach is the "top-down" life satisfaction theory, which believes that when assessing their life satisfaction, people first judge their overall life satisfaction then apply this general feeling to their contentment with different life domains (Lucas, 2014).

Although research has been published to support both theories, I believe that the "bottom-up" theory is most relevant for this research. When reviewing previous academic work for my literature review, although not explicitly stated, it is obvious that almost every study on life satisfaction examined it from a "bottom up" approach, focusing on how certain life domains affect overall life satisfaction, rather than how overall life satisfaction affects different domains.

Examining life satisfaction of Black Syracuse residents from a “bottom-up” approach allows me to use discussion to explore what domains of life the participants find most important and how these domains contribute to their perceived overall life satisfaction. Instead of focusing the conversation on perceived overall life satisfaction, I focus it on the domains of life that research suggests has the biggest influence on overall life satisfaction to see how participants feel about and weigh these domains.

This thesis contributes to positive psychology, more specifically life satisfaction, in multiple ways. First, not many studies on life satisfaction gather qualitative data and instead collect quantitative data through surveys. By hosting focus groups, I was able to examine life satisfaction with different life domains on a deeper and more intimate level than most surveys allow. I was able to ask questions to go beneath the surface of satisfaction to discover why the participants feel how they do. Focus groups also allow participants to lead the conversation, which means it was possible for them to bring up thoughts and ideas that call for further research and may have not been previously studied. Lastly, this study examines life satisfaction in relation to living in Syracuse, an area of high crime and poverty and low academic performance. Findings from this study may lead to further research on the lives of Syracuse residents and ways to improve their lives and the city overall.

Research Design and Methodology

I held two 90-minute in-person focus groups to examine the life satisfaction of the participants by bringing different domains of life into an informal conversation. The focus groups were ideally the same but were held at different times on different days of the week to attend to different people’s availability. For this study's purposes, demographic information and

focus group data was combined in the analysis to allow for aggregate data analysis among the participants, which has been done in previous studies (see, e.g. Dahlan et al., 2010; Keane et al., 2012). This allows me to easily find trends in the data and for conclusions to be drawn based on who my participants are as a group, rather than comparing smaller subgroups or each person individually (Chatterji et al., 2023, p. 88). This fusion of data, along with providing anonymity in the report of results was also done to create a vulnerable and comfortable space for participants to express themselves and tell their stories. Participants were recruited via social media (i.e. Instagram and Facebook) and snowball sampling. They also invited family and/or friends to join the focus group and contribute to the study.

Inclusionary Criterion

To participate in the focus groups individuals had to be at least 18 years old, identify as Black, currently live in Syracuse, and have attended high school in a Syracuse zip code for a minimum of two years. For the purposes of this study, Black is considered a race rather than an ethnicity, meaning that individuals who identified as Black because of ethnicities other than African American (e.g. Jamaican, Liberian, Bahamian, etc.) met the racial criteria for the study. Nine participants in total met all the criteria and were allowed to choose which focus group best fit their schedule. At the end of the focus group each participant received a \$15 Visa Gift Card to compensate for their time and effort.

To determine eligibility and collect demographic information on the participants, they were asked to complete a questionnaire through Qualtrics before being given the location and time of the focus group sessions. The demographic results of participants are reported in the next section.

Demographic Results

The demographic information of the participants was collected through Qualtrics. This study originally aimed to focus on experiences of both Black and Latinx people; however, all the people who participated in the focus groups identified as Black, except one who identified with multiple races (Black and Native American). All the participants also identified as women. The average age of participants was 27.56 years old; however, the ages were not evenly distributed. Six of the nine participants were between ages 18 and 25, while the other three were between ages 38 and 45 (see Figure 1). This age gap between participants may be a limitation of the study because it creates an information gap. Individuals ages 26-37 hold valuable information to this research because of experiences that may have been unique to their age group. All participants in the current study spent four years in and earned a diploma from a high school in Syracuse. One participant's highest education level was a high school diploma, 4 participants had some college education but no degree, two earned a bachelor's degree, and two earned a master's degree (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

Age of Participants

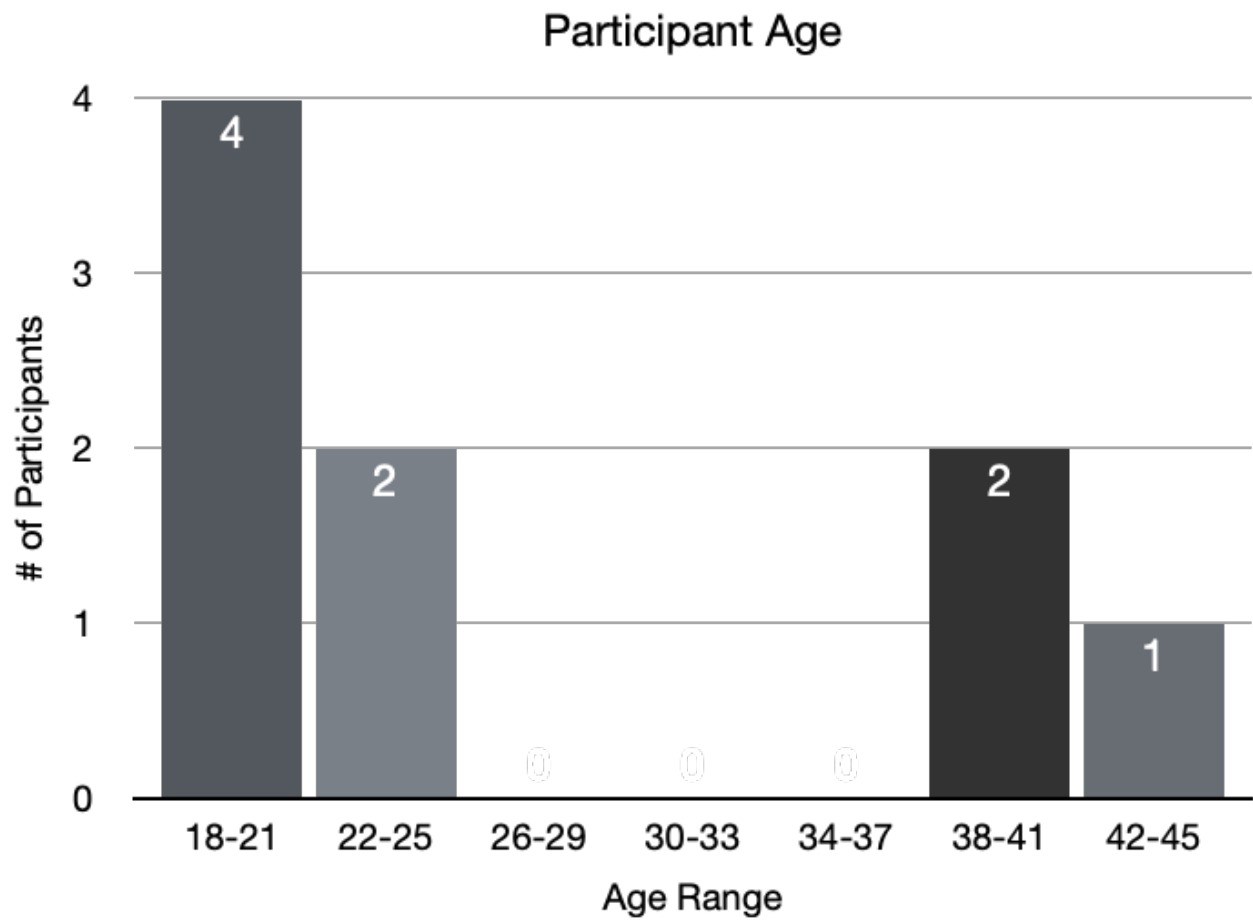
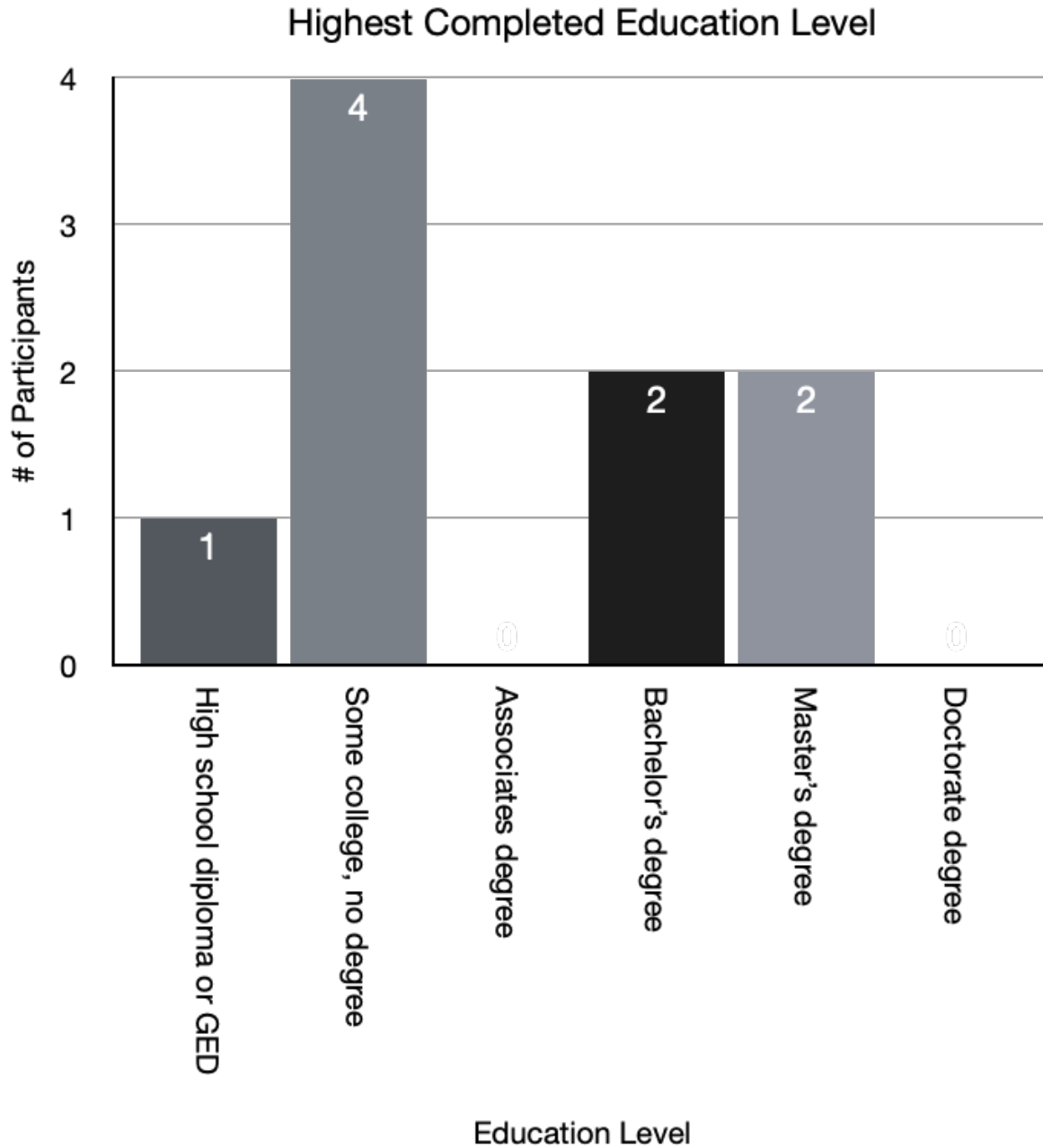


Figure 2

Education Level of Participants



Data Collection and Analysis

The focus groups were semi-structured, meaning guiding questions related to life domains, such as income, safety, and relationships, were provided. These guiding questions were created based on the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Harmony in Life Scale (HILS). Each questionnaire includes five measures of psychological well-being and is measured on a 7-

point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree (Kjell et al., 2016). The SWLS was created for people to reflect on their current lives and compare it to what they expected for themselves, whereas the HILS was more recently created to compliment the SWLS and give a more holistic approach to subjective well-being by focusing on an individual's psychological balance and flexibility (Kjell et al., 2016). The Harmony in Life Scale focuses on interconnectedness, selflessness, safety, and peace, with its five statements: (1) My lifestyle allows me to be in harmony; (2) Most aspects of my life are in balance; (3) I am in harmony; (4) I accept the various conditions of my life; (5) I fit in well with my surroundings. The Satisfaction with Life Scale's five statements focus more on independence, self-centeredness, achievement, and power: (1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal; (2) The conditions of my life are excellent; (3) I am satisfied with my life; (4) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life and; (5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing (Kjell et al., 2016). A few guiding questions used in the focus groups that derived from these two scales are (a) Do you feel a sense of connectedness within your community? (b) What are your thoughts on the City of Syracuse's attempts to reduce crime? (c) Would you want to give your children the childhood you had? These questions allowed me to better assess participants' satisfaction with different aspects of their lives than a survey because they gave specific answers and examples. In a focus group, they were able to expand on the answer they would have given for each survey response with more details and unique experiences.

Although there were guiding questions, participants were allowed and encouraged to lead the conversation and bounce thoughts off one another because I wanted them to feel heard and the conversation to flow effortlessly without seeming rushed. I only intervened when the conversations got off topic or were repetitive because I wanted to maximize our time together.

This also allowed topics to arise that were not a part of my guiding questions. Before beginning each group, I helped make the atmosphere comfortable and relaxed by reminding the participants that they all have a few things in common—spending part or all their youth in Syracuse, attending high school in Syracuse, and currently living there. This reminded them that their experiences may not be foreign to one another and that others in the room may relate to their experiences more than others who do not have as many ties to Syracuse. I also reminded them that I too grew up in Syracuse, attended a Syracuse high school, and currently live there.

The focus groups were audio recorded over Zoom and uploaded to and transcribed by Rev’s AI transcription services. I then matched the transcription to the audio manually to cross check for errors and make necessary corrections, as well as get familiar with the data.

The data from both focus groups was combined and manually analyzed using thematic analysis. As defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a flexible six-step method used in qualitative research that allows a researcher to identify, analyze and report themes that occur throughout the data. The six steps are as follows: (1) familiarize yourself with the data; (2) generate initial codes; (3) search for themes; (4) review themes; (5) define and name themes; (6) produce the report. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), many decisions must be made to specify how you will conduct thematic analysis. For this study, a theoretical thematic analysis was done at a latent level. A ‘theoretical’ thematic analysis means that the data was coded to answer specific research questions, rather than the data developing the questions to be researched (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In other words, the analysis is analyst-driven and not data-driven. Latent level coding means that the researcher goes beyond the surface of what the participant said and makes assumptions to further interpret the data and draw conclusions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

By analyzing the focus group data this way, I established themes related to the research questions and used my own knowledge and existing literature on both life satisfaction and Syracuse to give meaning to the data beyond what was said outright. Themes were identified based on what topics were discussed most often and how passionate participants seemed about these topics. I used what participants said, as well as non-verbal communications (e.g. facial expressions, hand gestures, head nods), about their experiences growing up and living in Syracuse to make assumptions about their overall life satisfaction. Thematic analysis was the best analytical technique to analyze the focus groups because according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is time-efficient, summarizes and organizes large sets of data, allows interpretations of the data, and has proven successful with analyzing experiences and perspectives from participants.

Chapter 2 concentrates on bringing existing academic literature on life satisfaction into conversation with previously collected data and research on Syracuse, NY crime, poverty, and primary and secondary school performance. The chapter demonstrates how findings from previous research on life satisfaction may relate to people in Syracuse. Chapter 2 will also highlight the gaps in existing research and explain how this study will be beneficial. It will also explain why the chosen methodology for this study is appropriate.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Qualitative Research on Life Satisfaction

Existing academic literature on life satisfaction varies in methodology, especially data collection and analysis plan. I have found that most studies on the topic use quantitative data collection in the form of questionnaires or surveys to assess life satisfaction (see, e.g, Barger et al., 2009; Powdthavee, 2008; Song & Appleton, 2008). Many other studies take a mixed methods approach and use both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data and analyze participants' life satisfaction, usually utilizing surveys and interviews or focus groups (see, Dahlan et al., 2010; Ramos et al., 2017; Suldo et al., 2014). A mixed methods approach allows for each method to complement the other and strengthen the overall results (Dahlan et al., 2010). The initial plan of my study was to take a mixed methods approach using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Harmony in Life Scale (HILS) in a single survey format, then invite participants to an optional focus group to expand on their answers. Dahlan (2010) took a similar approach, using the SWLS then following with semi-structured focus groups to examine the life satisfaction of elderly living in Malaysian institutions. However, the initial survey in my study was unsuccessful due to low participation since the number of participants that signed up would have not created significant statistical results. Continuing the study with the focus group as the only method of data collection allowed for significant data to be collected with a smaller number of participants. They were also able to give more detailed responses than the surveys alone would have allowed. According to Suldo (2014) qualitative methods allow researchers to explore topics related to a specific domain in depth. Further, focus groups encourage participants to bounce ideas off each other, since different individual experiences may invoke thought in another participant. It also allows participants to agree or disagree with each other, giving the

data strength due to commonality of beliefs and ideas, or lack thereof. Puchta and Potter (2004; as cited in Acocella & Cataldi, 2021) believe that participant interaction with each other and the moderator plays a significant role in the overall data collection because it provides useful information to the goal of the study.

Determinants and Effects of Life Satisfaction

Previous research has demonstrated that there are many determining factors of life satisfaction, including but not limited to employment status, disability status, health, marital status, emotional support, and social integration (Barger et al., 2009). However, some of these topics have a stronger relationship with life satisfaction than others. The rest of this chapter will discuss what life domains play a role in life satisfaction and how significant this role is, and the effects of life satisfaction on these same domains.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is a relatively new concept that can be defined as the relationship or subjective experience individuals have with other people (Van Bel et al., 2009). It is measured by both the quantity and quality of those relationships and may be demonstrated intimately or platonically, as well as through basic interactions with strangers or acquaintances (Van Bel et al., 2009). Social connectedness can affect an individual's sense of belonging and their interpretations of the quality of their support system and self-value, which may in turn impact their overall life satisfaction (Van Bel et al., 2009).

People tend to give a lot of value to their social status, or their relative importance within society (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Research shows that individuals who regularly

participated in social activities and social interactions reported higher life satisfaction than those who did not engage as much (Olasupo et al., 2021). One study found participants' voluntary activity in organizations was positively correlated to meaning in life (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2009), and meaning in life is positively correlated with life satisfaction (Steger & Kashdan, 2007, as cited in Stavrova & Luhmann, 2009). Further, some studies suggest that people believe being connected to their community and other people is more important than the individual relationships one holds (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2009).

These correlations between life satisfaction and social connectedness may be present because of the possibility that more participation in social activities creates a feeling of importance in society. Some research suggests that social interactions and personal relationships play a bigger role in life satisfaction than increases in income (Barger et al., 2009; Powdthavee, 2008), indicating that social status may be valued much more. Further supporting this idea, Appleton and Song (2008) found that social status had a stronger correlation with life satisfaction than current income, income compared to others, and income now compared to the past. People were more satisfied with their lives based on their status in society than absolute, relative, and the growth of income.

Social connectedness has also been found to be a strong mediator of the relationship between life satisfaction and emotional intelligence, which is the ability to manage your own and understand others' emotions (Olasupo et al., 2017). Olasupo et al. (2017) found that as emotional intelligence increases, social connectedness increases, which in turn leads to an increase in life satisfaction. They also found that those who had a more optimistic outlook on life tended to have greater emotional intelligence, which is associated with higher life satisfaction.

Relationships with adults have a significant impact on youth and their life satisfaction. Paxton et al. (2006) conducted a quantitative study on 2131 White (57%) and African American (43%) middle school students to examine the relationship between life satisfaction in adolescents and their ability to bond with adults in their communities and develop meaningful roles. Researchers found that opportunities for bonding with adults in the community and having a meaningful role in the neighborhood was positively correlated with higher life satisfaction among middle school students; however, this was more so the case for White students than African American students (Paxton et al., 2006). In this same study, demographic data collected from the participants demonstrated that White students were about six times more likely to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than Black students (Paxton et al., 2006). Considering both findings, researchers believe it is possible that Black students have less opportunities to bond with positive adults and hold meaningful community roles than their White peers due to a lack of material resources in their community, which further leads to lower life satisfaction (Paxton et al., 2006). Further, adults in their communities, including in their households, may not be as active in their lives or have limited material resources themselves, as research on Syracuse suggests. Also demonstrating how adult-youth relationships are significant in overall life satisfaction, Morenoff et al., (2000, as cited in Balestra & Sultan, 2013) suggested that close-knit neighborhoods allow children to receive advice and support from adults, making them less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors (e.g. smoking, drinking, gang involvement, use of drugs).

Many of the young Syracuse men who partake in violent crimes do so due to living in poverty and the lack of parental structure at home (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). Many of them are living in survival mode and doing whatever is necessary to make ends meet. They often come from low-income families that have trouble providing housing and nutrition, so they see

gangs as an opportunity to make quick money and provide a decent living for them and their families (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). Not only do they join gangs for basic needs, but they join for a sense of family and community that they do not have at home (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022), which will be discussed in detail shortly.

Family Dynamic & Structure

Social connectedness may also be demonstrated through close relationships, which are one of the strongest determinants of how satisfied an individual is with their life. This is especially the case for relationships related to family dynamic and structure. Within the family dynamic, research has shown that marital status is strongly associated with life satisfaction in adults. Those who are married tend to report greater life satisfaction (Powdthavee, 2008; Song & Appleton, 2008; Stavrova & Luhmann, 2016), while those who are widowed or divorced were found to report lower life satisfaction, similar to that of an individual who was never married (Powdthavee, 2008; Song & Appleton, 2008). It is estimated that in 2022, about 32% of Syracuse men and 30% of Syracuse women ages twenty and up were married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Also, research has found that women were more likely to be satisfied with their family life than men (Toth et al., 2002). Having dependents in the same household was also positively correlated with life satisfaction. Those who had dependent children had higher reports of overall life satisfaction than those who did not (Song & Appleton, 2008), and more specifically, having dependent children under the age of six was correlated with higher family life satisfaction (Toth et al., 2002). There was also an increase in overall life satisfaction for those who had dependent parents living in their households (Song & Appleton, 2008). Research also demonstrates that family life satisfaction significantly increases when individuals are

satisfied with their community and vice versa; however, having small children under the age of six often results in lower community satisfaction (Toth et al., 2002), which in turn may result in lower family life satisfaction.

The effects of family dynamic and structure on life satisfaction remain consistent across the lifespan, especially when examining youth who engage in risky or trouble behaviors. One study by Vashisht & Tanwar (2018) found that youth under 18 who have committed crimes and lived with their parents are significantly more likely to be satisfied with their lives and have higher levels of resilience than those who live with another guardian. In this context, resilience means being able to overcome previous stressful situations and do better, meaning that the youth who lived with their parents had a better chance of turning their lives around and not continuing their criminal behavior than the youth who lived with other guardians (Vashisht & Tanwar, 2018). On the contrary, some research suggests that the perceived quality of family life has more of an influence on youth partaking in violent behaviors (carrying guns and other weapons and physical altercations) than whether they live within a nuclear family structure (Macdonald et al., 2005). Between 2016 and 2022, thirty teenagers were charged with homicide in Syracuse, which gives the city one of the country's highest rates for youth charged with this crime (Eisenstadt & Dowty, 2022). Only one of the thirty teenagers who were charged with homicide during this time was White and all except three of the victims were people of color, mostly Black or African American. Almost all perpetrators and victims came from poor neighborhoods within the city that housed mostly people of color (Eisenstadt & Dowty, 2022).

Twenty-five of these teens used a gun to commit their crime (Eisenstadt & Dowty, 2022). From 2012 to 2021, firearms accounted for 73% of all the homicides in Syracuse, and 79% solely from 2016 to 2021 (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022), making them the most popular

weapon used in violent crimes in the city. Fifteen out of 18 homicides reported for 2022 were a result of guns (Hayes, 2023). There were 716 shots-fired incidents reported in 2022, which was about 100 more than reported in 2021 (Hayes, 2023).

Syracuse community members and officials believe that Syracuse youth join gangs because it gives them a sense of protection and acceptance that they may not get at home from their family (Eisenstadt & Dowty, 2022; Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). Gang activity is the leading factor of violent crimes in Syracuse, with personal disputes following. From 2012 to 2021 they accounted for 37% and 24% of homicides, respectively (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). The pattern of gang membership and gun violence in Syracuse follows teens into young adulthood, as men in their 20s tend to be homicide victims more than anyone else in the city (Hayes, 2023; Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). Further, in 2022, two homicide victims were 19 years old, and one victim was an 11-month-old infant (Hayes, 2023).

Race

Although an indirect effect, race has an impact on life satisfaction. People of different races experience life differently due to historical discrimination against people of color and them being viewed as racially inferior. In a study that drew data from a nationally representative sample of American adults, racial minorities reported being less satisfied with their family life than their white counterparts when they lived in urban settings; however, there was no racial difference for those from rural settings (Toth et al., 2002). Barger et al. (2009) found that White people had a higher overall life satisfaction than both Black and Hispanic people. When asked questions about different areas of life satisfaction from a life satisfaction assessment, those who identified as White were more likely to choose very satisfied, while those who identified as

Black and Hispanic were more likely to choose satisfied (Barger et al, 2009). However, when controlling for socioeconomic status these differences in overall life satisfaction lessened between White and Black people and were completely eliminated for White and Hispanic people (Barger et al., 2009). Another study found that African American middle school students (6th-8th grade) are more likely to live in non-intact families than White students, which means they are more likely to live in single-parent households or with guardians other than their parents (Paxton et al., 2006). As mentioned before, youth under eighteen that committed crimes and lived with their parents reported higher life satisfaction than those who lived with another guardian (Vashisht & Tanwar, 2018). Taking these findings from the two studies into consideration, it can be assumed that there is a positive correlation between living in non-intact families and life satisfaction for the African American middle school students in the study by Paxton et al. (2006).

Racial differences in life satisfaction may be due to historical discrimination and systemic oppression. This discrimination may lead to generational poverty, underfunded school systems, increased crime rates, distrust in the police and political system and other long-lasting issues within communities of color. Research shows that during the urban renewal period in the mid-1900s, African Americans suffered more from displacement than any other racial and ethnic group (see, e.g., Hyra, 2012; Rheingold, Fitzpatrick, & Hofeld, 2001). This is evident in Syracuse, NY with the demolition of the 15th Ward for urban renewal projects and the construction of Interstate-81 (Arpey, 2022). The 15th Ward was a successful Black working-class community, as well as a self-sufficient neighborhood that housed a lot of Black owned businesses and family-like neighbors (Blueprint15, 2022). The City of Syracuse received federal funds to demolish whichever neighborhoods they deemed fit to make room for urban renewal projects that would be developed downtown (Arpey, 2022; Ducre, 2012). However, they did not

leave the 15th Ward residents with many resources or opportunities for better housing. The displaced residents received little for their land and property because of the poor conditions of the neighborhood and noted low property values, which means many of them were forced to start over with no money or property for themselves or their family to pass on to future generations (Arpey, 2022). Many neighborhoods both in Syracuse and on the outskirts did not accept Black people who were displaced during urban renewal because they came from a zone that was redlined (Onondaga Historical Association, 2019), meaning banks and mortgage lenders denied mortgages to them because they were considered high risk due to the neighborhood in which they lived. Majority of the 15th Ward residents were forced to relocate to the East and South sides of the city with poor housing conditions and landlords who did not care about them or the conditions of the houses they lived in (Arpey, 2022; Ducre, 2012; Onondaga Historical Association, 2019). Today, homicides in Syracuse happen in clusters throughout the city but are most prominent in three areas—the southwest, west, and north sides of the city (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022). According to a Violent Crime Assessment published by the City of Syracuse in 2022, these sides of town also “have more rental units, vacant housing, single-parent households, and a higher African American and Hispanic population than the rest of the city” (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022, p. 7). Gang territories are also spread out across the city but happen to cluster in the same sides of the city where violent crime is most prominent (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022).

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is the combination of economic and social status and is often measured by education, income, and occupation (Baker, 2014). The socioeconomic status of

individuals from Syracuse is relatively low, especially when examining income. Syracuse residents who identify as Black have a poverty rate of 40%, which is the sixth highest in the nation for cities with over 100,000 residents. White Syracuse residents have a poverty rate of 21.7%, which is about half of that of the Black residents (Tampone, 2022).

The public school district that dominates Syracuse is the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). According to data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED), the SCSD had a total kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment of 17, 801 students during the 2021-22 school year. Majority of the district is made up of students who identify as Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino, 48% and 15% respectively (New York State Education Department, 2022). Multiracial students also make up 8% of the population (New York State Education Department, 2022). The NYSED uses the term “economically disadvantaged” to describe the following students:

those who participate in, or whose family participates in, economic assistance programs, such as free or reduced-price lunch programs, Social Security Insurance (SSI), Food Stamps, Foster Care, Refugee Assistance (cash or medical assistance), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), or Family Assistance: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (New York State Education Department, n.d.).

Economically disadvantaged students made up 85% of the district population (15,218 students), with Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students accounting for 56% collectively. Homeless students accounted for 4% of students in the district (743 students) during the 2021-22 school year (New York State Education Department, 2022). These statistics are consistent with the findings from a study by Paxton et al. (2006) that African American students

were six times more likely to report that they came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and receive free or reduced-price lunch—indicating low household income—than their White counterparts. Census data from 2020 shows that Syracuse had the highest child poverty rate in the nation with a rate of 48.4% and more than 14,000 children under 18 years old living below the poverty line (Tampone, 2022). For children under five years old, the poverty rate was 51%, which is more than 4,400 children in the city. When factoring in larger cities with over 50,000 residents, Syracuse still ranked fifth in the nation for child poverty rates (Tampone, 2022). Based on these statistics, more than half of the students in the SCSD lived below the poverty line in 2020. Research suggests that White students who came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than their Black peers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to have a higher perceived life satisfaction (Paxton et al., 2006). Applying these statistics to the racial differences in poverty amongst Syracuse children, one can suggest that students of color have a lower perceived life satisfaction than White students in the Syracuse City School District. To further support this indication, a study by Liu & Fu (2022) found that as impoverished college students' perceived poverty increased, their life satisfaction decreased. However, they also found that the more self-esteem a student had, the less of an influence perceived poverty had on their life satisfaction. In other words, the higher one's self-esteem, the less of an impact their own perception of their poverty had on how satisfied they were with their life.

Although the previously discussed research suggests that social interactions and relationships have a bigger impact on life satisfaction than income, other studies suggest that employment status is one of the most significant life satisfaction predictors (Barger, 2009). A study by Powdthavee (2008) found that individuals who were unemployed reported lower levels of self-esteem than those who were employed. This may be due to the idea that they do not have

surplus funds to do things that they enjoy once their bills are paid, or they may even struggle paying their bills, leading to unwanted stress. The same study found that those who were retired are generally satisfied with their lives (Powdthavee, 2008). Although the income of retired individuals may not be as great as it was when they were employed, they can relax knowing that their pay is routinely guaranteed. Unexpectedly, this study also found that when controlling for income and employment status, those with higher education levels reported lower life satisfaction (Powdthavee, 2008).

Residential Environment

Residential well-being, also known as residential satisfaction, can be defined as the feelings one holds towards their residential environment based on how they perceive different aspects of it (Aragones et al., 2016) and has an impact on the overall well-being of an individual (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012). Researchers believe that residential satisfaction is made up of three main components—the area in and around the home, the physical and social aspects of the neighborhood, and the sense of community or relationships between neighbors (Aragones et al., 2016).

A lot of research on residential well-being focuses specifically on residential quality of life, which Perlaviciute & Steg (2012) define similar to residential well-being, arguing that residential quality of life examines which aspects of an individual's neighborhood are most important to them and to what extent are these conditions met to satisfy their needs and values. For this literature review and study, the terms *residential quality of life* and *residential well-being* will be used interchangeably because of the similar definitions and content of the research surrounding these two topics.

Aragones et al. (2016) believes that the home is important in the lives of people because it is a place that provides comfort, shelter, security, protection; helps shape one's identity; and helps form social relationships between family, friends, and neighbors. If a person has negative experiences within the home, they may have lower life satisfaction. Having resources and businesses near a person's home may also affect how satisfied they are with their neighborhood, as one study by Ma et al., (2018) found that longer commuting time was significantly associated with lower overall life satisfaction.

The neighborhood's physical aspects may also have a significant impact on people's lives and how they perceive their quality of life. Perlaviciute & Steg (2012) found that when examining the importance of 23 neighborhood aspects, people reported feeling safe, having freedom, and having privacy in their neighborhoods to be most important. This is relevant to Syracuse residents' residential satisfaction because the high crime rate may impact feelings of safety, which can play a role in their overall life satisfaction. Religion/spirituality, material beauty in the neighborhood, and appreciation/respect by neighbors were found to be least important (Perlaviciute & Steg., 2012). Research has also found that lower levels of residential well-being has been correlated with high noise levels (Ng, 2000, as cited in Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012) and pollution in the neighborhood (Bonnes et al., 2007, as cited in Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012). Further, the neighborhood not being maintained (e.g. litter, unkept buildings) is correlated with feeling insecure, which in turn influences overall neighborhood satisfaction (Aragones et al., 2016).

Researchers also found that the neighborhoods provide an important social relationship between residents and a sense of belonging (Aragones et al., 2016), which is related to social connectedness, thus impacting overall life satisfaction. Putman (1993, as cited in Balestra &

Sutan, 2013) believes that close-knit neighbors are more likely to assist one another to make their neighborhood cleaner and safer, share information and resources (e.g. childcare or jobs), and help maintain the undesirable behavior in their neighborhood.

Connections have also been made between neighborhood satisfaction and sociodemographic factors. Aragonés (2016) found that an impoverished neighborhood may lead to residential dissatisfaction because of the conditions of that neighborhood, but those from low socioeconomic backgrounds build attachments to their neighborhoods, which may make it difficult for them to move away to a neighborhood that may increase their residential satisfaction. As Syracuse is an impoverished city, it is possible that residents may experience residential dissatisfaction but still build attachments to their neighborhoods. Further, Vemuri et al., (2011, as cited in Aragonés, 2016) found that those who identify as White and have higher education levels reported being more satisfied with the quality of life in their neighborhood.

Academic/Job Performance and Achievement

Life satisfaction and academic performance and achievement have been found to have a mutual positive correlation. Research suggests high levels of life satisfaction positively influence academic outcomes, which may increase life satisfaction over time (Ng et al., 2015). Being more satisfied with life may push students to do well in school, participate in more activities, and be rewarded for their efforts. In turn, receiving good grades and being acknowledged for their efforts may lead to them being more satisfied with their lives. In contrast, research found that people were less satisfied with their personal and career achievements than with life overall (Appleton & Song, 2008). This suggests that their career does not have a significant influence on their overall life satisfaction.

Crime and poverty have significant impacts on Syracuse's youth and their academic performance. The city's 2022 crime assessment found that Syracuse students who attend elementary schools in areas with high violent crime rates have 50% lower English language arts (ELA) standardized test scores than students who attend schools in areas with lower rates of violence (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022, p. 13-14). Thus, those living in more violent zones may have lower life satisfaction than those from areas with less violence, since there is a positive correlation between life satisfaction and academic performance.

Conclusion

Existing academic literature and research suggest that many life factors play a role in overall life satisfaction and impacting peoples' lives. When examining both determinants and effects of life satisfaction while factoring in crime and poverty rates, as well as low academic performance of Syracuse residents, it is possible that residents may have low satisfaction because of certain factors, including poor family and community support, racial discrimination, low socioeconomic status, and poor academic performance. In return, these determinants may lead to increases in violent crime, gang participation, poor youth behaviors, and low standardized test scores.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the existing literature on life satisfaction is very dense with quantitative data and lacks qualitative data collection methods. The lack of qualitative data makes it difficult to get beneath the surface of general life satisfaction and why or how people truly feel about their lives. It is also important to note that most studies on life satisfaction collect data based on how people view their own lives. This leaves room for error in the data collection and analysis because people's feelings may vary based on many factors,

including the type of day they are having at the time of data collection. Participants may also not report accurate information for various reasons.

The existing literature and research on issues in Syracuse include a lot of statistical data and trends over the years, as well as thoughts from community leaders and officials; however, they do not include thoughts from general community members, especially those who may be directly impacted by the poverty and crime many residents experience. This study gave Syracuse residents the opportunity to tell their own stories relating to life satisfaction and living in Syracuse. The next few chapters will report the thematic analysis results of the focus groups in detail, including themes and subthemes that were identified from the participants' thoughts and experiences.

Chapter 3: Theme 1: Community Connectedness

Community Connectedness

After reading over 60 pages of focus group transcriptions and using thematic analysis to repeatedly analyze the discussions, three major themes were identified. The first theme frequently brought up by the participants was Community Connectedness, which described how connected they felt to their community and the people in it. Based on participants' responses to the focus group questions and discussion, the people who make up their community include those who live nearby, coworkers, members from the same organizations as them, mentors, community activists, and family. To further organize and analyze participants' relationships with their community, two subthemes were identified under the first main theme—Connectedness Among General Community Members and Connectedness Among Family.

Connectedness Among General Community Members

The focus groups were opened with the following question: Do you feel a sense of connectedness or closeness within your community, and why or why not? In response to this question, participants mentioned their relationships with general community members most frequently (e.g. co-members of organizations, coworkers, neighbors, community activists). Most of the participants felt connected to their community through these relationships and their own involvement in community activities.

One participant felt connected to her community because she was involved in local organizations, community service, and staying up to date with what was happening in the city (e.g. available resources, clothing drives, crime incidents). She also believed that this involvement allowed her to locate necessary or helpful resources in a time of need and that those

who are not as involved may not feel a sense of community as strong as she does. In response to the initial question stated above, she explained:

I know people who are not involved in community-based organizations to help further the community. But as someone who is, I would say yes...So, because I'm involved, I feel connected, and I feel like if I needed to find resources or help for someone else or myself, I could...

In response to the same question, a different participant also mentioned that she feels connected to her community because she knows who to reach out to for resources:

I would say yes, uh, you know, outside of work and sorority life, I, I do have a support team, you know, who taught me how to use my resources. Um, you know, pretty much key players within the community if I need to go to so, for advice or just to ask questions.

Although Syracuse is considered a mid-sized city with almost 150,000 residents, one participant described it as a “weird mix of like big city and like a really small town at the same time. Like everybody knows everybody, but at, but at the same time, like you can avoid people 'cause it's big enough.” Other participants agreed with this statement and their personal stories expanded on this idea, indicating that it is common for people in Syracuse to know almost everyone in their community, either through social media, mutual friends, or becoming familiar with them through additional encounters. These encounters are important because they may aid in finding answers or resources when needed. In response to the initial question about whether she felt a connection to her community, one participant said:

I would also say yes. Um, I grew up on the east side of Syracuse. Um, attended Nottingham high school. I know probably everyone on the east side from whoever is sleeping on the corner to somebody, you know, the little house on the hill. Um, I do have tons of connections in the community, particularly because of a lot of my close connections. So, I know if I don't know the answer, I know how to get it.

Although participants believed that having many interpersonal connections to others in their community is useful in helping them navigate outlets for resources, some also found this as a downfall in the community. One participant believes that there is “a clique-iness in Syracuse.” Those who do not have deep interpersonal connections with others in Syracuse are sometimes left out and cast as outsiders, even if it is unintentional. It may be difficult for them to find the best places for services and resources (e.g. hair and nail salons, restaurants, clothing drives). The participant that said this about Syracuse moved to the city from Virginia when she was young, but her family emigrated from an African country to the United States decades ago. They knew absolutely no one in Syracuse when they moved, so every connection they made was new. She explained how difficult it was for her to build connections and find someone to style her hair because everyone she asked for references had a friend or family member who did their hair privately and wasn't open to doing strangers' hair.

Additionally, the participants believed that another downfall of "everybody knowing everybody" in Syracuse was that rumors spread easily, attacking residents' character, and affecting the support and help some people receive. For example, Oprah Winfrey visited Syracuse in 2014 and met with Mary Nelson, who she called a “community warrior” before writing a \$100,000 check to help fund her community initiatives. Mary Nelson initially said that she was going to build a community basketball court, but when her plans changed many

community members began to question her intentions and spread rumors about what she did with the money (Breidenbach, 2014). Speaking on this topic, one participant said:

“...we all know that one person who got that money from Oprah and is questioned about what she did with it <laugh among group>. And it's like, some people don't support because of like what they hear about her. But at the end of the day, like she is a community figurehead who is, like, her intentions are to help the community.”

Some participants reported feeling a sense of community as children, while others were not given the opportunity to build relationships to feel the connection. One participant explained that her mom kept her isolated for much of her childhood and did not let her join youth programs like many of the other participants were able to join. She understands now that it was for her own protection, but she also acknowledges how that could affect community connectedness and one's sense of belonging:

So, I never got to go to the um, Boys and Girls Clubs and like that kind of stuff. So, I know about it now and I've like known about things like Hillside 'cause I had peers that went there, but I never got to experience some of that stuff. So, I think like when you think about parents or adults trying to protect their own, it kind of hurts that connectivity that could be there...

As mentioned in the literature review, social connectedness is positively correlated to life satisfaction, which indicates that when one feels disconnected from their community, their overall life satisfaction may begin to decrease.

Other participants were fully immersed in their communities as kids. One participant was describing a conversation that her and her boyfriend had about programs for youth in Syracuse. He believed that there were not enough youth centers and there was nothing for him to join when he was younger. She told him, “the reason why you feel this way is because you were not exposed to youth centers.” Comparing her experience to his, she said, “I grew up going to the East Side Boys and Girls Club. Like that was *the* club. I was a club kid, you know, me and my sister and my brother.” Another participant explained how her childhood home was considered the “safe house” for the children in her neighborhood:

We had a huge backyard. It was fenced in so all the kids came to our house looking for us to play...and they would come and play in our backyard. So, we had a lot of kids in the neighborhood and we all just kind of played together. So that was very good. A lot of families, lots of children in the neighborhood...there was a lot of, um, camaraderie among the kids in the neighborhood.

These participants who were able to build community connections at an early age believed that that plays a role in why they are able to feel connected to their community today. This adolescent connectedness may have influenced life satisfaction both as a youth and as an adult.

A few participants believed they could make a difference in the lives of those who came from the same community they did. They wanted to give back to those who may experience struggles similar to those that they have experienced or witnessed. One participant mentioned that she used to volunteer with the local youth at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Syracuse as a mentor, as well as help clean up the neighborhood that she grew up in. A couple participants also discussed that they do not want to buy houses or live outside of Syracuse, especially in the

suburbs, because they want their tax money to benefit public city schools and neighborhoods. They want to be able to feed back into their community, rather than take advantage of a cleaner, safer, and less impoverished community. A participant said that her parents instilled in her the idea that “you can do well for yourself, and you can still live and serve in your community,” which is why she said:

Like if I were to stay in Syracuse my entire life, I would wanna live in the city just because I'm tied to the city. I want to be able to live and make, make a difference in the city...my big thing is I wanna pay my taxes to the city so that my money is going towards the schools.

Similarly, another participant said, “...if I buy a house in Syracuse, I wanna be in the city limits because I want my money, my resources, my funds, everything to go to the city.” Despite wanting her tax money to go to the City of Syracuse, later in the discussion this same participant expressed her dissatisfaction with the tax base in Syracuse and how the collected tax money is allocated. Passionately, she said:

Our tax base can't be that high. They refuse to raise the taxes in Syracuse. And you have a high population of renters. My rent money don't go to the schools...Everybody's renting and you do not have enough tax base to support the school programs and give them more resources and all this other stuff that goes along with having a community that can improve. We can't even get decent stores!

Connectedness Among Family

Under the main theme Community Connectedness, Connectedness Among Family was the next most prevalent subtheme. Participants felt an overall strong sense of family connectedness and believed that connections with family members are important, whether they are close or distant relatives. They also differentiated between relationships with the family they grew up with and the family they have created or want to create (e.g. children, spouse). When asked how important family is in their lives, one participant responded, “It's top priority...and this is not necessarily just your biological family, but the family you've created for yourself. So it's just very important” and other participants nodded in agreement.

Participants who had children mentioned that they wanted to provide them with a better lifestyle, experiences, and support than they had when they were growing up. One participant was very adamant about ensuring that her children knew they could depend on her and that she was going to give them more than what she had. During the discussion she said:

I couldn't depend on the generation that came before me, but I know my kids can depend on me almost to a fault. Like, they know that...I will never let them fall. Like they know that...I'll make sure that as long as I have breath in me that they will never have to feel like they can't ever depend on me. Never.

Further supporting her argument, later in the conversation the same participant stated that her and her siblings had no close relative who attended college, but they all attended college. She was unsure of what pushed them but believed it may be because they all wanted to be role models for their children: “But every last one of my dad's kids went, every last one of us went to college. I don't know what the driving force was...maybe that we needed to show our kids something better.”

Participants continued to express their dissatisfaction with their adolescence by explaining what they would do differently for their children. When asked, “Would you give your children the childhood you had?” one participant responded with, “Like, I don't want my daughter to grow up like that. So, I really, really, work hard to try to get her some different environment that's better.” She does not want her daughter to experience living in a high-crime neighborhood like she did, resulting in her doing whatever is necessary to provide her daughter with a better environment.

Participants also gave personal accounts of their relationships with their immediate families. Almost all the participants reported having close relationships with their family members at all stages of their lives and every participant referenced a story involving a family member at least once during the discussion. They mentioned having strong bonds with siblings, cousins, nieces, grandparents, and parents. One participant expressed that she was especially close to her parents and nieces, stating:

I've always been attached to my family almost to a fault sometimes where I make their business my business. Um, I would rather hang out with my parents than my friends.

Always been that way. And then when I had my nieces, I was like the third parent for my nieces. Now they don't live here. And I realized how entangled I was in being a parent, instead of doing my own thing.

Further showing how family oriented she was, she said she is the one in her family who plans all of the family vacations. For her paternal family who she does not speak to as often as her maternal family, she makes sure to attend family functions (e.g. birthday parties, graduation parties, weddings, backyard barbecues) to show support simply because they are family no matter the strength of the bonds.

A couple participants expressed how close they were to their grandparents growing up and how significant a role their grandparents played in raising them. Their grandparents not only lived in close proximity to them, but also provided a space where they felt safe and welcomed.

One participant stated:

And one thing that I recognized, even back then, that there were a lot of grandparents kind of like stepping in and like managing kids. So whether you lived with your grandparent, they were right there. Like my grandparents literally lived right next door to us. It was so cool. So, they were kind of like our secondary supports. Always had food, always had stuff to do.

However, when discussing whether or not she would give her children the childhood she had, the same participant said:

...what I would like them to have is something that I grew up with, with a lot of grandparent influence. Like these kids, the grandparents of today, they're nothing like the grandparents of yesterday. Those grandparents were grandparents like community grandparents. So they're not experiencing that...So I would like for them to have been able to experience the true grandparents because the grandparents they have is not that.

She compared her satisfaction with grandparents she sees in the present, including her children's grandparents, to those she experienced in her youth. She believed that today they are not as supportive and helpful with raising their grandchildren as grandparents in her youth were. She would have liked for her children to have the same grandparent-grandchild relationship and experience she had.

Another participant agreed that her grandparents played a significant role in her childhood. She told the group about childhood experiences with her grandmother, which also demonstrated her closeness with her siblings and cousins in their youth:

...me and my siblings, me and my cousins were always with my grandmother. Um, before school and after school until our parents got outta work. Um, and even on the weekends we had family dinners. It was everything at my grandmother's house.

Another participant gave an example of a cousin relationship when she expressed her closeness to her cousins in both her childhood and adulthood:

I grew, grew up with those cousins and we are extremely close. Like to this day, we all get together. It's a, it's a good time. Never arguing. We can get together and have two drinks together and nobody's leaving, um, disassembled or anything and such. So I enjoy them a lot!

Participants also discussed their satisfaction with their relationships with their siblings. They talked about how they played outside together, went to youth centers together (i.e. The Boys and Girls Club), and talked to one another. They also spoke about how they were there for one another when others were not, especially their parents. One participant explained that although her parents are not open to answering questions from the curious minds of her little brothers, they can always ask her, and she would give them answers or guide them in the right direction to get the answers. Another participant explained that she had her sister to speak to about important topics and her feelings because her parents did not have those conversations with her. She shyly stated, "Like, my parents never talked to me. Um, the most, the only person that I really talked to was my sister because we could relate on a lot of things."

Another participant explained that her mom left her to handle her college entry and financial aid process alone, leaving her in debt because she did not know how to properly handle the paperwork. She assisted her sisters so that they would not make the same mistakes she did:

My mother didn't fill out my paperwork. I filled out all my own paperwork to go to Syracuse [University] and paid a lot of money unnecessarily because of the way I did. But I wanted to make it better, I wanted to make it better for my siblings. So I went with my sisters when they were looking at schools to try to help them make better decisions on, you know, financial aid packages and things.

Lastly, participants expressed that being in a healthy intimate relationship, specifically marriage, is an important aspect of family life. As mentioned before, many agreed that the family you create is just as important as the family you were raised with. After stating that she was not married but would one day love to be, one participant said it is very important for children to experience a married, two-parent household:

And I think that that's very important for your children to, um, see a two-parent home. Somebody that's loving, has a healthy communication and healthy, you know, home environment. Um, it has a lot to do with how they, you know, present themselves out in the world.

Further demonstrating the importance of marriage in their lives, another participant agreed, adding:

I think marriage is good as long as it's healthy, you know?...Every marriage you get in arguments, you have disagreements, but as long as you guys figure out a way to work through those things, so your kids...What parents don't realize is kids pay attention from the start...They get it. They can see. So, you just have to be, figure out a way to coexist

that's healthy for the entire family, not just for you guys, because that might not work, you know, for the entire family.

She believes that a two-parent household with married parents is only beneficial if the marriage is healthy because children pay attention to everything, and it can impact them. She also does not believe that you must be married to the child's other biological parent for it to be healthy for them, stating:

So I had the experience of having a baby daddy and then a husband. Somebody that's different. And it was definitely very different because my husband, when I, when we were having our daughter, I felt like we went through all those steps together. Like it felt like a, a team effort.

Further expressing the significance of and her satisfaction with her marriage, she continued to talk about how close all her children are to her husband even though he is not the biological father of all of them. She expressed how he helps her create a healthy environment for the children because they work as a team.

Another participant who admitted she was single with no children at the time of the focus group expressed how she valued marriage more than she valued having children:

I'm not tied to the idea of children, not because I don't want them, but at this point in my life, I, I'm not, I would not be like cornered where I'm like, "oh my God, I don't know, because I don't have kids." Not...that wouldn't make or break me. Marriage? I go back and forth between wanting a man and not wanting a man. Again, I've been single most of my life, more than...I've probably only been in one serious relationship.

Conclusion

Throughout the focus groups, participants repeatedly mentioned their satisfaction and relationships with different people (e.g. family and general community members). They also discussed their overall feelings of being connected to the community, which impacts overall life satisfaction. Although connections between community members may negatively impact some people (i.e. being outcasted), the participants in this study mainly benefited from them. As a group, they reported being very involved in their communities at multiple stages of life, as well as having strong bonds with their families since they were children.

Chapter 4: Theme 2: Residential Environment

Residential Environment

Residential Environment is another main theme that was identified during the focus groups. This theme consists of participants' perspectives and feelings about the physical, social, and political environment of Syracuse, NY. Further, four subthemes were identified: Community Resources & Services, Crime/Safety, Local Government & Authority, and White Centeredness. Throughout these subthemes participants held conversations about what they believe makes up a good community, what resources are available to residents, feelings of safety, police brutality, efforts (of lack thereof) by the local government, the mindset of others who live in Syracuse, and whether Syracuse is a place that is welcoming to Black people. All these factors may have an impact on their overall life satisfaction, as residential satisfaction affects overall life satisfaction, which has been mentioned previously.

Community Resources & Services

Based on statements from multiple participants, a good community is one that has a lot of families and children with fellowship among the children, schools and churches in walking distance, helpful resources for the disadvantaged, ice cream stores, restaurants, and boutiques or small shops. One participant was telling the group how she has witnessed her childhood community change and began giving examples of what aspects of it most satisfied her in her youth:

So we had a lot of kids in the neighborhood and we all just kind of played together. So that was very good. A lot of families, lots of children in the neighborhood...But there was a lot of, um, camaraderie among the kids in the neighborhood. So that was a big thing.

Um, you know, school was walking distance. I could walk to school, and I was in elementary school. Um, even high school, I lived less than two miles from my high school so I could walk. Um, so those are all good things. The church that we, that I grew up in was right across the street. So again, everything is in walking distance. My parents always have vehicles, but it's good to have things that are in your neighborhood.

Another participant also told the group her positive experiences of her childhood neighborhood:

There were a ton of kids that lived down my street. We could ride our bikes up and down the streets and do things. There were businesses, on Croly and on Fayette at that corner. I mean like ice cream stores, Chinese food, boutiques, all kinds of things.

Participants believed there were many resources available for the disadvantaged in Syracuse. However, a few participants agreed with the idea that “they don’t use ‘em or they don’t know they exist.” One participant believed that her connection to her community made her more able to find resources; however, she believed many other people from Syracuse may not be as connected, resulting in less knowledge of available resources. Acknowledging that residents may be unaware of available resources, she stated:

So, because I'm involved, I feel connected, and I feel like if I needed to find resources or help for someone else or myself. I could, but I feel like a lot of the city is not...I know, like, there's a large population of people who don't know where to get help or who don't attend the back to school, um, giveaways and drives that are held or who don't go to the food pantries and like, stuff like that.

In this statement, she is also acknowledging her own involvement in her community, which may play a role in overall life satisfaction.

One participant expressed her own knowledge and participation in a community giveaway by Mary Nelson, which consisted of free boxes filled with returned Amazon items (Scott, 2023): “Her with that money ain't gonna stop me from getting my Amazon box.” Another participant said that many people in Syracuse choose not to support or benefit from Mary Nelson’s many giveaways because of the doubt she has received over the distribution of the monetary donation from Oprah, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In addition to physical resources and giveaways, one participant mentioned that there were political resources available to those who would like to know more about local politicians and what is going on in their city, but some people may fear reaching out. Speaking on local politicians, she told other participants in the room:

Do you know that you can actually reach 'em? Like you can email 'em, you can call 'em, you can do X, Y, Z, and that might be fearful, for some people, like, maybe they're like, ‘oh well, like I don't, maybe I didn't finish high school and I don't have the proper way to speak to them, so they're not gonna listen.’ It's like, it doesn't matter!

Another participant acknowledged that politicians hold council meetings and meetings to discuss affordable housing for the public to attend, ask questions and get information from city officials but from what she has seen there has been low attendance. She believes that many Black people in Syracuse do not have intentions to improve their quality of life because they do not take advantage of the resources and services that are available to them, including these public meetings. Another participant agreed, saying, “And I think that people find, find it easier to blame someone else for their tragedy. Like they're not putting any effort in to fix their problem.”

Participants also believed that there are a ton of resources and services for children in Syracuse and that they themselves were able to benefit from them in their youth. Participants

mentioned there being clubs, programs, and activities for them to engage in and keep busy, such as The Boys and Girls Clubs, Say Yes, after school programs through their schools, and sports at the YMCA. However, as mentioned previously, not all children are exposed to these resources, which may affect how they connect to their communities and hinder their ability to find resources later.

Although participants believe there are many services and resources in the community for people of all ages, they also express their dissatisfaction with the public schools in Syracuse, arguing that the schools lack academic and behavioral resources for students. One participant stated that “the school don't have the resources” to help students who are misbehaving and get in a lot of trouble, eventually resulting in poor academic performance for them and a disruptive learning environment for other students. Another participant stated that “The school is passing them and they're still underperforming, but it looks like they're doing well.” They both agreed that the school’s lack of resources results in them giving underperforming students passing grades and not disciplining students who are misbehaving. As previously mentioned, participants believed that the main reason schools in Syracuse lack resources and funds to obtain resources is that not enough taxes go into them because of the high number of renters and low-income families.

Crime and Safety

Another prominent subtheme under the theme Residential Environment is Crime and Safety. Every participant in this study was familiar with the high crime rate in Syracuse and they all spoke about it at one point, often expressing that they felt unsafe in their neighborhoods. Many participants have witnessed crimes or have been directly impacted by them, while others

have only heard about the crimes through the media or by word-of-mouth. Some participants were aware of the crime that was occurring during their childhoods, and it affected the decisions they made as adults. One participant was telling a story about a high-speed police chase and other speeding vehicle situations that she witnessed in her neighborhood and how it traumatized her:

And when I tell you cars fly up and down that street all the time...it is scary. Um, and you have criminal activity. You got people that's running from the cops all the time, driving down the street, not wanting to stop for the police...that traumatized me a little bit because I have witnessed people getting hit--almost getting hit--so many times on that street. It's just like, you know, now that I have my nieces, it's like, no, like let's go to a cul-de-sac. 'cause it's no through. You can't go through it...So in my mind I'm like, I would prefer to live in a neighborhood where there's a cul-de-sac because it's less traffic or a dead end or something like that.

Because of the speeding and careless driving she witnessed in her childhood neighborhood while other kids were around, she is cautious of where she lives, especially since she often cares for her nieces. Her careful decisions demonstrate her dissatisfaction with the crime that occurred in the neighborhood in her presence.

Another participant agreed and discussed her own dissatisfaction with her childhood neighborhoods. She mentioned how she does not want her daughter to have an experience like hers and witness the crime she witnessed in the neighborhoods she grew up in:

...neither street that I lived on, I would not want my kids to have an experience like that. Um, again, gun violence, um, you know, you're not gonna keep them from everything. You know, like in my neighborhood people were fighting, the kids, starting fights and

stuff like that...It's not gonna go away...with my daughter being so young...I am looking for a house where the, the street is quiet. She can ride her bike up and down the street. She don't have to worry about, like you said, speeding cars. Right now, we live across the street from a busy store and any, and everybody come here with the, uh, drug deals every day... Like, I don't want my daughter to grow up like that. So I really really work hard to try to get her some different environment that's better.

She acknowledged that her environment was not a safe place to live when she was younger, which impacts residential satisfaction, thus affecting overall life satisfaction. Like the last participant, her house search depends on the surrounding environment, which she prefers different than the one she experienced growing up.

Further, participants agreed that many neighborhoods in Syracuse have had undesirable environments for raising children in the past and present. One participant referring to the condition of the West side of Syracuse when she was growing up said:

I grew up on the West side, so it was kind of like a mixed community. Um, it was a little rough...gun violence and everything over on that side of town...Um, they [my parents] didn't really care if we, kind of like, was outside, as long as we came back in before it got dark. Um, but now, you know, you cannot do that because, you know, the streets have gotten a lot worse for kids to be outside the way we did.

She acknowledged that there was crime, specifically gun violence, in her West side neighborhood growing up and that it was even worse in the present. She believed that children cannot enjoy being outside safely the way she was able to. She also gave her experience living on the South side:

...the street that I grew up on was the majority of Black people. Um, and my neighbors weren't the nicest...their kids pick fights, stuff like that. Um, but again, we were still afraid to be able to, you know, roam the streets to a certain extent...But now if I was to go on either street it looks really run down.

Although she first stated that her parents would let her play outside freely until nighttime, she then says that she was “afraid to...roam the streets to a certain extent” because of the crime. She also states that in the present, both of her childhood streets—one on the West side and one on the South side—look unappealing and in poor condition.

Another participant had an experience like the last participant. She was able to spend time outside in her East side neighborhood with her friends and family without worrying about her safety, but the same neighborhood was not as welcoming to her children:

And, um, I noticed as I grew up, I, we could be outside just the same, do whatever, you know, as long as you're in before, you know, it's too late, nobody really bothered me. But I found that living on Croly as an adult...I found that my kids could not really learn how to ride a bike. And part of that was because there was so much going on outside...you put them outside there and they're liable to see anything. I mean, when I say anything from prostitution to drug sales, to whatever...It was like watching Cinemax as a five year old and, um, the street...it is worse now. There's now a lot of broken families. Just a lot of just hanging out, drugs.

She did not want to let her children play outside or even teach them how to ride a bike because she did not want them to witness crimes or inappropriate behaviors, namely prostitution and drug transactions. She acknowledged that the street, Croly, is even more unsafe and filled with crime now than it was when her children were growing up.

By giving their accounts of how their childhood neighborhoods are not ideal to raise children and that they have a lot of crime in the past and present, they are expressing their dissatisfactions with the neighborhoods at different times in their lives.

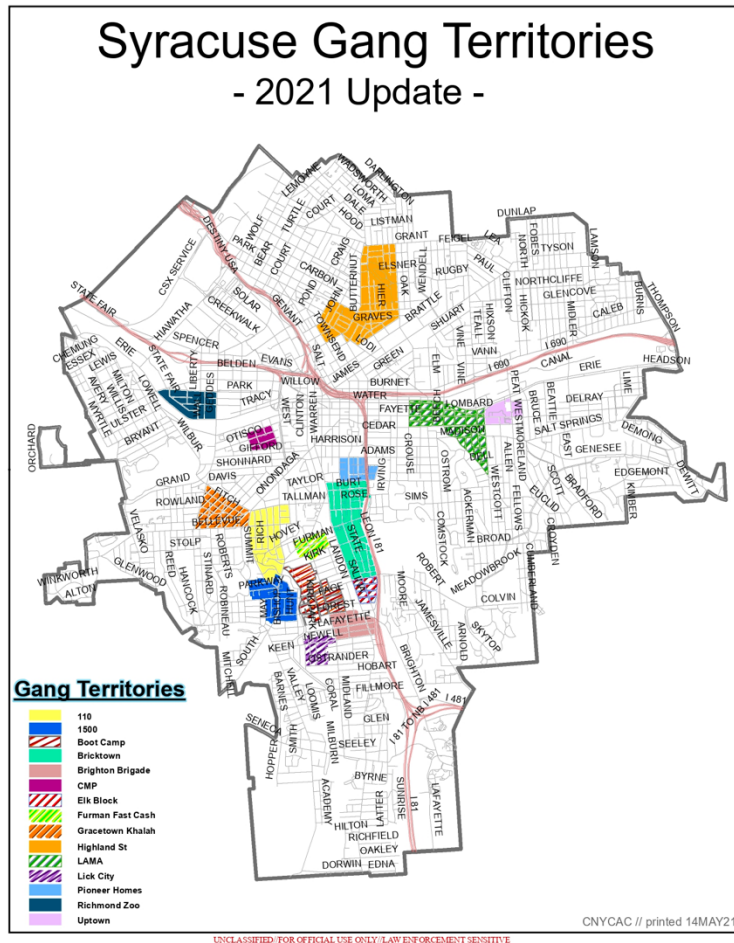
Additionally, one participant expresses both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with her childhood neighborhood, saying that it “wasn’t terrible,” but it also is not the best neighborhood today. She also talks about a neighbor who “had these after parties, like late night, like it started like four o'clock to six sometimes or seven o'clock in the morning. And it was a problem.” She then goes on to explain that people would often argue at these parties and eventually someone got shot and killed.

All the study participants were aware of the high rates of violent crime among adolescents, and it came up frequently. They spoke on the topic very passionately, with raised voices and exaggerated hand motions to express strong dissatisfaction. Participants also often used the word “crazy” to describe the role of youth in violent crime and gang activity. One participant mentioned the ages of the teens who she believed committed the most violent crimes in the city, stating, “I mean, our highest category of shooters in this city are like 15...13 to 15. It's crazy...the streets are eating up our babies in Syracuse.”

Another participant discussed how gang participation, either by the youth or the youth’s family, affects where they can hang out in Syracuse. She says, “...the fact that there are programs that are on the East side that's only for east side kids, because you can't have the South side kids on the East side. Like that's crazy.” She suggested that some children are not allowed on certain sides of Syracuse if they are raised on a different side due to the gangs that derive from different sides of the city, which may put them in danger. For reference, a 2021 map of the active gangs in Syracuse is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

A color-coded map of the active gangs in Syracuse, NY (Johnson-Kinsey & Uribe, 2022, p.8).



Additionally, youth who have no gang affiliations are also affected by the crime surrounding the resources they use. A participant briefly mentioned how her parents stopped allowing her and her siblings to attend the Boys and Girls Club of Syracuse on the East side of the city after being long-time members due to the increase of violence:

I grew up going to the East Side Boys and Girls Club. Like that was *the* club. I was a club kid, you know, me and my sister and my brother. We all went there. When it became unsafe then my parents were like, 'oh, okay'.

This specific Boys and Girls Club is less than one block away from Croly Street, a street previously mentioned by a different participant in reference to it not being safe.

Participants also acknowledged that not only is violent crime in Syracuse common, but those who commit violent crimes are reckless, often time affecting other Syracuse residents. One participant told the group that her father was murdered when she was 17, though not sharing further details. In an enraged tone, another participant explained how gang members in Syracuse are even more reckless today than they were in the past. She claimed that their violent actions put innocent people's lives in danger, especially children and young adults:

But the thing about gang bangers that changed from way, way, way back when up until now, they don't care that you are a student in college trying to get a degree. They don't care that this baby is two years old, learning how to walk, learn how to or to talk. They do not care that this is a birthday party in the middle of a park, middle of the day. They don't care no more.

Furthermore, she suggests that living in areas with high crime rates in Syracuse causes people to be “unintentionally roped into nonsense” because they could become victims or know someone who could.

Local Government and Authority

The subtheme Local Government and Authority focuses on participant's thoughts and beliefs on local politicians, law enforcement, and their efforts to decrease crime and poverty rates in Syracuse. Overall, participants were very critical of the efforts made by Syracuse police officers and politicians to make the city better and to build strong relationships with the residents, especially those who identify as Black. The tone and increase in volume of the

participants' voices, as well as their strong use of hand gestures and head nods showed how strongly they felt about this topic. They also demonstrated feelings of dissatisfaction, annoyance, resentfulness, and hopelessness towards the efforts of politicians and police officers and the changes they can make in Syracuse.

Participants strongly agreed that law enforcement and politicians' efforts to decrease crime and poverty in Syracuse is an act to boost their appearance and that they are not actually trying their best. Referring to the efforts of law enforcement in catching people who commit crimes, one participant said:

Honestly, I think it's performative. A lot of the stuff that happens here is performative.

They put the cameras up around the city, police cameras capture nothing. They don't ever solve anything. They don't see nothing. They don't catch nothing.

Adding onto her statement, another participant said that law enforcement in Syracuse does not solve any crimes “Until they wanna prove that police didn't do something,” to defend their public image.

Further showing dissatisfaction with efforts of law enforcement, a participant mentioned that crimes occur in Syracuse in areas that have a high police presence. She said, “I mean, even like when going out Downtown, the cops are out there talking with people and more people still being shot up. It doesn't really matter.” She is referring to Armory Square, an area in Downtown Syracuse that is popular for its nightlife and has multiple bars and restaurants walking distance apart (Visitsyracuse.com, n.d.). The most recent incident relating to her statement occurred one and a half months prior to the focus groups, where a 25-year-old man was killed in a gang-related shooting (Stevenson, 2023).

Another participant described a poor experience she had with the police when requesting their services. As mentioned previously, her neighbors used to throw parties that one time resulted in someone getting shot and killed. She explained that before it escalated to that point, her parents attempted to call the police, but they never responded to the scene:

Um, and you call for assistance and the police don't come. And literally my parents were like, 'well, someone's going to get shot. They arguing, someone's going to die,' and they called several times. Nobody came. Sure enough, somebody got shot, they came, the person died.

Participants also believed that local officials and government have not done enough to serve and help the people of Syracuse. One participant said:

Like y'all [government officials] are literally supposed to be in power to, not protect and serve, but like, at least serve. Like y'all supposed to be doing something. So, if you're sitting in the mayor's office and y'all are having these city council meetings, this that and the third, and nothing's being done, but the county executive is trying to build an aquarium when we ain't got no housing, there's a problem...

For reference, in 2022, an \$85 million aquarium was approved by Onondaga County (the county in which Syracuse is situated) legislatures to be built in Syracuse with surplus funds that have been accumulated over the last two years (Knauss, 2022).

Further supporting the idea that lawmakers in Syracuse are not serving the city to the best of their ability, one participant believed that local organizations were taking care of residents' needs more than the local government, which also creates a further disconnect between residents and politicians. Showing her dissatisfaction with the efforts of local politicians to help the community, she said:

...the local government is a non-factor is because there are way too many groups, like auxiliary groups, community organizations, things like that in the city that take care of the stuff that the local government should be taking care of... Like people don't have, um, you know, fair housing or, or food, or access to X, Y, Z, but there are programs that will give it to you... And that's why I think it's become like, so disconnected.

Many participants gave verbal affirmations in response to her statement, including "right," "mh-hmm," and "honest to God." Also agreeing, another participant added on, "Even though that's a good thing, that we have the supplement, it shouldn't be that way."

Although participants believed that politicians have not carried out what they were put in office to do, when asked if they believe that Syracuse politicians had their best interest at heart, they said yes because they were seeing a shift in who are becoming politicians. One participant responded to the question:

I mean in the last three, four years, like people in the community are starting to wake up and wanting to be a part of the change. So I've noticed that a lot of common folk, people I grew up with, running for office because they want to be a part of that change. So I'm super excited about that. Um, seeing that that shift and it's not your average politician, you know, like, 'cause these politicians, like I could say I have all these family members, I'm like, y'all are politicians like now. But I'm glad they are because I know who sits at the table and I know that they understand what the community needs because they, they're a part of this community.

In agreeance, a different participant added:

I would agree with that. I see the 45 and younger... Black professionals are stepping up.

Um, you do have people that I grew up with up with who are serving as county counselors who are running for these legislative positions...

However, she also added that even though they may have good intentions to serve their community, “there’s only so much they’re gonna do” because they are not given the resources or assistance needed to help them excel in their political roles. She said:

Um, I think the, the people above them, they let these black people have their little positions in their communities. They're not gonna give them any real resources. Like you have to have a person that knows how to get money and distribute money into the proper places. You have to have somebody that is able to stand against the White men that are gonna be above them to really get them to listen and to provide the resources...Like they're telling these common counselors, ‘Okay, you wanna run for District 4? Yeah, go ahead...We want you to empower and run your community and you know what's best for your community.’ They don't give a damn...they're not gonna really give anything...So I think it's starting at least having people of color and people from these neighborhoods running for these positions, but I don't think they really know what they're up against.

She also believed that once Black politicians get into their positions their support is limited. She said, “the white soldier is gonna let us run around in circles and have these titles, but they don't really have intention of giving us power.”

Under the subtheme Local Government and Authority, participants mentioned that from what they can tell, crime in Syracuse has not improved despite the city’s efforts. One participant acknowledged that she has seen police officers on foot patrolling the East side and interacting with community members to build rapport, but she goes on to say, “the crime on the east side

hasn't changed.” Referring to the crime in Syracuse, one participant expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of improvement in criminal activity by saying, “there has been absolutely, you know, no real improvement. And I'm 38,” suggesting that crime rates have not significantly decreased as long as she can remember.

On the contrary, one participant believed that city officials and law enforcement do their best to reduce crime, but the people who reside in Syracuse accept and normalize the criminal behavior. She said that this acceptance is what makes the crime rate stagnant:

...I appreciate the city's attempts and I think they should continue looking into those avenues...But as long as we as a society...passively okay the behavior, it's not gonna change.

Additionally, a couple participants further expressed their dissatisfaction with crime rates in Syracuse by discussing how it is not improving because everyone (i.e. city officials, law enforcement, and residents) focuses more on *what* crime is occurring and *who* is committing it rather than *why* someone feels the need to commit the crime in the first place. One participant says, “I feel like too much be happening and there's not enough people asking questions about why it's happening and just they're reactive to what's happening.” Further, she adds, “and I think that like, with that fact we all kind of overlook why it's happening, and we go straight to the, who's doing it... Like, ‘forget why it's happening. We don't care’.” She then went on and gave an example of a young boy who was stopped and harassed by Syracuse Police officers for stealing a bag of chips a few years ago. Her argument was that they did not bother to see if hunger warranted his actions; instead, they saw a young Black boy who committed a crime and punished him for it.

Many participants agreed with head nods and verbal interjections (e.g. mh-hmm, right) that people in Syracuse do not focus on the root of why people are committing crimes. However, they contradicted themselves when they were critical of the Safer Streets Community Violence Intervention Program, which aimed to provide money to those who may choose to engage in criminal behavior due to poverty. When I explained the program to them and stated that gang members were initially going to receive a weekly paycheck, they had many different reactions. Most of them had never heard of the program and a few were in shock that gang members were going to get paid “to stop ganging,” as one participant stated. Another participant laughed because the payment the gang members would receive was less than what they would make if they were to sell drugs, stating, “it's only like \$100, when you can go on the block and make way more...” Another participant responded, “right!” in agreement with her statement.

Participants also believe that there is a poor relationship between local government and authority and Black people in Syracuse. First, they suggested that the crime and poverty rates in Syracuse are not decreasing because police officers and politicians of Syracuse are not from Syracuse and do not come from the communities they serve. One participant recognized the efforts of police officers trying to build rapport with Syracuse youth but also suggests that it might not be enough:

So, I know that they're trying to do something to bridge those relationships with the kids at a younger age to try to connect with them. But I don't know how effective it's is. I think it'll be more effective if more police came from these communities... These cops are not coming from these communities.

Further, before participants were informed by another participant that Syracuse's mayor Ben Walsh lived within Syracuse city limits and has children that attend schools in the Syracuse

City School District, a participant said, "...I'm thinking of Ben Walsh...if being a mayor and also not living in the city that you're a mayor of...I think that says enough. I think that says enough." Another participant agreed by nodding her head and saying, "that's weird," referring to a person not living in the city they are a mayor of. When they finally learned that he lived in Syracuse, a few participants were very shocked because they assumed he lived in the suburbs of Syracuse.

Also suggesting that there is a poor relationship between local authorities and Black Syracuse residents, one participant said:

Like people don't take black people serious. And the reason is because they say, 'oh well you guys don't even take yourself serious. You guys killing, Black on Black crime.' That doesn't make sense. Black on Black crime was a term created.

She was suggesting that law enforcement and politicians do not take Black people seriously because of the violent crimes committed against one another in Syracuse.

Further showing the participants' dissatisfaction with the relationship between politicians and law makers, one participant explained that those who cooperate with law enforcement, even to help stop the crime that occurs in their community, are seen as traitors to their community because people know that authorities do not have genuine intentions to help them create long-term changes:

...the people that are, you know, cooperating, they are looked at as traitors by their own community. 'Cause as a community, we all know this, these people don't have our best interests, right? So, we could shoot, we could kill, we could gang bang, whatever we want. By the end of the day, that person right there doesn't have our best interest so we shouldn't work with them, we shouldn't listen to them. We shouldn't do nothing...

Because on one end it's like this is how we, this is how we heal the communities, how we

help. But on the other end, is it genuine? Is this gonna be a continuous thing where like this is how we rebuild and you know, get our kids back in school and back doing the right thing?

Lastly, another participant also believes that the actions of the police department are not genuine to the Black community, stating, “a lot of the things that happened with the police department in the City of Syracuse, like to prevent crime or improve relations with the citizens, is performative.” She believes that they do not genuinely care about building rapport with residents, but instead care about maintaining a good reputation.

Although participants put a lot of blame on politicians and law enforcement for not seeing improvements in crime and poverty rates, they also acknowledged that there is a lack of effort on the community level. They suggested that Black Syracuse residents do not put a great deal of effort into enacting change, even though they continuously point out what needs to be changed, as mentioned previously in this chapter. Referring to people not partaking in local elections but pointing out the negatives in their community, one participant said, “and I think that people find, find it easier to blame someone else for their tragedy. Like they're not putting any effort in to fix their problem.”

Participants believed that voting is one of the main ways to enact change in their communities because only people from these communities truly know what they need. However, they argued that not enough people are involved in local politics and voting to create change. One participant argued that not only do not enough people vote, but they do not volunteer to help with the poll locations:

You've been having the same people do this election board since I've been able to vote since about 20 years. So, until you get people that want to be involved, that want to shake

up the system a little bit--and I think honestly, they just don't know how or don't know where to start--um, I don't see a whole lot changing to be honest. And that goes with the big systems, and it trickles down. It trickles right on down to the most simplest things.

With this statement she is also saying that people may not be involved in local politics simply because they do not know where to start. Another participant agreed that being uneducated about politics is what may prevent people from participating in it, adding:

So it is, I think a lot of it is education and understanding how it works. 'cause politics is very, like, there's a lot of jargon. There's a lot of like...certain ways to speak. And so, if you don't understand what legislative means, if you don't understand how redlining and redistricting works, you're not gonna get it. And it is going to push you back from wanting to be involved.

White Centeredness

The last subtheme presented under the theme Residential Environment is White Centeredness. For this study, I define White centered as prioritizing Eurocentric cultures, values, and experiences over others. This subtheme focuses on participants' thoughts about how suitable Syracuse is for Black residents. They discussed its suitability for Black residents regarding Black culture, networking opportunities, entrepreneurship, work environments, and resources. This topic relates to self-identity, which has an impact on overall quality of life, thus influencing life satisfaction.

Overall, participants believed that Syracuse is not a suitable place for Black culture to thrive. One participant said that Syracuse is "White centered," then continued by saying:

...there's not a lot of spaces for like Black professionals or even Black people that like socialize. We get space and it doesn't ever last. Um, it's not heavy in Black businesses at all. Um, the mall, the stores that are available...it's not a city that is a prime environment for young, Black professional people. It's just not. Even the social scene is not optimal so people would go. Whether you a Black professional or not a Black professional. I feel like it's a very White centered place.

She believed that there are not enough spaces, such as night life and clothing stores, that cater to Black people and help maintain their culture in the city, which may impact one's identity and their life satisfaction. In that same quote, she is making the argument that Syracuse is not an ideal place for Black entrepreneurs to be successful. She believed that Black businesses are scarce and that there are not enough opportunities for Black entrepreneurs to network and receive support.

Another participant shared an experience that demonstrates how people from the community may directly affect Black entrepreneurs' success. She said that people were reluctant to support her aunt's new catering business because they believed people only supported her because she was popular instead of supporting her because they wanted to see her succeed and feed back into the community. She said:

When my aunt had first started her catering business and I remember like, there was this influx of like, like negativity in the community. A lot of positivity. But there were a few people that were like, 'oh, people are only supporting because she's popular'...And it was just like a really weird thing to think about...and you're saying, 'oh, people are only supporting her because she's popular.' Why would you not? Like?

As mentioned before, relationships within the community, which includes how people support one another, affect overall life satisfaction.

Additionally, some participants believed that people behave the way they do regarding supporting other Black people and working together to succeed as a group because they may think that there is limited room for Black people to succeed in Syracuse. One participant was explaining how a Black woman coworker of hers had her guard up and possibly saw her as a threat because she would stare at her but not speak to or compliment her. In response, another participant asked her, “do you think that has to do with the White centeredness?” and she responded, “potentially.” The participant who asked the question then responded, “And you know, you gotta make it in the White space so you can't really mingle and mix. Um, or you fight for that one spot, so you don't really reach back. 'Cause it's only space for one,” giving a possible explanation for why the woman would not connect with the other participant. Agreeing, the participant who encountered the woman said, “that’s possible.”

Not only are Black employees in Syracuse feeling tension between one another, but participants have experienced microaggressions and feelings of being unwanted in their own place of work. One participant acknowledged that microaggressions exist in many different workplaces, stating, “There's a lot of microaggressions in a lot of work environments...” Also showing how race may affect life satisfaction, another participant said, “there's so much like, even microaggressions amongst us” when talking about her experiences in her workplace. One participant also explained that she was soon getting a promotion at her job and was expecting backlash from White women coworkers because they do not think she belongs in that position. She said, “And I know it's gonna be a lot of backlash once that title becomes public. Because

once it becomes public, all these White women that hehe in your face, oh, they're gonna be mad. They have no idea.”

Some participants also believed that people of color in Syracuse who are successful or attempting to improve the city are often placed “in proximity to whiteness,” as one participant states. She said:

I feel like when it boils down to it, especially if you are a person of color and you are making ways to make the city better...they [Black Syracuse residents] try to put you in proximity to whiteness or they either just completely disregard what you're trying to do at all.

She then began to explain how this judgement may lead to children not wanting to participate in youth programs and instead partake in behaviors that may lead them down the wrong path, specifically to committing crimes, just so they can avoid the connection to whiteness. This effort from the youth demonstrates their attempts at developing their own identity, which impacts life satisfaction.

Conclusion

Participants constantly expressed their feelings and experiences with the environment of Syracuse, specifically the physical, social, and political environment, which all play a role in overall life satisfaction. They discussed the positives and negatives of their experiences with their environment and some participants’ experiences were very similar. For the most part, there was general agreement among the group, allowing participants to add onto the topic with their own experiences to make a stronger argument. As a group, they reported doubt in a positive change regarding crime and politics in Syracuse, unsafe communities, dissatisfaction with law

enforcement and politicians, and an environment that is not ideal for Black culture, ideas, and overall success.

Chapter 5: Theme 3: Adolescent Experiences

Adolescent Experiences

Adolescent Experiences is the final main theme identified during the focus groups, which focuses on the experiences of living in Syracuse during participants' adolescence. Two subthemes were identified within the theme Adolescent Experiences: Adult-Youth Relationships and Parental Involvement. These subthemes derived from participants' conversations reflecting on their youth. These conversations surrounded participants' relationships with adult community members as youth, how important they view these relationships to be, the extent to which their parents or guardians were involved in their lives and the impact they believe it had on them, and how they behaved in their adolescent years. All of these conversation topics have an impact on overall life satisfaction throughout different stages of the lifespan.

Adult-Youth Relationships

Throughout the focus group, participants often mentioned relationships that they held with adults at the time of their adolescence, or relationships they held with adolescents in their adult years. I asked participants if they believed that youth-adult relationships are important, in which they immediately responded with affirmations. One participant said, "so much" and another stated, "they help with so much," while others responded with overlapping "yes" and "yeah" while nodding their heads.

One participant gave an example of a woman who worked at a program she attended as a kid and told her mom when she misbehaved. She explained that at the time she was unhappy with her telling her mother about her actions because she was punished at home, but as she got older, she appreciated it because it helped keep her on the right track:

...some of the adults in my young life who I was just so, 'I, I hate this person. I can't stand her,' they really had my best interest at heart because they knew that I was, you know, a kid that they felt the need to protect and take care of.

The same participant also stated that she was afraid to misbehave in school because she did not want her teachers to tell her mother.

Further demonstrating the importance and strength of relationships with adults during their adolescence, another participant explained that she remembered her first Black teacher because she always said positive things to her and believed in her, even at a young age:

And she used to say, like, oh, 'good morning, [participant name], miss Secretary of State'...I remember asking her one day, 'what is Secretary of State?' And she was like, 'it's literally what you're gonna do 'cause you're gonna grow up and be so great.' And I remember like, you know, talking to her...As an adult, you don't realize, like how important it is to have people like that in your life lifting you up.

Although most participants did not hesitate to say that adult-youth relationships are important, one participant said, "I think you can have meaningful relationships, but...they have to be consistent." She believed that these relationships are important and can be meaningful only if they are maintained properly. She then goes on to tell the group about her own experience as a mentor to youth at the Boys and Girls Club, how she initially failed, and what she learned from the experience:

I remember I was a terrible mentor once...But I wasn't being honest with myself about the time commitments and what I had. And I realized that these kids need you beyond that whatever six months that the program is running, like you are, if you're their mentor, you

are it...like for life. Like you gotta pay attention and you gotta be a support...once they trust you, that's not easy to build.

From her own experience as a mentor, she knows that being a mentor to Syracuse youth is so much more than just supporting them within the program timeframe. She explained that they need continuous support beyond what the program requires to make the time with them impactful. She also said that matching the child up with the right mentor matters, stating, “So I believe like, it's matching the right kid with the right mentor. And when they don't have that, they're lost. And if they have it for six weeks, it's not, it's, it's not doing any good.”

Participants also discussed how there is a disconnect between youth and adults today. One participant said that there was a disconnect then explained how she experiences that disconnect herself:

...it really should be studied, like this disconnect that's happening right before our eyes, because like, I'm not gonna lie, you couldn't pay me to be nowhere with no little kids aged 13 to 17. I'm sorry. I'm not gonna be there. I'm not going. They suck! Like they're so mean and they suck. Like they're so disconnected. They think they know everything.

She believes that youth ages 13 to 17 are especially disconnected from adults, which makes her not want to be around them. This disconnect may impact social connectedness between the youth and adults in the community, which can play a role in the life satisfaction of both groups.

Parental Involvement

Participants discussed the frequency and in what ways their parents were involved in their lives, the impact of the involvement in both their adolescent and adult years, and whether

they were satisfied with the level of involvement. Participants believed that their parents “did the best that they could with what they had,” as one participant stated. She admitted that her family struggled financially but tried their best to provide for their children “with the, the choice that they made as far as career and, and that house.” Another participant added on, “I agree...They did what they had to do.”

Watching her parents struggle financially and pay bills late led to another participant developing a fear of being in the same situation, or worse off:

...I don't want my lights to get cut off, you know...I do kind of separate on like being homeless. I have like these fears of like my situation and like losing it all. Maybe if I get too far behind, something...

She then discusses how she is cautious with her money because she wants to be prepared for the worst:

I kind of try to watch my money and always have something for a rainy day because you just never know. And this world don't care about you...So if you get yourself in a situation, you get sick, you're hospitalized, you gotta go to rehab, you don't pay your bills, you're out, they don't care.

Further demonstrating the impact her adolescence had on her life choices in both adulthood and adolescence, she also said, “I've been a tight wad since I was kid...I always had money somewhere. To this day, I have, I will hide money everywhere. Now, I will spend money, but I'll also hide it so I always have something...”

Additionally, almost all participants acknowledged that their parents did not hold important conversations with them as they were growing up. One conversation topic that they believed was most important but also most withheld was money and finances. One participant

said, “no conversations were held about money... No financial literacy until an adult. And natural consequences cause financial literacy.” She believed she learned financial literacy on her own due to her own life experiences rather than being taught financial literacy by her parents. Another participant said, “I didn't really get talked to about money. Um, I know we struggled.” Another participant agreed, saying, “I don't think we really had that conversation about money like in the house...never like had that.”

Many participants agreed that if money was discussed around them growing up, it was discussed indirectly rather than the skill of financial literacy being taught to them. One participant explained in depth and other participants agreed with passionate head nods and verbal affirmations:

So like, it was kind of those...circumstances where money was brought up, but it wasn't like, ‘oh, let's teach you how to budget. Let's teach you that the value of a dollar is this. Let's teach you why it's important. Get a college degree’...It was very like surface level. Further, she explained that kids may only talk or hear about money when they are asking to buy something or are made aware that their parent has to pay a bill:

And so, when you think about money conversations, those are only happening if you think you wanna go to the store. It's like, ‘oh, well can I go buy some now & later?’ or whatever and then ‘okay here’, um, or you know, like mom owes the NIMO bill, the National Grid bill or whatever.

Another participant explained that sometimes her parents would withhold money conversations when she inquired about them not paying a bill, and instead fix the problem among themselves:

Like sometimes water wouldn't be on and like, I'd be like, what we doing about water? My parents would go and try to get some water bottles...there was no question if something happened, you're gonna figure it out. And that was that.

Another participant added her own experience with money conversations with her parents:

...we talked about money, but...the conversation was 'I had to struggle. You do not...don't make choices that will force you to struggle. Because...I had to struggle. I had to take out loans and take out all these credit cards and do this to pay myself through school. Like, I didn't have parents who could take care of me.'

She explained that her parents told her to make financial decisions that would be most beneficial to her but did not give her advice on how to navigate finances on her own. She later explained that her mom would not talk with her about money, but rather talk down to her, "especially if it's about something that they've [parents] quote on quote lived or dealt with." She explained, "My mom, anytime we talk about money, she's talking down to me because she's like, 'I struggled, you don't have to struggle.'"

The same participant also explained that her mom did not really have conversations about money until she was in college and offered to use her refund check to help with household finances. She said:

Conversation got real when we got into college and started getting refund checks... And I was like, 'mom, like you could use this for this.' And she was like, 'yeah, actually.' So she started letting me in a little more on like what we're doing and stuff like that.

Another participant explained that she had a very similar experience, saying, "...I got my working papers at 14, but I didn't have my first like, legal job until I was like 16. But as soon as

money started coming into the house, it was like, ‘oh, okay, let's talk.’” She used her income from her job as a teenager to buy her own phone and pay her monthly phone bill to take some financial burdens off of her mom.

Participants believed that conversations surrounding money would have been beneficial not only for financial literacy skills, but one participant also believed that it taught responsibility. She said, “And so like, because those conversations are kind of being held off or like the need-to-know basis, it's hard to try to teach kids certain levels of responsibility.” She then gave an example of how she is using her own experiences to better assist those younger than her. She explained that her niece, who just got a job, owes her sister money and how she is working with her niece to teach her about prioritizing her own debt before new purchases.

Aside from a lack of conversations surrounding money, participants expressed that there were other important topics that lacked depth when in conversation with their parents, including politics, sexual health, school responsibilities, and even general conversations about how their days went. One participant said, “...there were never any real conversations about anything--sex, education, politics.” One participant expressed that her parents did not really talk to her at all, stating, “I never really got talked to at home at all. Like, my parents never talked to me.” She instead relied on her sister to hold conversations with her. The lack of important conversations being held also demonstrates the relationship between participants in their adolescent years and their parents, which influences overall life satisfaction.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants believed that people in Syracuse were not involved in local politics in part because they were uneducated on it. Many participants also revealed that they did not discuss politics in their homes growing up, including the voting process and how their vote matters. When asked if their parents discussed politics with them as

children, one participant simply said, “no,” and another said, “You know, my parents didn't really talk about politics at home.” Another participant said that she did not begin to pay attention to politics at all until the 2020 presidential election season when she was about 15 years old because she realized how impactful it was on the entire country. Further, one participant told a story of a recent situation that demonstrated her lack of knowledge of the voting process:

...I got like a notice saying like, ‘oh, like you voted, but your vote does not count.’ I didn't know what that meant until I went to go vote and it was like, ‘oh, you're not registered.’ I was like, ‘I registered with a lady like a few weeks ago’ and they was like, ‘yeah, you should have registered like months ago.’ Like, I didn't know!

Additionally, participants expressed that their parents did not educate them on sexual health. One participant said, “And then don't even get into sex because they really didn't tell me about that either.” Another participant explained that her mom did not discuss sex with her but told her not to get pregnant. She said, “Was my mother talking to me about sex? Absolutely not. Uh, only thing it was ‘if you get pregnant, imma kill you.’ Like, ‘... don't bring me home no babies.’

Another participant explained that young Black girls are often sexualized, but not informed about safe sex practices and the risks of giving birth:

So, we sexualize our young girls really young, but we don't teach 'em about sex. We just tell you, ‘oh, that's too grown.’ But we are not gonna tell you you, you know, ‘hey, if you were to ever get pregnant, there's a chance that you might not make it on the other side because you're Black.’

Another participant acknowledged that learning about bodies and reproductive systems does not happen as often as it should:

...You know, people aren't really teaching each other about our bodies because it's not cool. It's not cool to know, you know, that you have a period and this is why it happens or anything like, just little stuff like that. Nobody is talking about it.

She also explained that she was not talked to about sex, but it may be because it was a taboo topic when she was growing up. She said, "Like we wasn't really talking about sex when I was young. We wasn't. Nobody was. It was very taboo. Like you just don't talk about it."

Participants also discussed their experiences with conversations about school. One participant told the group that her mom gave her expectations for school, but never specified exactly what she meant:

"...my mom, one thing she did, was she always stressed education, but she stressed it with words...she'll tell you, '... you need to take care of your business in school.' Well, what does that mean? Like if I was a kid that had no idea... Well, what does that mean? What is take care of your business in school?"

Another participant expressed that she did not have any type of real conversations with her parents. She mentioned how they never asked about school and how she does the opposite for her own children, which shows her dissatisfaction with the lack of conversation that took place in her youth:

We didn't really have conversations. Um, not even about school. Like they never asked about school. Like how was your day, stuff like that...my kids, I ask 'how was your day? What was the favorite part? ...did you have anything negative that happened? Or how did you feel?' Stuff like that.

Participants had many reasons for why they believed these important conversations surrounding politics, sexual health, education, and daily feelings were not discussed. One reason

a participant gave was that parents simply may have not known the information their children were looking for. She said, “my parents, I couldn't ask them nothing. Like literally nothing. Um, and I think part of it was like that they didn't know, and they were like embarrassed to say they didn't know.” She explained that she often used the internet to get answers for many of her questions. Another participant believed that in addition to not knowing the correct information to provide, parents may not know how to approach their children about certain topics:

And I think about like why the conversations don't happen and, I don't know, I feel like it definitely is a matter of them, the parents, just not knowing or how to approach it. 'Cause like, I'm putting myself in my parents' shoes. If I found out that my children were sexually active, how would I come to the conversation with no prior knowledge or no, like, like how do you approach a conversation?

Another participant agreed with her perspective, stating, “I don't see how you would,” in reference to approaching a child about being sexually active.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, a participant explained that sometimes her parents talked down to her in an authoritative way, rather than having conversations *with* her. She also believed that this type of tone may lead to important conversations not being held or children to not be receptive of the information:

I think that's another reason why conversations don't happen. 'cause a lot of the times it can be like you are talking down...especially if it's about something that they've quote on quote lived or dealt with. Like money, right. My mom, anytime we talk about money, she's talking down to me because she's like, ‘I struggled, you don't have to struggle.’ And I'm like, ‘alright, relax,’...so...you're less likely inclined to listen.

She also expressed that if she had to hold these types of conversations with children, she would “talk to them like they’re people, not talk down,” indicating that she would handle conversations differently than her mom.

One participant also expressed that she could not ask her parents anything because they would not give her answers, either because they did not know or because they did not want her to know the information:

...my parents, I couldn't ask them nothing. Like literally nothing...But then part of it also was like, ‘why are you even thinking about that,’ right? ...like, let's be for real...once you get to the age where you're thinking about things...You're not gonna stop any kid, youth, whatever from thinking or asking those questions. So why would you not want them to ask YOU? Right? But in my household, no.

She received many verbal affirmations and head nods in agreement from the group. She then went on to explain that she had to get the information on her own in different ways, and can now better educate her siblings:

...I'm kind of glad that like I was the first to go through it because I found other ways.

Like there were some avenues in school where I could ask and like, I feel like the parts of the internet where I did go to find would be like helpful...So now I'm glad that like my brothers still can't ask my parents often, but they can ask me.

Another participant explained that her parents did allow her to come to them with any questions; however, her mom took an authoritative approach in giving responses:

Um, I would say as a teenager, my parents had like an open-door policy. So like, if I had a question I could ask. I could definitely ask. But the answer heavily depended on how my parents took it. So, I always thanked my dad for this 'cause he was never one to like

sugarcoat anything. Like he was always gonna tell me what I needed to hear or what was appropriate for me to hear. But my mom, she was one of those, ‘because I said so like, because I,’ you know, and I always found it weird.

A couple participants expressed that they had no parental role models in their lives, which may have impacted their overall life satisfaction, community connectedness, and choices going into adulthood. One participant explained that although she grew up in a healthy two-parent household, her and her siblings “did not see any positive role models as kids.” They had to encourage each other to go to college, in which all of them attended college and graduated, even though no adults in their lives growing up did. However, she explained that she looked up to her grandmother because she thought she was a nurse, later finding out she was not:

I thought my grandmother was a nurse...She was like a OR transporter person, what I found out many, many years later. But I ended up becoming a nurse just following that, just following, watching her go to hospitals and things.

Another participant explained that her parents wanted her and her siblings to be involved in the community as much as possible, so they participated in activities with them. She said, “...we did Pop Warner sports and my parents helped run the, the team, squad, whatever you wanna call it.”

Lastly, participants believed that their generation will be “more prepared to be parents and raise a community” than the generation that raised them. To justify this thinking, one participant said, “I feel like our parents before were just surviving...” She then further explained that society functions differently today than it did when their parents were raising children. She said that one of the main ways it functions differently is in forms of respect:

What they perceive to be respect is to be very like...no one's gonna talk back. No one's gonna voice any opinion. It's just what they say and that's gonna be it. Like that's their version of respect...Our version of respect is mutual parties, you know, coming to a conclusion on one common goal. And we are looking at it like...I can voice my opinion, I can say what I have to say because that's, that's what communication is. And their version is like, no, that's talking back, that's disrespectful.

She received head nods and one “mm-hmm” to show agreement among other participants, demonstrating that they also believe they can do better for their children than their parents did for them, which relates to their satisfaction with their lives.

Conclusion

Throughout the focus group, participants reflected on their adolescence very often. They told many stories about their experiences in their youth, how they view those experiences in the present compared to the past, and what they have learned from them. These experiences frequently involved their parents or another adult who was present in their youth. Participants constantly shared verbal and physical affirmations with one another, demonstrating that they understand or can relate to each other's experiences. These experiences also demonstrate a relationship between life satisfaction and adolescent experiences.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the satisfactions and dissatisfactions Black residents of Syracuse, NY have with living in and being raised in Syracuse. Specifically, I aimed to examine (1) the life satisfaction in Black residents of Syracuse, NY; (2) the role of adolescent experiences on current life satisfaction; (3) and the relationship between life satisfaction and social connectedness. The two questions that guided my research are (1) “what factors play a role in the life satisfaction of Black individuals in Syracuse, NY?” and (2) “what effect do these factors have on them and their community?”

The results of this study revealed three main themes: Community Connectedness, Residential Environment, and Adolescent Experiences. Within these themes, eight subthemes arose: Connectedness Among General Community Members, Connectedness Among Family, Community Resources & Services, Crime/Safety, Local Government & Authority, White Centeredness, Adult-Youth Relationships and Parental Involvement.

Overall, participants had many similar life experiences specific to growing up in Syracuse, which was demonstrated by them agreeing with each other and telling similar stories of their personal experiences. They were familiar with the stories from others, as they understood them without context being given within the group. They bonded well (e.g. laughing, smiling, telling jokes, speaking directly to one another) and agreed on most topics that were brought up.

Participants seemed to be satisfied with their overall life satisfaction. Although they critiqued aspects of their childhood and their current environment, they were satisfied with the relationships they have built and the resources around them. Of all topics discussed, participants were most satisfied with their social connectedness, especially their voluntary participation in

their community and their relationships with people within their community. Social connectedness is positively correlated with life satisfaction. They were least satisfied with their residential environment, especially the crime and the efforts made by politicians and law enforcement to reduce crime and poverty in Syracuse. Residential environment is also positively correlated with overall life satisfaction.

This chapter will present a discussion of the findings of the research, a further analysis of the literature in relation to the findings of this study, implications, suggestions for future research, and strengths and limitations of the study.

Theme 1: Community Connectedness

In the first theme, Community Connectedness, participants reported feeling a strong sense of community connectedness, or being connected to their communities. They were very involved in their communities, whether it was through volunteering their time to make the community better or staying updated on what was happening in their community. They expressed both satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their connectedness to their community in their youth and adulthood.

Subtheme 1: Connectedness Among General Community Members

A subtheme within the main theme was Connectedness Among General Community Members. Participants discussed how they felt connected to their community and its members by being a part of organizations and clubs, building relationships, and providing resources for others within their communities.

Many participants expressed that they believed they felt connected to their community because they were involved in local organizations. They also believed that people who are not as involved in their community do not feel as connected as them. Participants also reported feeling connected to their communities as children because they were involved in many different social activities or programs (e.g. Boys and Girls Club, basketball, and Pop Warner sports). One participant explained that she felt excluded as a child because her mom did not let her participate in different social activities, which she believes could have been damaging to her connection to the community. As Stavrova and Luhmann (2009) found, meaning in life, which is positively correlated with life satisfaction (Steger & Kashdan, 2007, as cited in Stavrova & Luhmann, 2009) increases as participants' voluntary activity in organizations increase. Olasupo et al., (2021) also found that individuals who regularly participated in social activities and social interactions reported higher life satisfaction than those who did not. Taking the findings from both the literature and the current study into consideration, it is possible that participants had a higher life satisfaction than residents who do not engage in as many organizations and social activities. Participants expressed being very involved in both their adolescence and adulthood.

Participants expressed that residents in Syracuse make up a close-knit community that provide support and resources for one another. They explained how their ability to find resources has helped them feel connected to their community, and in turn, them being connected helps them find resources. Further, one participant explained that she felt secluded in her childhood because her mother didn't allow her to participate in some programs like other youth (e.g. Boys and Girls club and Hillside). She then explains how that could be damaging to one's ability to experience community connectedness and find resources. This finding aligns with Putnam (1993, as cited in Balestra & Sutan, 2013), which suggests that close-knit neighbors provide resources

and share information among each other to provide a sense of belonging or social connectedness among residents. Again, regular social interactions among people are positively correlated with life satisfaction (Olasupo et al., 2021). Further supporting the positive correlation between social interactions and life satisfaction, one participant expressed her dissatisfaction with the close-knit Syracuse community. She explained that she was casted as an outsider when she first moved to the city and was unable to find resources and support, which negatively affected her sense of belonging in the community.

Participants also reported not wanting to move out of Syracuse because they wanted to improve the lives of others. Specifically, they wanted their tax money and the money they spend to support local businesses and schools. This demonstrates an attachment to the City of Syracuse because even though they knew that the suburbs may offer better opportunities and a better residential neighborhood, they wanted to stay in Syracuse. Aragonés (2016) found that people from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to not be satisfied with their neighborhood because it is an impoverished environment, but they manage to build attachments to their neighborhood because of the social and psychological components that makes it up. These connections may make moving away difficult, even if it may improve their residential environment, which may be the case with the participants in this study. Throughout the study they discussed the strength of their connections with community members, family members, and their participation in community activities. At the same time, they complained about what they disliked most about the residential environment of Syracuse, including the crime, lack of school resources, and not having decent local businesses. Although they expressed dissatisfaction with their residential environment, their connections to the community may have made it difficult to leave Syracuse.

Subtheme 2: Connectedness Among Family

The second subtheme under the theme Community Connectedness is Connectedness Among Family. Participants mentioned importance of relationships with children, parents, nieces, siblings, cousins, grandparents, and intimate partners. They expressed a high value of marriage and intimate relationships in their lives, as well as the importance of strong bonds and support for their children. Overall, participants reported having strong relationships and connections to their family in both their adolescence and adulthood.

Many participants indicated dissatisfaction with certain aspects of their childhood by expressing that they would give their children different childhood experiences than they had. These dissatisfactions mainly surrounded a lack of parental support and conditions of their residential environment, leading to participants having an increased desire to be a person their children can depend on and look up to (e.g. financially, psychologically, and academically), and live in neighborhoods with less crime. These findings relate to those by Suldo and Huebner (2006, as cited by Antaramian et al., 2009), which suggests that greater parental support was associated with higher life satisfaction. Participants wanted to provide better support for their children because they were not satisfied with the level of support they received as children, which may have affected their life satisfaction during their adolescence. Further, Perlaviciute & Steg (2012) found that people valued safety more than most other neighborhood aspects. Participants wanted to provide a safer environment for their children than they had, which demonstrates their dissatisfaction with their residential neighborhood during their adolescence. Residential satisfaction has been found to have an impact on overall life satisfaction (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012).

Additionally, based on participants' statements, it is clear that they put a high value on relationships with family members and that the importance of family was consistent throughout their lifespan. They demonstrated overall satisfaction with their family life by emphasizing how they have made an effort to be surrounded by family on different occasions at different stages of their lives and how it made them feel. Research has found that family relationships have a greater impact on overall life satisfaction of adolescents than peer, school, and community relationships (Dew & Huebner, 1994, as cited in Antaramian et al., 2009; Huebner, 1991, as cited in Antaramian et al., 2009). Toth et al. (2002) also found that frequent visits to parents, siblings, and extended family is positively correlated with higher life satisfaction.

Participants also put a high importance to healthy marriages; however, only one participant expressed that she was married. Research has shown that life satisfaction is greater in those who are married than those who are widowed, divorced, or have never been married (Powdthavee, 2008; Song & Appleton, 2008; Stavrova & Luhmann, 2016). Further, participants expressed that marriage has a significant role in family life and that healthy marriages are important for children to see. Antaramian et al., (2009) has found that non-intact families--which they define as any family structure that does not include both biological parents--has a negative behavioral, psychological, and relational effect on children, which may affect their overall well-being. However, one participant's statement disagreed with this finding, as she explained that her husband, who is not the biological father of all her children, has bonded with them as if they were his own and has helped her demonstrate a healthy marriage and home environment for them.

Theme 2: Residential Environment

In the second theme, participants expressed both satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their residential environment in Syracuse, NY. However, when speaking on their dissatisfactions, they spoke more passionately (e.g. more hand gestures and speaking louder than when discussing other topics) than they did when discussing their satisfactions.

Subtheme 1: Community Resources & Services

In the first subtheme that arose under the theme, Residential Environment, participants reflected on the resources that have been available to them as residents of Syracuse in both their youth and as adults. They discussed both the positive and negatives of the resources that have been available to them.

Participants expressed that a positive aspect of their neighborhood growing up was that there were many businesses, schools, churches, and organizations within walking distance from their homes. This finding is associated with the finding by Ma et al. (2018), which suggests that a long commuting time is associated with lower overall life satisfaction. Therefore, their daily activities being easily accessible to them may have a positive impact on their life satisfaction. Additionally, research suggests that easy accessibility to these locations is highly valued by residents (Aragones et al., 2016; Becker, Böhmer, & Gerike, 2008, as cited in Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012). Another positive aspect of their childhood neighborhood was being able to play with other children who lived close by. Aragones et al. (2016) suggests that neighborhoods provide residents with important social relationships and a sense of belonging, which may impact their overall life satisfaction (Van Bel et al., 2009).

The abundance of services and resources available to Syracuse residents was another aspect of their community that participants reported being satisfied with. They acknowledged

available resources and services for the economically disadvantaged, political resources, and services for children. However, they also mentioned that public schools in Syracuse do not have enough resources to properly serve the students. The evaluation of resources was expected, as Aragonés et al., (2016) found that long-term residents of an area tend to give high importance to the adequacy of public services. These focus group discussions relate to a study by Ruiz et al. (2019), which found that residents who lived in neighborhoods with fewer resources were more likely to have a lower level of optimism, which they also believe is positively correlated with satisfaction with life. Further, Ruiz et al. (2019) found that participants' perceptions of services offered in their community was positively correlated with optimism and residential satisfaction, which has an impact on overall well-being (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012). Thus, because participants of the present study perceive Syracuse to offer many valuable resources and services, they may be more likely to be optimistic about their neighborhood and have higher residential satisfaction; however, this may not be true if they value academic resources and services higher than other types.

Subtheme 2: Crime/Safety

Crime/Safety is the second subtheme under the main theme Residential Environment. In this subtheme, participants expressed their opinions on the crime in Syracuse and their feelings of safety within the city. This may have an effect on their satisfaction with living in Syracuse, also known as their residential satisfaction, which has an affect on overall life satisfaction (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012).

Overall, participants reported very strong feelings of being unsafe in Syracuse due to the violent crime they have witnessed, been directly impacted by, or heard about. Research has

found that crime is one of many factors that negatively affect residential satisfaction (Balestra & Sultan, 2013). Perlaviciute & Steg (2012) also revealed that participants gave more importance to feelings of safety within their neighborhood than 22 other neighborhood aspects, further indicating that feelings of safety heavily impact residential satisfaction.

Research has also found a negative correlation between life satisfaction and living in an area with high crime rates (Cohen, 2008; Powdthavee, 2005, as cited in Manning et al., 2016), though the type of crime is not specified. The same correlation is found between residential satisfaction and living in high crime areas (Balestra & Sultan, 2013). Further, although statistically insignificant, Cohen (2008) found that life satisfaction decreased for those that lived within a mile of an area they perceived to be unsafe.

Subtheme 3: Local Government and Authority

Under the subtheme Local Government and Authority, participants expressed their thoughts and feelings on local politicians and law enforcement in relation to their efforts to serve the residents of Syracuse. Their beliefs and comments may be linked to both residential and overall life satisfaction.

Participants' critical opinions and dissatisfactions with law enforcement in Syracuse align with the results from a study by Reisig & Giacomazzi (1998). Researchers found that people who came from neighborhoods that were less integrated, more unruly, and housed younger, less educated, and lower income residents reported lower satisfaction with police performance than people from neighborhoods with opposite characteristics (Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998). These characteristics are similar to those of Syracuse, as both statistics and focus group results of the present study show. Participants' dissatisfactions with law enforcement efforts also relate to

research findings that suggest there is a negative correlation between crime rates and satisfaction with police (Sampson & Jeglum-Bartusch, 1998, as cited in Hinds, 2009; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005, as cited in Hinds, 2009). Lastly, one study by Hinds (2009) has found a positive correlation between feeling safe in one's neighborhood and satisfaction with police. As mentioned previously, people reported feeling safe as one of the most important aspects of residential satisfaction, which has an impact on overall life satisfaction (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012). Thus, it can be implied that police dissatisfaction has a negative impact on overall life satisfaction for the participants of the present study.

Research shows that participation in politics or expressing a general interest in it does tend to increase life satisfaction (Appleton & Song, 2008). Participants of the present study mentioned their own involvement in voting, attending political meetings, and their own knowledge of politics in general. However, they reported beliefs that other residents in the city do not get involved in politics or cooperate with law enforcement, even though they acknowledge that there are issues in Syracuse that need to be improved (e.g. high crime rates). This belief contradicts a finding by Lavrakas and Herz (1982, as cited in Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998) which states that residents of an area are more likely to get involved in change if they believe there are neighborhood problems.

Although participants themselves are politically active and knowledgeable, they were dissatisfied with the efforts of politicians in developing efficient solutions to make Syracuse better for its residents. They believed that politicians and law makers have not tried their best to serve the residents of Syracuse, especially Black residents. According to previous research, trustworthiness in the government, its responsiveness to issues, and its efficiency in serving the people is positively and significantly correlated with higher life satisfaction (Liu et al., 2020).

Further, their ability to provide public service had the most influence on life satisfaction (Liu et al., 2020). Participants expressed negative feelings towards all of these aspects of the local government, which may have a negative effect on their overall life satisfaction.

Subtheme 4: White Centeredness

The last subtheme under the theme Residential Environment is White Centeredness. Participants explained that Syracuse is a city that prioritizes Eurocentric cultures, values and experiences. They expressed their dissatisfactions with Black residents' ability to be immersed in Black culture.

Participants' dissatisfactions with their opportunities to engage in Black culture (e.g. Black-owned businesses, night life, and clothing stores) may impact their residential satisfaction, thus having a negative effect on their overall well-being. One study found that out of 23 aspects of residential satisfaction, participants rated the ability to develop their own identity as the 5th most important aspect (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012).

Participants also expressed how people in their community are reluctant to support one another (e.g. business endeavors and in the workplace), possibly due to the White Centeredness. Research shows that social relationships affect sense of belonging, which may impact overall life satisfaction (Van Bel et al., 2009). However, Perlaviciute & Steg (2012) found that appreciation/respect by neighbors was one of the least important aspects of residential satisfaction, meaning it may not be a significant factor of overall life satisfaction. One study that contradicts the findings of the present study found that people reported having less social support when they came from neighborhoods with fewer resources (Ruiz et al., 2019). Participants

expressed that Syracuse has an abundance of resources but not a lot of social support among community members.

Theme 3: Adolescent Experiences

In the third and final theme, Adolescent Experiences, participants reflected on their life experiences as youth, especially their relationships with parents and other adults in their lives. The topics were discussed with a lot of emotion (e.g. sadness, embarrassment, and appreciation) and impacted overall life satisfaction in their youth and adulthood.

Subtheme 1: Adult-Youth Relationships

In the first subtheme, Adult-Youth Relationships, participants mentioned relationships that they held with adults other than their parents in their adolescence. They expressed satisfaction with and appreciation of these relationships, even if they did not feel as positive about them in the past.

Participants said adult-youth relationships are important and benefit the youth in many ways (e.g. adults help keep them out of trouble, protect them, and speak positive affirmations to them). These beliefs are consistent with findings by Morenoff et al. (2000, as cited in Balestra & Sultan, 2013), which suggest that youth who live in close-knit communities are less likely to partake in risk-taking behaviors because they may receive advice and support from adults in their community.

Further, one study found that middle school students had higher life satisfaction when they were presented with more opportunities to bond with adults in their community (Paxton et al., 2006). However, this same study suggests that Black students had less opportunities to bond

with adults than their White counterparts due to a lack of resources in their neighborhoods (Paxton et al., 2006). Based on participants' focus group responses, there were plenty of resources and opportunities for them to bond with adults in their community as youth, especially at youth programs and in school. Being socially connected to one's community also affects the perceived quality of their support system, which has an impact on their overall life satisfaction (Van Bel et al., 2009).

Participants also expressed that they felt a weak connection to youth today. Based on findings from existing literature, this may have a negative impact on both the participants of the present study and the youth they are talking about. Building positive relationships with neighbors has been reported to be of high importance in residential satisfaction (Perlaviciute & Steg, 2012). Because participants are not able to build positive connections with youth, their residential satisfaction may be negatively affected, thus impacting overall life satisfaction (Van Bel et al., 2009).

Subtheme 2: Parental Involvement

In the second subtheme that emerged under the theme Adolescent Experiences, participants reflected on how involved their parents were in their lives as youth and how they felt about this involvement. Within their responses they expressed feelings of dissatisfaction with the way their parents handled certain circumstances, which made them do things differently in their adulthood.

Many participants expressed that they witnessed their parents struggle financially during their adolescence and knew that they did the best they could. There is a lack of literature that examines the direct effects of childhood household income on psychological well-being;

however, research has found that low socioeconomic status, specifically social class, has a negative influence on self-esteem (Louis & Zhao, 2002), especially for adolescents ages 8-18 (Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1972, as cited in Chen et al., 2016). Diener and Diener (1995, as cited in Chen et al., 2016) suggest that high self-esteem positively affects life satisfaction. Thus, participants who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and were aware of their parents' financial struggle may have had lower overall life satisfaction during their adolescence.

Some participants also mentioned that their parents were not role models in terms of education and occupation, as they did not attend college and held jobs that provided just enough money to take care of necessities. As research shows, there is a positive correlation between mother's education level and general life satisfaction; however, this correlation is an insignificant predictor of life satisfaction (Loius & Zhao, 2002).

Participants explained that their relationship with their parents lacked efficient communication about topics that they believe should have been discussed in depth (e.g. politics, finances, sexual health, etc.). Research has found that parent-child communication is a stronger predictor of life satisfaction than family structure (Levin et al., 2012). Further, participants expressed that when they attempted to discuss these topics with their parents, they were often pushed away or talked down to, making communication difficult. In relation to this finding, Levin et al. (2012) found that girls who experience easy communication with parents had higher life satisfaction than those who experienced difficult communication. Thus, the difficulty and inadequacy of communication between participants and their parents could negatively affect their life satisfaction. Additionally, research found a strong correlation between the level of parental support and life satisfaction in adolescents (Suldo & Huebner, 2006, as cited in Antaramian et al., 2009).

Although participants described how their childhood experiences have impacted their choices in adulthood, research suggests that experiences in adulthood have more of an impact on life satisfaction in adulthood than childhood experiences do (Loius & Zhao, 2002). Therefore, participants' negative childhood experiences may not have a significant effect on their life satisfaction in adulthood.

Limitations

As with most research, there were limitations to the current study, especially with the qualitative method used to collect data (i.e. focus groups). Because the participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling, they may have known one another to a certain extent, whether it was on a personal level or as acquaintances. This could have affected participant responses because they could have been more reluctant to discuss their experiences in fear of a lack of confidentiality, resulting in people outside of the group knowing what was discussed. However, purposive sampling was also a strength because participants were able to give responses knowing that others in the group held similar experiences and characteristics to them, possibly making participants more comfortable and willing to share their stories.

Another limitation to this study is that there was a small sample size among the focus groups. Despite recruiting efforts over a four-month period and providing two different focus group sessions for participants to choose from based on their availability, the number of participants willing to partake in this study was below what was desired. Each person has their own experiences that could contribute to the research in different ways. Thus, the low sample size limits the available data that could possibly be collected. Taken together, the small sample size and purposive sampling create ungeneralizable results because the experiences of the

participants in this study cannot be applied in a larger context. On the contrary, both factors allowed for more intimate conversations among participants who may relate to each other.

The demographic information collected for this study was very limited in scope. It was collected based on inclusionary criterion rather than for the purpose of exploring what factors may play a role in life satisfaction and which of those that may be affected by it. Collecting demographic information such as marital status, income, and number of dependents would be beneficial to life satisfaction research because these are all factors that have been present in the literature, as mentioned previously in the literature review.

Lastly, this study is no different from many other qualitative studies in that it relies on self-reported data from participants. This is a limitation because participants may report inaccurate answers due to reasons such as poor memory, invalid assessments of themselves, and dishonesty. Due to me knowing some of the participants, they may have reported false information due to social desirability bias. This bias argues that participants give responses that the researcher wants to hear rather than those that align with their actual beliefs and values (Larson, 2019). One way that the chances of social desirability bias occurring could have been reduced would have been to remove myself from the data collection and allow another researcher to sit in during the focus groups. However, due to the nature of this experiment, I was unable to do so.

Although knowing the participants created potential biases within the study, it was also a strength of the study, along with the participants being made aware in the beginning of the focus groups that I am from Syracuse. Participants may have been more willing to share with me than they would have with another researcher knowing that I had some of the same experiences as them and was able to understand their stories with little context.

Implications

This exploratory study raises several opportunities for future research and adds to the existing literature on life satisfaction, especially for Black residents of Syracuse, NY. The current study used a qualitative method for data collection, which is rarely present in the literature on life satisfaction. Accordingly, future studies on life satisfaction could benefit from a mixed methods approach (i.e. qualitative and quantitative data collection) because it would strengthen the results and allow for researchers to make statistical inferences while also collecting detailed responses, which could possibly lead to further research implications. Other types of qualitative methods, including interviews, would also be beneficial because they allow participants to provide oral histories based solely on their own experiences and what they believe is most important to discuss. This is different from focus groups because focus group participants may not have a chance to share all their own thoughts on certain topics and may be more likely to speak to topics that were brought up by other participants for the sake of time and engagement in the conversation.

The literature on life satisfaction also lacks research in a few areas that were brought up during my study, implicating a need for further examination. First, much of the literature was not focused on the United States, and instead focused on countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa. This calls for a need of research on the life satisfaction of Americans, as cultural and political differences between countries may have an impact on perceived life satisfaction. Although there was a small sample size and the findings are not generalizable, this study adds to the literature on life satisfaction by focusing on the experiences and perspectives of Americans. This study also contributes to the literature because it shed light on the effect of local government efficiency and

crime rates in residential neighborhoods on overall life satisfaction, both of which are insufficient in the literature.

Future research on life satisfaction would also benefit from examining the importance of different factors of life satisfaction to participants. Although the literature discussed factors' correlation with life satisfaction, they often ignored how people weigh each factor in their life. A factor's importance determines the strength of the correlation between that factor and overall life satisfaction (Lucas, 2014). Further, as this study examined life satisfaction in both adolescence and adulthood, future research could benefit from longitudinal studies to determine direct correlations between life satisfaction and its determinants across the lifespan.

Lastly, based on the topics mentioned by participants, this study could be of interest to policy makers and community organizations, especially those in Syracuse, NY. They should consider the factors that impact life satisfaction, especially those discussed in the theme Residential Environment, and try to improve the quality of life for the residents of Syracuse. The topics discussed in this theme, especially those in the subthemes Crime/Safety and Local Government & Authority, were all very negative and suggest that the participants were highly dissatisfied in these areas. Further research on life satisfaction in Syracuse residents could bring attention to areas that may have been overlooked in previous life satisfaction research, including the effect of crime on life satisfaction. Participants may also suggest ideas to help tackle the issues of high poverty and crime rates in the city because they deal with it and are impacted by it daily.

The finding that was most interesting to me was the fact that participants were so critical of their residential environment regarding crime, poverty, behavior of today's youth, and White centeredness, but still wanted to pour into their neighborhoods and give back to their city. Even

though some of them acknowledged that they were in a position to move outside of the city, none of them expressed interest in doing so. Instead, they specifically acknowledged that they wanted to make sure they were able to give back through volunteering in local organizations, neighborhood cleanups, mentoring, and living within city limits so that their tax money goes back into the city.

In conclusion, this study makes several contributions to positive psychology, specifically life satisfaction, and provides opportunities for further research. The focus groups of the present study produced interesting results and further exploring the topic based on these results would give researchers a better understanding of the factors and effects of life satisfaction.

Appendices

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
MEMORANDUM

TO: Kendra DeLoach McCutcheon
DATE: September 7, 2023
SUBJECT: Amendment Approval - Use of Human Participants
IRB#: 23-168
AMENDMENT#: 1 - A) Change in Protocol Title;
B) Consent Form Changes (Revised);
C) Change in Total Number of Subjects (150 to 20);
D) Change in Methods;
E) Change in and/or Addition of Research Instruments/Tools;
F) Change in Recruitment Materials/Methods (Revisions);
G) Other - Adding Compensation (\$15 Visa Gift Card for participation)
TITLE: *Life Satisfaction of Syracuse, NY Residents*

The amendment to the above referenced human participants protocol has been reviewed and approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you have amended your currently approved consent/assent form and/or added a new consent/assent form, a copy of this document is attached. Your revised document has been date stamped with the amendment approval date. If you have amended your consent/assent form, the amended document replaces the original approved document and is to be used in your informed consent/assent process.

Federal regulations require that each participant indicate their willingness to participate by signing the informed consent/assent document and be provided with a copy of the signed form. Regulations also require that you keep a copy of this document for a minimum of three years.

This protocol was approved as of **June 13, 2023**. An Expedited Status Report will be requested annually until you request your study be closed.

You are reminded that formal amendment requests are required for any additional proposed changes to this protocol. It is important to note that changes cannot be initiated **prior** to IRB review and approval; except when such changes are essential to eliminate apparent immediate harm to the participants. In this instance, changes must be reported to the IRB within five days. All protocol changes must be submitted on an amendment request form available on the IRB web site at: [IRB-Amendment-Request-Form.docx](#).

Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB within 10 working days of occurrence on the Report of Unanticipated Problems form located on the IRB website at: [Report-of-Unanticipated-Problems.docx](#).

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Katherine McDonald
IRB Chair

DEPT: FALK Social Work, 276 White Hall

STUDENT: Shalyce Wilson

Office of Research Integrity and Protections
214 Lyman Hall, 100 College Place
Syracuse, NY 13244

T: 315.443.3013
orip@syr.edu



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Protocol Title: Life Satisfaction of Syracuse, NY Residents

Principal Investigator

Dr. DeLoach McCutcheon
Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Syracuse University
Email: kmccutch@syr.edu
Project Role: As principal investigator, Dr. DeLoach McCutcheon will oversee project implementation and overall project completion.

Key Research Personnel

Shalyce Wilson
Student, Pan-African Studies Master's Program, African American Studies Department,
Syracuse University
Email: swilso10@syr.edu
Project Role: As key research personnel, Shalyce Wilson will be responsible for running the focus group and organizing and analyzing the data.

Introduction:

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about participation in a research study and offer you the opportunity to decide whether you wish to participate. You can take as much time as you wish to decide and can ask any questions you may have now, during or after the research is complete. Your participation is voluntary.

What is the Purpose of This Research Study?

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine life satisfaction of Black and Latinx individuals in Syracuse, NY, what factors play a role in their life satisfaction, and the effect it has on them and their community. The main research question of interest is "What factors play a role in life satisfaction of Black and Latinx individuals in Syracuse, NY, and what effect do these factors have on them and their community?" This study hopes to examine (1) life satisfaction in Black and Latinx residents of Syracuse, NY; (2) the role of adolescent experiences on current life satisfaction; (3) and the role life satisfaction plays in social connectedness.

Study Procedures

As a research participant, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute focus group led by research team member Shalyce Wilson. The focus group will include guiding questions relating to life satisfaction in specific areas of life, such as general happiness, family, employment, education, and social life.

Possible Risks

The risk to you, as the participant, is minimal. You may be asked to think about or reminded of past and present economic struggles, educational struggles, social relationships, personal achievements, life satisfaction, happiness, and feelings about your community.

Whenever one works with email or the Internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet via third parties.

Benefits

There aren't any direct benefits to you as the participant; however, the given responses and discussion may be used to make improvements in the Syracuse, NY community. Since the study focuses on life satisfaction, your responses may lead to ways to improve the life satisfaction of others in the community. This may also lead to public policy changes, which could be transformational in poverty, crime, and academic performance.

Privacy

During the focus group, names will not be used in order to mask the participants' identity. The doors to the room that the focus group will be held in will be locked and shut. No electronic devices are permitted inside the room and will be collected before the focus group begins.

Raw data will not be coded linking the participants' identity to the data. Only members of the research team (Dr. DeLoach McCutcheon and Shalyce Wilson) will have access to the data for organizing and analysis purposes. Observational notes and voice recordings will be stored on a password protected device on Syracuse University's Microsoft OneDrive system and will only be accessible to members of the research team. If necessary, it will also be transferred between team members through this system. The audio voice recordings will be recorded on a Zoom meeting where only Shalyce Wilson is present. The meeting will be password protected.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of your data will be our highest priority. There is the risk that information about you may become known to people outside of this study, but we will make sure to remove all personally identifiable information protect your privacy throughout the data analysis process. We also expect that some of this data will be of general interest to the research community, educators, and other stakeholders. After the removal of identifiable information, the data may be shared with these stakeholders without additional consent.

Although privacy and confidentiality are a priority and members of the focus group will be instructed not to share information disclosed in the focus group, your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Audio Recording

The focus group will be audio recorded to compliment observational notes and allow the research team (Dr. DeLoach McCutcheon and Shalyce Wilson) to have access to this data for later analysis. Only members of the research team will have access to the audio recordings. They will be recorded on Zoom and then transferred to and stored in Syracuse University's OneDrive, where they will be kept for possible future research. The only person that will be active in the Zoom meeting will be Shalyce Wilson, the research team member who is leading the focus group. The meeting will be password protected so that no other individuals can join.

Compensation for Participation

Compensation will be given to you, the participant, in the form of a \$15 Visa Gift Card that will be distributed at the end of the focus group. If you choose to withdraw within the first 45 minutes of the focus group, you will receive \$5 in cash for your time and efforts spent participating in the study. If you withdraw between 46-89 minutes, you will receive \$10 in cash.

Information regarding situations of abuse/risk/harm if/when mandated reporting is indicated

We will keep your study data as confidential as possible with the exception of certain information that we must report for legal or ethical reasons, such as child abuse, elder abuse, sexual misconduct, or intent to harm yourself or others. Under Syracuse University policy, faculty and researchers are considered mandated reporters.

Your Rights as a Research Participant

- Your participation is voluntary.
- You may skip and/or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

If You Have Questions Now, During or After the Research is Complete

- For questions, concerns or more information regarding this research you may contact Dr. DeLoach McCutcheon at kmccutch@syr.edu or Shalyce Wilson at swilso10@syr.edu.
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

Final Consent

- All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and by signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this form for my personal records.
- By signing this form, I understand that the focus group will be audio recorded.

Printed Name of the Participant

Date: _____

Signature of the Participant

Printed Name of the Researcher

Date: _____

Signature of the Researcher

Black & Latinx Syracuse, NY Residents... **WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

The purpose of this research study is to examine life satisfaction of Black and Latinx individuals in Syracuse, NY, what factors play a role in their life satisfaction, and the effect it has on them and their community.



Eligibility:

- **Age 18+**
- **Identify as Black and/or Latinx**
- **Currently live in Syracuse, NY**
- **Attended high school in Syracuse, NY**

Requirements:

- **90 minute in-person focus group at Syracuse University (agreeing to be audio recorded is required for participation)**
- **Availability 10/05 5-6:30pm OR 10/07 12:30-2pm**

**JOIN US FOR A DISCUSSION ON
THE ROLE LIFE SATISFACTION
HAS IN YOUR LIFE!**

**\$15 VISA GIFT
CARD FOR
PARTICIPATION!!**

For more information and/or questions contact Shalyce Wilson at swilso10@syr.edu or text "info" to 315-708-1088



**TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP PLEASE FOLLOW THE LINK
BELOW OR SCAN THE QR CODE
[HTTPS://SYRACUSEUNIVERSITY.QUALTRICS.COM/JFE/FORM/SV_6TJX
BORRHVYXAW](https://syracuseuniversity.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/sv_6tjx_borrhvyyxaw)**

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. Do you feel a sense of connectedness/closeness within your community? Why do you think you do/don't?
2. In what ways has your community changed?
3. Would you want to give your children the childhood you had?
4. Did your parents want you to live in the communities you lived in as children?
5. What are your thoughts on the City of Syracuse's attempts to reduce crime and poverty?
6. As an adolescent, did you have a meaningful relationship with any of the adults in your life besides family?
7. Are youth-adult relationships important?
8. Do you think Syracuse politicians have the city's minority population in their best interest?
9. Does Syracuse provide an opportunity for social mobility?
10. Were important conversations held at your home growing up?
11. Did your parents talk about politics at home?

Age	Gender	Race	Race (specified if other)	Do you currently live in Syracuse, NY?	Highest Education Level Completed	Years in a Syracuse High School	High School Attended
21	Woman	Black or African American		Yes	High school diploma or GED	4	Syracuse academy of science
22	Woman	African American		Yes	Some college, no degree	4	lrc
25	Woman	Black or African American		Yes	Bachelors degree	4	Nottingham
21	Woman	Other/multiple (please specify) (Onondaga)	Black, white, Native	Yes	Some college, no degree	4	Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School
38	Woman	Black or African American		Yes	Bachelors degree	4	Corcoran
45	Woman	Black or African American		Yes	Masters Degree	4	Nottingham Sr. High
38	Woman	African American		Yes	Bachelors degree	4	Thomas J Corcoran
19	Woman	Black or African American		Yes	High school diploma or GED	More than 4	corcoran high school
19	Woman	Black or African American		Yes	Some college, no degree	More than 4	Syracuse Academy of Sciences charter school

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Vita

Shalyce Wilson received a B.S. in African American Studies and Psychology from Syracuse University in May 2022. During her time at Syracuse, she was a research assistant in the Close Relationships psychology lab and conducted independent research that was presented at multiple annual conferences, including Society for Social and Personality Psychology (SPSP) and National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR). Her undergraduate research focused on perspective taking and interracial closeness in platonic relationships; the impacts of race and gender on health among people in interracial relationships; and the effects of intergroup conflict on perceived mental health for the 2020 presidential election. Shalyce's current research interests include ethnic-racial identity development, specifically in Black adolescents; examining the intersection of race and gender; the long-lasting effects of redlining on underrepresented communities; and the impact of one's environment on their ability to learn.