UNDERSTANDING ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND RESILIENCE AMONG

STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH: A QUANTATIVE AND QUALITATIVE

EXPLORATION

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Abstract

Aims: This study examined romantic relationships among street-involved youth through the perspectives of resilience and developmental relationship theory. The main goal was to determine if romantic relationships were related to resilience among street-involved youth.

Methods: Two studies were conducted. A self-report survey administered to125 youth at shelters examined if the positive and negative qualities of romantic relationships were linked to higher and lower resilience (Study 1). Study 1 also provided current descriptive data on the youth's romantic relationship activities. In Study 2, 21 youth participated in semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was conducted exploring how the youth understand their romantic relationships as supporting or undermining their resilience.

Results: Study 1 found that romantic relationships were linked to resilience. Involvement in survival sex was associated with higher drug use and lower self-esteem. Among youth in a current romantic relationship, physical and sexual dating violence were associated with lower core strengths, and sexual dating violence was associated with self-esteem. Positive relationship qualities were also found to play a role in resilience, with feeling 'in love' linked to higher self-esteem.

Study 2 indicated that consistent with the social bonding theory, connection, support, validation, and encouragement within a relationship were related to the youth's resilience, in the form of comparatively lower drug use, achieving goals, increasing self-worth, and promoting positive coping. The youth also reported many negative experiences within their romantic relationships, including dating violence and the stress of street-life, which they saw as undermining their resilience. A key finding was that the youth appeared to have difficulty integrating the positive and negative aspects of their relationships. These results were

encapsulated through the meta-theme: It can be Beautiful or Destructive, along with five main themes.

Discussion: In this study, the majority of youth had been involved with a romantic partner at some point in their lives. Through these relationships the youth face both positive and detrimental experiences, which are linked to other areas of their functioning. Addressing the negative aspects of the youth's relationships, and promoting the development of more positive romantic relationships may play a role in increasing the youth's resilience.

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Chapter 1: Overview

Romantic relationships are a key aspect of adolescent and young adult development (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Romantic partners likely play a particularly large role in a street-involved youth's life given that many of these youth do not have other sources of family support (Karabanow, 2006). Another key aspect of development is resilience, which provides an understanding of how at-risk youth can develop along a more positive trajectory (Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Masten, 2007). Much of the research to date has focused on the risks street-involved youth face, however researchers are now beginning to examine the resiliency in their lives as well (Cronley & Evans, 2017; Kolar, Erickson & Stewart, 2012).

Research on resilience among street-involved youth has found that support from adults and entering street life at a later age are associated with more positive functioning (Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Voegler, 2000). The question is whether or not romantic relationships also contribute to a youth's resilience. Indeed, there is limited research on street-involved youth's dating relationships from a developmental and theoretical perspective, and what research there is focuses mainly on risks. Given that romantic relationships are a key part of adolescent development, the lack of resilience-based research on this aspect of the lives of street-involved youth means that we are missing important information about possible links to resilience which could then inform interventions (Masten, 2007).

This study examines romantic relationships among street-involved youth from a theoretical perspective rooted in resilience and developmental relationship theory. The main goal of this dissertation project is to determine if romantic relationships are related to resilience among street-involved youth, as measured by perceived individual strength, self-esteem, lower drug use, positive coping, feeling supported, and engaging in pro-social activities (i.e. work and

school). In doing so, this dissertation will also expand our knowledge of their romantic relationships through exploring the youth's dating activities, and the positive and negative aspects of their relationships. It also explores the key role the unique conditions of street life play in the romantic relationships of street-involved youth. This dissertation provides both qualitative and quantitative data, and therefore will be divided into two studies. The quantitative study addresses whether romantic relationships, and the positive and negative qualities of these relationships, are linked to resilience. The qualitative study employs the theoretical lens of resilience and relationship-development to understand how the youth conceptualize romantic relationships, and how these relationships both support and undermine resilience from the youth's perspectives.

Demographics of street-involved youth

As stated in the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness, "Youth homelessness [or street-involvement] refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence." Youth who are street-involved are considered inherently different from adults experiencing homelessness. Although adolescents and young adults are in the process of psychosocial development and life skill acquisition, they still remain dependent upon relationships with adult caregivers to meet their economic, emotional, safety, and personal needs. As such, the experience of street involvement for youth is often dangerous and may impact their development into adulthood (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016, p.1).

Of the 35,000 Canadians experiencing homelessness on a given night, about 6-7000 are between the ages of 13-24 years old. Over the course of a year about 35-40,000 youth will

experience an episode of homelessness (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016). In a survey of street-involved youth across Canada, 57.6% identified as cisgender male, 36.4% as cisgender female, and 29.5% identified as LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit), with 6% identifying as either transgender, two-spirit, or gender non-binary. Eleven percent of the youth reported being 13-16 years of age, 49% reported being 17-20 years of age, and 37% reported being 21-24 years of age (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016).

The Experience of Homelessness

The youth's paths to street-involvement, and their experiences while on the street, appear as varied as the youth themselves. A number of dynamic and interwoven factors contribute to youth entering street life, including personal factors, familial factors, economic factors, and systemic factors (Kidd et al., 2016). Some youth living on the street have removed themselves from a difficult situation at home (runaways), others are removed from the home by parents or guardians, and some are forced to leave because they are no longer eligible for government programs, such as child protective services (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kirst & Erickson, 2013; Karabanow, 2008). For example, when a protective services order ends and adolescent 'ages out' of services, or an adolescent is old enough to sign themselves out of services, but the family conflict has not resolved, often youth are either forced out of home shortly after returning, or go to a shelter instead of returning to a negative home environment (Nichols, 2013). A very small minority of youth are on the street, not because of difficulties at home, but out of a desire for adventure and freedom. Youth also leave as a result of drug use (parental or their own), poverty, divorce, unstable or uncaring family life, and sexual identity issues (Gaetz et al., 2016; Karabanow, 2008). Many street-involved youth also suffer from pre-existing mental health conditions such as depression, conduct disorder, psychosis, and post-traumatic stress disorder

(Kidd, 2004; Mckay & Aiello, 2013). For most however, emotional, physical or sexual abuse in the family are the main reasons youth leave their homes for the street (Karabanow, 2008; Karabanow & Naylor, 2013). Indeed, in studies of Canadian street-involved youth, about two-fifths to two thirds of youth report physical abuse, and almost one-quarter report sexual abuse by an adult (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kirst & Erickson, 2013; McKay & Aiello, 2013).

While on the street, youth are at high risk for suicide, substance abuse, mental health problems, violence, exploitation, prostitution, nutritional vulnerability and malnutrition, respiratory illness, and STIs (Forchuk et al, 2013; Kennedy et al., 2012; Kidd et al., 2016; Kirst & Erickson, 2013; Murphy, 2016; Wagner, Carlin, Cauce, & Tenner, 2001). A study of Canadian street- involved youth indicated that 29% reported a current STI (Kumar et al., 2015), and another Canadian study reported that 3% of street-involved youth are infected with HIV. Indeed, street-involved youth are about six times more likely to be infected with HIV compared to youth living in stable housing (Marshall, et al., 2008).

In addition to illness, the majority of street-involved youth do not get enough food to meet their nutrition and energy needs (Gaetz et al., 2016). Almost half of young women and over a quarter of young men on the street experience chronic food deprivation, with no food intake for several days at a time. Youth lack money to purchase adequate food for themselves, and navigating charitable food programs can be challenging due to restricted quantities and schedules (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2013; Li, Dachner, & Tarasuk, 2009).

The youth's physical safety is compromised through physical violence from others on the street. About 60% of street-involved youth in Canada report violent criminal victimization, such as assault or robbery, and 57% report property theft (Gaetz, O'Grady, & Buccieri, 2010; Gaetz et al., 2016). Furthermore, a North American study of street-involved youth found that almost one-

fifth experienced human trafficking victimization (Murphy, 2016).

The stress and trauma the youth experience while street-involved necessarily impacts their mental health (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2016; McCay & Aiello, 2013). In a sample of Canadian street-involved youth, 31% reported experiencing major depression, 27% reported a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, and 36% reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Kidd, 2013). Furthermore, within the last 12 months, 27% of a sample of street-involved youth experienced suicidal ideation, and 15% reported a suicide attempt (Kirst & Erickson, 2013). In a Canada-wide survey of street-involved youth, 42% reported at least one suicide attempt in their lifetime (Kidd, Gaetz, & O'Grady, 2017). Young women on the streets report higher rates of suicide attempts compared to young men (Gaetz et al., 2016). Some youth use substances to cope with mental health challenges and the difficulties of street life (Buccieri, 2013; Forchuk et al., 2013). Almost three quarters of the youth in Kirst and Erickson's study reported using alcohol and marijuana over the past month, with over one third using hallucinogens, one quarter using cocaine, and one tenth using crack (2013). Thirty-five percent of street-involved youth across Canada reported at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization (Kidd et al., 2017).

Approximately 25-40% of street-involved youth identify as LGBTQ2S (Josephson & Wright, 2000). These youth leave home for reasons similar to those mentioned above, with the exception of also leaving home due to family conflict regarding their sexual orientation. Compared to cisgender street-involved youth, LGBTQ2S youth report higher rates of physical and sexual victimization, substance use, and mental health difficulties, including suicide attempts, compared to street-involved youth who identify as heterosexual (Abramovitch, 2013; Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Gaetz et al., 2016; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). In a study of street-involved youth, 25% of youth identifying as gay or lesbian, and 10% of youth

identifying as bisexual reported having a diagnosis of HIV (Rew, Whittaker, Taylor-Seehafer, & Smith, 2005). Twenty-four percent of street-involved LGBTQ2S youth reported being trafficked for sex (Murphy, 2016).

Although there are specialized shelters for street-involved youth in the United States, few LGBTQ2S shelters or transitional living programs currently exist in Canada (Lenti, 2015). While there are LGBTQ2S-based drop-in programs on certain evenings, youth report that they often feel unsafe in general shelters, due to experiencing homophobia and transphobia within services. Because of this discomfort and fear some opt to sleep in parks or on the street instead (Abramovitch, 2013; Abramovitch, 2017).

Street-involved youth spend much of their time searching for ways to make money in order to meet their basic needs (Karabanow, Hughes, Tichnor, Kidd, & Patterson, 2010). The majority of street-involved youth indicate that they are interested in finding paid work, however a minority of the youth actually participates in the formal workforce. Street-involved youth who are formally hired are generally paid 'under the table,' below minimum wage. The youth may also have difficulty maintaining jobs, with street-involved youth reporting an average of almost 3 jobs in a year (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004). The challenges of being 'street-involved' make keeping a formal job difficult; the youth attend work during the day, then have to find somewhere to sleep at night, with police and other people waking them up during the night. This lack of sleep then makes it difficult for them to wake up and engage productively at work during the day Karabanow et al., 2010). The paid work in which they participate includes, physical labour, painting, welding, courier, cashier, telemarketing, and babysitting. Fifteen percent of youth receive social assistance, and almost half of the youth engage in panhandling, sell drugs and participate in other criminal activities, such as stealing (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz et al.,

2016; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004).

Attributes of Street-Involved Youth

As with all populations, street-involved youth demonstrate both vulnerabilities and strengths. Despite the abovementioned concerns, street-involved youth may possess many strengths which could help them to navigate life on the street. Some youth attend school and some maintain contact with family (Gaetz et al., 2016; Gibson, 2007; Karabanow, 2006; Liljedahl, Rae, Aubry, & Klodawsky, 2013). Support services for street-involved youth world-wide offer programs to help youth reconnect with their families on their own terms (Winland, 2013). Indeed, some researchers (e.g. Karabanow, 2008; Ferguson, 2007) propose that street-involved youth can be autonomous, active agents who are capable of assessing their own needs and goals. Interviews with street-involved youth indicate that the majority of the youth view living on the street as being mentally and physically safer than continuing to live at home (Karabanow, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

This study views 'youth' as a unique developmental stage, comprised of adolescents and emerging adults. During this stage young people develop their identity, autonomy, and an understanding of relationships, particularly romantic relationships. Additionally, youth must learn to cope with life's challenges with reduced or no parental support (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). The ability to cope with extreme challenges is resilience (Masten, 2007). This study utilizes the framework of resilience to identify when youth are coping adaptively and maladaptively. Given that an individual's resilience does not develop in isolation, the social bonding theory is employed to understand the mechanisms through which romantic relationships may support the development of resilience (McCarthy & Casey, 2008).

Resilience. The study of resilience originated from observing the variety of individual responses to trauma and other catastrophic experiences. Resilience involves positive adaptation during or after experiencing adverse conditions that have the potential to harm the developing individual (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2007; 2011; Rutter, 2013). Indeed, resilience may be defined as "The capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development" (Masten, 2001, p.494). Thus there is an understanding that resilience is not a fixed state, as the resilience an individual displays may change across time and situations. Just as behavioural concerns in childhood can spread from one domain to another, there is an increasing understanding that positive functioning in one domain (i.e. academics) can spread to others, particularly with support or intervention (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Sapienza & Masten, 2011; Ungar, 2013).

Given the dynamic nature of resilience, it has been conceptualized differently across research studies. Some researchers define resilience as the individual meeting typical developmental expectations based on societal values. Other researchers define resilience as a lack of or reduction in problems functioning. Additionally, resilience may also be defined based on external (e.g. lack of delinquency) and/or internal (e.g. low psychological distress) factors (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2015). Because resilience is clearly multidimensional, for the purposes of this project resilience will be defined as both decreased negative functioning (i.e. low drug use) and increased positive functioning (i.e. pursuing academic or employment opportunities), and will examine key internal and external factors relevant to street-involved youth.

Resilience is best viewed from a 'systems' perspective, through understanding that resilience is the result of youth's interactions with their environments, including genetics, culture, personality, family, school, service providers, peers, and significant others. Key system

factors related to resilience in at-risk youth include components associated with close relationships, such as caring relationships with adults, peers and romantic partners. Recent research on resilience has focused on how these factors may be associated with resilience. This study will particularly address when and how romantic relationships help to foster resilience (Masten, 2011; Sapienza & Masten, 2011; Ungar, 2013; Ungar, 2015).

Social bonds and resilience. The theory of social bonding provides insight into how relationships in general may foster resilience in times of stress. The theory of social bonding views delinquency as the result of an individual with limited or broken links to society (Rayburn, Pals, & Wright, 2012). A key aspect of social bonding involves the strength of an individual's close relationships. The positive benefits of strong social bonds are supported through substantial research. For example, they discourage delinquency because people with strong bonds are more sensitive to the impact their actions will have on their loved ones (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Individuals with strong, healthy relationships are more likely to have positive, socio-emotional outcomes even in difficult circumstances (Akers & Lee, 1999; Ungar, 2013). It is important to note that social bonds have been found to be particularly weak among homeless youth (Rayburn, Pals, & Wright, 2012).

Resilience and social bonds among street-involved youth. While the majority of research on homeless youth focuses on the risks they face, research is beginning to also address homeless youth's resilience (Kidd & Shahar, 2008). Resilience among street-involved youth is significantly negatively correlated with factors such as hopelessness, suicidal ideation, psychological distress, and life threatening behavior, and positively correlated with factors such as self-esteem, spirituality, and creativity (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; Cronley & Evans, 2017; Perron, Cleverley, & Kidd, 2014; Rew et al., 2001). Connections to family, school, and prosocial

peers are related to lower levels of psychological distress for street-involved youth (Dang, 2014).

Stronger decision-making skills predict an increase in condom use for males, and fewer sexual

partners for females. Positive expectations for the future also predict fewer sexual partners for

males and females (Tevendale, Lightfoot, & Sloccum, 2009). Indeed, resilience in street-

involved youth includes both positive behaviours and attitudes, and a lack of or decrease in

maladaptive behaviours and attitudes (Cronley & Evans, 2017).

When asked what they feel makes them resilient, street-involved youth cite a strong sense

of self, the ability to adapt, and self-reliance (Kolar, Erickson, Stewart, 2012). Youth who hold

more mainstream values, and view life on the street as contrary to their identity, are often more

motivated to disengage from life on the street. Street-involved youth also find strength in social

bonds, through belonging to a social group, with more experienced youth acting as mentors for

youth who are new to life on the street. Many of the youth express a need for understanding,

connection and support from others (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). They appreciate flexible services

that permit them to use their strengths to succeed (Ungar, 2008). Resisting self-harm and suicide

is also cited as a key achievement for street-involved youth. The youth state that support from

workers plays a large role in their resistance of these behaviours and the development of positive

coping (Altena et al., 2017; Kolar, Erickson & Stewart, 2012).

In a qualitative study examining how youth cope with life on the streets, Kidd and

Davidson (2007) identified that social relationships play a large role in the youth's lives, and the

youth appreciate understanding from individuals with similar life experiences. This helps the

youth to feel less lonely, provides security, and contributes to their sense of self-worth. Some

youth in Kidd and Davidson's study placed a particularly strong emphasis on their romantic

partner as a source of motivation and support. In a few cases, the youth highlighted that their

partner was the main reason they decided to decrease their drug use and try to disengage from street life. Finally, the youth found that caring for others led to feeling good and a sense of pride. Given that this finding was uncovered in a study focusing on a wide range of relationships and factors related to resilience among street-involved youth, it necessarily provides but a glimpse into the possible link between romantic relationships and resilience. Examining this link in greater detail will provide more information on when and how romantic relationships foster resilience.

Romantic Relationships Among Youth

   Dating among normative populations of youth. Before examining romantic relationships among street-involved youth, it is beneficial to address the romantic relationships of youth in general, as it provides a basis for understanding romantic relationships at this stage. While compared to youth in stable housing, there are likely differences in street-involved youth's romantic relationships given their living situation, there are also likely similarities due to their developmental stage. Romantic relationships can involve intimacy, commitment, and sexual passion, and are defined as a close, mutually acknowledged connection between two people (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). In looking at prevalence, according to a 2004 American census, approximately one quarter of 12 year olds, half of 15 year olds, and three quarters of 18 year olds reported having a romantic partner within the past 18 months. Sixty percent of young adults, ages 21-24, reported being in a current romantic relationship. The majority of individuals reported that they had more than one romantic partner over the course of their adolescence. Romantic relationships in adolescence and young adulthood typically last longer with age, with relationships lasting only a few weeks in early adolescence, and lasting over a year for individuals over 18 years of age (U.S. Department of Health and Public Services, 2008).

Developmental theory concerning romantic relationships among youth. Romantic relationships both support the youth in their individual development while also progressing with the youth's development. There are four ascending stages in the romantic development typical of adolescence and into young adulthood: 1) bonding, where teens explore romantic interests through fantasy and talking with peers; 2) affiliation, which involves activities in mixed-gender groups, through which adolescents can begin to explore romantic feelings with their peers, 3) intimacy; and 4) commitment (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). However, it is important to note that the timing of participation in romantic activities can vary among youth. For example, youth from divorced families generally participate in dating activities at a younger age compared to youth from intact families (U.S. Department of Health and Public Services, 2008; Zimmer-Gembeck, Hughes, Kelly & Connolly, 2012). Additionally, a study of young adults found that only 51% of the sample had engaged in a committed relationship (married or living together) by the age of 26 (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004).

Romantic relationships during adolescence and young adulthood can enhance youth's social bonds, as the relationships provide the youth with the means to experience a type of bond that they may not have engaged in before: romantic love. Romantic love includes a "set of emotions, cognitions, behaviours, and identifications that people interpret as signifiers of being in love" (McCarthy & Casey, 2008, p.945). As supported by the social bonding theory, romantic relationships can offer adolescents the safety they need to explore new ideas and ways of being. This safety can promote a change in behaviours, thoughts and emotions. Additionally, social bonds may increase as romantic love strengthens. Depressed mood, conduct issues, and alcohol abuse decrease as ties to others increase, and romantic love is negatively correlated with crime and substance use. The strength of the bond in romantic relationships may make the latter a more

powerful influence than other relationships, such as friendships (McCarthy & Casey, 2008).

     Romantic Relationships and Gender. A key aspect that is important to address when examining romantic relationships is gender, considering that romantic relationships generally take place within the context of a gendered environment. As such, romantic relationships may impact men and women's resilience differently. Men and women are exposed to some differing norms and rules, which necessarily impacts their conceptualization of and interaction within romantic relationships (Smith, White, & Moracco, 2009). Thus, while young men and women report many similar dating experiences, there are key differences as well. For example, in early adolescence, more young men report engaging in romantic relationships, and then in mid to late adolescence more young women report engaging in relationships, with young women's romantic relationships lasting longer in duration at all stages (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). More young men than women desire sexual activity in their relationships (Cavanagh, 2007), while more young women report wanting to tell people about their partner. Young women also have a greater desire for intimacy, and report higher levels of emotional intimacy in a relationship compared to men. Indeed, young women tend to focus more on romantic aspects of relationships, while young men focus on the sexual aspects, although both genders report a desire for both romance and sexual activity (Choukas-Bradley, Goldberg, Widman, Reese, & Halpern, 2015; Meier & Allen, 2009; Shulman & Scharf, 2010). Finally, when discussing dating dilemmas, young women are more likely to promote caring and responsiveness, and justice and fairness, while young men are more likely to promote justice and fairness alone (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012).

     Romantic relationships among street-involved youth. Youth engage in a wide variety of romantic relationships on the street. Youth report relationships including being engaged,

having a committed relationship, boyfriends, girlfriends, casual relationships, "on-off" relationships, strictly sexual relationships, and still maintaining ties with an ex-partner (Blais et al., 2012). The research on romantic relationships among street-involved youth generally focuses on the negative aspects of romantic activities on the street. Two major areas of romantic risk for street-involved youth include unprotected sexual activities and dating violence. Fifty to 84% of street-involved youth report having unprotected sex at least once in the last one to six months, and more females report having unprotected sex and a sexually transmitted infections compared to males (Asante, Meyer-Weitz, & Petersen, 2015; Fairbairn, Wood, Dong, Kerr, & DeBeck, 2017; Tevendale, Lightfoot, & Slocum, 2009). Street-involved youth in a committed relationship are more likely to have unprotected sexual intercourse compared to street-involved youth sleeping with multiple partners (Kennedy, Tucker, Green, Glinelli, Ewing, 2012). LGBTQ2S youth report higher rates of unprotected sexual intercourse than heterosexual youth, with more than twice as many LGBTQ2S youth in a study of street-involved youth reporting that they did not use condoms all of the time (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002). Street-involved LGBTQ2S youth are also less likely to have supportive conversations about condom use with their romantic and sexual partners compared to heterosexual youth (Ecker, 2016; Rew et al., 2005).

With regard to dating violence, thirty-five percent of street-involved youth report emotional violence, and 30% to 62% report physical violence, with young women being twice as likely to report dating violence victimization compared to young men (Slesnick et al., 2010; Tyler & Melander, 2012; Tyler & Schmitz, 2015). Although there is limited research on dating violence among street-involved LGBTQ2S youth, one study with youth who identified as such, reported that 44% of youth in the sample who had experienced an episode of homelessness also

experienced dating violence victimization (Langenderfer-Magruder, Walls, Whitfeld, Brown, & Barrett, 2016). Many street-involved young women face a choice between violence on the street and violence from their partners. These young women remain in abusive relationships because the violence from their partner, a known entity, is preferable to physical and sexual violence at the hands of strangers (Watson, 2011). Given the high levels of violence experienced, we are left wondering how these events impact the youth's resilience?

The research on positive aspects of romantic-relationships on the street is often intermingled with the benefits of street-involved youth's other social bonds. This makes it difficult to discern the particular benefits of romantic relationships for street-involved youth, versus the benefits of relationships in general. In looking at the research on street-involved youth's relationships in general, members of street-involved youth's social networks include family members, caseworkers, home-based peers, street-based peers, and romantic partners (Rice, Milburn, & Monro, 2010; Wenzel et al., 2012). Street-involved youth report that while their relationships are not always positive and it can be difficult to trust others due to their life experiences (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kolar, Erickson, Stewart, 2012), members of their social networks may provide support in numerous ways, including teaching street-smarts, and providing food, shelter, advice, protection, emotional support, and help avoiding drug use (Tyler & Melander, 2011). Additionally, youth report specifically engaging in romantic relationships to remove themselves from a difficult home environment, for sexual pleasure, and for financial support (Blais et al., 2012; Watson, 2011).

Members of street-involved youth's social networks fall into two categories: the emotional network, which includes people who care and are reliable, and the instrumental network, which includes people who help meet their physical needs. Nineteen percent of street-

involved youth have a romantic partner in their emotional network, and 14% have a romantic

partner in their instrumental network. The likelihood of having a romantic partner for emotional

support increases with time, given that after two years of street-life 24% of youth report having a

romantic partner in their emotional networks (Falci, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Rose, 2011).

     Survival sex. As described above, some youth participate in romantic relationships not

primarily out of love or caring for the other person, but to meet their physical needs (Falci, et al.,

2011). This is known as an instrumental romantic relationship or 'survival sex.' Survival sex

involves exchanging sexual acts for food, shelter, or protection for as long as the relationship is

needed. There often appears to be a lack of emotional connection between partners, or at least on

the part of one of the individuals involved (Warf et al., 2013; Watson, 2011). Due to social

desirability and multiple definitions of survival sex it is difficult to obtain precise estimates,

however about 8-36% of street-involved young women report exchanging sexual acts for shelter,

food, and/or drugs, and about 11-32% of young men report engaging in survival sex (Green,

Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999; Gwadz et al., 2009). Of the young men who engage in survival sex

with other men, about half describe themselves as gay or bisexual (Lankenau et al., 2006).

     While some view survival sex as simply a strategy or an economic transaction, others

argue that this fails to acknowledge the complexity and variability of intimate relationships

within the context of survival on the streets. There are multiple motivations for engaging in

romantic relationships, and while a lack of love or emotional connection may alter intimacy, it

does not necessarily negate its presence (Bourgois, Prince, &, Moss, 2004; Watson, 2011).

Young women report that desperation is a prime motivation for engaging in survival sex,

including being pregnant and not having eaten all day, or needing a place to live (Warf et al.,

2013). For example, young women are more likely to exchange sexual acts for food when they

are without food for an extended period of time (Tarasuk, Dachner, Poland, & Gaetz, 2010).

Twenty percent of young women are coerced into engaging in survival sex through threats or violence, and an even greater number discuss being pressured or encouraged to participate in survival sex by friends (Warf et al., 2013). Young women also report engaging in intimate relationships for personal safety, stating that they attach themselves to one particular man to avoid being harassed or abused by others (Watson, 2011). Some young women report that although they entered the relationship for a source of material support, they like their partners and feel well-treated (Bourgois, Prince, &, Moss, 2004). Reasons young women discontinue survival sex include negative feelings towards themselves, other romantic or sexual partners disapproving, danger, and decreasing drug use. Some women report feelings of shame, regret and betrayal when discussing survival sex (Warf et al., 2013). Young men report engaging in survival sex for similar reasons to young women, including for gifts, alcohol, drugs, food and shelter, but report fewer negative feelings around the act, describing it as "good" and "easy" money (Lankenau et al., 2006, p.15),

The context of street life and romantic relationships. The majority of what is known about the interplay between street life and romantic relationships stems from a qualitative study on love-based relationships among street-involved youth by Blais et al. (2012).When asked how living on the street impacts their romantic relationships, youth report that drug use decreases their ability to support their partners, they often feel betrayal around their partners participating in survival sex, and they are concerned about non-street-involved partners' reactions to life on the street. Some youth are also aware that they are not fully able to invest in romantic relationships due to the challenges of living on the street. For example, the youth need to spend their energy finding food and shelter, leaving them little time to care for someone else. When

partners spend all day and night together, panhandling and looking for shelter, it can lead to increased arguments and greater emotional dependency on each other. The belief in 'romantic love' is also impacted by time spent on the street, with youth who have lived in unstable circumstances for a year or more viewing love as less special and idyllic compared to youth who have spent less than a year on the street.

However, street-involved youth also view their partners as a source of hope, helping to decrease or end drug use, and mitigate the challenges of life on the street by having someone at their side. Some young women view their romantic partners as being 'outside' the context of living on the street. These young woman believe that they are part of caring, committed relationships which would exist whether they lived on the street or not (Blais et al., 2012; Watson, 2011).

Overall Project Goals

The main goal of this paper is to examine romantic relationships among street-involved youth from a theoretical perspective, in order to address when and how romantic relationships may be related to resilience among street-involved youth. While there are some qualitative data on how relationships in general are linked to resilience (Kidd & Davidson, 2007) romantic relationships have yet to be analyzed as a separate entity with regard to resilience. It is necessary to do so because within developmental theory there is an understanding that romantic relationships in adolescence and young adulthood play a key role in development, separate from other relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). This paper also serves to build on existing research regarding street-involved youth's romantic relationships by providing further information on the characteristics of the youth's relationships, the impact of street life on romantic relationships, as well as risk behaviour within relationships.

This project addresses these goals through two studies: a study that uses quantitative methodology (study 1) and a study that uses qualitative methodology (study 2). The quantiative study assesses if romantic relationships, both emotional and instrumental (i.e. survival sex), and the positive and negative qualities of these relationships, are linked to higher and lower resilience. This study also addresses a gap in the literature by providing data on the proportion of street-involved youth engaged in romantic relationships, the length of the youth's relationships, and the proportion of youth experiencing positive qualities within their romantic relationships (i.e. love and commitment). Finally, this study provides current data on sexual health, emotional well-being, and dating violence for the sample.

The qualitative study expands on previous research by conducting a thematic analysis through a theoretical lens of resilience and relationships, exploring a variety of romantic relationships, continuing to address the nuanced impact of street life, and directly inquiring about how the youth conceptualize romantic relationships in order to explicitly compare this to their actual relationship experiences. This study also assesses how the youth understand their romantic relationships as supporting or undermining their resilience. The results of these two studies will then be integrated through an overall discussion regarding clinical and policy implications (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

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Chapter 2: Study 1- Romantic Relationships and Resilience Among Street-Involved Youth:

Associations Between Relationship Qualities and Resilience

Romantic relationships are considered an integral part of adolescent and young adult development (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009$_a$). Despite their difficult life circumstances, street-involved youth nevertheless engage in romantic relationships, which likely play a key role in their lives. However, there is little research on many aspects of their romantic relationships, and whether these relationships are associated with other areas of their functioning (Blais et al., 2012; Karabanow, 2006). One way to examine functioning is through 'resilience,' which provides an understanding of how at-risk youth can develop along a more positive trajectory (Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Masten, 2007). Like all young people, street-involved youth are capable of displaying resilience in multiple areas of their lives. However, given their adverse circumstances, they are also at high risk for many negative outcomes, including drug use (Buccieri, 2013; Forchuk et al., 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016; Kolar, Erickson & Stewart, 2012). Due to the youth's risk it is important to gain a better understanding of their romantic relationships, and determine if and when the relationships are linked to resilience.

Street-Involved Youth

Street-involved youth are young people, 13-24 years of age, who live without caregivers and are not able to obtain stable housing or shelter due to their developmental level, and personal, societal, familial and economic factors (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). Of the 35,000 Canadians experiencing homelessness on a given night, about 6-7000 are between the ages of 13-24 years old. Over the course of a year about 35-40,000 youth will experience an episode of homelessness (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016). In a survey of street-involved youth across Canada, 57.6% identified as cisgender male, 36.4% as cisgender

female, and 29.5% identified as LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit; Gaetz et al., 2016).

While on the street, youth are at high risk for suicide, substance abuse, mental health problems, violence, exploitation, prostitution, nutritional vulnerability and malnutrition, respiratory illness, and STIs (Forchuk et al, 2013; Kennedy et al., 2012; Kidd et al., 2016; Kirst & Erickson, 2013; Murphy, 2016; Wagner, Carlin, Cauce, & Tenner, 2001). A study of Canadian street- involved youth indicated that 29% reported a current STI (Kumar et al., 2015), and a Canadian Public Health study of street-involved youth reported the prevalence of Chlamydia among young women was 15% and 8% among young men (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Another Canadian study reported that 3% of street-involved youth are infected with HIV. Indeed, street-involved youth are about six times more likely to be infected with HIV compared to youth living in stable housing (Marshall, et al., 2008). Additionally, street-involved young women are four times more likely to become pregnant compared to housed-youth, with pregnancy rates for street-involved young women ranging from 33% - 62% (Berry, Skillington, Peak, & Hohman, 2000; Green & Ringwalt, 1998; Haley, Roy, Leclerc, Boudreau, & Bovin, 2004; Winetrobe et al., 2013). Possible risk factors for STI and pregnancy rates include low condom use, with one study reporting that only 35% of street-involved youth always use condoms, and early age of sexual activity, at a mean age of 14 years for street-involved youth's first experience with sexual intercourse (Solorio et al., 2008; Weber et al., 2002).

Drug Use. A key concern related to street-involved youth is their drug use. Substances reported to be used by the youth include alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, crack, heroin, hallucinogens, ecstasy, ketamine, and prescription opiates (Mitra, Wood, Nguyen, Kerr, & DeBeck, 2015; Van Leeuwen et al., 2004). Almost three quarters of street-involved youth in a

Canadian sample reported using alcohol and marijuana over the past month, with over one third using hallucinogens, one quarter using cocaine, and one tenth using crack (Kirst & Erickson, 2013). In another sample of Canadian youth, 59% reported binge-use of illicit substances, including heroin, cocaine, crack, methamphetamines, and alcohol (Nolan, DeBeck, Nguyen, Kerr, & Wood, 2014). Thirty-five percent of street-involved youth across Canada reported at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization (Kidd et al., 2017). Drug use is associated with a myriad of other high risk behaviours including hospital visits, suicide attempts, unsafe sexual behaviour, increased rates of STIs, sex work, non-fatal overdose, dealing, drug injecting, and violence victimization (Fairbairn, Wood, Dong, Kerr, & DeBeck, 2017; Nolan, DeBeck, Nguyen, Kerr, & Wood, 2014; Sibthorpe, Drinkwater, Gardner, & Bammer, 1995). Thus lower drug use is considered to decrease risk and increase positive functioning among street-involved youth (Rew, Powell, Brown, Becker, & Slesnick, 2017).

Despite these challenges, street-involved youth possess many strengths which help them to cope with life on the street (Gibson, 2007; Karabanow, 2006). The youth report feeling increased pride at their ability to function independently without help from parents or other adults (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Indeed, some researchers argue (e.g. Karabanow, 2008; Ferguson, 2007) that street-involved youth can be autonomous, active agents who are capable of assessing their own needs and goals.

Resilience

One way to conceptualize strengths is through resilience. Resilience involves positive adaptation during or after experiencing adverse conditions that have the potential to harm the developing individual (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2007; 2011; Rutter, 2013). Indeed, resilience may be defined as "The capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover

from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development" (Masten, 2001, p.494). Resilience is comprised of both external and internal components or factors. External components involve behaviours or actions that demonstrate an individual's resilience, such as decreasing drug use or increasing school attendance. Internal components involve psychological processes or characteristics within an individual which indicate resilience (Masten, 2001;Ungar, 2015).

Key internal components of resilience include what this study terms as 'core strengths.' Core strengths contain five personal characteristics including: "a purposeful life, perseverance, equanimity, self-reliance, and existential aloneness." A purposeful life involves finding meaning in life. Perseverance is the ability to keep going or recover during difficult times. Equanimity includes the capability to see both the positives and negatives in life. Self-reliance is confidence in one's capabilities. Finally, existential aloneness involves self-acceptance and appreciation. These 5 factors have been found to indicate the extent to which an individual is capable of coping with the trials and struggles of life (Wagnild, 2011, p.15). Previous research has used core strengths as measure of resilience among street-involved youth as it identifies the personal means through which the youth cope with street life (Cronley & Evans, 2017). The youth's mean core strengths scores ranged from low to moderate across studies (Kidd et al., 2017; Rew et al., 2001).

Another key internal component of resilience not addressed through core strengths is self-esteem (Kidd & Shahar, 2008). Self-esteem is an individual's belief in his self-worth, and has been found to be positively correlated with other measures of resilience among street-involved youth (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; Rosenberg, 1986). Increased self-esteem is linked to decreased loneliness, suicidal ideation, and psychological distress among street-involved youth (Dang,

2014; Kidd & Shahar, 2008).

There is an understanding that resilience is not a fixed state, as the resilience an individual displays may change across time and situations (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Sapienza & Masten, 2011; Ungar, 2013). Thus, given the dynamic nature of resilience, it has been conceptualized differently across research studies. Some researchers define resilience as the individual meeting typical developmental expectations based on societal values. Other researchers define resilience as a lack of or reduction in problems functioning (Masten, 2001). Because resilience is clearly multidimensional, for the purposes of this project resilience will be defined as both decreased negative functioning (i.e. lower drug use) and increased positive functioning (i.e. higher self-esteem), and will examine key internal and external components of resilience relevant to street-involved youth.

Resilience is best viewed from a 'systems' perspective, through understanding that resilience is the result of youth's interactions with their environments, including genetics, personality, family, school, culture, service providers, peers, and significant others. Key system factors related to resilience in at-risk youth include components associated with close relationships, such as caring relationships with adults, peers and romantic partners. Recent research on resilience now focuses on how these factors may be associated with resilience. This study will particularly address when and how romantic relationships help to foster resilience (Masten, 2011; Sapienza & Masten, 2011; Ungar, 2013).

Social bonding and resilience. The theory of social bonding provides insight into how relationships in general may foster resilience in times of stress. A key aspect of social bonding involves the strength of an individual's close relationships. When people have close relationships with others, they care about how their behaviour will impact their loved ones, and so strive for

more positive achievement (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Close relationships have been found to be predictive of resilience, such as decreased drug use, even in difficult circumstances (Akers & Lee, 1999; Ungar, 2013).

Street-involved youth report that relationships with others help them feel less lonely, provide security, and contribute to their sense of self-worth. Some youth place a particularly strong emphasis on their romantic partner as a source of motivation and support. In a few cases, the youth even stated that their partner was the main reason they decided to decrease their drug use and try to get off the street. Finally, the youth found that caring for others led to feeling good and a sense of pride (Kidd & Davidson, 2007).

Romantic Relationships Among Youth

Romantic relationships are a key aspect of development in adolescence and young adulthood, with the majority of individuals reporting more than one romantic partner over the course of this time period. Romantic relationships in adolescence typically last longer with age, with relationships lasting only a few weeks in early adolescence, and lasting over a year for individuals over 18 years of age, with 60% of young people reporting a current romantic relationship by the age of 24 years (U.S. Department of Health and Public Services, 2008). Romantic relationships can involve intimacy, commitment, and sexual passion, and may be defined as a close, mutually acknowledged connection between two people (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009[a]).

The role of love and commitment. Romantic relationships during adolescence and young adulthood can enhance youth's social bonds, and therefore likely their resilience, as the relationships provide the youth with the means to experience a type of bond that they may not have engaged in before: romantic love. Romantic love includes a "set of emotions, cognitions,

behaviours, and identifications that people interpret as signifiers of being in love" (McCarthy & Casey, 2008, p.945). Key components of romantic love include planning a future together and being 'in love.' As supported by the social bonding theory, romantic relationships can offer adolescents the safety they need to explore new ideas and ways of being. This safety can promote a change in behaviours, thoughts and emotions.

The experience of dating violence. While relationships may provide adolescents with positive experiences they may also lead to negative experiences as well. One such negative experience is dating violence, which includes actions of emotional, sexual, and physical abuse directed at a romantic partner. Actions include damaging a partner's belongings, insulting a partner in front of others, slapping, shoving, choking, beating, and forcing a partner to engage in other sexual acts against their will (Foshee et al., 2009). Within a relationship an individual may be a perpetrator, victim, or perpetrator-victim of dating violence.

Dating violence rates among community samples are highly variable, as according to a recent meta-analysis, among adolescents, the prevalence of physical dating violence ranges from 1-61% and the prevalence of sexual violence ranges from 1-54% (Wincentak, Connolly, & Card, 2016). Dating violence perpetration and victimization have been found to increase with age. However, moderate and severe physical and sexual violence perpetration peaks at around 17 years of age and then decreases in young adulthood. Despite some declines in rate, intimate partner violence can continue across developmental stages, as according to a longitudinal study of dating violence, while 25% of the sample experienced dating violence victimization in young adulthood alone, 7% of the sample experienced victimization in both adolescence and young adulthood (Tucker Halpern, Spriggs, Martin, & Kupper, 2009). Indeed, it has been shown that adolescents who experience dating violence victimization are significantly more likely to

continue as both victims and perpetrators of dating violence in young adulthood compared to adolescents who have not experienced victimization (Gomez, 2011).

Romantic relationships and gender. A key aspect that is important to address when examining romantic relationships is gender, because romantic relationships generally take place within the context of a gendered environment. As such, romantic relationships may impact men and women's resilience differently. Men and women are exposed to differing socialization which necessarily impacts their conceptualization of and interactions within romantic relationships (Smith, White, & Moracco, 2009). Thus, while young men and women report many similar dating experiences, there are key differences as well. For example, young men place more emphasis on sexual activity in their relationships (Cavanagh, 2007), while young women have a greater desire for intimacy in a relationship (Meier & Allen, 2009; Shulman & Scharf, 2010). Additionally, while young women report perpetrating more physical dating violence, young men report perpetrating more sexual dating violence. Young women also report higher rates of sexual dating violence victimization than young men (Wincentak et al., 2016). Due to these and other differences it is important to explore the role of gender when examining romantic relationships in adolescence (Zimmer-Gembeck, Hughes, Kelly & Connolly, 2012).

Romantic relationships among street-involved youth. Although we do not have quantitative information on the proportion of street-involved youth engaged in romantic relationships and the length of these relationships, we do know that youth engage in a wide variety of romantic relationships on the street. Youth report relationships including being engaged, having a committed relationship, boyfriends, girlfriends, casual relationships, "on-off" relationships, strictly sexual relationships, and still maintaining ties with an ex-partner (Tyler & Melander, 2011). However, we lack quantitative data on the youth's level of commitment to their

partners and rates of love-based relationships.

Indeed, the research on the romantic relationships among street-involved youth generally focuses on the negative aspects of romantic activities on the street. Two major areas of romantic risk for street-involved youth include unprotected sexual activities and dating violence. Fifty to 84% of street-involved youth report having unprotected sex at least once in the last one to six months, and more females report having unprotected sex and a sexually transmitted infection compared to males (Asante, Meyer-Weitz, & Petersen, 2015; Fairbairn, Wood, Dong, Kerr, & DeBeck, 2017; Tevendale, Lightfoot, & Slocum, 2009). Street-involved youth in a committed relationship are more likely to have unprotected sexual intercourse compared to street-involved youth sleeping with multiple partners (Kennedy, Tucker, Green, Glinelli, Ewing, 2012).

With regard to dating violence, thirty-five percent of street-involved youth report emotional violence, and 30% to 62% report physical violence, with young women being twice as likely to report dating violence victimization compared to young men (Slesnick et al., 2010; Tyler & Melander, 2012; Tyler & Schmitz, 2015). Many street-involved young women face a choice between violence on the street and violence from their partners. These young women remain in abusive relationships because the violence from their partner, a known entity, is preferable to physical and sexual violence at the hands of strangers (Watson, 2011). Given the high levels of violence experienced, we are left wondering if these events are related to the youth's resilience?

The research on positive aspects of romantic-relationships on the street is often intermingled with the benefits of street-involved youth's other social bonds. This makes it difficult to discern the particular benefits of romantic relationships for street-involved youth, versus the benefits of relationships in general. In looking at the research on street-involved

youth's relationships in general, members of street-involved youth's social networks include family members, caseworkers, home-based peers, street-based peers, and romantic partners (Rice, Milburn, & Monro, 2010; Wenzel et al., 2012). Street-involved youth report that while their relationships are not always positive and it can be difficult to trust others due to their life experiences (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kolar, Erickson, Stewart, 2012), members of their social networks may provide support in numerous ways, including teaching street-smarts, help avoiding drug use and providing food, shelter, advice, protection, and emotional support (Tyler & Melander, 2011). Additionally, youth report specifically engaging in romantic relationships to remove themselves from a difficult home environment, for sexual pleasure, and for financial support (Blais et al., 2012; Watson, 2011).

Members of street-involved youth's social networks fall into two categories: the emotional network, which includes people who care and are reliable, and the instrumental network, which includes people who help meet their physical needs. Nineteen percent of street-involved youth have a romantic partner in their emotional network, and 14% have a romantic partner in their instrumental network. The likelihood of having a romantic partner for emotional support increases with time, given that after two years of street-life 24% of youth report having a romantic partner in their emotional networks (Falci, et al., 2011).

Survival sex. As described above, some youth participate in romantic relationships not primarily out of love or caring for the other person, but to meet their physical needs (Falci, et al., 2011). This is known as an instrumental romantic relationship or 'survival sex.' Survival sex involves exchanging sexual acts for food, shelter, protection, etc. for as long as the relationship is needed. There often appears to be a lack of emotional connection between partners, or at least on the part of one of the individuals involved. While some view survival sex as simply a strategy or

an economic transaction, others argue that this fails to acknowledge the complexity and variability of intimate relationships within the context of survival on the streets. There are multiple motivations for engaging in romantic relationships, and while a lack of love or emotional connection may alter intimacy, it does not necessarily negate its presence (Watson, 2011; Warf et al., 2013).

Due to social desirability and multiple definitions of survival sex it is difficult to obtain precise estimates, however about 8-36% of street-involved young women report exchanging sexual acts for shelter, food, and/or drugs, and about 11-32% of young men report engaging in survival sex (Green, Ennett, & Ringwalt, 1999; Gwadz et al., 2009). Of the young men who engage in survival sex with other men, about half describe themselves as gay or bisexual (Lankenau et al., 2006). Twenty percent of young women are coerced into engaging in survival sex through threats or violence, and an even greater number discuss being pressured or encouraged to participate in survival sex by friends. However, other young women report liking and feeling safe with their partners, although their primary reason for entering the relationship was for a source of material support (Bourgois, Prince, &, Moss, 2004; Warf et al., 2013; Watson, 2011).

Study Goals

The main goal of this paper is to examine romantic relationships among street-involved youth from a theoretical perspective, in order to address when and how romantic relationships are related to resilience among street-involved youth. While there is some qualitative data on how relationships in general are linked to resilience, (Kidd & Davidson, 2007) there is no identified quantative research investigating the link between romantic relationships and resilience. Additionally, romantic relationships have yet to be analyzed as a separate entity, apart

from other types of relationships, with regard to resilience. It is necessary to do so because within developmental theory there is an understanding that romantic relationships in adolescence and young adulthood play a key role in development, separate from other relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009b). This paper also serves to build on existing research regarding street-involved youth's romantic relationships by providing further information on the characteristics of the youth's relationships, as well as risk behaviour within relationships.

This study assesses whether romantic relationships, both emotional and instrumental (i.e. survival sex) relationships, and the positive and negative qualities of these relationships are linked to higher and lower resilience. This study also addresses a gap in the literature by providing data on the proportion of street-involved youth engaged in romantic relationships, the length of the youth's relationships, and the proportion of youth experiencing positive qualities within their romantic relationships (i.e. love and commitment). Finally, this study provides current data on sexual health, core strengths, self-esteem, drug use, and dating violence for the sample.

Resilience was measured through core strengths, self-esteem, and lower drug use. Positive qualities included being 'in love' and planning a future together (McCarthy & Casey, 2008), and negative qualities included physical and sexual dating violence. It was hypothesized that due to their social bonds, romantic relationships would be linked to resilience among street-involved youth, but that due to a lack of attachment between partners, survival sex would be linked to lower resilience (Warf et al., 2013). Additionally, among youth in current romantic relationships, it was hypothesized that positive relationship qualities would predict higher core strengths and self-esteem, and less drug-use, while negative relationship qualities would predict the inverse (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; McCarthy & Casey, 2008; Tyler & Melander, 2011).

Methods

Participants

Data were collected from 125 youth, 66% of whom were male, at five shelters and one

drop-in centre across the Greater Toronto Area. The age of the sample ranged from 14-25 years,

with an average age of 20 years. The sample was ethnically diverse (see Table 1), and 4% of the

sample identified as gay, 7% as bisexual, and 2% as questioning. The average length of time the

youth had been street-involved for was 15 months. A third of the youth reported lifetime

involvement with the Children's Aid Society, and almost three quarters reported verbal abuse by

an adult, half reported physical abuse by an adult, and over one tenth reported sexual abuse by an

adult.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Demographic Variables		n (%)
Gender	Male	83 (66.4)
	Female	39 (31.2)
Ethnicity	Caucasian	49 (39.2)
	African/ Caribbean	30 (24.0)
	South Asian	8 (6.4)
	Aboriginal	7 (5.6)
	Hispanic	7 (5.6)
	Asian	5 (4.0)
	Other	13 (10.4)
Involvement with CAS		43 (34.4)
Abuse by an Adult	Verbal	89 (71.2)
	Physical	61 (48.8)
	Sexual	17 (13.6)

Measures

Demographics. Participant demographics were obtained. Variables of interest included

gender, age, and ethnicity. Information was also collected regarding abuse by an adult and

involvement with the Children's Aid Society.

      Romantic Relationships. The Dating Questionnaire (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004) was utilized to explore the youth's romantic relationships. Youth were asked to indicate their romantic relationship status (*current boy/girlfriend; past, but not current, boy/girlfriend; never had boy/girlfriend*). Those with current or past relationships were polled about their total number of partners (*1-2 partners; 3-5 partners; >5 partners*), the number of people they dated over the past year, the length of their relationships, and whether or not they were happy with their dating status. Validity of this measure has been demonstrated in multiple studies (ex. Connolly, Nguyen, Pepler, Craig, & Jiang, 2013; Dhariwal & Connolly, 2013).

      All youth were asked about lifetime involvement with survival sex *(have you ever had sex or done sexual acts with someone to get money, food, drugs, a place to stay, or something else you wanted?)*, as well as the number times they had done so. Youth also reported on romantic-affiliative activities such as hugging, holding hands, and giving gifts *(1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = a lot).*

      The youth's sexual behaviour was measured with the *Sexuality Questionnaire* (O'Sullivan, 2015). Youth reported their age the first time they had sexual intercourse *(0 = never, 1 = 11 years old, 2 = 12 years old, 3 = 13 years old, 4 = 14 years old, 5 = 15 years old, 6 = 16 years old, 7 = 17 years old)*. Youth who were sexually active reported the number of lifetime sexual partners, using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1-6+ partners. These youth indicated if they or their partners had ever become pregnant, used the birth control pill a condom, or withdrawal during their last sexual experience, or had ever contracted a sexually transmitted infection *(1 = yes, 0 = no)*. The youth also reported whether they discussed pregnancy prevention with their partners *(1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3=occasionally, 4 = very often)*, and on

resisting sexual pressure *(1= very unsure, 2 = somewhat unsure, 3 = somewhat sure, 4 = very sure).* Validity of this measure is documented in O'Sullivan's use of this measure with adolescents (2015).

Romantic Relationship Qualities.

Positive qualities. The Dating Questionnaire (Connolly, et al., 2004) was also utilized to examine the positive qualities in youth's romantic relationships. Youth in a current romantic relationship were asked if they were 'in love' with their primary partner (*either yes, no, or maybe*), although this variable was dichotomized for analysis (*yes = 1 and no/maybe = 0*). Youth were also asked about the level of commitment within their primary romantic relationship to determine whether or not they were planning a future with their partner. This was coded as either 'spending time together in a large group of friends,' 'spending time alone in a non-serious relationship,' 'only seeing each other,' 'being in a serious relationship,' 'planning to get engaged, married, or live together,' and 'already engaged, married, or living together.' Again, this variable was dichotomized for analysis (*1 = either planning or already engaged, married, or living together, and 0 = not planning a future together*).

Negative qualities. Experiences of physical and sexual dating violence were assessed using participant's responses to the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, short form (CTS2S; Straus & Douglas, 2004). Participants rated how often behaviours occurred during "differences" with their current partner, within the past year, on an 8-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 *(once)* to 6 *(more than 20 times)*, with 7 *(not in the past year but it has happened)* and 8 *(never).* On this measure, participants are asked about both their and their partners' behaviour regarding issues such as physical, and sexual violence.

For the purpose of analysis, items were combined to create dichotomous variables *(0 = never, 1 = ever)* for physical dating violence perpetration, physical dating violence victimization, sexual violence perpetration, and sexual violence victimization. Physical violence items included actions such as *pushed, shoved, slapped, punched, kicked and beat up*, and sexual violence items included actions such as *forcing or insisting on sex, with or without a weapon*. The CTS2S has strong concurrent validity with the CTS2, ranging from .65-.94 on the various constructs, and construct validity highly comparable to the CTS2 (Straus & Douglas, 2004). Additionally, this sample also demonstrated high internal consistency on the four CTS variables (Cronbach's alpha ranged from .82-.90).

Resilience. Resilience was measured using three variables: lower substance use, self-esteem, and core strengths.

Substance use. Substance use was assessed, with the Adolescent Alcohol and Drug Involvement Scale (AADIS; Moberg, 2003) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 *(never)* to 7 *(several times a day)*. There are no set cut off points, however the higher the score the more severe the drug use. The substances evaluated included alcohol, marijuana, hallucinogens, amphetamines, cocaine, barbiturates, heroin and other opiates, PCP, inhalants, and tranquilizers. For analysis, the youth's scores for each drug were combined to reflect no/ minimal use *(0)*, minor use *(1)*, and severe use *(2)*. The youth's scores for each of the eleven categories of substances were added to give each youth a score out of 22 indicating *Total Drug Use*, these scores were then normalized for statistical analysis (Moberg & Hahn, 1991). This sample displayed high internal consistency this scale (Cronbach's alpha = .91).

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale assesses global self-esteem, which is an individual's belief in his self-worth. Items on the scale include *"On the whole I am satisfied with*

myself" and *"I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others."* The

scale is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to

strongly disagree. The participants' scores for the ten items were summed and normalized for

analysis, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Scores from 0-15 indicate "low" self-

esteem, 15-20 "normal" self-esteem, and 25-30 "high" self-esteem. The Cronbach's alpha

coefficient for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ranges from .77 to .88, and this sample

displayed high internal consistency on this scale as well at .87 (Rosenberg, 1986).

  Core strengths. Core strengths were measured using the 25-item Resilience Scale

(Wagnild, 2011). The scale reflects the five characteristics of core strengths: perseverance (*i.e. I*

am determined), equanimity *(i.e. I usually take things in stride)*, meaning *(i.e. My life has*

meaning), self-reliance *(i.e. I usually manage one way or another)*, and existential aloneness *(i.e.*

I am friends with myself). Youth were asked to rate the statements on a Likert scale ranging from

1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree)*. The youth's scores on each item were summed to

create an overall core strengths score for each participant ranging from 25-175, and then

normalized for analysis. Scores lower than 115 indicate "very low" resilience, scores from 116-

144 indicate "moderately low to moderate" resilience, and scores above 145 indicate

"moderately high to high" resilience (p.76). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Resilience

Scale ranges from .85 to .94, and this sample displayed high internal consistency on this scale as

well at .91.

Procedure

  This study was conducted in accordance with the standards of the research ethics board of

the university of the principal investigator. Eleven youth shelters across the GTA were contacted

to assess if they would permit the researchers to conduct the study at their centre. Six shelters

agreed to participate, one refused, and the others did not return phone messages. The staff at the participating shelters were provided with a copy of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) in the weeks before administration so they could offer feedback regarding content and wording. The shelters were also provided with posters advertising the study (see Appendix B). On the day of the study youth were recruited at the shelter through snowball sampling.

Prior to beginning the questionnaire, the youth gave written, informed consent to participate (see Appendix C). The youth were informed that participation was voluntary and that identification numbers were used in place of names to ensure confidentiality. The shelters offered a quiet space for the youth to complete the questionnaire, and the principal investigator and trained research assistants supported the youth during the survey administration. When the youth reported that they were finished the questionnaire (whether or not they had reached the end), they were offered $15.00 for their work, and a page of support services in their area in the event that the questionnaire resulted in distress. Additionally, the principal investigator also reviewed the questionnaires to determine if any of the youth endorsed items concerning self-harm or suicidal ideation. The names of the youth who endorsed these items were provided to shelter staff, as the youth were informed that this process would take place at the beginning of the survey.

Missing data. To maximize sample size, the individual mean imputation method was used. Thus if only 20% of data was missing from a participant's answers on a particular variable, the data was normalized by finding the average value of the answers the participant provided, and extrapolating across the entire scale to create a total scale value. This method produces accurate and valid results compared to known population values, and performs similarly to more complex methods such as multiple imputation (Shrive, Stuart, Quan, & Ghali, 2006).

Results

Descriptive Data

Romantic Relationship Activities. Almost half of the youth (58% of women and 38% of men) reported being in a current romantic relationship, with 5% of men reporting involvement with more than one partner. Another 57% of men and 37% of women had been in at least one relationship at some point in the past. Seventeen percent of the youth reported engaging in a survival sex-based relationship at least once during their lifetime (see Table 2). Overall, these youth reported engaging in a survival sex relationship 1-10 times, with an average of 4 times. Men dated an average of 3 people in the past year and 17 people overall, and women an average of 2 people in the past year and 6 overall, although there was a wide range for both men and women (see Table 3). The youth's relationships more commonly last over three months for both men and women (see Table 4). Most of the youth (70%) were happy with their dating status.

Table 2

Current Dating Status

Dating Status	Males % (n)	Females %(n)
One current partner	33.3 (27)	57.9 (22)
More than one current partner	4.9 (4)	0.0 (0)
Past partner	56.7 (46)	36.8 (14)
Lifetime survival sex involvement*	17.1 (14)	17.9 (7)

Note. N = 119; * N = 121

Table 3

Number of Romantic Partners

Romantic Partners	Males mean (mode) *range*	Females mean (mode) *range*
Number of people dated this year[a]	2.5 (1), *0-23*	2.1 (1), *0-16*
Number of romantic partners ever[b]	17.4 (2), *0-500*	5.9 (1*), *0-50*

Note. * = multiple modes, lowest shown; N[a] = 116; N[b] = 106

Table 4

Typical Romantic Relationship Length

Length	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
Never had a romantic relationship	3.8 (3)	7.7 (3)
2 weeks or less	11.5 (9)	5.1 (2)
1-2 months	14.1 (11)	7.7 (3)
3-5 months	21.8 (17)	20.5 (8)
6-12 months	24.4 (19)	28.2 (11)
12+ months	24.4 (19)	20.8 (12)

Note. N = 117

The majority of the youth (91%) had participated in sexual activity at some point in their lives, with the average age of their first sexual experience being 14 years old. Over half of men and women reported more than six sexual partners over their lifetime (see Table 5). Twenty-four percent of men and 39% of women reported a pregnancy, and 6% of men and 15% percent of women reported contracting a STI at some point in their lives. Relatively more men reported condom use during their last sexual encounter compared to women (see Table 6). On average, the youth rarely discussed infection and pregnancy prevention with sexual partners. Also, on average, the youth were only occasionally confident that they can say "no" to a partner who will not wear a condom, or refuse sex when facing pressure from friends or a partner.

Table 5

Lifetime Sexual Partners

Number of Partners	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
1	10.9 (7)	11.5 (3)
2	6.3 (4)	3.8 (1)
3	12.5 (8)	7.7 (2)
4	10.9 (7)	7.7 (2)
5	7.8 (5)	11.5 (3)
6+	51.6 (33)	57.7 (15)

Note. N = 90

Table 6

Sexual Behaviours and Outcomes

Behaviour/ Outcome	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
Have had sex[a]	94.4 (67)	79.4 (27)
Ever pregnant[b]	23.8 (15)	38.5 (10)
Ever had STI[c]	6.3 (4)	15.4 (4)
Used condoms last time had sex[d]	61.5 (40)	42.3 (11)
Used the pill last time had sex[d]	30.8 (20)	23.1 (6)
Used withdrawal last time had sex[e]	12.1 (8)	11.5 (3)

Note. N[a] = 105; N[b]= 89; N[c] = 90; N[d]= 91; N[e]= 92

Positive relationship qualities. Many of the youth reported feeling connected and being committed to their romantic partners. Indeed when thinking about their relationship activities and status over the past year, almost half of both males and females described their relationship as committed (i.e. planning a future, living together, married, etc.; see Table 7), and of the youth in a current romantic relationship relatively more women than men reported being in love with their partner. For the most part, the majority of the youth reported engaging in actions to enhance affiliation and connection with their romantic partners (see Table 8).

Table 7

Commitment-Level of the Youth's Romantic Relationships

Commitment Level	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
Time in mixed groups or group dates[a]	4.0 (3)	7.7 (3)
Casual dating with multiple people[a]	17.3 (13)	7.7 (3)
Monogamous relationship[a]	32.0 (24)	43.6 (17)
Planning a future/ living together/ married[a]	46.7 (35)	41.0 (16)
In love with current partner[b]	30.3 (10)	47.6 (10)

Note. N[a] = 114; N[b] = 54

Table 8

Romantic-Affiliative Activities

Activity	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
Hold hands often[a]	54.5 (18)	45.5 (10)
Hug often[a]	73.5 (25)	86.4 (19)
Kiss often[a]	70.6 (24)	81.8 (18)
Give gifts often[a]	29.4 (10)	22.7 (5)
Almost always spend free time together[b]	36.5 (27)	54.5 (18)

Note. N[a]= 56 (youth reported on current relationship);
N[b] = 107 (youth reported on past or current relationship)

Negative qualities. However, the youth also reported violence within their relationships, including physical and sexual violence (see Table 9). Rates were generally comparable for both men and women.

Table 9

Lifetime Dating Violence

Violence	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
Physical violence perpetration[a]	49.2 (29)	57.1 (16)
Physical violence victimization[b]	68.6 (48)	69.4 (25)
Sexual violence perpetration[c]	44.1 (26)	26.9 (7)
Sexual violence victimization[c]	44.1 (26)	38.5 (10)

Note. N[a] = 87; N[b] = 106; N[c] = 85

Resilience. With regard to resilience, (see Table 10) on average the youth reported moderate core strengths. Their self-esteem was in the "normal" range, and they reported engaging in drug use on the lower end of the continuum. Average scores for the resilience constructs were relatively similar between men and women.

Table 10

Overall Sample Resilience

Resilience	Males M (range)	Females M (range)
Core strengths	136.1 (53-175)	131.29 (74-175)
Self-esteem	19.1 (5-30)	17.45 (5-30)
Drug use	4.2 (0-22)	3.8 (0-20)

Note. Maximum possible scores: Core strengths = 175; Self-esteem = 30; Drug Use = 22

Analytic Strategy for Assessing Links Between Romantic Relationships and Resilience

Regression analyses were conducted in two stages. The first stage involved multiple linear regression analyses with the entire sample to examine whether romantic relationships in and of themselves are related to resilience. Analyses in this stage examined survival sex relationships in addition to 'traditional' romantic relationships, as both are relevant to the context of street-life. To examine the role of negative and positive relationship qualities, the second stage of multiple linear regression analyses examined a subset of the sample who reported a current romantic relationship. The negative relationship qualities included in the model were physical and sexual dating violence, as these aspects lead to a lack of connection and trust. The positive relationships qualities included in the models were whether or not the youth were in love and planning a future with their partner, as these are aspects of social bonding (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Separate regression models were computed for the positive and negative qualities. During both stages of analysis, gender (male or female) was also entered as an independent variable and interaction term due the key role it has been found to play in romantic relationships (youth who identified as transgender were entered according as the gender with which they identified; Smith, White, & Moracco, 2009). Ethnicity (minority or majority) and age were entered as control variables due to the variability and range of these constructs within the sample, respectively. However, no significant findings were obtained for these variables. The dependent variables

examined during both stages were drug use, core strengths, and self-esteem, as these have been

considered to be key indicators of resilience among street-involved youth (Cleverley & Kidd,

2011; Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Rew et al., 2017). Regression models were computed for each

dependent variable in both stages.

Romantic Relationships and Resilience: Overall Sample

Interrelationship among variables. Correlation analysis was first conducted for all

variables in stage one with the entire sample. As shown in Table 11, no two variables

demonstrated correlations above .80, indicating low multicollinearity (Field, 2013). In looking at

key variables, survival sex was significantly positively related to drug use ($p < .05$), and

negatively related to self-esteem ($p < .05$). Additionally, drug use was negatively related to core

strengths and self-esteem ($p < .05$), and self-esteem was positively related to core strengths ($p <$

.01).

Table 11

Summary of Intercorrelations Among Variables for the Overall Sample

Measure	*1.*	*2.*	*3.*	*4.*	*5.*	*6.*	*7.*
1. Age	-						
2. Ethnicity	-.01	-					
3. Gender	-.28**	.01	-				
4. Current RP	.18*	.13	-.21*	-			
5. Survival Sex	.20*	.08	.01	.02	-		
6. Core strengths (TRS)	.08	.14	-.09	.09	-.08	-	
7. Drug and Alcohol Use (AADIS)	-.04	-.22*	-.05	-.09	.20*	-.24*	-
8. Self-Esteem (TRSES)	.16	.27**	-.12	.09	-.20*	.54**	-.26*

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Regression analyses. The first stage of multiple linear regression analyses examined the entire sample to assess if having a current romantic partner and ever engaging in survival sex-based relationships were related to resilience. Two of the three dependent variables yielded significant main-effects models. There was a link between lifetime survival sex involvement and impaired resilience, such that youth who have engaged in survival sex-based relationships reported higher levels of drug use and lower levels of self-esteem. See tables 12-14 for results.

Table 12

Multiple Regression Analysis for Drug Use: Overall Sample

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
gender	-0.80	0.90	.37
current RP	1.08	0.84	.20
survival sex	3.15	1.10	.00**

Note. n = 102, R^2 = .14, F (5,97) = 3.23, p =.01; regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Table 13

Multiple Regression Analysis for Self-Esteem: Overall Sample

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
gender	-1.09	1.31	.41
current RP	-.78	1.20	.52
survival sex	-3.72	1.57	.02*

Note. n = 109, R^2 = .15, F (5,104) = 3.77, p =.00; regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Table 14

Multiple Regression Analysis for Core Strengths: Overall Sample

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
gender	-5.10	5.24	.33
current RP	-4.89	4.78	.31
survival sex	-5.87	6.21	.35

Note. n = 109, R^2 = .06, F (5,103) = 1.31, p =.27; regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Romantic Relationships and Resilience: Youth in a Relationship

  Interrelationship among variables. Correlation analysis was conducted for all variables in stage two with participants in a current romantic relationship. As in stage one analyses, no two variables demonstrated correlations above .80, indicating low multicollinearity, shown in Table 15 (Field, 2013). In looking at key variables, physical and sexual violence perpetration and victimization were all significantly, positively correlated with each other ($p < .05$ & $p < .01$). Additionally, physical violence perpetration was significantly negatively correlated with being in love ($p < .05$) and positively correlated with drug use ($p < .05$), physical violence victimization was significantly positively correlated with planning a future with a partner ($p < .01$) and negatively correlated with self-esteem $(p < .05)$, and sexual violence perpetration was significantly, negatively correlated with core strengths and self-esteem ($p < .05$), and positively correlated with drug use ($p < .05$). Self-esteem was significantly, positively correlated with being in love with a current partner ($p < .05$).

Table 15

Summary of Intercorrelations Among Variables for Youth in a Relationship

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Age	-										
2. Ethnicity	-.23	-									
3. Gender	-.01	.01	-								
4. Phys.Vio.Perp. (CTS)	-.30*	.28	.08	-							
5. Phys.Vio.Vic. (CTS)	-.17	.11	.00	.51**	-						
6. Sex.Vio.Perp. (CTS)	-.16	.19	-.14	.44**	.54**	-					
7. Sex.Vio.Vic. (CTS)	-.11	.24	.02	.37*	.37**	.55**	-				
8. In Love	-.01	.10	.17	-.31*	-.20	-.27	-.26	-			
9. Planning Future	-.08	.05	.07	.18	.43**	.18	.17	.23	-		
10. Core Strengths (TRS)	.06	.01	-.04	-.27	-.21	-.37*	.00	.28	.17	-	
11. Drug & Alcohol Use (AADIS)	-.02	-.06	-.02	.30*	.16	.35*	.25	-.13	.03	-.44**	-
12. Self-Esteem (TRSES)	.13	.17	-.05	-.26	-.29*	-.37*	.01	.32*	.03	.75**	-.30*

$* p < .05, ** p < .01$

Regression analyses.

Negative relationship qualities. Analyses of the negative qualities within the youth's current romantic relationships indicated that there were two significant regression models for negative relationship qualities. There was a significant relationship between dating violence and core strengths (see Table 16). This model yielded two significant interactions; one between gender and physical violence perpetration, with perpetrating physical violence against a current

partner significantly linked to impaired core strengths for females (see Figure 1), and one

between gender and sexual violence perpetration, with perpetrating sexual violence against a

current partner being significantly linked to impaired core strengths for males (see Figure 2).

Table 16

Multiple Regression Analysis for Core Strengths: Youth in a Relationship- Negative Qualities

Variable		B	SE(B)	p
Main Effects				
	gender	15.99	12.06	.19
	physical violence perpetration	9.99	13.59	.47
	physical violence victimization	-4.56	12.40	.72
	sexual violence perpetration	-36.32	12.13	.01
	sexual violence victimization	22.22	11.30	.06
Significant Interactions				
	gender x physical violence perpetration	-39.97	18.16	.04
	gender x sexual violence perpetration	51.67	24.24	.04

Note. n = 44, R^2 = .41, F (11,33) = 2.10, p =.04; Regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Figure 1. Significant interaction for Core Strengths Between Physical Violence Perpetration and

Gender

Figure 2. Significant interaction for Core Strengths Between Sexual Violence Perpetration and Gender

There was also a significant relationship between dating violence and self-esteem (see Table 17). This model yielded two significant interactions; one between gender and sexual violence perpetration, with perpetrating sexual violence against a current partner significantly linked to impaired core strengths for males (see Figure 3), and one between gender and sexual violence victimization, with sexual dating violence victimization being significantly linked to impaired self-esteem for females and higher self-esteem for males (see Figure 4). The regression model for drug use was not significant (see Table 18).

Table 17

Multiple Regression Analysis for Self-Esteem: Youth in a Relationship- Negative Qualities

Variable		B	SE(B)	p
Main Effects				
	gender	3.13	2.67	.25
	physical violence perpetration	0.23	2.84	.94
	physical violence victimization	-0.98	2.72	.72
	sexual violence perpetration	-8.83	2.51	.00
	sexual violence victimization	7.76	2.47	.00
Significant Interactions				
	gender x sexual violence perpetration	18.07	5.25	.00
	gender x sexual violence victimization	-16.66	5.00	.00

Note. n = 45, R^2 = .50, $F (11,35)$ = 2.10, p =.01; Regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

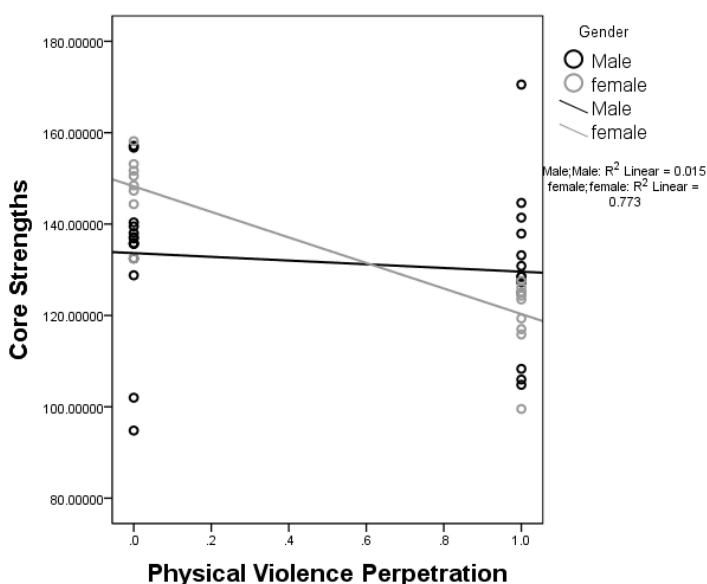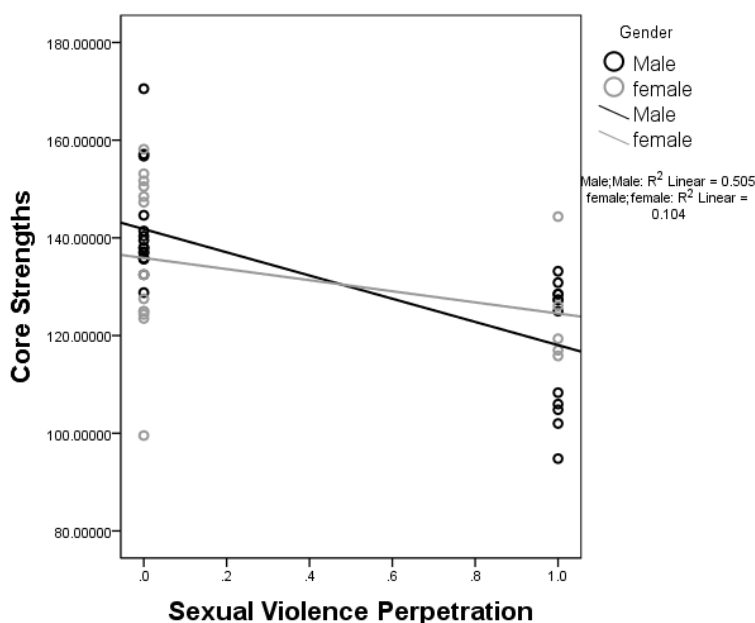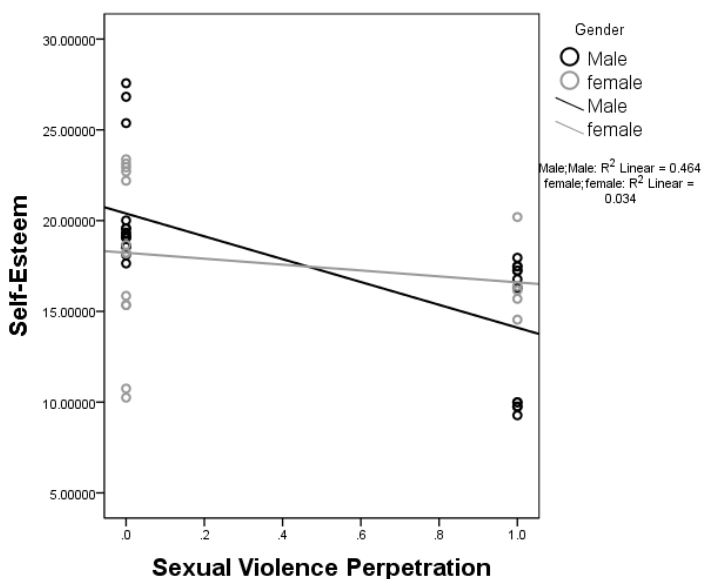Figure 3. Significant interaction for Self-Esteem Between Sexual Violence Perpetration and

Gender

Figure 4. Significant interaction for Self-Esteem Between Sexual Violence Victimization and

Gender

Table 18

Multiple Regression Analysis for Drug Use: Youth in a Relationship- Negative Qualities

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
Gender	0.35	1.51	.82
Physical violence perpetration	2.60	1.85	.17
Physical violence victimization	-0.93	1.89	.63
Sexual violence victimization	2.68	2.02	.19
Sexual violence victimization	.93	1.81	.61

Note. n = 44, R^2 = .19, $F (7,37)$ = 1.25, p =.30; Regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Positive relationship qualities. Analyses of positive relationship qualities within the

youth's current romantic relationships found one significant regression model (see tables 19-21),

which indicated that there was a significant relationship between being in love and resilience,

such that youth who reported being in love with their partner also reported higher self-esteem.

Table 19

Multiple Regression Analysis for Self-Esteem: Youth in a Relationship- Positive Qualities

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
Gender	-2.47	1.85	.20
Planning future	.51	1.94	.80
In love	5.30	1.94	.01

Note. R^2 = .26, $F(5,36)$ = 2.53, p =.04; Regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Table 20

Multiple Regression Analysis for Core Strengths: Youth in a Relationship- Positive Qualities

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
Gender	-9.23	8.08	.26
Planning future	15.61	8.45	.07
In love	9.08	8.39	.29

Note. R^2 = .15, $F(5,34)$ = 1.20, p =.33; Regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Table 21

Multiple Regression Analysis for Drug Use: Youth in a Relationship- Positive Qualities

Variable	B	SE(B)	p
Gender	0.56	1.70	.74
Planning future	-1.19	1.78	.51
In love	-0.11	1.80	.95

Note. R^2 = .02, $F(5,35)$ = 0.15, p =.98; Regression analyses controlled for age and ethnicity

Discussion

Romantic relationships play a unique role in the development of adolescents and young adults, helping them to develop both the autonomy and intimacy needed to cope with challenges and adversity (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009b). Despite this, there is little information regarding street-involved youth's participation in romantic relationships. Recognizing this gap in the literature, the present study sought to identify the proportion of street-involved youth participating in relationships, as well as collect information on the youth's dating histories and practices. Through a research lens focused on resiliency and the importance of social bonds developed during adolescence and young adulthood, this study also addressed whether romantic

relationships among street-involved youth are related to resilience, along with the impact of positive and negative relationship qualities.

Overall, street-involved youth are highly engaged in romantic relationships, with over 90% of youth in the study having had a romantic relationship at some point in their lives. This is somewhat higher than what has been seen in the general population, with only 60% of youth 13-20 years of age reporting ever having involvement in romantic relationships (Meier & Allen, 2009). Within the current sample a relatively greater proportion of young women reported a current romantic relationship and being in love with their partners compared to young men, although the length of men and women's relationships was relatively similar. This is consistent with previous developmental literature highlighting that more young women report a need for a romantic relationship, and desire intimacy within their romantic relationships than young men. However, within the current sample, both men and women were more likely to report monogamous, serious dating activities compared to casual dating. Thus, although these young men may not have been socialized to emphasize intimacy and love within their romantic relationships, they are still invested in these relationships. This indicates that romantic relationships likely play a key role in the lives of both the young women and men in the sample, although they may derive different benefits from the relationships (Cavanagh, 2007; Smith et al., 2009).

The youth in this study also reported sexual risk behaviour within their romantic relationships. The mean age for the first experience with sexual intercourse was 14 years of age, and only about half of the youth reported using a condom during their last sexual experience. Twenty-four percent of men and 39% of women reported at least one pregnancy within their romantic relationships. These results are similar to other Canadian samples of street-involved

youth (Kidd, 2007; Oliver & Cheff, 2012). Additionally, 6% percent of men and 15% of women reported ever being diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection. Although this is somewhat lower than other studies, these results indicate that sexual risk continues to be a key issue among street-involved youth.

To examine the link between romantic relationships and resilience, two types of romantic relationships were addressed. The first being what would be considered a 'typical' romantic relationship, which meets either emotional needs, or both emotional and instrumental needs. The second type categorized as an instrumental relationship relevant within the context of street life, known as survival sex. Although survival sex-based relationships often involve violence or coercion, they can also involve caring and safety. As such, considering survival sex a type of romantic relationship acknowledges the complexity and variability associated with romantic relationships occurring within the context of street-life (Watson, 2011).

In this study, 17% of men and 18% of women reported engaging in a survival sex-based relationship at least once in their lives. Lifetime involvement in survival sex was found to undermine resilience through both significantly higher drug use and significantly lower self-esteem, compared to youth not involved in survival sex. Indeed, in previous research, young men involved in survival sex reported that their drug use severely increased as a result of their involvement (Lankenau et al., 2006). Drug use is regularly employed as a coping method to help the youth tolerate the required sexual acts, as well as the feelings of depression youth in the sex trade often experience. Due to their participation in this trade, youth report feeling worthless, disenfranchised, and excluded from mainstream society (Kidd & Coimbra Liborio, 2011). Suicidal attempts and gestures are higher among women involved in survival sex compared to those who are not, and feelings of worthlessness are the main reason women cite for not

attempting to exit the sex trade (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2014; Warf et al., 2013).

While emotional romantic relationships in and of themselves were not a predictor of resilience among street-involved youth in this study, results indicated that the negative qualities of romantic relationships are linked to lower resilience and positive relationship qualities are linked to higher resilience. Over half of the youth reported dating violence within their current romantic relationships, which is also consistent with previous research with this age group and population (Slesnick et al., 2010; Tyler & Melander, 2012; Tyler & Schmitz, 2015). Dating violence perpetration and victimization was linked to resilience for both men and women.

In this study, sexual dating violence was particularly associated with resilience for young men. From an evolutionary perspective, sexuality and sexual behaviour is often highly linked with identity, desirability and capacity among young men (Pass, Lindenberg, & Park, 2010). Indeed, in both late adolescence and early adulthood, and in marginalized cultures, having sex is equated with manliness, leading youth to feel more like a man when they have sex (Diamond, 2006; Flemming, Andes, & DiClemente, 2013). Given this, men who feel they have to force or coerce their partners to have sex with them likely feel worthless, less desirable, or less capable as a partner or as a man (Diamond, 2006).

Thus it follows that this study found that sexual dating violence perpetration is associated with lower core strengths and self-esteem for young men. Young men in college who reported perpetrating sexual violence also reported higher levels of vulnerability and depression, as well as more difficulty coping with stress. Men who perpetrate sexual aggression tend to be less sociable and see themselves as less capable compared to men who do not perpetrate sexual aggression (Voller & Long, 2010). However in this study, perpetrating physical dating violence

was not associated with lower resilience for young men. Physical aggression has been linked to increased feelings of manhood and can be viewed as a demonstration of manliness, and thus may not negatively impact self-esteem in the same manner as sexual aggression (Reidy, Berke, Gentile, & Zeichner, 2014; Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

Sexual victimization was linked to higher self-esteem in men, in this study. While this may initially seem unexpected, men are less likely to reflect on the impact of their victimization compared to women, given that men are socialized to see any opportunity for sex as 'good.' Therefore, sexual coercion may be conceptualized by some men simply as sexual experience, which enhances their feelings of masculinity and blocks negative reactions. However, men do report feelings of confusion, fear, violation, and concerns about their sexuality following sexual victimization (Davies, 2000).

Violence perpetration and victimization was linked to lower resilience among young women. In both circumstances this is likely rooted in feelings of fear and helplessness for the women. This study found that perpetrating physical violence was significantly linked to young women's' core strengths. In clinical and forensic samples, women who reported perpetrating physical violence against their partners have higher rates of mood and anxiety disorders, panic disorder, borderline personality disorder, and suicide attempts. They were also found to lack problem-solving and coping skills (Dowd & Leising, 2008; Shorey et al., 2012). Additionally, young women who reported perpetrating dating violence also reported intense feelings of vulnerability, acting in self-defense, and not knowing how to address disagreements with their partners. Thus perpetrating dating violence likely decreases young women's self-efficacy and feelings of control, as situations with their partners deteriorate or their partners retaliate with further dating violence. Perpetrating dating violence also likely leads young, street-involved

women to feel less capable of handling challenges within their relationships in the future, leading to lower core strengths (Joly & Connolly, 2016).

Additionally, sexual dating violence victimization was associated with lower self-esteem for the young women in this study. Previous research with high risk young women who experienced sexual violence victimization, indicates that these young women feel a lack of agency regarding forced sex, stating that if they refuse to have sex their partners will take it anyway. This leads to the women feeling hopeless, worthless, and at times, as if they did something wrong (Joly & Connolly, 2016). The violation associated with sexual assault necessarily decreases the young women's bond with her partner, making her more vulnerable to low resilience (McCarthy & Casey, 2008).

In looking at positive relationship qualities, feeling 'in love' with a current partner was associated with higher self-esteem. According to the Social Bonding Theory, being in love with a partner is an indication of a strong social bond. This bond increases the youth's sense of self-worth and esteem through their ability to care for another person and through likely being cared for by that person (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Planning a future with a partner was not a significant predictor, which may be the results of some street-involved youth participating in relationships for reasons other than love or attachment, such as financial security and a place to live (Blaise et al., 2012; Tyler & Melander, 2011). Given the lack of research on the positive aspects of romantic relationships among street-involved youth, speaking to the youth themselves about the positive aspects of relationships they feel help them to be resilient will likely be beneficial.

Contrary to hypotheses, substance use was not associated with either positive or negative relationship qualities. Previous research on dating violence and substance use is somewhat

inconsistent. According to a literature review on dating violence and substance use among college students, overall, while alcohol problems and binge drinking are associated with both perpetration and victimization, there is not enough research on other substance and dating violence to draw substantive conclusions (Shorey, Stuart, & Cornelius, 2011). Only 12% of youth in a current relationship in the current sample reported drinking alcohol daily or several times a day, thus a lack of power may have led to a lack of significance.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. As with all research on romantic relationships, focusing part of the analyses solely on the youth reporting current romantic relationships reduced the sample size from 125 to 55 youth, which is relatively small. A larger sample size enhances statistical power which may have resulted in non-significant findings in this study being significant. Additionally, this study only inquired about lifetime involvement in survival sex, versus current involvement in a survival sex-based relationship.

This study reported lower proportions of gay/lesbian, bisexual, and questioning youth (4%, 7%, and 2% respectively), compared to other recent Canadian samples (Gaetz et al., 2016). Given this, LGBTQ2S youth could not be analyzed separately for statistical analysis, which is unfortunate given the lack of research on romantic relationships among this population (Ecker, 2016). The lower proportion of LGBTQ2S in the current study may have been due to the research taking place at shelters, as many LGBTQ2S choose to sleep on the street instead of in shelters due to the homophobia/transphobia they experience from other youth and staff (Abramovitch, 2013). Additionally, although the poster advertising this project to youth in shelters sought to be inclusive by using rainbow-coloured figures (i.e. red and green), the poster did not explicitly state that LGBTQ2S youth were encouraged to participate. Street-involved

LGBTQ2S youth look for services specifically attuned to them, and so using a rainbow flag

symbol on posters for future research projects may ensure LGBTQ2S youth feel their

participation is welcome (Government of Alberta, 2017; Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014;

Snead, Hsieh, Snethen, 2016).

In regards to methodology, this study recruited participants through snowball sampling

versus random sampling, and as such there may be a difference between participants who agreed

to participate and participants who refused. This study also only recruited participants from

shelters versus street-involved youth not accessing services, and there may be differences in

resilience between youth who are capable of accessing the shelter system and youth who are

unable to do so, or choose not to do so due to personal characteristics or circumstances (Hyde,

2005).

Finally, this study is based on self-report data, thus there may have been some bias in

how the youth responded, particularly in regard to violence perpetration. This sample used a

broad measure of dating violence, which asked about specific actions (versus asking if the youth

had ever perpetrated dating violence), which tends to elicit higher and likely more accurate

response rates (Wincentak et al., 2016). However, some researchers have noted that broad

measures of dating violence miscategorize playful hitting or kicking as dating violence, resulting

in overestimates (Capalidi & Crosby, 1997; Fernández-González, O'Leary, & Muñoz-Rivas,

2013).

Implications

Results of this study indicate that street-involved youth are highly invested and engaged

in their romantic relationships. They often view these relationships as serious, are in love with

their partners, and are planning a future with them. Thus, it is important to recognize that when

the youth's relationships are negative the romantic relationships are associated with lower resilience, but when the relationships are positive, they are associated with higher resilience. Given this, healthy relationship programs, in shelters and other community organizations for street-involved youth, aiming to decrease dating violence and increase positive qualities, would likely be beneficial in supporting the youth's overall functioning. Programs need to teach skills such as positive problem-solving, interpersonal effectiveness, and self-advocacy around condom use. There is also a need for healthy relationship programs targeted specifically towards LGBTQ2S youth, so the youth can feel welcome and comfortable exploring their relationships. It will be important for staff to receive specific LGBTQ2S-training, and youth report that they would appreciate LGBTQ2S staff and volunteers running the programs (Abramovitch, 2013: Keuroghlian et al., 2014).

This study further highlights the need to continue to provide accessible support for street-involved youth who have involvement with survival sex relationships and dating violence. Not only do these experiences result in lower resilience as defined by this project, but also other mental health issues such as personality disorders, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks (Shorey et al., 2012). However, resilience is a dynamic process, and youth are able to increase their resilience through positive relationships, and learning skills through programs. Higher self-esteem and core strengths may help youth to leave the sex trade and abusive relationships.

Finally this study supports the value of further research in this area. While there is research on the prevalence of dating violence among street-involved youth, little is known about the impact dating violence has on these youth, particularly with regard to perpetration. Even less is known about the impact of positive relationship qualities on resilience. Further investigation to

identify the positive qualities within romantic relationships among street-involved youth will help tailor support and interventions programs to the youth's unique needs and experiences. There is also highly limited research on romantic relationships among specific populations of street-involved youth, such as LGBTQ2S youth. Identifying similarities and differences within their relationships will help guide specific programming and supports which are desired by the youth (Abramovitch, 2013; Ecker, 2016).

Conclusion

While the majority of street-involved youth participate in romantic relationships, they report difficulties with self-advocacy and positive problem-solving within these relationships. Results of this study suggest that positive relationship qualities, such as being in love with a partner, are associated with higher , and negative relationship qualities, such as survival sex and dating violence, are associated with lower resilience among street-involved youth. Thus, this study highlights that it is important to support street-involved youth in developing healthy romantic relationships, in order to help enhance their overall resilience.

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Chapter 3: Study 2- It Can Be Beautiful or Destructive: Street-Involved Youth's

Perceptions of Their Romantic Relationships and Resilience

With the majority of youth reporting at least one romantic relationship during the course of adolescence, these relationships play a significant role in adolescent and young adult development. According to developmental theory, romantic relationships may provide youth with new avenues through which to explore their identity, emotions, and relationships with others (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Although their lives are often highly unstable, street-involved youth participate in the dating and romantic activities seen among youth in more stable housing. Given the nature of their lifestyles, including a lack of involvement from parental-figures, romantic relationships likely play an especially important role for street-involved youth (Karabanow, 2006). When romantic relationships are secure they may provide the youth with much needed support to develop the resiliency required to cope with their circumstances. However, when romantic relationships are unsupportive or abusive they may be linked to lower resilience.

Although studies have previously examined street-involved youth's experiences within romantic relationships (Blais et al., 2012; Watson, 2011) the literature has yet to approach the topic from a theoretical perspective based in developmental and resilience theory. The theoretical perspectives provide a basis to understand how the youth themselves conceptualize their relationships, and view the association between their relationships and other areas of functioning. Given that this is a relatively new area of study, examining the youth's understanding of their experiences can provide further insight into factors associated with resilience not previously considered. Additionally, exploring the interconnectivity between

romantic relationship development and resilience among street-involved youth can help guide interventions and services for this population.

Street-Involved Youth

Street-involved youth are characterized by their lack of permanent residence, and their resulting unstable and unsafe life situations (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016; Karabanow, 2008). Many of these youth experience both abuse from family members before leaving their homes, and violence once they enter life on the street. While on the street, youth are at high risk for suicide, mental health problems, exploitation, prostitution, nutritional vulnerability and malnutrition, respiratory illness, and STIs. Some youth may engage in high rates of drug use in order to cope with these experiences (Forchuk et al, 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016; Johnson, Whitbeck & Hoyt, 2005; Kennedy et al., 2012; Kidd et al., 2016; Kirst & Erickson, 2013; Murphy, 2016; Wagner, Carlin, Cauce, & Tenner, 2001). Youth who identify as LGBTQ2S face increased risks on the street, such as higher rates of physical and sexual victimization, substance use, and mental health difficulties including suicide attempts, compared to street-involved youth who identify as heterosexual (Abramovitch, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016). Despite these difficulties, street-involved youth display a number of strengths. Some of the youth remain in school despite their lack of housing, and many of the youth either have employment or are motivated to find paid work (Gibson, 2007; Karabanow, 2006; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004).

Resilience

Street-involved youth's ability to cope with the difficulties they face can be understood through the concept of resilience. Resilience constitutes positive adaptation during or after experiencing adverse conditions (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2007; Ruttar,

2013). Resilience is determined based on the degree of adversity, in that as the level of adversity experienced increases, the required level of functioning to be considered resilient decreases (Robinson, 2000; Gest, Reed and Masten, 1999). This concept is key when assessing resilience among street-involved youth, as given the level of adversity they experience, attending school or obtaining work can be considered resilient. Just as difficulties in one area of life can spread to another, positive behavior and functioning in one area can lead to positive functioning in other areas (Masten, 2011; Sapienza & Masten, 2011).

An individual's resilience is impacted by a multitude of external and internal factors. External factors involve behaviours or actions that demonstrate an individual's resilience, such as decreasing drug use or increasing school attendance. Internal factors involve psychological processes or characteristics within an individual which indicate resilience, such as high self-esteem (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2015).

Key factors related to resilience in at-risk youth include components associated with relational attachment, such as caring relationships with adults, peers and romantic partners, a belief that life is meaningful, perceived self-efficacy, and emotion-regulation skills. Resisting self-harm and suicide is also cited as a key achievement for street-involved youth (Kolar, Erickson & Stewart, 2012). When asked what they feel makes them resilient, street-involved youth cite a strong sense of self, the ability to adapt, and self-reliance (Kidd & Davidson, 2007).

The role self-reliance may play in resilience for street-involved youth highlights the importance of addressing context, and the complexity of examining resilience among this population. An emphasis on self-reliance may be indicative of difficulties forming secure relationships with others, which may impede the development of resilience. However, self-reliance is seen as a factor related to higher resilience within the context of street-life as it

protects youth from bonding with peers who may be dangerous or a negative influence.

Concurrently, this emphasis on self-reliance may hamper the youth's ability to trust individuals

who can help them disengage from street-life, such as social workers, thereby decreasing their

resilience over the long-term (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Kolar, Erickson, & Stewart, 2012;

Silverman, 2011).

Given the many factors involved in resilience, the latter has been conceptualized

differently across research studies with at-risk youth. Some researchers define resilience as the

individual meeting typical developmental expectations based on societal values. Other

researchers define resilience as a lack of or reduction in psychopathology or deficiency, versus

achievement (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2015). Because resilience is clearly multidimensional, for

the purposes of this project resilience will be defined as both lower psychopathology and positive

achievement, and more importantly, will be based in what the youth in the sample see as their

strengths and capabilities.

Attachment and Resilience

One way resilience is fostered is through strong and secure attachments to others. An

attachment is a close tie between one individual and another, resulting in these individuals

seeking proximity with each other, and believing that they can rely on the consistent care and

support of others when needed (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). The nature of the individual's

attachment to others has key implications for his feelings of security within the world, and his

ability to trust others throughout life (Bowlby, 1982). According to developmental theory, an

individual's ability to develop attachments to others, or attachment style, is first developed in

infancy with their primary caregiver. Two main styles of attachment to the primary caregiver

have been identified: secure and insecure. Securely attached children see their caregiver as a

secure base from which to explore their world, and seek comfort from their caregiver with appropriate displays of emotion when distressed. Insecurely attached children see their caregiver as unpredictable or unable to meet their emotional needs, and so are unable to trust that their caregiver will support them in times of distress. A third, less prevalent style of attachment, disorganized attachment, may result from abuse, neglect, or difficulties parenting due to trauma. Children with disorganized attachment view their caregiver as both a source of safety and danger, resulting in inconsistent and confused responses to caregivers and others in their lives (Main, 2000; Van Ijzendoorn, Schuengel, & Bakermans- Kranenberg, 1999).

The infant internalizes this view of their caregiver, called the Internal Working Model, which then impacts their relationships with others throughout life (Main, 2000). Indeed, caregiver-infant attachment has been found to generally be predictive of both relationships with peers and romantic partners later in life, with individuals viewing their friends and partners as sources of safety, similar to their caregivers, to varying degrees. Thus an individual with a secure Internal Working Model would likely feel comfortable turning to a romantic partner when stressed, whereas someone with an insecure Internal Working Model may find it more difficult to do so. It is possible for individuals to experience different levels of attachment with different people. Consequently, someone with a secure Internal Working Model may develop an insecure attachment style with a romantic partner due to negative experiences with that partner, and vice versa. Individuals with secure Internal Working Models are likely capable of displaying more resilience due to their ability to trust others, compared to someone with an insecure Internal Working Model (Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey, 2002).

Theory of Social Bonding and resilience. The theory of social bonding provides further insight into how secure attachments may lead to adaptive functioning in times of stress

(Rayburn, Pals, & Wright, 2012). Secure attachments enable the development of close and healthy social bonds with others due to the ability to trust that key individuals will reciprocate caring and support. Close social bonds involve individuals spending time together, and engaging in activities that demonstrate caring and kindness, such as giving gifts or offering help. The positive benefits of close social bonds are supported through substantial research. They discourage delinquency because people with close bonds are more sensitive to the impact their actions will have on their loved ones (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Individuals with close social bonds are more likely to have positive socioemotional outcomes, even in difficult circumstances (Akers & Lee, 1999; Ungar, 2013). It is important to note that social bonds have been found to be particularly weak among homeless youth (Rayburn, Pals, & Wright, 2012).

Romantic relationships during adolescence can enhance youth's social bonds, as the relationships provide the youth with the means to experience a type of bond that they may not have engaged in before: romantic love. Romantic love includes a "set of emotions, cognitions, behaviours, and identifications that people interpret as signifiers of being in love" (McCarthy & Casey, 2008, p.945). As supported by attachment and social bonding theory, romantic relationships can offer adolescents the safety they need to explore new ideas and ways of being. This safety can promote a change in behaviours, thoughts and emotions. The strength of the bond in romantic relationships may make the latter a more powerful influence than other bonds, such as friendships (McCarthy & Casey, 2008).

Romantic Relationships Among Street-Involved Youth

Romantic relationships can involve intimacy, commitment, and sexual passion, and may be defined as a close, mutually acknowledged connection between two people. In adolescence and young adulthood, romantic relationships progress with the youth's development, while also

supporting individual development (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). The research on the romantic

relationships among street-involved youth generally focuses on the negative aspects of romantic

activities on the street. A major area of romantic risk for street-involved youth includes dating

violence. Thirty-five percent of street-involved youth report emotional violence, and 30% to 62%

report physical violence, with young women being twice as likely to report dating violence

victimization compared to young men (Slesnick et al., 2010; Tyler & Melander, 2012; Tyler &

Schmitz, 2015).Many street-involved young women face a choice between violence on the street

and violence from their partners. These young women remain in abusive relationships because

the violence from their partner, a known entity, is preferable to physical and sexual violence at

the hands of strangers. Still, some of the women reported feeling protected and cared for by their

partners despite the nature of the relationship (Bourgois, Prince, & Moss, 2004; Watson, 2011).

Given the high levels of violence experienced, we are left wondering how these events are

related to the youth's resilience?

The research on positive aspects of romantic-relationships on the street is often

intermingled with the benefits of street-involved youth's other social bonds. This makes it

difficult to discern the particular benefits of romantic relationships for street-involved youth,

versus the benefits of relationships in general. In looking at the research on street-involved

youth's relationships in general, members of street-involved youth's social networks include

family members, caseworkers, home-based peers, street-based peers, and romantic partners

(Rice, Milburn, & Monro, 2010; Wenzel et al., 2012).

Street-involved youth report that while their relationships are not always positive and it

can be difficult to trust others due to their life experiences (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kolar, Erickson,

Stewart, 2012), members of their social networks may provide support in numerous ways,

including teaching street-smarts, and providing food, shelter, advice, protection, emotional

support, and help avoiding drug use (Tyler & Melander, 2011). Additionally, youth report

specifically engaging in romantic relationships to remove themselves from a difficult home

environment, for sexual pleasure, and for financial support (Blais et al., 2012; Watson, 2011).

In a qualitative study examining how youth cope with life on the streets, Kidd and

Davidson (2007) identified that some youth in the study placed a particularly strong emphasis on

their romantic partner as a source of motivation and support. In a few cases, the youth even

stated that their partner was the main reason they decided to decrease their drug use and try to get

off the street. Finally, the youth found that caring for others led to feeling good and a sense of

pride (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Again, given that this was uncovered in a study focusing on a

wide range of relationships and factors related to resilience among street-involved youth, it

necessarily provides but a glimpse into the possible link between romantic relationships and

resilience. Examining this link in greater detail will provide more information on when and how

romantic relationships foster resilience.

The context of street life and romantic relationships. The bulk of what is known about

the interplay between street life and romantic relationships is from a study on love-based

relationships among street-involved youth by Blais et al. (2012). When asked how living on the

street impacts their romantic relationships, youth report that drug use decreases their ability to be

there for their partners, and they are concerned about non-street-involved partners' reactions to

life on the street. Some youth are also aware that they are not fully able to invest in romantic

relationships due to the challenges of living on the street. For example, the youth need to spend

their energy finding food and shelter, leaving them little time to care for someone else. When

partners spend all day and night together, panhandling and looking for shelter, it can lead to

increased arguments and greater emotional dependency on each other. The belief in 'romantic love' is also impacted by time spent on the street, with youth who have lived in unstable circumstances for a year or more viewing love as less special and idyllic compared to youth who have spent less than a year on the street (Blais et al., 2012).

However, street-involved youth also view their partners as a source of hope, helping to decrease or end drug use, and mitigate the challenges of life on the street by having someone at their side. Some young women view their romantic partners as being 'outside' the context of living on the street. These young woman believe that they are part of caring, committed relationships which would exist whether they lived on the street or not (Blais et al., 2012; Watson, 2011).

Study Goals

This study expands on the limited research on romantic relationships among street-involved youth, by engaging youth in discussions on both their conceptualization and lived-experiences of all-types of romantic relationships, from a unique perspective based in developmental theory and resilience. This study further explores how the youth define relationships, as well as the impact of street-life on romantic relationships. It also identifies a wide range of positive and negative experiences within their relationships, and whether the youth find these experiences helpful or harmful in their development of resilience. For the purposes of this study, resilience was conceptualized as reduction of psychopathology, and adaptation and achievement, based on the youth's evaluation of their situation (i.e. whether or not they think they are displaying strength and adaptation; Masten, 2001).

As street-involved youth often feel discounted or on the fringes of society, conducting qualitative research with these youth is important as it promotes fully understanding the

experiences of the participants through using their language, grounded in the context of their reality (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). The qualitative data in this study is analyzed through thematic analysis, which is a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). The data are explored in detail, while still permitting organization and interpretation.

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Methods

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Participants

Participants included 21 youth (11 men and 10 women), with an age range of 16 to 24 years. One man identified as gay, while 1 woman identified as bisexual. Of the 21 youth, 5 women and 6 men reported a current romantic relationship, with 1 man reporting an open relationship. Additionally one participant said he was uncertain about the status of his relationship, and 1 man and 1 woman reported engaging in casual sexual relationships. All of the youth reported using traditional labels to describe their romantic partners, such as boyfriend, girlfriend, and 'my girl', with two men using the term "baby-momma" to refer to their partners. Nine youth reported meeting romantic partners at shelters or while street-involved, and 16 youth discussed meeting partners before becoming street-involved (i.e. at school) or during activities not related to life on the street, such as through social media. Romantic relationship length ranged from a brand new relationship of 4 days old, to over 5 years, with 6 youth reporting relatively large age differences between partners (5-9 years). Youth stated that they did not regularly use condoms, had contracted sexually transmitted infections, and 4 men and 3 women reported either at least one pregnancy or child.

Procedure

Participants were recruited the day following survey administration for study one, at the

same six shelters and one drop-in centre within the Greater Toronto Area. While completing the survey in study 1, youth were informed that interviews would be taking place. All youth who participated in the interviews had also completed the survey, although this was not a requirement. This study was conducted in accordance with the standards of the research ethics board of the university of the principal investigator. The staff at the participating shelters were provided with a copy of the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) in the weeks before administration so they could provide feedback regarding content and wording. The shelters were also provided with posters advertising the study. On the day of the study, youth were recruited at the shelter through snowball sampling. In order to participate in the interview portion of the study, youth were required to have experienced at least one romantic relationship during their lifetime.

Prior to beginning the interview, the youth gave written, informed consent to participate. The youth were informed that participation was voluntary and that identification numbers were used in place of names to ensure confidentiality. The shelters offered a quiet space for the interview, and interviews were conducted by the principal researcher, who had previous clinical experience working with high-risk youth. The interview addressed topics including dating history, the definition of a romantic relationship, positive and negative dating experiences, and the impact of romantic partner's on the youth's lives. When the interview was finished, the youth were offered $15.00 for their work, and a page of support services in their area in the event that the interview resulted in distress. The interviewer also inquired about the youth's mood at the end of the interview and encouraged self-care as needed. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed by trained research assistants. These were checked for accuracy by the principal investigator.

Analyses

Following Braun & Clarke's guidelines, a cross-case thematic analysis (referred to as "thematic analysis" throughout) was conducted to identify, analyze, and report patterns (i.e., themes) within the data. This study can be considered a "theoretical thematic analysis" in that it was driven by the theories of Resilience, Attachment, and The Social Bonding (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The data was approached with the lens that romantic relationships are important in adolescence and young adulthood, and that these relationships impact resilience in some way. Thus the data were analyzed with the goal of identifying themes regarding resilience.

Data analysis was conducted through the six thematic analysis phases, including 1) data familiarization, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial coding was conducted by the principal researcher and a senior research assistant, with the assistance of the software program Atlas.ti. Key segments of text were free-coded, either using the youth's own language or keeping as close to the youth's language as possible, in order to maintain the integrity of the results (Patton, 2002). Relevant segments of text were assigned to categories to facilitate organization of the text and thematic development, based on four a-priori constructs: definition of romantic relationships, past romantic relationship experiences, strengths and challenges, and romantic relationships and resilience (See Appendix E; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Key segments were coded inclusively as needed, such as coding a full sentence or entire paragraph, so the relevant context was preserved.

The principal researcher and research assistant initially coded three interviews together for training and discussion purposes. The remaining 18 interviews were double-coded separately, stopping after each interview to determine inter-coder reliability (percent agreement), to explore

coding approach, and reach unanimity on any coding disagreements. Percent agreement is calculated by dividing the number of times coding is in agreement, by the total number of code comparisons, in each transcript, with an agreement rate of 80% or higher being considered acceptable (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). On average across the 18 interviews coded independently, inter-coder agreement was 85% (range = 78% - 90%).

Following the initial coding, the principal researcher then identified themes and sub-themes among the codes, using Microsoft Word. Themes are a phrase or sentence that captures the meaning underlying a group of data. Themes identify a pattern within the data, as related to the research question. Subthemes then represent a particular aspect of a theme identified within the data. As in the coding process, wording for the themes and sub-themes was either a direct quote or kept as near to the youth's original wording as possible. The themes generated by the principal researcher were then reviewed by a group of senior researchers and research assistants, in order to determine if the data formed a coherent pattern within the themes. Themes were reworked and new themes were created and named, or re-named, as needed based on this discussion group (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012).

As the themes and subthemes in the data were identified, it became clear that while each theme was unique, together they painted an overall picture of how romantic relationships impact street-involved youth. This overall picture was identified as the meta-theme. A thematic map outlining the relationship between the meta-theme, themes, and subthemes, was then created by the principal researcher. This map was also reviewed and reworked through discussion with a team of senior researchers. This discussion and re-working of codes and themes is vital to the process in order to insure analysis is organic and reflective (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

The findings in this section are presented first as an overall meta-theme, followed by descriptions of themes and associated subthemes. One meta-theme and five main themes related to the youth's experiences of romantic relationships were identified through thematic analysis and are discussed below. Overall, it was found that romantic relationships can either be positive or highly negative for street-involved youth, leading to the meta-theme 'It Can Be Beautiful or Destructive.' During the interviews the youth spoke of both positive and negative features within their romantic relationships, however when speaking about the impact of these features on their adaptation and achievement, there was little integration of the positive and negative aspects. Thus, among the five identified themes, two highlight the positive aspects of relationships: 'Best Intentions' and 'A Strong Connection', two highlight the negative aspects: 'Betrayal and Violence' and 'Street Life Definitely Strains Your Relationship,' and the final theme denotes a polarized view of the impact of romantic relationships on resilience: 'Builds You Up or Brings You Down' (see Figure 1).

Meta-Theme: It Can Be Beautiful or Destructive

The meta-theme identified romantic relationships as either an overall highly positive or highly negative presence in the youth's lives. While the youth enter their romantic relationships with the best of intentions and can feel a strong connection to their partners, the youth also face betrayal and violence, and the negative impact of life on the street within some of their romantic relationships. Given this, the youth saw their relationships as either building or undermining their resilience.

Indeed, this meta-theme highlights the youth's polarized view of their romantic relationships. A particular relationship or partner was either good or bad, and there was little discussion of 'ups and downs,' or the existence of shades of grey within relationships. The youth
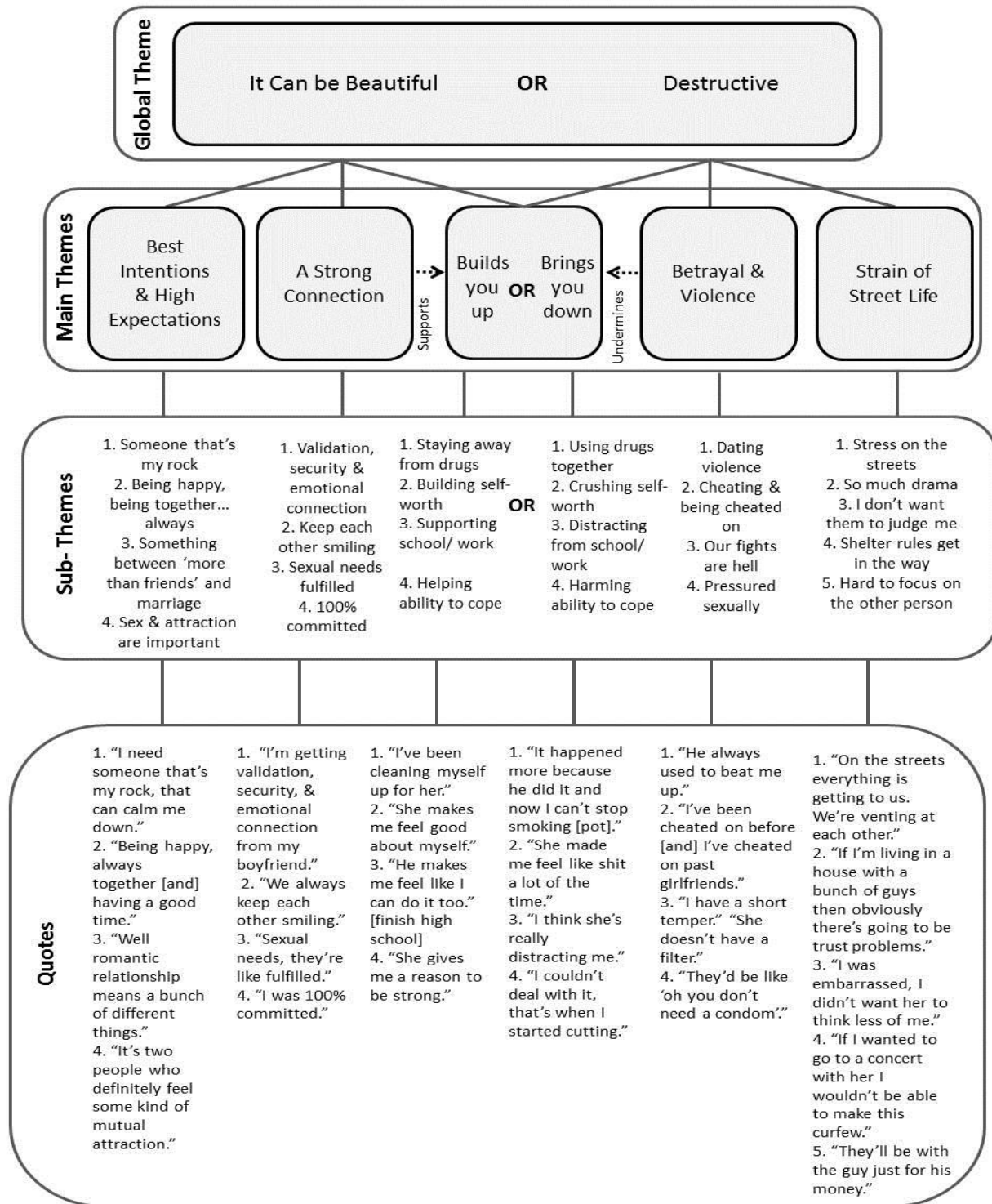
Global Theme

| It Can be Beautiful | **OR** | Destructive |

Main Themes

| Best Intentions & High Expectations | A Strong Connection | Builds you up **OR** Brings you down | Betrayal & Violence | Strain of Street Life |

Supports · · · →   ← · · · Undermines

Sub-Themes

1. Someone that's my rock
2. Being happy, being together… always
3. Something between 'more than friends' and marriage
4. Sex & attraction are important

1. Validation, security & emotional connection
2. Keep each other smiling
3. Sexual needs fulfilled
4. 100% committed

1. Staying away from drugs
2. Building self-worth
3. Supporting school/ work
4. Helping ability to cope

OR

1. Using drugs together
2. Crushing self-worth
3. Distracting from school/ work
4. Harming ability to cope

1. Dating violence
2. Cheating & being cheated on
3. Our fights are hell
4. Pressured sexually

1. Stress on the streets
2. So much drama
3. I don't want them to judge me
4. Shelter rules get in the way
5. Hard to focus on the other person

Quotes

1. "I need someone that's my rock, that can calm me down."
2. "Being happy, always together [and] having a good time."
3. "Well romantic relationship means a bunch of different things."
4. "It's two people who definitely feel some kind of mutual attraction."

1. "I'm getting validation, security, & emotional connection from my boyfriend."
2. "We always keep each other smiling."
3. "Sexual needs, they're like fulfilled."
4. "I was 100% committed."

1. "I've been cleaning myself up for her."
2. "She makes me feel good about myself."
3. "He makes me feel like I can do it too." [finish high school]
4. "She gives me a reason to be strong."

1. "It happened more because he did it and now I can't stop smoking [pot]."
2. "She made me feel like shit a lot of the time."
3. "I think she's really distracting me."
4. "I couldn't deal with it, that's when I started cutting."

1. "He always used to beat me up."
2. "I've been cheated on before [and] I've cheated on past girlfriends."
3. "I have a short temper." "She doesn't have a filter."
4. "They'd be like 'oh you don't need a condom'."

1. "On the streets everything is getting to us. We're venting at each other."
2. "If I'm living in a house with a bunch of guys then obviously there's going to be trust problems."
3. "I was embarrassed, I didn't want her to think less of me."
4. "If I wanted to go to a concert with her I wouldn't be able to make this curfew."
5. "They'll be with the guy just for his money."

Figure 1. Thematic map of romantic relationships' impact on resilience

regularly used words such as 'always,' 'never,' and 'every time.' The youth's conceptualization

of romantic relationships was especially idealized, while their descriptions of actual experiences

tended towards the negative, with limited integration of the positive and negative characteristics.

Additionally, when speaking about the impact of romantic relationships on their lives, the youth

again saw their partners' influence as being either entirely beneficial or entirely harmful, versus

somewhere in the middle. As described by one 20 year old woman speaking about romantic

relationships, "it can be the most beautiful thing to you, or it can like destroy you." Other than

the above comment, the youth did not appear to have insight into their dichotomous views of

their romantic experiences.

1. Best intentions and high expectations. When speaking about their conceptualization

of romantic relationships the youth noted that "people go into relationships with the best

intentions" (male, age 16). According to the youth, romantic relationships should involve high

levels of support, togetherness, a special bond, and sexual attraction. Thus the youth believe the

majority of relationships have the potential to be good and beneficial. Four sub-themes were

identified within this theme.

1.1. "Someone that's my rock" (female, age 18). For the youth, partners should enter

into a relationship with the intention to support their partner. Nine men and 11 women noted that

support should be a key aspect of romantic relationships. Support involves being there for each

other, respect, mutual understanding, sharing, and providing comfort and caring. Support can be

emotional, financial, or physical in nature. Expectations for support included helping the person

through tough times or helping them to be the best version of themselves. When describing the

nature of a romantic partner a 22 year old young woman said "It's someone that looks out for the

other person. Like you know if you're struggling, they're looking out for you."

1.2. Being happy, being together… always. Having the best intentions for a romantic relationship also means wanting to be with your partner. Nine men and 9 women reported expectations that romantic relationships involve spending a lot of time together, which leads to feelings of happiness and decreases loneliness. As described by a man (age 19) "[you] smile at the thought of their name, just makes you happy." It is important for partners to make time for each other, and engage in positive, romantic activities together such as dinners and walks on the beach. There was little tolerance for negativity, as many youth also emphasized that relationships should not involve fighting.

1.3. Something between 'more than friends' and marriage. Six men and 9 women explored what uniquely delineates romantic relationships from other relationships. Entering a romantic relationship with the best intentions necessarily involves wanting the relationship to be different from other relationships. As such, many youth noted that romantic relationships are inherently different than friendships due to a special connection between people who have a desire to be together. Romantic relationships were seen as "deeper" and more committed than friendships, indeed, "a much higher feeling than friendship" (male, age 24). That being said, some youth also stated that there are different levels to romantic relationships, as "well romantic relationship means a bunch of different things" (male, 20 years). Thus, romantic relationships can be more superficial and based primarily on sexual attraction, while other relationships are based in commitment, trust, and love. However for other youth, a relationship is only considered 'romantic' if it involves commitment.

1.4. Sex and physical attraction are important. Finally, wanting physical intimacy with a partner is a key part of having the best intentions and high expectations for a romantic relationship. Six men and 8 women emphasized the important role sex and physical attraction

should play in romantic relationships, with some youth placing more emphasis on it than others. Youth discussed the need to feel drawn to a person, as one youth stated, a romantic relationship is "two people who definitely feel some kind of mutual attraction" (male, age 24). Actions such as hugging, kissing, holding hands were seen as key parts of a relationship. Many youth also noted the importance of safe sex in romantic relationships, including using condoms, getting tested, obtaining consent, and "taking things slow" (male, age 23). That being said, many youth emphasized that physical intimacy is only one component of a romantic relationship, and should not be the main focus.

2. A strong connection. When discussing their lived romantic relationship experiences many youth described positive attributes that matched their conceptualization of romantic relationships. Indeed, the youth felt deeply emotionally and sexually connected to some of their partners, as their relationships involved happiness, sexual intimacy, emotional security, and commitment. Four sub-themes were identified within this theme.

2.1. Validation, security, and emotional connection. Nine men and 8 women reported a strong sense of emotional support and connection in their romantic relationships. As one participant stated, "I'm getting validation, security, and emotional connection from my boyfriend" (female, age 18). The youth bonded through communication about feelings, and used compromise to meet each other's needs. There was also an emphasis on caring for and protecting each other: "She's always there for me, she didn't give a fuck if it's two o'clock in the morning, as long as I'm okay and she's okay we're good" (male, age 20).

2.2. "We always keep each other smiling" (female, age 17). For the youth, being connected to their partners involved experiencing happiness with their partners. Ten men and 11 women reported that their partners have been a source of positivity in their lives. The youth

reported having fun with their partners, and engaging in enjoyable activities such as shopping, watching movies, going to concerts, cooking, and busking together. As one woman (age 23) stated, "I'm happy around him, he makes me happy." Similar to the conceptualization of romantic relationships, for some youth, happiness in a lived-relationship was contingent upon never having fights. For example, one participant emphasized, "we used to have a really fun relationship, […] he's the one person I haven't had an argument with" (female, age 16).

    2.3. Sexual needs fulfilled. Being connected to a partner also involved sexual connection. Nine men and 7 women discussed sexual activity in their romantic relationships, as one woman stated, "sexual needs, they're like fulfilled" (female, age 22). Five youth reported sexual intimacy within the context of romance and love, such as cuddling and affection, making statements such as "when we lay down together she fits perfectly" (male, age 24). Whereas 4 youth described relationships that were primarily based on casual sexual activity.

    2.4. "100% committed" (males ages 19 & 20). Finally, commitment and love was related to connectedness for the youth. Seven men and 8 women reported strong feelings of commitment and love in their romantic relationships; "it just happened, like love at first sight kind of thing, […] and like he cried to me telling me that, how much he loves me" (female, age 17). Youth planned to attend school with, live with, or marry their partners in the future. For example, one participant explained, "We'd talk about how cute our babies would be, and then like just thinking about things like where we would want to live, what stuff we would have" (male, age 19).

    3. Betrayal and violence. In addition to their positive romantic relationship experiences, the youth also discussed many highly negative events and attributes. The youth reported dating violence, infidelity, intense fights, and sexual pressure within their relationships. Four sub-themes were identified within this theme.

3.1. Dating violence- "crazy, abusive, and controlling" (female, age 23). One man and 8 women experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence within their romantic relationships, with one other woman stating that she did not want to elaborate further when asked a probing question about arguments with her current boyfriend. The youth were not specifically asked questions about dating violence, and so spontaneously described acts including name calling, being locked in the apartment, being deprived of a phone to call family, hitting, kicking, beating, breaking bones, and rape. One woman (age 16) described her experiences as, "this is like probably my longest relationship but I never counted it as a relationship because it was too violent, like he broke my wrist, I used to have cuts on my arms, and I had like those rug burn kind of things from being dragged on the school walls."

3.2. Cheating and being cheated on. In addition to violence, betrayal was also present in their romantic relationships. Six men and 6 women reported that infidelity was a key issue in their romantic relationships. Many of these youth had both cheated and been cheated on. Unsurprisingly this resulted in hurt feelings, as well as suspicion and jealousy in subsequent romantic relationships. Some of the youth broke up with their partners due to infidelity, while others stated that they cheat because it is less effort than going through the hassle of a break-up. As one young man (age 24) explained, "We started resenting each other, we probably should have broken up then, but instead of breaking up we just cheated on each other."

3.3. "Our fights are hell" (female, age 18). Volatile fights contributed to feelings of craziness and unpredictability within romantic relationships. Eight men and 10 women discussed intense conflict and feelings of anger in their romantic relationships. Youth described their partners as getting angry easily or having anger management issues, while also acknowledging that they may have anger issues themselves and know how to push their partners' buttons.

According to one woman (age 17), "He has, gets really angry really easily. I mean it's because he's not on the drugs and he, so you can say one little thing to him and he will freak, like he yelled at me hysterically one day." Men tended to downplay the arguments, whereas women discussed the arguments as being more serious and upsetting. Some youth felt that fights were generally over money, a lack of support, or trivial issues, and arguments involved lying, yelling, twisting words, and ignoring each other. The fights were difficult emotionally and sometimes involved breaking up for a short period.

3.4. *Young women pressured sexually- "It wasn't something I wanted" (female, age 19).* Finally, sexual pressure was also related to issues of control in romantic relationships. Despite many of the youth reporting that physical intimacy was a positive aspect of their relationships, 5 women reported pressure around sexual activity, either to please their partners or to gain access to shelter. Not only did the women report feeling pressured to have sex, but also to engage in sexual activity without protection. One woman (age 17) recounted her experiences, "They'd be like 'oh you don't need a condom,' cause they knew I was on birth control. I was like 'yeah I do because birth control doesn't always work you know,' but they would, I'm gullible, so that's how they would get to me."

4. Street life definitely strains your relationship. In addition to the challenges street-involved youth experience in their relationships, living at a shelter and being street-involved negatively impacts their relationships, and exacerbates difficult interpersonal dynamics between the youth. Key issues discussed include the stress of street life, the shelter environment and culture leading to rumors of infidelity, fear of judgment, the impact of shelter rules, and issues related to struggling financially. Five sub-themes were identified within this theme.

4.1. On the streets, the stress is getting to us. A key aspect of street life that strains

relationships is enhanced stress. Eight men and 6 women reported that the stress of being street-

involved impacted their romantic relationships, particularly leading to arguments as they often

take their stress out on each other. For example, a young man (age 22) stated, "on the streets, it's

kind of, everything is getting to us, we're both venting at each other instead of to each other."

Indeed, the police are regularly called to the shelter due to stress-related violence. Stressful

issues related to life on the street include couch surfing, pregnancy, mental health issues, life

instability, low mood, lack of sleep, traveling, spending too much time together and becoming

sick of the person, and the prevalence of drug use in shelters. Youth highlighted that it is difficult

to care for or focus on another person when they are facing so much pressure in their own lives.

Living in a shelter also causes stress and worry for their romantic partners in stable housing, with

1 youth's girlfriend breaking up with him after he was kicked out of his house (male, age 19).

4.2. Rumors and jealousy in shelters: "So much drama happens" (female, age 19).

Rumors and jealousy in shelters is another challenging aspect of being street-involved. Three

men and 4 women indicated that jealousy and cheating are prevalent aspects of shelter life.

Because there are a number of youth sleeping and spending a large portion of their time together

on one place, youth in relationships are faced with gossip, rumors, and seeing their partners

interact intimately with members of the opposite sex. Youth are not able to show affection for

their partners physically in shelters, so watching their partner interact with other potential

partners in a similar manner leads to feelings of insecurity. As one young woman (age 16)

explained, "if I'm living in a house with a bunch of guys then obviously there's going to be trust

problems." Additionally, due to their backgrounds, many of these youth have issues with

attachment, and see their partners as their only source of support, which leads to heightened sensitivity to cheating (Taylor-Seehafer, Jacobvitz, & Holleran Steiker, 2008).

4.3. I don't want them to judge me. Another strain related to street life is worrying about being judged by romantic partners. Five men and 4 women reported feeling shame at living in a shelter, and had concerns that romantic partners, potential or current, would judge them for their living situation. Some youth noted that they are not currently dating because it would be too "embarrassing" or "awkward" to have to admit to not having a home. Other youth had not told their current romantic partner they were at a shelter because they were concerned their partner would be angry or would not understand. One young man (age 20) explained why he had not told his girlfriend he was at a shelter, "Cause I was embarrassed, I didn't want her to think less of me."

4.4. Shelter rules get in the way. Shelter rules, which are often seen as restrictive by the youth, also adds strain to romantic relationships. Two men and 4 women reported that shelter rules negatively impacted their romantic relationships. Youth felt frustrated because they are not allowed physical contact in shelters, so they cannot go to their partners for physical comfort and have to find alternate venues for sex. According to one young woman (age 18) "We can't kiss, we can't hug, we can't have private conversations. I can't fall asleep next to him, and like there's times when I need him to hold me and I can't have that, and that's a huge deal for me for comfort, you know?" Youth also struggle with early curfews which make it difficult to go on dates to movies or concerts.

4.5. Hard to focus on the other person when you're struggling financially. Finally, financial strain associated with street life negatively impacts romantic relationships. Five men and 4 women discussed the negative impact low finances have on their dating situation. The

youth do not have money for dates, and struggle with not being able to financially contribute to the relationship. Several of the youth's self-worth was tied to their financial situation. According to a woman (age 18) "right now I have nothing to offer [financially], that person has nothing to offer because we are struggling right now. It's just extremely hard right now and it would have been so much easier if things went out right." One youth stated that having a romantic partner was a distraction from the important tasks of looking for a job and stable housing. Youth also reported engaging in romantic relationships for a place to stay or financial support, with a young man (age 19) expressing frustrations about some women in shelters: "they'll be with the guy just for his money."

5. Builds you up or brings you down. When the youth discussed how their romantic relationships have impacted their resilience, their various partners had either impacted them entirely positively or entirely negatively. Thus, according to the youth, romantic relationships both promote and undermine several key aspects of resilience. Four sub-themes were identified for this theme, and the aspects the youth discussed included drug use, self-worth, school or work, and coping.

5.1. Staying away from drugs vs. using drugs together. Romantic partners had reportedly either supported the youth's resilience by helping them to decrease drug use, or had undermined their resilience by encouraging drug use. Two men and 1 woman reported that their romantic partners helped them to decrease drug or alcohol use, either by providing support or motivation. For example, a man (age 20) said, "I've been cleaning myself up for her [his girlfriend]." However, 3 men and 4 women regularly engaged in drug use with their partners. The majority of these youth smoked marijuana together, with only 1 man reporting he also did MDMA with is partner, and 1 female youth reporting she did drugs other than marijuana with

her partner. Three of the youth met their partners through buying or selling drugs. One woman (age 16) described meeting her partner through drug use: "Uh he was dealing drugs and I was running, dealing drugs under him […] like we never thought we'd end up like dating or moving in."

5.2. Building vs. crushing self-worth. Romantic relationships also impact the youth's self-worth, an aspect of resilience, both positively and negatively. Eight men and 7 women reported that their romantic partner's make them feel good about themselves and increase their self-esteem, with one man (age 19) saying "[she made me feel] "Awesome! She made me feel good about myself all the time." The youth highlighted that their partners helped them to feel valued, smart, desirable, and mature. Their partners contribute to this growth through support, validation, and acceptance. However, romantic partners negatively impacted the self-worth of 1 man and 5 women, making them feel horrible, insecure, weak, small, and badly about themselves. The youth feel their partners lead to this by invalidating them, putting them down in front of friends and family, ignoring them, or pressuring them sexually. For example a woman (age 18) exemplified this by saying, "I feel small sometimes, I feel like whenever I am with him and there is other girls around I feel he is looking at those girls. I just feel like he doesn't really think that I am as pretty anymore."

5.3. Supporting vs. distracting from school and work. Romantic partners had either reportedly helped to promote the youth's resilience by supporting school or work goals, or undermined their resilience by acting as distractions from school or work. Five men and 4 women reported that their romantic partners impacted their school or career goals positively. Youth highlighted that their partners increase their motivation to achieve their goals, and even help them with their homework, resumes, and job applications. For example, one woman (age

23) said her boyfriend is a role model for her because he has finished high school, stating "he makes me feel like I can do it too." Only 1 male and 1 female felt that their partners interfered with their goals, either refusing to help them apply for jobs or resenting the time training took from the relationship. When speaking about the impact of his girlfriend one man (age 24) said, "She doesn't have any direction to her life, no structure, and I think she's really distracting me."

5.4. Helping vs. harming ability to cope. Finally, interactions with romantic partners reportedly either supported resilience through helping the youth to cope positively, or undermined resilience through leading to negative coping practices. For 3 men and 3 women, their partners helped them resist self-harm or suicidal thoughts, or remove themselves from unsafe situations. Romantic partners served as a source of support through difficult emotions or gave the youth a reason to push through and keep going. As described by one man (age 20), "I always think 'sure I can end it' […] and then I think about those two [his girlfriend and child] and I know I can't do that, can't, I have to work, I have to push through, I have to get through for them, not even for myself, for them." Indeed, another youth's partner helped give her the courage to leave her abusive home. However, 2 women's partners led them to feel afraid and remain in unsafe situations. One young woman (age 18) discussed engaging in self-harm due to a forced sexual relationship: "I couldn't deal with it, that's when I started cutting."

Discussion

This study sought to examine how street-involved youth conceptualize romantic relationships, and expands on previous research by exploring the romantic relationships of street-involved youth through a lens based in developmental and resilience theory. Together, the results of this study indicated that although the youth have high hopes for their romantic relationships, these hopes may not always be realized. When romantic relationships are supportive and positive

the youth feel they enhance resilience, but when the relationships are aggressive and violent the youth see the relationships as undermining their resilience. Although the youth reported both positive and negative experiences within the same relationships, they have difficulty discussing these relationships in an integrated manner.

In looking at the positive aspects of the youth's romantic relationships, the youth enter these relationships from a place of hope and positivity. Indeed they enter these relationships with the best of intentions, and define romantic relationships as relationships which involve support, connection, specialness, and sexual attraction and intimacy. This view is congruent with Blais et al. (2012), where street-involved youth reported that key components of a successful relationship include sharing interests, and mutual support. Additionally, similar to this study, the youth in Blais et al. also noted that sex and physical attraction are reasons for engaging in romantic relationships, and that these relationships can vary in length and commitment. However the youth in Blais et al. reported that love is a key aspect of romantic relationships, while youth in the current study placed less emphasis on the necessity of love. This may be because Blais et al specifically focused on love-based relationships, whereas this study focused on any relationship the youth considered 'romantic' in nature.

A key finding was that all of the youth in this study do experience the positivity in their relationships that they believe is possible. The youth felt highly connected to some of their partners, through being happy together, experiencing sexual and emotional intimacy, commitment, and love. The results of this study exemplify the Social Bonding Theory's notion that secure and strong connections to others support resilience (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). Indeed, romantic relationships support the youth in positive coping, building their self-worth, staying away from drugs, and achievement in school and work. Support, validation,

encouragement, and acceptance are particularly important in helping the youth to push through difficult times and achieve their goals. It is likely that these positive aspects of the relationships help proved the attachment-based security needed to promote emotional and behavioural growth (Furman et al., 2002; McCarthy & Casey, 2008; Rayburn el al., 2012).

However, the youth also reported many highly negative experiences within their romantic relationships, which they saw as undermining their resilience. The youth spoke of betrayal and violence in their relationships, including dating violence, cheating, intense fights, and sexual pressure. These issues likely contributed to the youth feeling as though their partners had undermined their resilience. Among youth in stable housing, dating violence is associated with depressed mood, suicidal ideation and attempts, and non-suicidal self-harm. Youth report that they particularly engage in self-harm as the result of fights with their partners, and to cope with the negative emotions related to their relationships (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Stanzer, 2007; Baker, Helm, Bifulco, & Chung-Do, 2015). Consistent with this, youth in this study reported that fights, sexual pressure, and invalidation lead to low self-worth and self-harm, thereby undermining their resilience.

Additionally, street-life itself also impacts romantic relationships, which may then undermine resilience. In Blais et al (2012) the youth reported that they believe cheating in their romantic relationships occurs more frequently than for housed-youth due to street-life. The present study expands on this by highlighting that this increased cheating is due, in part, to the nature of shelter life, where men and women sleep and live together in close quarters. Youth in the present study also reported that it is difficult to balance the demands of street-life and a romantic relationship. Romantic partners undermine their resilience by distracting the youth from finishing school or finding employment, which may decrease their chances of disengaging from

street life (Karabanow, 2008). Concerns around being judged by partner for living in a shelter may also impact self-worth, and stress, boredom, and low finances leads to drug use within romantic relationships, all of which is an indication of lower resilience.

It is evident that there are links between the positive aspects of street-involved youth's romantic relationships and resilience, and the negative aspects of their romantic relationships and low resilience, leading to the overall meta-theme "it can be beautiful or destructive." However, there was little integration of the positive and negative experiences and outcomes within the youth's narratives. The youth spoke so dichotomously of their romantic experiences that it was often difficult to determine whether they were speaking about acts committed by the same or different romantic partner, and this had to be clarified. A possible explanation for this dichotomous thinking or splitting can be addressed through Attachment Theory.

Dichotomous thinking or splitting (further referred to as DT) involves characterizing one's experiences in extremes instead of cohesively integrating both positive and negative experiences as a realistic whole (Coifman, Berenson, Rafaeli, & Downey, 2012). Individuals with a disorganized attachment style often engage in DT because they have not learned to integrate the positive and negative aspects of individuals in their lives. As an infant, seeing a parent as both safe and dangerous is too damaging and incompatible to process, so the internal working model of the parent is split in two, creating a 'good' parent and a 'bad parent. Thus the attachment figure is seen as both 'rescuer' and 'persecutor,' but never at the same time. This splitting of people and events may continue throughout the individual's life (Lotti, 2004).

In looking at attachment and street-involved youth, study of 25 street-involved adolescents found that 60% met criteria for disorganized attachment (Taylor-Seehafer, Jacobvitz, & Holleran Steiker, 2008). Although attachment style was not assessed in the present study,

disorganized attachment is linked to childhood abuse (VanIjzendoorn et al., 1999), and the youth

in the current study were part of the sample for study 1, where 34% of the youth had been

involved with the Children's Aid Society at some point in their lives, and 71% reported verbal

abuse by an adult and 49% reported physical abuse by an adult. Therefore, it is likely that many

of the youth in the current sample have a disorganized attachment style and engage in DT.

Additionally, DT is also associated with a number of mental health issues, including borderline

personality disorder, depression, and experiencing trauma (Lotti, 2004; Pec, Bob, & Raboch,

2014; Teasdale et al., 2001). Street-involved youth are at high risk for mental health concerns,

and again, although this was not specifically addressed in the present study, during the interviews

many of the youth disclosed that they had been diagnosed with mental health issues such as

borderline personality disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder

(Bender, Brown, Thompson, Ferguson, & Langender, 2015; McCay et al., 2015).

Consequently, it is not unreasonable to assume that many of the youth interviewed are

prone to DT. Because of this, the youth are unable to integrate the positive and negative aspects

of their romantic relationships and partners, and so split their experiences into 'good' and 'bad.'

As such, although this study found that based on the youth's narratives, romantic relationships

both undermine and support resilience, the youth may not view their relationships this way due

to their cognitive styles.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study is that the interviewer had limited contact with the youth

prior to the interview. Although the interviewer was clinically trained to work and develop

rapport with high risk youth, the youth may have felt more comfortable with someone with

whom they were more familiar, particularly when discussing their negative relationship

experiences. During the interviews the youth often did not discuss their experiences of violence or abuse in great detail or said that they did not want to talk about these experiences. If the interviewer had a relationship with the youth prior to the interviewers, the youth may have provided more in-depth information on their experiences.

Implications

The results of this study have implications regarding programming and services for street-involved youth. In addition to this study, other considerable evidence indicates that abusive romantic relationships are detrimental to an individual's mental health and safety (ex. Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Banyard & Cross, 2008; Bourgois, Prince, & Moss, 2004; Brown, Brady & Letherby, 2011; Coker et al., 2000; Satyanarayana, Chandra, & Vaddiparti, 2015). Programs catered towards helping street-involved youth disengage from violent relationships are of great importance. However, this study also suggests that when relationships are positive, they may play a role in fostering resilience within street-involved youth. Given this, healthy relationship programs, in shelters and other community organizations for street-involved youth, aiming to decrease dating violence and increase positive qualities would likely be beneficial in supporting the youth's overall functioning (Cpuntryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Additionally, youth may benefit from supports mitigating the impact of shelter and street life on their romantic relationship development. For example, it may be possible for shelters to offer youth a curfew extension for youth with proof of concert or movie tickets.

A key finding of this study was that the youth did not appear to cohesively integrate the positive and negative aspects of their romantic relationships. This may result in youth remaining in abusing relationships due to an over-emphasis on the positive aspects of the relationship. Conversely, youth may prematurely leave supportive relationships due to the occurrence of

typical fighting seeming catastrophic. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) programs teach

youth to integrate the positive and negative aspects of people and events, which decreases DT.

DBT programs also teach coping and interpersonal effectiveness skills. DBT programs have

been successfully implemented with street-involved youth (McCay & Aiello, 2013; McCay et

al., 2015).

Finally, this study supports the value of further resilience-based research in this area. This

study identified several positive relationship factors related to resilience including support,

validation, and encouragement. It would be of benefit to explore these factors through

quantitative analysis to better solidify their role in the pathway to resilience.

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Chapter 4: General Discussion

The primary goal of this dissertation was to explore the role romantic relationships play in street-involved youth's resilience. This goal was approached from a theoretical perspective highlighting the importance of social relationships in the development of resilience. Romantic relationships were understood as playing a unique role in an individual's growth during adolescence and young adulthood (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Given that street-involved youth have weak social bonds, as they are often not in contact with caregivers, it was suggested that romantic relationships would play a particularly key role in their development at this stage (Karabanow, 2006). The first study in this dissertation assessed whether romantic relationships, and their positive and negative attributes, are linked to resilience. The second study used thematic analysis to explore how street-involved youth conceptualize romantic relationships, and understand how these relationships contribute to resilience from the youth's perspectives.

Summary of Findings from Studies 1 and 2

There is a lack of theoretically-based research exploring romantic relationships and resilience among street-involved youth. Study 1 was the first to explore this link using quantitative data. Street-involved youth were found to be highly involved in romantic relationships with over 90% of the youth reporting at least one romantic relationship in their lifetime. Consistent with other studies (ex. Kidd, 2007; Oliver & Cheff, 2012) the youth reported high sexual risk behaviours, including variable condom use, and high pregnancy rates. Over half of the youth reported dating violence within their romantic relationships. Romantic relationships were found to be linked to resilience. Involvement in survival sex was predictive of higher drug use and lower self-esteem. Among youth in a current romantic relationship, sexual dating violence perpetration was predictive of lower core strengths and self-esteem for young men,

while sexual violence victimization was linked to higher self-esteem for young men. For young women in a current relationship, perpetrating physical dating violence was found to be linked to lower core strengths, and sexual violence victimization was linked with lower self-esteem. Finally, positive relationship qualities were also found to play a role in resilience. Feeling 'in love' with a partner was predictive of higher self-esteem.

Study 2 examined youth's conceptualizations of romantic relationships and how the youth view their lived experiences as contributing to their resilience. The results of this study indicated that although youth's notions of romantic relationships are overly positive and somewhat idealized, this is not always the case in their lived experiences. The youth highlighted many positive experiences within their romantic relationships including happiness, commitment, intimacy, and love. Consistent with the social bonding theory, the youth reported that connection, support, validation, and encouragement was related to their resilience, in the form of lower drug use, achieving goals, increasing self-worth, and promoting positive coping. However, the youth also reported many negative experiences within their romantic relationships, which they saw as undermining their resilience. The youth reported occurrences of dating violence, cheating, fighting, and sexual pressure. The youth also noted that the demands of street life and the restrictions of shelter life negatively impacted their romantic relationships. The youth reported that these negative aspects lead to lower self-worth, higher drug use, distractions from school and work, and self-harm. A final key finding from the analysis was that the youth appeared to have difficulty integrating the positive and negative aspects of their relationships, leading to the meta-theme: It can be Beautiful or Destructive. This dichotomous thinking is possibly the result of early attachment experiences or current mental health difficulties (Lotti, 2004; Pec, Bob, & Raboch, 2014; Teasdale et al., 2001).

Implications

Although there are many factors involved in street-involved youth's development of resilience, this dissertation is the first to directly identify romantic relationships as one of those factors. Thus, despite the apparent stress and chaos in the lives of these youth the results indicated that, in fitting with their developmental stage, they are still highly engaged in romantic relationships, and these relationships have an impact on their functioning (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). The social bonding theory provides an effective mechanism through which to understand this link, as social bonds can create motivating connections between romantic partners (McCarthy & Casey, 2008). This dissertation highlighted that youth feel connected to their partners through love, support, and encouragement, but they feel disconnected from their partners through survival sex, dating violence, sexual pressure, and intense fights. Given this, the positive aspects of their romantic relationships can help to improve their resilience and so should be fostered. Likewise, the negative aspects of these romantic relationships play a part in undermining resilience and so need to be addressed. When youth are at a high need for support in multiple areas of their lives factors such as romantic relationships may be overlooked, however doing so discounts a possible pathway through which to increase the youth's functioning.

This dissertation also highlights the gendered aspects of romantic relationships and resilience. Results of study 1 indicated that men and women are impacted differently by some aspects of romantic relationships, possibly due to differing socialization experiences (Smith, White, & Moracco, 2009). Machoism, which is prevalent in marginalized societies, may play a part in how men process their sexual perpetration and victimization experiences within romantic relationships (Diamond, 2006; Flemming, Andes, & DiClemente, 2013). For women, vulnerability and power differentials are likely linked to their dating violence perpetration and

victimization (Brown, Brady, & Letherby, 2007; Schaffner, 2007). Additionally, in study two, more women than men noted the impact of dating violence on their romantic relationships, and only women spoke of engaging in self-harm as the result of distressing interactions with their partners. The reasoning behind these gender differences likely requires further investigation.

Finally, this dissertation also indicated that the youth's unique cognitive processes may shape how romantic relationships impact their resilience. Cognitive processes are formed, in part, through attachment experiences, and affect the youth's ability to bond to others and integrate relationship experiences (Lotti, 2004). Distortions in cognitive processes, such as dichotomous thinking, may lead youth to view events within their relationships inaccurately. For example, youth who grew up in abusive households may see abuse as a necessary part of relationships or even a sign of love. Conversely, youth who are sensitized to aggression, may not be able to tolerate even a typical argument with their partners (Petersen, Joseph,& Feit, 2014). This may then lead the youth to make decisions that further impact their resilience, above and beyond the actual circumstances of the relationship.

Future Research

Results of this dissertation indicated that there is a link between romantic relationships and resilience. Given the importance of finding means to increase resilience in the lives of street-involved youth, further research in this area will likely have key implications for policy and clinical work. This dissertation was unique in examining the link between positive relationship qualities and resilience. While study 1 only identified the quality "being in love" as linked to resilience, in study 2 the youth reported that other qualities such as support, encouragement, and validation were key factors in their resilience. Accurately measuring these constructs and integrating them in statistical models will serve to better solidify and understand the link between

positive relationship qualities and resilience. Additionally, the dependent variables assessed through quantitative models were drug use, self-esteem, and core resilience. Other relevant resiliency outcomes identified by the youth in study 2 included coping, school and employment achievement, and self-worth. It may be beneficial to also include these as variables in future statistical models.

The identification of possible key variables through qualitative analysis speaks to the benefit of involving street-involved youth in the research process. Involving the youth in designing research questions and studies may lead to unique directions and findings for future research. Furthermore, involving the youth in the research process may help to decrease marginalization, increase participation by youth who identify as LGBTQ2S, and provide an opportunity for employment (Kim, 2016; Snead, Hsieh, Snethen, 2016).

A key finding for this dissertation was the role gender plays in resilience. It was proposed that gender socialization is linked to the differences found between men and women. While it is known that machoism is prevalent in some marginalized cultures, it would be of benefit to explore if this is indeed valid for North American street-involved youth (Flemming, Andes, & DiClemente, 2013). Exploring the notion of gender roles among street-involved youth may provide a better understanding of the impact of dating violence on street-involved young men and women. This insight could then help with the development of programming.

It would also likely be beneficial to continue to explore the influence of dichotomous thinking and other cognitive processes on romantic relationship conceptualization among street-involved youth. We are missing information concerning the disparity between actual relationship events and how the youth view these events, as well as how this effects the youth's involvement in romantic relationships and their resilience. Are street-involved youth able to accurately assess

the impact of their relationships and make decisions accordingly, or is this something with which

the youth struggle? How do early attachment experiences impact street-involved youth's current

romantic relationships? Linking the interviews of current couples may help to address these

questions.

There is also highly limited research on romantic relationships among specific

populations of street-involved youth, such as LGBTQ2S youth (Ecker, 2016). It will be

important for future research to target and include these youth. Providing research assistants and

volunteers with LGBTQ2S-based training, and hiring assistants and volunteers who identify as

such will likely help youth to feel more comfortable and welcome (Abramovitch, 2013).

Additionally using research posters with rainbow flags and pictures of diverse couples may

encourage all youth to participate (Government of Alberta, 2017; Snead, Hsieh, Snethen, 2016).

Identifying similarities and differences within their relationships will help guide specific

programming and supports which are desired by the youth (Abramovitch, 2013).

Finally, this study did not explicitly address the impact of the termination of romantic

relationships on street-involved youth's resilience. There is literature indicating the negative

effects of break-ups on adolescents' mood and behaviour (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, Lewinsohn,

1999; Rizzo, Daley, Gunderson, 2006). Given the increased importance of romantic relationships

for street-involved youth, break-ups may be more impactful for this population (Karabanow,

2006).

Policy and Clinical Implications

Learning how to foster healthy relationships is a key part of development for youth. In

looking at the Canadian province in which this study was conducted, education regarding healthy

relationships is part of the Ontario Ministry of Education's health and physical education

curriculum. Healthy relationship education in Ontario schools includes communicating consent, the importance of honesty, communication and respect in romantic relationships, abusive relationships, interpersonal effectiveness, and conflict resolution. The curriculum was updated to include these components in 2015, and recognized the need for a proactive message focused on current relationship issues relevant to adolescents. The curriculum acknowledges that youth have difficulty navigating not only sexual activity, but also romantic relationships, and need guidance in these areas (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Unfortunately, street-involved youth may not receive this education due to the transient nature of their lifestyles. According to studies in Canada and the U.S., only 34-54% of street-involved youth reported attending school regularly (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016; Hyman, Aubry, & Klodawsky, 2011; Thompson, Pollio, & Bitner, 2000). Given that at most, half of street-involved youth attend school consistently, it is likely that they are missing much, if not all of what is taught regarding healthy relationships in school. This is particularly concerning given that they are at increased risk for dating violence and negative sexual health outcomes.

Shelters and other services for street-involved youth can play a vital role in addressing the youth's knowledge gap. Healthy relationship programs aiming to decrease dating violence and increase positive qualities would likely be beneficial in supporting the youth's overall functioning. Additionally, programs catered towards helping street-involved youth disengage from violent relationships are of great importance. Healthy relationship programs have been developed for use with street-involved youth. One such program is the Lotus Psychoeducational Group, a ten-session program designed for street-involved youth at-risk for sex-trafficking. The program focuses on increasing awareness of healthy versus unhealthy relationship patterns, setting boundaries, increasing the desire of and expectation of respect, and assisting in safe exits

from abusive relationships. In a study of the program's efficacy, the majority of youth in the program demonstrated a knowledge increase in the above areas, and reported that the program would help them to develop more positive relationships. Furthermore, 12% of the youth reported that they left an abusive relationship and 24% reported that they no longer engaged in survival sex-based relationships due to the program (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014). Addressing challenges related to romantic relationships in individual therapy may also be of benefit to the youth. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) programs teach youth to integrate the positive and negative aspects of people and events, which decreases dichotomous thinking. DBT programs also teach coping and interpersonal effectiveness skills. DBT programs have been successfully implemented with street-involved youth (McCay & Aiello, 2013; McCay et al., 2015).

It is understood that shelters and services for street-involved youth often have limited resources, thus implementing further programming may be a difficult task. However, healthy relationship education can be provided informally as well. Street-involved youth report that their workers are often key sources of support and information (Kolar, Erickson & Stewart, 2012). Thus, informal conversations between workers and youth, which integrate information regarding consent and constructive problem-solving within relationships would also be of value. Street-involved youth also report that they appreciate receiving brightly-coloured brochures that provide clear, youth-centric information (Connolly & Joly, 2012). Brochures with information regarding developing healthy relationships could be provided by resources such as shelters or government ministries at less cost than therapeutic groups.

Another programming avenue is Housing First for Youth. Housing First for Youth is a recovery-driven approach, which emphasizes the need to provide street-involved youth with immediate housing and required supports as a method of helping them stabilize, versus requiring

the youth to provide proof of stability prior to receiving support with housing. A considerable

body of research (ex. Falvo, 2009; Gaetz, 2013; Goering et al. 2012; Waegemakers Schiff &

Rook, 2012) indicates that providing housing first can be considered best practice for

homelessness intervention. Given their developmental stage youth may not be capable of living

wholly independently, thus for youth, housing may involve transitional housing, supportive

housing, or returning to caregivers, in addition to individual housing. Housing First for Youth

promotes the development of autonomy, self-determination, and the transition to young

adulthood (Durham, 2013; Forchuk et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2014; Gaetz et al., 2016). Given this,

Housing First programs should endeavor to assist youth who wish to live together as romantic

partners. Street-involved youth report that they feel pressure to choose between housing and

staying with a partner, and so often chose to stay with their partner on the street (Forge & Ream,

2014). To encourage youth to exit street-life, Housing First programs should provide support for

the development of healthy relationships including the programming mentioned in previous

sections, as well as couple's counselling.

It is important for youth to have access to all of the abovementioned treatment

approaches. When asked which programming they would most prefer, 40% of a sample of street-

involved youth said they wanted housing first, 31% preferred treatment first, and 20% wanted

treatment and housing combined (Forchuk et al., 2013). As such, programming for street-

involved youth must reflect this diversity of preferences, and also offer support to youth at

multiple points along their journey (i.e. when they enter street life, as they are transitioning into

housing, etc.; McCay & Aiello, 2013).

Some might question the validity of funding and offering romantic relationship programs

and supports to youth prior to stabilization, when they have multiple needs and are involved in

street culture, which often results in many negative relationships and influences. However, this current dissertation indicates that street-involved youth are highly involved in romantic relationships, and many street-involved youth are not willing to put their relationships on hold while they transition to stable housing; insisting they put these relationships aside is unrealistic (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Forge & Ream, 2014). The results of this dissertation suggest that not addressing negative relationship patterns can decrease their resilience, which may hamper their ability to stabilize, even with housing. Additionally, key recommendations for helping youth to transition out of street life include strengthening "natural supports," such as positive relationships with family and friends (Gaetz et al., 2016, p.108). This dissertation indicates that romantic relationships have the potential to increase the youth's resilience through acting as positive natural supports. Given the youth's limited social connections it is important to utilize and enhance natural supports whenever possible, and healthy romantic relationships are a potential way to do so. It is important to note that promoting healthy relationships involves teaching youth to leave romantic relationships when they are impacting the individual's safety, autonomy, and mental health (Countryman- Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Kidd et al., 2016).

However, there are challenges in promoting healthy relationships among street-involved youth. Some youth shelters and transitional living programs view romantic relationships as counter-productive and forbid couples to stay together. Indeed, many of the youth in this dissertation commented that shelter policy negative impacts their romantic relationship development. Alternatively, adult shelters and housing programs recognize the importance of romantic relationships, and are more likely to accommodate romantic partners, including same-sex couples (Forge & Ream, 2014), despite homeless adults also struggling with negative

relationship patterns, such as dating violence (Forenza & Bermea, 2017; Henny, Kidder, Stall, & Wolitski, 2007).

Given the negative view many youth shelters and programs have of romantic relationships, a key shift in youth programming policy is required. It is possible to engage youth in mental health interventions, and for the youth to form supportive bonds with service providers, however there needs to be policy regarding providing adequate training for staff regarding how to appropriately talk to youth about their romantic relationships using non-judgmental, positive language (McCay & Aiello, 2013). Shelter policy also needs to adjust to provide more space for the youth to engage in developmentally appropriate romantic activities. This could include extending curfew for youth who have purchased items such as concert or movie tickets to go on dates, or permitting hand-holding and cuddling in common areas. Housing program policy should permit youth to enter housing as couples. Policy needs to recognize youth's autonomy and support them through a type of 'harm reduction' approach, in improving relationships they wish to improve, and in leaving relationships they wish to leave. Training staff in techniques such as motivational interviewing and DBT will be key to this endeavor (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin, 2014; Gaetz, 2014; Gaetz et al, 2016; McCay & Aiello, 2013). In order to support these changes it will likely be beneficial for government ministries to address assessing and supporting youth with romantic relationships as part of policy regarding street-involved youth (Government of Alberta, 2017).

Specific policy regarding supporting street-involved, LGBTQ2S youth's romantic relationships in shelters and services helping them to transition to life off the street is also vital. LGBTQ2S youth report wanting to talk about their romantic relationships with workers and clinicians, but require an atmosphere that fosters their ability to do so (Snead et al., 2016).

Program policy needs to clearly address working with youth who identify as LGBTQ2S (Gates & Durso, 2012). Staff need to be trained in LGBTQ2S cultural competency, and both staff who identify as LGBTQ2S and those who do not should be hired to promote inclusivity and serve as positive role models. Staff should also be trained to address violence and discrimination towards individual youth and LGBTQ2S partners. Policy must enforce permitting youth to choose the pronoun by which they are addressed, as well as the title they use for their romantic partners, which should be respected by staff. It is also important to acknowledge that LGBTQ2S youth's relationships may not adhere with expectations driven by cisgender and heterosexual relationship models. Gender neutral and non-judgmental language should be used when first meeting a client. Pamphlets and brochures should reflect gender diversity, and contain resources for LGBTQ2S youth (Gaetz et al., 2016; Government of Alberta, 2017; Hunter, 2008). Healthy relationship programming needs to be created specifically for LGBTQ2S youth, and involving the youth in the creation of these programs will likely be beneficial (Abramovitch, 2013: Keuroghlian et al., 2014).

When examining concerns related to street-involved youth it is prudent to address the issue of stigmatization. Street-involved youth report feeling judged by society due to their personal circumstances. Many of the youth believe that society views them as unmotivated, deviant, untrustworthy, or broken (Toolis & Hammach, 2015). According to the youth, the public does not see them as individuals of worth, but as a homogenous group. They report enduring insults, assault, and disdain from passersby, and often feel misunderstood by society. Perceived stigma has been associated with low self-esteem, feeling trapped, suicidal ideation, and loneliness, among street-involved youth (Kidd 2004; 2007). Indeed, youth in study 2 reported concerns about being judged for their living situation by romantic partners who were not street-

involved, with some lying to their partners about living in a shelter. Because of this, it is important that we as a society do not contribute to their shame and encourage hiding.

Funding further resiliency research with street-involved youth and providing accurate information concerning their stories and circumstances is vital to the process of removing this stigma. By feeling unable to participate in romantic relationships the youth are missing out on an important aspect of their development. Fostering an atmosphere of support and inclusion can help begin to decrease the marginalization of these youth.

Limitations

The current dissertation has several limitations. As with all research on romantic relationships, focusing part of the quantitative analyses solely on the youth reporting current romantic relationships reduced the sample size from 125 to 55 youth, which is relatively small. A larger sample size enhances statistical power which may have resulted in non-significant findings in this study being significant. Additionally, this study recruited participants through snowball sampling versus random sampling, and as such there may be a difference between participants who agreed to participate and participants who refused. This dissertation also only recruited participants from shelters versus street-involved youth not accessing services, and there may be differences in resilience between youth who are capable of accessing the shelter system and youth who are unable to do so, or do not choose to do so due to personal characteristics or circumstances (Hyde, 2005).

This dissertation is based on self-report data, thus there may have been some bias in how the youth responded, particularly in regard to violence perpetration. This sample used a broad measure of dating violence, which asked about specific actions (versus asking if the youth had ever perpetrated dating violence), which tends to elicit higher and likely more accurate response

rates (Wincentak et al., 2016). However, some researchers have noted that broad measures of dating violence miscategorized playful hitting or kicking as dating violence, resulting in overestimates (Capalidi & Crosby, 1997; Fernández-González, O'Leary, & Muñoz-Rivas, 2013).

This dissertation reported lower proportions of gay/lesbian, bisexual, and questioning youth (4%, 7%, and 2% respectively), compared to other recent Canadian samples (Gaetz et al., 2016). Given this, LGBTQ2S youth could not be analyzed separately for statistical analysis, which is unfortunate given the lack of research on romantic relationships among this population (Ecker, 2016). The lower proportion of LGBTQ2S in the current study may have been due to the research taking place at shelters, as many LGBTQ2S choose to sleep on the street instead of in shelters due to the homophobia/transphobia they experience from other youth and staff (Abramovitch, 2013). Additionally, although the poster advertising this project to youth in shelters sought to be inclusive by using rainbow-coloured figures (i.e. red and green), the poster did not explicitly state that LGBTQ2S youth were encouraged to participate.

Due to the street-involved youth's heightened concerns about confidentiality (Connolly & Joly, 2012), their names were not recorded on surveys or during interviews. Because of this, surveys could not be matched to interviews for the youth who participated in both parts of the project. This may have offered an opportunity for a higher level of integration of the data. Couples were also interviewed separately, and as their names were not recorded, their interviews could not be compared or analyzed together. Due to the same constraints, as well as the transient nature of the youth's lifestyles, the completed analyses could not be presented to the youth who participated to obtain their thoughts and examine the validity of the results.

A final limitation of this dissertation is that the interviewer had limited contact with the youth prior to the interview. Although the interviewer was clinically trained to work and develop

rapport with high risk youth, the youth may have felt more comfortable with someone with whom they were more familiar, particularly when discussing their negative relationship experiences. During the interviews the youth often did not discuss their experiences of violence or abuse in great detail or said that they did not want to talk about these experiences. If the interviewer had a relationship with the youth prior to the interviewers, the youth may have provided more in-depth information on their experiences.

Conclusion

This dissertation examined the role romantic relationships play in street-involved youth's resilience, from a theoretical perspective highlighting the importance of social and attachment relationships in the development of resilience. Results indicated that street-involved youth are highly involved in romantic relationships, and the youth emphasized the impact of these relationships in their lives. The positive qualities of romantic relationships, including being in love with a partner, and receiving support, validation, and encouragement were associated with higher resilience, and negative relationship qualities, including survival sex-based relationships, dating violence, aggression, cheating, and sexual pressure were linked to lower resilience. Addressing the negative aspects of the youth's relationships, and promoting the development of more positive romantic relationships may play a role in increasing their resilience.

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Appendix A

Survey

Research Number _____

York University Research Project:
Relationships and Personal Experiences

For this survey a boyfriend or girlfriend (aka romantic partner) is whatever you think it is or means to you. It can be someone you dated casually, someone you slept with regularly, or someone you were in love with, etc.

If you are romantically, intimately or sexually involved with more than one person, please answer questions about your **"primary partner"**- the person most important to you or who has the most impact in your life.

*All of the information you provide in this survey will be kept anonymous and confidential

ALL ABOUT ME

Please tell us a little about yourself by answering the following questions.

1. How old are you now? _____ (years)

2. When is your birthday? _____ (month) _____ (day) _____ (year)

3. Please indicate the gender you identify as (check one)   ☐ Male ☐ Female

   ☐ Transgendered (Male to Female)   ☐ Transgendered (Female to Male)   ☐ Other

4. Check the box that shows how you identify yourself by race.

   ☐ European-Canadian (White)   ☐ Asian-Canadian (e.g., Chinese, Korean)
   ☐ Native-Canadian (e.g., Native Indian)   ☐ South-Asian Canadian (e.g., East Indian,
   Pakistani)
   ☐ African/Caribbean-Canadian (Black)   ☐ Latin American-Canadian (e.g., Hispanic)
   ☐ other: _____

5. Were you born in Canada? (check one)   ☐ yes   ☐ no

   If "NO":   A) How long have you lived in Canada? _____ (years)

   B) What country were you born in? _____

6. How long have you lived on the street for? _____

7. How many times have you left home since the first time you left? _____

8. Check the box(s) that shows where you spend your time.

   ☐ Parent(s)' home   ☐ Other family member(s)' home(s)
   ☐ Shelter(s)   ☐ The street
   ☐ Friend(s) home(s)   ☐ School
   ☐ other: _____

9. Have you ever had sex or done sexual acts with someone to get money, food, drugs, a place to stay, or something else you wanted? (check one) ☐ yes   ☐ no

10. If "yes" how often _____

11. Have you ever been involved with the Children's Aid Society (CAS)? (check one) ☐ yes
☐ no

12. Have you ever lived in (check all that apply) ☐ a foster home ☐ a group home

13. Of the adults you have lived with (parents, foster parents, grandparents, other relatives, etc.),
have any ever (check all that apply):

☐ Called you names, yelled, screamed or swore at you
☐ Hurt you physically (kicked, hit, punched, slapped, grabbed, pushed, or threw something
at you)
☐ Sexually assaulted you (touched you in a sexual way, had you touch them in a sexual
way, had sex with you)

ATTRACTION AND DATING

> These questions ask about **dating**. By "dating", we mean spending time with someone
> you are seeing or going out with. Examples of this might include going to a party,
> regularly having sex, being in love with each other, or hanging out. It doesn't have to be a
> formal date or something you planned in advance and it may be with a small group. The
> word "date" includes both one-time dates and time together as part of a long-term
> relationship.

> If you consider yourself to be dating multiple people please answer questions about your
> primary, (most important) partner unless it says otherwise.

Section A: Current Dating Status

1. Do you consider yourself to be: (Check one)

☐ straight (heterosexual) ☐ gay/lesbian (homosexual) ☐ bisexual ☐ questioning

2. Do you currently have a romantic partner (boy/girlfriend)? (Check one):

☐ Yes, we have been dating for _____ (fill in how long in weeks)

☐ Yes, I have *more than one* romantic partner.
We have been going out for _____ _____ _____ _____ (fill in how long in
weeks for each one)

☐ No, I do not have a romantic partner right now, but I had one within the last 2
months.
We went out for_____ (fill in how long in weeks)

☐ No, I do not have a romantic partner right now, but I had one in the past,
more than 2 months ago.

☐ No, I have never had a romantic partner.

3. How happy are you with your current dating status? (Check one)

☐ not at all   ☐ a little happy   ☐ somewhat happy   ☐ very happy

**If you DO NOT have a current romantic partner (boy/girlfriend), skip ahead to *Section B*.
If you HAVE a current romantic partner, answer these questions and then go to *Section B*.**

4.a. Are you "in love" with your current (primary) romantic partner? ☐ yes   ☐ no   ☐ maybe

4.b. If you have secondary partner(s) are you in love with them? ☐ yes   ☐ no   ☐ maybe   ☐ N/A

5. Select ONE statement that best describes your relationship with *your current (primary) romantic partner*:

☐ When we spend time together, it's usually with big group of friends.

☐ We spend time together "just the two of us", but it's not a serious relationship.

☐ We are only seeing each other.

☐ We are in a serious relationship.

☐ We are planning to get engaged, married, or live together.

☐ We are already engaged, married, or living together.

6. How often did you and your *CURRENT (primary) romantic partner* do the following with each other?

Please circle the amount for each item.	**never**	**rarely**	**sometimes**	**a lot**
a. Hold hands	1	2	3	4
b. Hug	1	2	3	4
c. Kiss	1	2	3	4
d. "Make out"	1	2	3	4
e. Sexual acts other than sex (i.e. oral sex)	1	2	3	4
f. Have sex	1	2	3	4
g. Give each other gifts	1	2	3	4
h. Tell the other person you love them	1	2	3	4
i. Use drugs or alcohol together	1	2	3	4

Section B: Dating History

1. For each sentence, check the box that best describes your dating activities *over the past year*

True	False	
☐	☐	I rarely participated in dating activities.
☐	☐	I hung out with guys and girls.
☐	☐	I went on "dates", but with a group of people.
☐	☐	I went on casual "dates", just the two of us.
☐	☐	I dated more than one person casually.
☐	☐	I had a boy/girlfriend and I only dated him/her.
☐	☐	I had a boy/girlfriend and we were in a serious relationship.
☐	☐	I had a boy/girlfriend and we were planning to get engaged, married, or live together.
☐	☐	I was engaged, married, or living with someone.

2. How many people have you dated in the last 12 months? _____ (please write a number)

3. How many different romantic partners have you ever had? _____ (please write a number)

4. How long do your relationships with your romantic partners typically last? (Check one)

☐ I have not had a boy/girlfriend   ☐ 2 weeks or less
☐ 1 to 2 months   ☐ 3 to 5 months
☐ 6 to 12 months   ☐ l2 months or more

Section C: Break-Up Experiences

The next set of questions deal with the experience of **"breaking-up"**. "Breaking-up" means that you are no longer *"going out with"* or *"dating"* your boy/girlfriend, even though you may continue to *"hang out"* or *"be friends"* with him/her.

7. How many break-ups have you experienced? (Check one)

☐ none
☐ 1 to 2
☐ 3 to 5
☐ more than 5

> **If you HAVE NOT experienced a break-up, move on to page 7. If you HAVE experienced a break-up, answer these question about your most recent one.**

8. How long ago did the break-up take place? (Check one)

   ☐ less than 4 weeks   ☐ 1 to 3 months
   ☐ 4 to 6 months   ☐ 7 to 12 months
   ☐ more than 12 months

9.   How long were you dating the person? (Check one)

   ☐ less than 4 weeks   ☐ 1 to 3 months
   ☐ 4 to 6 months   ☐ 7 to 12 months
   ☐ more than 12 months

10.   Who decided to end the relationship? (Check one)

 ☐ I did   ☐ my partner   ☐ both of us

11. Select ONE statement that best describes your relationship with *your PAST romantic partner*:

☐ When we spent time together, it was usually with big group of friends.

☐ We spent time together "just the two of us", but it was not a serious relationship.

☐ We were only seeing each other.

☐ We were in a serious relationship.

☐ We were planning to get engaged, married, or live together.

☐ We were engaged, married, or living together

12. How often did you and your *PAST romantic partner* do the following with <u>each other</u>?

Please circle the amount for each item.	never	rarely	sometimes	lots
a. Hold hands	1	2	3	4
b. Hug	1	2	3	4
c. Kiss	1	2	3	4
d. Sexual acts other than sex (i.e. oral sex)	1	2	3	4
e. Have sex	1	2	3	4
f. Give each other gifts	1	2	3	4
g. Tell the other person you love them	1	2	3	4
h. Use drugs or alcohol together	1	2	3	4

More on Boyfriends/Girlfriends

NOTE: If you have <u>NOT</u> had a boyfriend/girlfriend in the last <u>year</u>, please skip to page 10.

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please mark how many times you did each to these things in the past year with your primary partner, and how many times your primary partner did them in the past year. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past year, but it happened before that, mark a "7" on your answer sheet for that question. If it never happened, mark an "8" on your answer sheet.

How often did this happen?
1 = Once in the past year
2 = Twice in the past year
3 = 3-5 times in the past year
4 = 6-10 times in the past year
5 = 11-20 times in the past year
6 = More than 20 times in the past year
7 = Not in the past year, but it did happen before
   8   = This has never happened

1. I explained my side or suggested a compromise for a disagreement with my partner
     1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

2. My partner explained his or her side or suggested a compromise for a disagreement with me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

3. I insulted or swore or shouted or yelled at my partner 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

4. My partner insulted or swore or shouted or yelled at me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

5. I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut, or felt pain the next day because of a fight with my partner 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

6. My partner had a sprain, bruise, or small cut or felt pain the next day because of a fight with me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

7. I showed respect for, or showed that I cared about my partner's feelings about an issue we disagreed on 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

8. My partner showed respect for, or showed that he or she cared about my feeling about an issue we disagreed on 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

9. I pushed, shoved, or slapped my partner 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

10. My partner pushed, shoved, or slapped me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

11. I punched or kicked or beat-up my partner 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

12. My partner punched or kicked or beat-me-up 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

13. I destroyed something belonging to my partner or threatened to hit my partner 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

14. My partner destroyed something belonging to me or threatened to hit me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

15. I went see a doctor (M.D.) or needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

16. My partner went to see a doctor (M.D.) or needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

17. I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

18. My partner used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make me have sex 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

19. I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to or insisted on sex without a condom (but did not use physical force) 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

20. My partner insisted on sex when I did not want to or insisted on sex without a condom (but did not use physical force) 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

Circle the answer that best fits how you feel about the statements below:

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

1. When I make plans, I follow through with them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I usually manage one way or another.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I am able to depend on myself more than anyone else.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Keeping interested in things is important to me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I can be on my own if I have to.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I usually take things in stride.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I am friends with myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. I feel that I can handle many things at a time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I am determined.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I seldom wonder what the point of it all is.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I take things one day at a time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I have self-discipline.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I keep interested in things.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I can usually find something to laugh about.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. My belief in myself gets me through hard times.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. In an emergency, I'm someone people can generally rely on.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I can usually look at a situation in a number of ways.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. Sometimes I make myself do things whether I want to or not.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. My life has meaning.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. I do not dwell on things that I can't do anything about.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way
out of it.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I have enough energy to do what I have to do.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. It's okay if there are people who don't like me.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

SELF-ESTEEM

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle **SA**. If you agree with the statement, circle **A**. If you disagree, circle **D**. If you strongly disagree, circle **SD**.

1.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA A D SD
2.*	At times, I think I am no good at all.	SA A D SD
3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA A D SD
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA A D SD
5.*	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA A D SD
6.*	I certainly feel useless at times.	SA A D SD
7.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA A D SD
8.*	I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA A D SD
9.*	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA A D SD
10.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA A D SD

-Continue to the next page-

HOPE

Answer (circle) True (T) or False (F)

1. I look forward to the future with hope and enthusiasm   T   F

2. I might as well give up because there is nothing I can do about making things better for myself T   F

3. When things are going badly, I am helped by knowing that they cannot stay that way forever   T   F

4. I can't imagine what my life would be like in ten years   T   F

5. I have enough time to accomplish the things I want to do   T   F

6. In the future, I expect to succeed in what concerns me most   T   F

7. My future seems dark to me   T   F

8. I happen to be particularly lucky, and I expect to get more of the good things in life than the average person   T   F

9. I just can't get breaks and there is no reason I will in the future   T   F

10. My past experiences have prepared me well for the future   T   F

11. All I can see ahead of me is pleasantness rather than unpleasantness   T   F

12. I don't expect to get what I really want   T   F

13. When I look ahead to the future, I expect I will be happier than I am now   T   F

14. Things just won't work out the way I want them to   T   F

15. I have great faith in the future   T   F

16. I never get what I want, so it's foolish to want anything   T   F

17. It's very unlikely that I will get any real satisfaction in the future   T   F

18. The future seems vague and uncertain to me   T   F

19. I can look forward to more good times than bad times   T   F

20. There's no use in really trying to get anything I want because I probably won't get it

T   F

SELF-HARM

Please circle the number of times you have done the following:

Have you ever intentionally cut your wrist, arms, or other area(s) of your body, or stuck sharp objects into your skin such as needles, pins, staples (NOT INCLUDING tattoos, ear piercing, needles used for drugs, or body piercing)?	0	1-4	5 or more
Have you ever intentionally burned yourself with a cigarette, lighter, or match?	0	1-4	5 or more
Have you ever intentionally carved words, pictures, designs, or other markings into your skin, or scratched yourself to the extent that scarring or bleeding occurred?	0	1-4	5 or more
Have you ever intentionally prevented wounds from healing, or bit yourself to the extent that it broke skin?	0	1-4	5 or more
Have you ever intentionally banged your head or punched yourself thereby causing a bruise?	0	1-4	5 or more
Have you ever intentionally hurt yourself in any of the above-mentioned ways so that it led to hospitalization or injury severe enough to require medical treatment?	0	1-4	5 or more
*How many times have you thought about killing yourself in the past year?	0	1-4	5 or more

DRUG USE HISTORY

For each drug listed, please write one number under the category that best describes your use pattern. If you are currently in residential treatment or secure custody, please answer regarding how often you typically used it, before you entered treatment or were taken into custody. Consider only drugs taken without prescription from your doctor; for alcohol, don't count just a few sips from someone else's drink.

	Never Used 0	Tried But Quit 1	Several Times a Year 2	Several Times a Month 3	Week-Ends Only 4	Several Times a Week 5	Daily 6	Several Times a Day 7
Alcohol (Beer, Wine, Liquor)								
Marijuana or Hashish (Weed, grass, blunts)								
LSD, MDA, Mushrooms Peyote, other hallucinogens (ACID, shrooms)								
Amphetamines (Speed, Ritalin, Ectasy, Crystal)								
Powder Cocaine (Coke, Blow)								
Rock Cocaine (Crack, rock, freebase)								
Barbiturates, (Quaaludes, downers, ludes, blues)								
PCP (angel dust)								
Heroin, other opiates (smack, horse, opium, morphine)								
Inhalants (Glue, gasoline, spray cans, whiteout, rush, etc.)								
Valium, Prozac, other tranquilizers (without Rx)								
OTHER DRUG_____								

Please answer these questions about your sexual experiences

2	How old were you when you o had sexual intercourse (sex) for the first time?	0-I have never done this 1-11 years old or younger 2-12 years old 3-13 years old 4-14 years old 5-15 years old 6-16 years old 7-17 years old or older
If You have never had sex with anyone please skip to page 18		
3	During your life, with how many people have you had sexual intercourse (sex)?	1-1 person 2-2 people 3-3 people 4-4 people 5-5 people 6-6 or more people
4	During the past 3 months, with how many people have you had sexual intercourse (sex)?	0-I have had sexual intercourse, but not during the past 3 months 1-1 person 2-2 people 3-3 people 4-4 people 5-5 people 6-6 or more people
5	The last time that you had sexual intercourse (sex), did you or your partner use a condom?	0-No 1-Yes
6	Have you/has a partner of yours ever used a condom during sexual intercourse (sex)?	0-No 1-Yes
7	Thinking of all the times you have had sexual intercourse, about what number of times have you/has your partner used a condom?	0-None of the time 1-Some of the time 2-Half the time 3-Most of the time 4-All the time
8	Thinking of all the times you have had sexual intercourse, about what number of times have you or your current partner use some form of contraception?	0-None of the time 1-Some of the time 2-Half the time 3-Most of the time 4-All the time

9	The last time that you had sexual intercourse, what method did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy? (Put an 'X' by any that apply)
	    o We used no method last time
	
	    o Birth control pills	

	o Condoms	
	o Depo-Provera (injectable birth control)	
	o Withdrawal	
	o Rhythm (sex only during safe time)	
	o Some other method	
	o Not sure/Don't know	
10	Have you ever been pregnant (or got a partner pregnant)?	0-No 1-Yes 2-Don't know
12	Have you ever been told by a doctor or a nurse that you had (or have you ever been treated for) a sexually transmitted disease, such as Chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, or genital warts (HPV)?	0-No 1-Yes 2-Don't know
	For the following questions please put the number of your answer beside the statement	
11	o I am worried about getting HIV or another infection that you can get by having sex o If I am not careful, I could get a sex disease o If I'm not careful, I could catch AIDS o I worry about catching a sexual disease	1-Strongly disagree 2-Disagree 3-Agree 4-Strongly agree
12	o Vaseline can be used with condoms and they will work just as well o If a man pulls out before he ejaculates (comes), it is still possible for a woman to get pregnant o It is only important to put a condom on right before a man ejaculates to avoid pregnancy o The most likely time for a woman to get pregnant is right before her period begins o When putting a condom on, it is important to have it fit tightly, leaving no space at the tip o It is impossible to get a sexually transmitted infection if you only engage in oral sex o Having multiple sexual partners is not risky in terms of infection if you use a condom each time you have sex o Using oral contraceptives (the pill) will protect a woman from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections o Using condoms will provide protection from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections o A woman can only get pregnant a few days before her period begins	1-True 2-False
13	How often do you talk to your sexual partner(s) about o Using condoms?	1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Occasionally

	o Preventing HIV?	4-Very often
	o Preventing other STDs?	
	o Preventing pregnancy?	
14	How likely is it that you will engage in sexual intercourse (sex) in the next year?	1-Sure it won't happen 2-Probably won't happen 3-Even chance (50-50) it will happen 4-Probably will happen 5-Will happen for sure
15	Have you ever received a birth control method from a doctor or clinic?	0-No 1-Yes 2-Don't know
16	How sure are you that you would be able to do the following? o Use a condom correctly o Tell a partner what you will or will not do sexually o Say no to sex if a partner refused to use a condom o Convince a new partner to use a condom o Refuse to engage in sex with someone who was pressuring you to o Resist friends' pressure to make you have sex with someone o Delay having sex with someone you really care about and find attractive o Avoid or escape a dangerous situation that your friends are approaching o Resist pressure from friends to use a drug o Resist pressure from friends to drink more alcohol than I intended	1-Very unsure 2-Somewhat unsure 3-Somewhat sure 4-Very sure
17	How important (or unimportant) is it that you be married before you have a baby?	1-Very unimportant 2-Somewhat unimportant 3-Somewhat important 4-Very important
18	How likely (or unlikely) will it be that you have a child before you get married? How likely (or unlikely) will it be that you have a child without getting married?	1-Very unlikely 2-Somewhat unlikely 3-Somewhat likely 4-Very likely

Appendix B

Recruitment Poster

Are You Interested In Sharing Your Experiences?

Want to Earn Some Money?

DATING RELATIONSHIPS RESEARCH PROJECT

WHAT: Researchers from York University, who work with youth, will be coming here to listen to your story. Your part will take about **1 hour**, and involves answering questions in a survey about yourself and any of your dating experiences. You will be paid **_15 dollars_**. You may also be asked to take part in an interview, and will be paid another 15 dollars.

WHO: Youth age 14-22 years can participate in the study, who do not live with parents or family members. You do not need to be in a dating relationship to participate.

WHEN: Saturday July 19th & Sunday July 20th at 1pm

HOW: On the dates above, the researchers will come to this centre and ask the youth there if they want to fill out the survey- it is as easy as that! You choose if you want to participate.

WHY: This project is to help you tell your story, and let others know why your experiences are important! We hope the work we do on this project will help make services better for you.

Appendix C

Consent Form

INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask the researcher any questions you might have. This study has been reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee of York University.

Researcher(s):
Lauren Joly, M.A., M.Ed., Graduate Student, Psychology
Dr. Jennifer Connolly, Supervisor, Psychology

Other Contact Information:
Psychology Graduate Program Office:
Manager of Research Ethics for York University:

Purpose and Procedure:
The purpose of this study is to shed light on the role of relationships in promoting resilience in youth who live and work on the street. We believe that helping young people to develop healthy relationships is important because the quality of relationships can have a positive effect on teen's development. We would like to explore the ways in which relationships with romantic partners are linked to sense of self, goals, behaviour and well-being. Further knowledge in this area of research will help parents, researchers, and educators, and to better understand these teens' development of relationships and how these relationships can lead to positive outcomes.

This study will take about one to two hours to complete and you will be asked questions about the quality of your relationships, sense of self, emotional well-being as well as behaviours and attitudes regarding dating violence, and sexuality. You will also be asked about information like age and gender. Most people will fill out a survey, and some people may also be asked to participate in an interview, which will be audio-recorded. Audio-recordings will be destroyed after the data is collected and coded.

Potential Benefits:
The results of this study will contribute to an understanding of the role of relationships in promoting resilience and positive outcomes for teens live on the street. This study will also help inform service providers about how romantic relationships can help teens feel good about themselves and meet their personal goals. As well, you will receive $15.00 for filling out the survey, and another $15.00 if you participate in the interview.

Potential Risks:
There are no known risks associated with taking part in this study. However, asking youth about relationships might lead to strong feelings. If it does, you will be provided with information on counselling services near you, and materials to help you get to the services. As well, researchers will check in with you to see how you are feeling after the study.

Confidentiality:

Any information gained from your participation in this study will remain confidential to the fullest extent of the law, and all identifying information will be removed from the data collected. Although the data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences, the data will be reported in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals.

All data will be stored in locked files in a locked research office at York University. Data access will be limited to researchers involved in this study. All study materials will be retained for seven years after data collection is completed. At that time all paper documents will be securely shredded.

Limits to Confidentiality:

There are a few reasons that we may not be able to keep your information confidential: 1) if we become concerned that you may seriously harm yourself or someone else; 2) if the information provided is subpoenaed by a court of law, 3) if information about the abuse or neglect of a child under the age of 16 is disclosed; 4) if information about abuse by a health care professional (including a worker at this shelter) is disclosed.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. Feel free to ask questions or share concerns about anything related to the study at any point during this meeting. The information that is shared will be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible by law, and discussed only with the research team. If you prefer not to participate, that is fine and there will be no consequences for you as a result of not participating. Refusal to participate, refusal to answer any questions or withdrawal from the study, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, the shelter, or any other group associated with this project. Upon withdrawal from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. If you withdraw before finishing the entire survey and/or interview, you will still receive $15.00.

Results of the Study:

You can ask us for a copy of the report when the study is finished.

How can I ask questions about the study?

If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact us at any point at the phone numbers or e-mails provided. If you have any questions about the ethics review process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, Phone:

Consent to Participate:

☐ I have read and understood the description provided. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

☐ I consent to the session being audio-recorded, understanding that the recording will be destroyed following data collection and coding.

Participant's Name	Date

Lauren Joly, Researcher	Date

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1) What is your age? Gender identify as? Where are you living right now?

2) How do you define romantic relationships? What is a romantic/dating partner (what should they do)? What do you believe dating or being in an intimate relationship should look like? What does it actually look like? How are RRs diff b/w youth living at home and youth without stable place to stay?

3) What does your current dating situation look like? (i.e. number of partners, committed, casual) How many people are you involved with right now? How did you and your romantic partner(s) meet? Before or after leaving home?

4) What kinds of intimate/romantic relationships have you been involved in? What were they like?

5) How would you label your current/ most recent romantic partner (i.e. boy/girlfriend, sexual partner, etc.)?

6) What kinds of things do you do with your romantic partners? How do they interact with other people in your life (friends, parents, teachers, case workers)? Do you have a group of people you spend time with (street family)?

7) How are/were your intimate relationship(s) impacted by your living situation? What role does your RP play in your living situation? People have intimate relationships for many different reasons- what are some of the reasons for your RR? Do you think your RR would be different if your living situation was different?

8) What are some strengths of your current/most recent romantic relationship(s)? Challenges? (good time/ difficult times, fighting)

9) How committed are you to your romantic partner(s)? Do you love them? What do you think your future might be like together?

10) How does your current/ most recent romantic partner(s) make you feel about yourself and your future? (How do they help you? Hurt you?)

11) What kinds of goals do you have for yourself?

12) How does your romantic partner(s) impact these goals?

13) What does the term resilience mean to you? What do you think helps you to be resilient?

Appendix E

Coding Manual

- Code one document (interview) at a time
- Read each coded meaning unit and decide which domain it is related to: (1) definition of romantic relationships (RR), (2) description of past/current romantic relationship experiences, (3) strengths and challenges, and (4) romantic relationships and resilience
- Code the unit as the domain it represents from the list below
- Create a note about a key idea from the quote.
- Do not code anything the interviewer says, unless it provides context for what the youth says, (i.e. if the youth answers "no" to a question without elaborating in a way that indicated to what the answer was in response)
- Code as inclusively as necessary to preserve context (i.e. if needed code an entire paragraph- more is better than less).

1. Definition of Romantic Relationships	- what the youth thinks a RR should look like or involve – what partners should do for each other – how the youth would describe a RR - what an ideal RR looks like, etc.
2. Description of current/ past RR experiences	- what their romantic relationships "look like" - if living together - doing drugs together - when and how partners met - activities together (i.e. going to movies, hanging out, etc.) - sexual activity
3. Strengths and Challenges	- commitment, love, planning a future - strengths and challenges of the RR - positive aspects and negative aspects - how RR impacts or is impacted by living situation - reasons for having a RR - issues related to shelter life and RR's (i.e. jealousy, impact on sex life, etc.)
4. Romantic relationships and resilience	-supporting or undermining resilience - how the youth's partner impacted their self-esteem, self-image, low/ high drug use, emotion regulation, outlook on life, major depression, etc. - How the youth's partner impacted their personal goals, future outlook, etc.

Data were coded inclusively, so the relevant context was preserved. In some instances, coders selected entire paragraphs so that the context of the youth's comment could be

understood. In other cases, a single sentence was sufficient. Also, codes were created freely so as

not to miss any possible meaning from the data. Coders followed the rule, "when in doubt,

code". Coders each kept a record of their interpretation and thoughts about the codes throughout

the coding process in a separate thematic memo, which were later used to assist with creating

themes.