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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COPING STRATEGIES AND
DELINQUENCY IN YOUNG ADOLESCENTS WHO ENDURE
STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
in
Psychology:
Clinical Counseling

by
Marjorie Lorraine Pardo

June 2003

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DELINQUENCY IN YOUNG ADOLESCENTS WHO ENDURE
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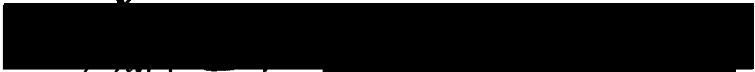
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Date

ABSTRACT

Research suggests that stress increases children's risk for acting out and failing. However, some children, despite exposure to high levels of stress, manage to thrive, succeed, and, refrain from engaging in delinquent behaviors. Researchers have called these children "resilient" and there has been a growing interest in elucidating factors that distinguish children who are resilient from those who are not. The purpose of this study was to evaluate resiliency by examining the relationship between coping ability and stressful life events on delinquent behaviors in young adolescents. One hundred and adolescents participated in this study. A multiple regression analysis was adopted to test if those who use adaptive coping would have less frequent delinquent behavior regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress was. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if children who utilize adaptive coping perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms. It was hypothesized that for those who use adaptive coping, delinquent behavior would be less frequent regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress was. The hypothesis was not supported.

However, some of the variance in delinquent behavior was accounted for by non-adaptive coping. In addition, ten percent of the unique variance accounted for in delinquent behavior is in common with actual experienced stressful life events combined with coping. It was hypothesized that children who utilized adaptive coping would perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms. This hypothesis was not supported. However, actual experienced stressful life events significantly predicted perception of stressful life events, accounting for 25% of the variance. In light of the escalation in recent years of violence in schools, it is imperative that researchers evaluate factors that might increase our understanding the of surge of behavioral acting out in children and adolescents. This study extends previous literature by contributing the unique opportunity to examine a culturally diverse population of at risk children.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Delinquency and Deviance	2
Socio Economic Status	3
Stressful Life Events	4
Family Stressors	5
Community Stressors	6
Developmental Stressors	7
Coping Ability	9
Coping and Delinquency	9
Coping and Stressful Life Events	11
Coping Strategies	12
CHAPTER TWO: SUMMARY	14
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES	15
CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD	
Participants	16
Design	16
Materials and Scoring	16
Scales	17
The Consent Forms	18
The Demographic Sheet	19
Stressful Life Events Inventory	19

Coping Inventory	21
Delinquency Checklist	23
The Debriefing Statement	23
Procedure	23
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSES	25
CHAPTER SIX: SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS	26
CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS	27
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION	32
APPENDIX A: PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM	36
APPENDIX B: CHILD VERBAL CONSENT	38
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET	40
APPENDIX D: LIFE EVENTS SCALE	44
APPENDIX E: COMMUNITY EVENTS	47
APPENDIX F: BEHAVIOR SCALE	49
APPENDIX G: COPING SCALE	52
APPENDIX H: STUDENT DEBRIEFING	56
REFERENCES	58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression of Actual Stressful Life Events and Coping on Delinquent Behavior	30
Table 2. Hierarchical Regression of Actual Stressful Life Events and Coping on Perceived Stressful Life Events	31

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Littleton Colorado tragedy, parents, communities, and schools officials have questioned why it occurred. Time magazine reported those who were there claimed that, "the hardest thing about the search for an explanation is the growing fear that there might not be one" (Gibbs, 1999, p. 29). School violence is not a new phenomenon but its increase in recent years has prompted many people to question what leads some children to act out in such violent ways. Many children face the sort of challenges reportedly experienced by the Littleton perpetrators (e.g., teasing, rejection, and stress), yet most children do not act out in violent or destructive ways. The challenge facing many families, communities and researchers is distinguishing those who act out from those who do not. We understand certain factors increase risk, but what provides protection from acting out for those who are believed to be at risk? This study examined the relationship between coping ability and the impact of life stress on adjustment in young adolescents. Specifically, the relationship between experienced stressful life event and delinquency if it would be moderated by coping ability

was addressed. In addition, the study investigated those who use adaptive coping. It was predicted that children who utilized adaptive coping would perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms. In other words, the study analyzed the relationship between experienced stressful life events and delinquent behavior predicted that relationship would be modified by coping ability.

Delinquency and Deviance

Delinquency has been defined as behaviors that are disorderly or destructive and which deviate or are in opposition to the laws or rules of society (Figelman & Sidd, 1994). In the United States, delinquency has been defined as behaviors that break laws and/or that are damaging or destructive. Delinquency is a *legal* term that focuses on antisocial behavior or conduct problems. The DSM IV (1994) has identified criteria for diagnosing severe antisocial behavior or conduct problems. According to the DSM IV, children with conduct disorders often behave in such a way that the "basic rights of others, or major age appropriate social norms or rules are violated" (DSM IV, 1994, p. 90). Some of the characteristics for diagnosing conduct disorder through the DSM IV are being

aggressive to people and animals, destroying property, being deceitful, stealing, and violating rules. Researchers have taken these ideas and developed a list of behaviors that fit this diagnosis (e.g., destroying property, killing animals) and have used these lists in research studies. Current research has focused on trying to elucidate factors that are associated with delinquency. Among the more commonly identified factors are socioeconomic stressors, stressful life events and limited social and emotional resources.

Socio Economic Status

Socio economic status has been investigated as a factor related to delinquency. Helode and Kapai (1986) examined the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and delinquency (manifested through psychopathic tendency) in children. Although their findings were not statistically significant, they reported a negative relationship between SES and delinquency. Specifically, the authors found as socioeconomic level rose, rates of delinquency decreased. Thus, children from lower SES were seen less resilient, or being at increased risk for delinquency. In a similar study, Clinard and Meier (1985) found a relationship between SES, education, and delinquency (demonstrated by felony criminal behavior). In

this survey of convicted murderers, researchers found that 57% of the offenders did not have an education beyond the eighth grade (education is often used as a proxy for SES). Only 6% had graduated from high school, and none had attended college. These and other findings suggest that low SES (including little education), increase risk for acting out antisocially. The Carnegie Council estimated that in the near future, 1 in 4 adolescence will be in serious jeopardy and considered "at risk" (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Adan, & Evans, 1992). It is unclear from this data exactly how low SES contributes to the risk of delinquency. One possibility is that these individuals have not learned to adopt coping strategies including how to problem solve or how to find social support. One approach to evaluating socio-economic status would be to collect data from a population with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, thus holding the variable constant as has been done in this study.

Stressful Life Events

A major factor that increases the likelihood of acting out delinquently is the experiences an individual has had throughout his or her life. The types of events that occur, the number of events, or the degree of stress

an individual associates with those events can have a great impact on behavior. Stressful life events may include experiences both within the home and in the community. Stressful life events have been associated with negative developmental outcomes (e.g., delinquency) which in turn elevated stress and increased demands placed on the child (DuBois et al., 1992). Home events that are experienced are often acute (e.g., loss of a loved one) but may also have chronic consequences (e.g., family suffers from financial loss). In contrast, community events are likely to effect many individuals in that setting (e.g., poverty and crime; Dubow, Edward, & Ippolito, 1997). Both chronic daily stresses and acute elevations in stressful circumstances have been shown to be strongly associated with a wide array of disorders, including psychological and emotional problems, behavioral problems (e.g., delinquency) at home and at school, poorer academic performance, and drug use (DuBois et al., 1992).

Family Stressors

Many children experience stressful events within the family environment. Family violence has received constant media attention and is known to be a source of constant stress. However, little attention has been given, in terms of evaluation and treatment, the children who witness the

violence in their families (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986). Stress can also be the result of natural causes (e.g., death of sibling, parent, or grand parent, serious illnesses, rejection from peers) it can also result from something inflicted on the family (e.g., family murder, loss of job). Regardless of the source of stress, it can be highly devastating, particularly if a child is overwhelmed with many occurrences in a short period of time. Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) assert that children learn violence by being a member of a violent family, and that the effects seem to permeate future generations within that family. Thus, family stress, including violence, imposes severe behavioral and psychological demands on the child, demands that inevitably alter the child's worldview (Eth & Pynoos, 1985) and potentially lead to delinquent behavior.

Community Stressors

Community level stress also has a great impact on children's behavioral outcomes and often has a direct effect on the family. Recent studies of inner-city communities indicate that stressful life events and neighborhood disadvantages are significantly related to peer-rated aggression, as well as personal (self), maternal, and teacher ratings of behavior problems (Dubow

et al., 1997). Those who reside in a city are more likely to live in a home that will be burglarized, are more likely to be exposed to maltreatment, drug use, substandard housing, and violence. The authors noted that the number of stressful life events and neighborhood disadvantages were related to delinquency (e.g., antisocial behavior and drug use). It is undetermined whether the high rates of delinquency were due to learned behavior or from lack of resources and coping abilities. Thus, evaluating the relationship between stressful life events and delinquency without illuminating the possible moderating effects of coping strategies offers a limited understanding of the children and how stressful life events might exert an influence and increase risk.

Developmental Stressors

Stressful life experiences have also been reported as impacting children's psychological state and developmental progress. A number of researchers have stated unequivocally that stress "can cause deleterious effects on cognition, including memory, school performance, and learning" (Pynoos & Nader, 1990, p 340). According to these authors, stress can also cause significant alterations in a child's behavioral attributes such that they exhibit reduced impulse control, increased

inhibition, and attraction to danger, traits that are usually associated with delinquent youth. Cohen, Burt and Bjorck (1987) warn that it is important to remember that the hallmark of the adolescent years is experimentation with diverse behaviors (including delinquency to some extent) as well as the tendency to create stressful experiences (e.g., running away and truancy). It is therefore becomes important to evaluate normal adolescent development within the context of external stressful events, while attending to the fact that normal developmental issues can also be sources of stress.

The interaction of "normal" developmental stressors and transitions with family and community based stressors becomes important as we try to understand both normal development and development gone awry. The data seems to suggest that children who experience higher levels of stress (whether the events warrant a higher stress "rating", or the individual feels overwhelmed from experiencing many less stressful events) are at increased risk for acting out in a delinquent ways. We know however, that not all children who experience major life stress act out; so how do we understand what differentiates those who do manage to function well, despite having experienced perceived highly stressful life events, from those who

have difficulty functioning? Illuminating the factors that protect or buffer an individual from behaving delinquently or developing other negative outcomes from those who do not is an important research issue. In this study, combinations of these factors will be used to define stressful life events. However due to the fact that all children participating in this study will be approximately the same age (10-12), developmental factors will be held constant. Similarly, because all the children come from low socioeconomic status communities, SES is held constant.

Coping Ability

The ability to cope is a major factor enabling adjustment to stressors and facilitates children's resiliency against acting out. Cognitive and behavioral coping, in particular, contribute significantly to an individual's psychosocial adjustment (e.g., reduce or eliminate psychological distress) during stressful periods or under stressful conditions (Valeniner, Holahan, & Moos, 1994, p. 1094).

Coping and Delinquency

Although coping is generally viewed as a positive feature in adapting or adjusting to difficult situations,

there are coping behaviors that have negative impact. For example, the use of avoidance may be appropriate as a short-term adaptation to a highly stressful situation. However, extended and frequent use of avoidance as a coping strategy will likely result in negative outcomes. Bender and Losel (1989) found that those who were characterized as having neurotic psychopathies (a more severe form of delinquency) had low amounts of adaptive coping strategies (e.g., problem solving), and high amounts of maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., avoidance). The research suggests that the lack of ability to cope in adaptive, proactive ways is associated with delinquent acting out.

Similarly, Wills (1985) evaluated coping strategies and how they related to positive behavioral outcomes. He reported that coping strategies such as decision making and cognitive coping were negatively associated with delinquency (in Will's study delinquency was defined as substance use). In other words, as the use of decision making and cognitive coping increased, the use of substances decreased. Wills (1985) also found that assertiveness was negatively related to the specific behaviors of smoking and alcohol consumption. Again, this refers to the notion that as the use of assertive coping

increased smoking and alcohol consumption decreased. Thus, certain destructive behaviors such as alcohol and tobacco use seem to be less frequent when adolescents possess active, problem solving coping abilities.

Coping and Stressful Life Events

Major life events can cause an excessive amount of stress, whether they are due to family and community violence, or other chronic stressors. Research indicates that the use of coping strategies can reduce the negative effects of some types of stressful life events. However, coping efforts have different consequences depending on the situation or context. Valeniner, Holahan, and Moos, (1994) studied stress reactions in people who endured controllable events (e.g., academic demands) and compared them to people who experienced uncontrollable events (e.g., illness). The authors found that when events were perceived as controllable, choice of coping strategy predicted changes in psychological adjustment. In contrast, when events were viewed as uncontrollable, coping was not linked with adjustment. In addition, the researchers also found that parent support for controllable events increased the likelihood of behavioral coping, while parental support given to those who endured

uncontrollable events was not associated with better use of coping strategies.

Coping Strategies

Research suggests that the use of different types of coping strategies can have different outcomes. For example, Wills (1984) highlighted the adverse effects of using maladaptive coping strategies. Valeniner, Holahan, and Moos (1994) reported strategies oriented toward approaching or confronting the problem were associated with better psychological outcomes. Valeniner, Holahan, and Moos (1994) also found that social support (e.g., encouragement) increased the likelihood that a person will use approach coping such as information seeking or active problem solving. In addition, social support was found to improve the chances that an individual would use the internal coping strategy of logically analyzing the problem. Thus, social support can be attributed to children's resiliency.

Coping strategies have been found to be a prominent segment of adaptive resources for children as well as adults and are essential to the dynamic nature of adaptive functioning (Valeniner, Holahan, & Moos, 1994). Discovering the sources of vulnerability and resilience is a promising path towards the prevention of negative

outcomes in children and adolescents. Doing this will allow researchers, parents, schools and communities to engage in activities that reduce the risk of delinquent acting out and also strengthen the child's resistance and ability to cope.

CHAPTER TWO

SUMMARY

In summary, children faced with multiple stresses often have poorer outcomes in terms of well-being and adjustment in the environment. Many of these children engage in delinquent behaviors including truancy from school, carrying weapons, and stealing. However, research has found that some children in high stress environments are more resilient, i.e., manage to refrain from delinquent behaviors and are successful in life. There is a growing interest in understanding what factors distinguish those who succeed from those who do not.

While some studies assessing these variables have been conducted, there is room for greater understanding of these variables and how they inter-relate. The current study analyzed the relationship between delinquent behaviors, stressful life events, and coping within a culturally diverse sample of young adolescents at risk for acting out. The research has found that socioeconomic status (SES) plays a role in delinquent behavior. For this study, all participants come from approximately the same (low) income level and therefore SES status was assumed to be held constant.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND
HYPOTHESES

Does coping ability moderate the relationship between experienced stressful life events and delinquent behavior? More specifically for those who use adaptive coping, will delinquent behavior be less frequent regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress was? In addition, do children, who utilize adaptive coping, perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms?

It was hypothesized that for those who use adaptive coping, delinquent behavior would be less frequent regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and six adolescents (ranging from 11 to 12 years of age) were recruited from a 6th grade elementary school in a rural area of Southern California. The sample included approximately 17% African-American, 67% Hispanic, and 16% children from other ethnic backgrounds. Both male and female children are included (nearly 50% of each gender). Students were paid for their participation.

Design

In this study, a multiple correlational-regressional approach was utilized to test the proposed hypotheses. The predictor variables were coping ability and stressful life events while the criterion variable was degree of involvement in delinquency.

Materials and Scoring

The variable stressful life events was measured by the Stressful Life Events Inventory (Compas, Davis, Forsythe, and Wagner, 1987) and the Impact of Events scale (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979). Coping was measured by the Eleven Factor Solution for 54 Item Coping Inventory

Wills, 1985). Delinquency was measured by the Delinquency Checklist (Kulik, 1968). The predictor and criterion variables were all continuous quantitative variables.

Stressful life events refers to events or experiences within the home and the community. Home events are often acute (e.g., loss of a loved one) but may have chronic consequences (e.g., family suffers from financial loss) while community events occur at the community level and are likely to effect all many individuals in that setting (e.g., poverty and crime) (Dubow et al., 1997). *Coping* is defined "as a stabilizing factor that can help individuals maintain psychological adaptation during stressful periods" (Valentiner et al., 1994). *Delinquency* pertains to behaviors of disorderly or destructive fashion which are often in opposition to what laws or rules require (American Heritage Dictionary).

Scales

In this study the following materials were used: (1) Two consent forms: a parent/ guardian consent/ permission form, child verbal consent form (see Appendix A1 and A2); (2) one demographic sheet (see Appendix B); (3) the Stressful Life Events Inventory (see Appendix C); (4) the Impact of Events scale (see Appendix D); (5) The

Delinquency Checklist (see Appendix E); (6) The Eleven-Factor Solution 54 Item Coping Inventory (see Appendix F); and (7) and a verbal debriefing form (see Appendix G).

The Consent Forms

The parent consent form (see Appendix A1) included information about the researchers and their purpose for doing the study as well as the method, participation, and incentive for the study. The consent form explained how long the child would be detained from class what the nature of the questions would be. In addition, this forms covered issues concerning how confidentiality would be maintained and explained the rights of the parents to view the questionnaire. Attached is a letter of agreement, restating the aforementioned concepts in the first person, for the parent to sign and return to the school. The child verbal consent form (see Appendix A2) explained the general purpose for the study. It clarified that the questionnaires were not tests to be graded and that they were able to ask questions during the session. It explained how confidentiality would be kept, how long it would take to complete the questions, when breaks would be given and when and how much incentive pay they would be given.

The Demographic Sheet

Each participant responded to questions pertaining to age, gender, ethnicity, an inquiry about their friends, whom they spend their time with, and what their favorite television shows and video games are (see Appendix B).

Stressful Life Events Inventory

Life events were measured by the Stressful Life Events Inventory (see Appendix C; Compas et al., 1987) and a modified version of the Impact of Events Scale (see Appendix D; Horowitz et al., 1979). These scales assessed how events within the home as well as in the community effect an individual. The Modified Stressful Life Events Inventory had 29 items constructed to represent a span of relevant life events that could occur within a family (e.g., death of a parent or grandparent, birth of a sibling, jail sentence of a family member, etc...). The Impact of Events scale had 14 items developed to get a sense of what type of environment the child is living in (e.g., if you, a family member, a friend, acquaintance of someone in the community was; stabbed, raped, beaten, etc.) For both scales, respondents were asked whether they had experienced stressful life events or not (yes or no) and if so how much did it bother them on a Likert scale of 1 (didn't bother you) to 5 (really, really bothered you).

A cumulative score was determined for each participant. If they indicated that yes (they had experienced the event), the participant received a 1, where if they answered no (had not experienced the event) they received a zero. The 5-point Likert scale was multiplied by the score given in the yes no category. For example, if a child answered yes (score of 1), and indicated it bothered them " a medium amount" (a score of 3) then the 1 and 3 were multiplied and the individual received a score of 3 for that item. If a child answered no (score of 1) and yet still indicated that it bothered them "a lot" (score of 5), the 0 and 5, multiplied cancelled out the score and they received a 0 for that item. The sum of all items will be totaled to give and composite score for the measure. A high score indicated that the participant views his life events as highly stressful. In turn, a low score will suggest that the participant views his life events as low or moderately stressful.

The test re-test reliability of The Stressful Life events inventory was reported as $r = .86$ and the alpha coefficient as .73 (major events) and .86 [daily events] (Compas, Davis, Forsythe, & Wagner, 1987). The scale was found to have empirical validity by appearance of associated clusters. Test retest reliability for the

impact of events scale was $r = .87$ and the reported alpha coefficient was .78 (intrusion subscale) and .82 (avoidance subscale) with a correlation of .42 ($p = 0.0002$) between the subscales (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979). The current study reported the alpha coefficient as .76.

Coping Inventory

Coping was measured by The Eleven-Factor Solution For 54 Item Coping Inventory (Wills, 1985) which was modified to include a five-point scale of 1 (almost always or always true) to 5 (almost never or never true). This modification was adopted to better measure the range of use of coping strategies (see Appendix E). The test was constructed to assess what coping strategies were utilized by individuals. The 54 items were divided into 11 factors, as defined through factor analysis. They included: decision making, adult social support, cognitive coping, peer social support, substance abuse, physical activity, aggression, social entertainment activity, solitary relaxation activity, parental support, and prayer. Nine items represented factor one, decision making, which were aimed to measure problem solving or direct action (e.g., "think about possible consequences"). Factor two, adult social support, was comprised of seven items such as "talk with a teacher." Seven items distinguished factor three,

cognitive coping factors which has been defined as emotion-focused coping, cognitive reconstruction or situational redefinition (e.g., "try to put it out of my mind"). Peer social support contained five items such as "let out feelings with someone I feel close to." Factor five had three items that represented substance abuse (e.g., "drink beer or wine"). The sixth factor, physical activity contained five items (e.g., "playing sports"). Seven items (e.g., "get mad at people") represented Factor seven, aggression, while only three items constitute factor eight, social entertainment (e.g., "go to a party"). Factor nine, individual relaxation, had five items such as go walking or read books and magazines. Parental support, factor ten, consisted of only two items; talking with mother or father and watching TV. Finally, factor eleven, entitled prayer, had two items as well; pray for guidance and worry a lot about the problem. The range for the scale was modified to a 5-point scale. The options consisted of Likert scale 1 (Almost always or Always) to 5 (Almost never or Never) which allowed the participant to respond to the range of possibilities that resemble their individual coping strategies. High scores indicated that the individual utilized many types of coping strategies, while low scores implied that the

participant did not use a range of coping strategies. Test retest reliability of the scale was $r = .60$, $p < .001$ and the reported alpha coefficient was .85 (Wills, 1985). The current study reported the alpha coefficient of .92.

Delinquency Checklist

For this study Delinquency was measured by The Modified Delinquency Checklist [see Appendix F] (Kulik, 1968). Delinquency was measured by how often one has been involved in an activity on a 1 (never) to 5 (very often) Likert scale. The reported alpha coefficient was .98 (Kulik, 1968). For this study, the reported alpha coefficient was .98.

The Debriefing Statement

In the debriefing statement (see Appendix G), participants were informed of the major research questions in the study, who they can contact if they experienced distress due to the study and if they wanted to discuss or obtain the results of the study.

Procedure

The teacher announced the study in their classrooms and distributed a description of the project and consent forms to the students who wanted to volunteer for the study. The project description informed parents that the

study focused on "identifying strengths in children" and that their children would be given \$5.00 for their participation. The children were directed to send signed consent forms to the attendance office where they were collected by researchers. Following the receipt of the consent forms, teachers were contacted to arrange appropriate times for their students to be tested. Testing occurred at a centrally located classroom twice a day for two weeks. Beginning at 8:00 am, students were collected from their classrooms in groups of twenty and escorted to the testing site. They were instructed to find a seat and listen to instructions and an explanation of the study. Participants then asked again for their consent to participate. They were then notified that at any time during the study, if they felt uncomfortable or did not wish to finish the surveys, they could be escorted back to their classrooms. Each student was directed to open their packet and begin filling out the questionnaires including a demographic sheet and questionnaires examining stressful events, coping, and behavior. The testing took approximately 90 minutes. Upon completing, students were verbally debriefed and given \$5.00 for their time.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSES

A multiple regression analysis was used to test if those who use adaptive coping would have less frequent delinquent behavior regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress was. A multivariate regression analysis was also conducted to determine if children, who utilize adaptive coping, perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms. A significance level of $p = .05$ was adopted to conclude statistical significance for the results.

CHAPTER SIX

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

In light of recent events, the functioning ability, or the capacity, of adolescents and young adults to contend and cope with life events has become a major social issue. Given the disruptions that have been occurring in school settings recently, many administrators are interested in what facilitates adjustment in children. We are especially interested in understanding what enhances resilience and protects children exposed to major stress from negative or behavioral acting out.

The purpose this research was to elucidate the factors that impact social, emotional and academic adjustment in early adolescence. More specifically, to evaluate resiliency by examining the role of coping as a moderator of the potentially negative effects of life stresses on delinquent acting out. It was hypothesized that for those who use adaptive coping, that delinquent behavior would be less frequent regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress was. In addition children who utilized adaptive coping would perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESULTS

It was hypothesized that delinquent behavior would be less frequent regardless of how great their amount of actual life stress was. In other words, would the relationship between experienced stressful life events and delinquency be moderated by coping ability? In addition, for those who use adaptive coping, it was suggested that children who utilized adaptive coping would perceive stressful life events as less stressful than do those who use non-adaptive coping mechanisms. Specifically, that the relationship between experienced stressful life events and delinquent behavior would be moderated by coping ability.

Because the data for delinquent behavior was skewed, targeting only those respondents who engaged in high levels of delinquent behavior, the sample was reduced to those scoring at or below the 25th percentile and those at or above the 75th percentile of acting out. Thus, only 109 participants were included in the analyses. This sample consisted of approximately 75% Hispanic, 19% African American and 6% children from other ethnic backgrounds.

In addition, the coping inventory was derived through factor analysis when developed. Wills (1985) did not

clearly indicate which items were adaptive and which were non-adaptive. Thus, for this experiment, construct validity was obtained through inter-rater reliability. Ten expert raters were given the 52 coping items and asked to deem whether they were adaptive or non-adaptive. Items were compared individually by rater. If 8 of the 10 raters agreed on an item (i.e., they judged the item as either adaptive coping or non-adaptive coping) the item was kept in the scale. Thirteen items were excluded (items: 3, 19, 22, 26, 30, 43, 35, 38, 42, 43, 47, 49, and 52). The alpha coefficient for the 39 item coping scale was reported as .95.

Finally, the stressful life events scale was scored through both a dichotomous scale as well as a Likert scale which needed to be differentiated. The dichotomous, "yes" and "no" portion of the scale was computed into the actual stressful life events vector of SPSS indicating whether or not a child actually experienced that event in his or her life. The Likert 5 point scale answers were computed into the perceived stressful life events variable indicating how much an event bothered a participant.

The relationship between stressful life events, coping and delinquent behavior was examined through multiple regression correlations using a hierarchical

regression approach. Two Hierarchical Multiple Regression analyses were conducted. The first analysis pertained to the relationship between experienced stressful life events and delinquent behavior, moderated by children's coping ability. The second multiple regression was run to determine if the relationship between experienced stressful life events and perception of stress was moderated by children's coping ability. Analyses were performed using SPSS Regression and SPSS Frequencies for evaluation of assumptions.

The assumptions of the analyses were met. There was evidence of normality. The standard residuals were small, centered around zero, and reasonably symmetrical (z score range from -1.75 to +2.75, mean = 0.00, sd = .99).

The first hypothesis was not supported. The relationship between experienced stressful life events and delinquent behavior was not moderated by children's coping ability. At step one, non-adaptive coping significantly predicted delinquent behavior, $F(1, 107) = 4.40$, $p < .05$, accounting for 4% of the variance.

At step two, experienced stressful life events significantly predicted delinquent behavior, $F(2, 106) = 5.79$, $p < .05$. Experienced stressful life events significantly improved the model. Ten percent of

the unique variance accounted for in delinquent behavior is in common with actual experienced stressful life events combined with coping.

Table 1.

Hierarchical Regression of Actual Stressful Life Events and Coping on Delinquent Behavior

Variable Entered	β	R^2	R^2 Change	t	p
Step 1 Coping	-.0674	.039	.039	-2.097	.038
Step 2 Coping	-.062	.099	.059	-1.97	.051
Stressful Life Events (RAW)	.079			2.636	.010
Step 3 Coping	-.089	.101	.003	-1.504	.135
Stressful Life Events (RAW)	-.0729			-.263	.793
Interaction SLE X Cope	.0197			.546	.586

The second hypothesis was not supported. The relationship between experienced stressful life events and perception of stress was not moderated by children's coping ability. At step two, actual experienced stressful life events significantly predicted perception of

stressful life events, $F(2, 191) = 31.90$ $p < .05$,
accounting for 25% of the variance.

Table 2.

Hierarchical Regression of Actual Stressful Life Events
and Coping on Perceived Stressful Life Events

Variable Entered	β	R^2	R^2 Change	t	p
Step 1 Coping	.0551	.001	.001	.528	.598
Step 2 Coping	.0764	.250	.249	.843	.400
Stressful Life Events (RAW)	.0760			7.965	.000
Step 3 Coping	.0866	.250	.000	.516	.607
Stressful Life Events (RAW)	.0824			.933	.352
Interaction SLE X Cope	.04624			-.072	.943

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate resiliency by examining the relationship between coping ability and stressful life events on delinquent behaviors in young adolescents. More specifically, the study examined children who experience highly stressful life events and how their ability to cope impacted or moderated their perception of stress and their acting out behaviors.

Based on prior research, it was expected that children would employ adaptive coping strategies to deal with stressful situations, thus rendering themselves resilient to behavior problems and preceptions of severe stress. However, the findings indicated that coping was not effective in buffering the consequence of stressful events on behavior or perception.

The results of this study failed to support the hypothesis that coping moderates the effects of actual experienced stressful events on children's delinquent behavior. Adaptive coping was found to be a significant predictor of resilience toward delinquent behavior, however, the effect appears to be contingent upon level of stress experienced. In other words, ability to cope may

protects children from acting out delinquent to some extent, but does not buffer the effects of highly stressful life events that a child experiences. Not surprisingly, experiencing actual stressful life events significantly predicted children's delinquent behavior.

The results of this study also failed to support the hypothesis that coping moderates the effects of actual experienced stressful events on perceptions of stress. Therefore coping does not act as a buffer to for children who experience actual high stress environments from perceiving those events as less stressful. As expected, actual experienced stressful life events was a strong predictor of how a child perceives stress.

It is imperative to stress that what these results indicate is that children who used non-adaptive coping were less resilient and were more prone to acting out delinquent and succumbing to pressures of stress. In other words, non-adaptive coping ability worsens the chances of resiliency. Moreover, it must be noted that this sample was derived from an area of extreme stress including high crime, and low SES. Thus, even though the results indicated that adaptive coping did not moderate the effects of highly stressful events, this does not portend that coping is an ineffective moderater for stress

in general. It may be that in cases of extreme stress reality precludes coping ability. Future research should analyze children in both high, moderate and low stress environments to assess the relationship between stressful events and coping on behavioral outcomes.

In addition, because our sample was from a low socioeconomic status, the availability of many of the coping items may have been beyond their reach. For instance, the coping inventory asked children if they used video games, played sports, read books, rode bikes, etc... which may have been beyond their financial means considering many children reported being homeless at one time or another. Therefore the coping scale may have lacked construct validity. The scale was originally based on middle class children and was inter-related for this study by educated college professors. It would be in the best interest of future research to go into the community prior to employing the study and conduct a focus group to better understand what is available to the members of that community.

This study was also limited by the types of measures it employed. Children were asked to self evaluate their behavior, which may not be an accurate account of their delinquency, or lack of. Looking at other measures, such

as GPA and school suspensions records in conjunction with the child's perception of her/his behavior might provide a more accurate portrayal of delinquency.

It is imperative that researchers continue to evaluate factors that might increase our understanding the of surge of behavioral acting out in children and adolescents.

APPENDIX A
PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION
FORM

PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM

I agree to allow my child to participate in the study, "Identifying Strengths in Children." This study is being conducted by researchers at California State University, San Bernardino and has been approved by the University's human subjects board. The benefits of this study include helping researchers understand how children cope and what factors help them cope best. The study is not a test and will not influence my child's grades in any way. The study will take my child about 90 minutes to complete. My child will be asked to fill out questionnaires about stressful situations and relationships and how he/she handles those concerns. If at any time my child wants to discontinue his/her participation, it can be done without penalty. Also, my child's teacher will be asked to take 5 minutes to answer questions about my child's behavior in the classroom.

I understand that by participating in this study, my child will not encounter any more stress or harm than she/he would during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. If my child does have a bad experience while filling out a questionnaire, one of the researchers will be present to calm my child or will contact the school psychologist.

I also understand that the information my child provides will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. At no time will my name or my child's name be reported along with his or her responses. All data collected by the researchers will be reported in group form only. At the conclusion of the study, I may request and receive a report of the results. If I have any questions or concerns, I am aware that I can contact Dr. Faith McClure (909-880-5598) or Dr. Jean Peacock (909-880-5579) for information. I acknowledge that I have been informed about and understand the purpose of the "Identifying Strengths in Children study". I freely consent to allow my child to participate and acknowledge that I am the parent/guardian.

Student and Parent/guardian Permission Form Identifying Strengths in Children Study

Student Name (Please Print) _____

Student Signature _____

Parent Signature _____

APPENDIX B
CHILD VERBAL CONSENT

CHILD VERBAL CONSENT

You are being asked to be part of a research study that tries to identify how children deal with stressful situations. We know that most of you cope well with various problems you, but sometimes you probably wish you could have more help. We hope that by learning more about you and your lives, we will be able to understand your strengths and the areas where parents, teachers, counselors and members of your community can know how best to help children increase their chances of succeeding and doing well in life.

This is not a test, there are no right or wrong answers, and you will not be graded on your performance. Some of the questions about stressful situations and the relationships with people in your life may be easy to answer. Some may be hard to answer. For example, we will ask you whether or not you know someone who was shot or beat up at school. We just want you to tell us about your experience so we can understand your situation. If you are uncomfortable with a question, or don't want to finish the questionnaire, just tell me and we can talk about your concern or I will take you back to class.

Your name will not be on the answers so you don't have to worry about your friends, teachers, or others knowing what you said. We call this "confidentiality" which means that we respect your privacy. The questionnaire will take about 90 minutes to finish. We will do part one and take a break; after the break we will complete the rest. We appreciate your participation and will give you \$5.00 if you choose to participate. Now that I have explained the project, would you like to participate?

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Code # _____

1. How old are you? _____
2. Are you a boy _____ or a girl _____?
3. How do you describe your ethnicity?
Asian American _____
African American _____
Caucasian _____
Mexican American or Hispanic _____
Native American _____
Other _____
4. How do you feel about you ethnicity?
I love my ethnicity _____
I feel okay about my ethnicity _____
I don't like my ethnicity _____
I don't think about my ethnicity _____
5. In my family, we talk about ethnicity.
Never _____ Sometimes _____ Often _____
6. Did you begin the school year at this school? Yes No
7. How many schools have you been to up to now, including this one? _____
8. How many different places have you lived in up to now, including this one? _____
9. Did you have friends at this school when you entered 6th grade? Yes No

10. Write the first names of 5 kids you consider your closest friends. If you can't think of 5 friends, write as many names that you can think of.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

11. Where do you usually spend time with these kids? Check all that apply.

home _____

church _____

school _____

community center _____

sports & similar activities _____

12. Based on your experience, how would you describe the kids at this school?

a) very unfriendly__ somewhat friendly__ very friendly__

b) very unkind(mean)__ somewhat kind__ very kind(helpful)__

13. Based on your experience, how would you describe the teachers at this school?

a) very unfriendly_ somewhat friendly_ very friendly-

b) very unkind(mean)_ somewhat kind- very kind(helpful)_

14. If you had a problem with your teachers at school, is there an adult that would speak up for you? Yes No

15. If this adult spoke up for you, do you believe that it would make a difference? Yes No

16. Is there an adult you could go to if you felt you had a problem? Yes No
Who is it?

parent/guardian _____

other family member _____

someone outside the family _____

17. Name 3 of your favorite T.V. programs

18. Name 3 of your favorite video games

How often do you get to play you favorite video game.

(a) every day (b)about 2 times a week (c)more than 3 times

19. The best thing I like about my school is

20. The one thing I don't like about this school is

APPENDIX D
LIFE EVENTS SCALE

LIFE EVENTS SCALE

Lots of things happen to children while they are growing up. Some bother them and some don't. If anything listed below happened to you in the past year, circle yes. Then circle how much it bothered you.

1 = Didn't bother at all, 2 = Bothered little, 3 = Bothered a medium amount, 4 = Bothered a lot and 5 = Really, really bothered.

1. Birth of a brother or sister	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
2. Increase in number of arguments with parents of guardian	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
3. Death of a parent or guardian	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
4. Tried out for something (e. g. band, team, a play) and did not make it	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
5. Death of a close friend	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
6. Suspension from school	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
7. death of a grandparent	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
8. Having problems with girlfriend/boyfriend	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
9. Serious illness requiring hospitalization	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
10. Jail sentence of a parent	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
11. Increase in number of arguments or fights between parents	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
12. Parents remarrying of having a boyfriend/girlfriend move in	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
13. Jail sentence of brother or sister	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
14. Low grades in school	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5

15. Rejection by peers	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
16. Death of a brother or sister	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
17. Brother or sister leaving home	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
18. Serious illness requiring hospitalization of parent or guardian	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
19. Becoming involved with drugs or alcohol	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
20. Separation or divorce of parents of guardian	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
21. Move to a new school	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
22. Move to a new home	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
23. Become homeless	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
24. Fights with other kids	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
25. Loss of job by parent or guardian	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
26. Trouble with police	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
27. Brother or sister in trouble with police	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
28. Serious illness requiring hospitalization of brother or sister	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
29. Please list any other event(s) that happened to you but were not listed above						
_____	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
_____	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
_____	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E
COMMUNITY EVENTS

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Sometimes bad things happen to people, like they get beat up, stabbed, etc. Has anything like this happened to you or someone you know? If yes, circle yes then circle the number that shows how much it bothered you.

1 = Didn't bother at all, 2 = Bothered little, 3 = Bothered a medium amount, 4 = Bothered a lot and 5 = Really, really bothered.

1. stabbed	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
2. shot	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
3. beaten (with hands or fists)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
4. beaten (with objects)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
5. kicked	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
6. hit (by objects like rocks)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
7. sexually assaulted e.g. raped	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
8. robbed (without weapon e.g. no gun or knife)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
9. robbed (with weapon e.g. gun or knife)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
10. Threatened (with weapon)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
11. Murdered (killed)	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
12. Committed suicide	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
13. Hearing guns go off close by	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5
14. Being bothered or arrested by police	yes/no	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX F
BEHAVIOR SCALE

BEHAVIOR SCALE

Please read each of the following questions and say how often you have been involved in something similar. Circle the number that fits best for you. 1 = Never, 2 = Once or almost never, 3 = several times, 4 = often, 5 = very often.

1. Gotten alcohol by asking someone to buy it.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ditched school without proper excuse	1	2	3	4	5
3. Gotten drunk	1	2	3	4	5
4. Stayed out all night	1	2	3	4	5
5. Broken into someone's house	1	2	3	4	5
6. Gone for a ride in a stolen car	1	2	3	4	5
7. Stolen a car	1	2	3	4	5
8. Taken part in a gang fight	1	2	3	4	5
9. Carried a knife or weapon to school	1	2	3	4	5
10. Stolen things worth \$5 or less	1	2	3	4	5
11. Stolen items worth more than \$5	1	2	3	4	5
12. Set a fire	1	2	3	4	5
13. Damaged property (broken stuff)	1	2	3	4	5
14. Written on wall, doors, desk or other places not meant for writing on	1	2	3	4	5
15. Hurt an animal on purpose	1	2	3	4	5
16. Smoked marijuana	1	2	3	4	5
17. Sniffed glue	1	2	3	4	5
18. Smoked cigarettes	1	2	3	4	5
19. Used hard drugs like crack	1	2	3	4	5
20. Sold marijuana or other drugs	1	2	3	4	5

21. Lied to get out of trouble	1	2	3	4	5
22. Disobeyed your parents	1	2	3	4	5
23. Disobeyed teachers	1	2	3	4	5
24. Shouted at your mom or dad	1	2	3	4	5
25. Cussed at your mom or dad	1	2	3	4	5
26. Hit your mom or dad	1	2	3	4	5
27. Shouted at a teacher	1	2	3	4	5
28. Cursed at another teacher or adult at school	1	2	3	4	5
29. Hit a teacher	1	2	3	4	5
30. Ran away from home	1	2	3	4	5
31. Gotten in trouble with police	1	2	3	4	5
32. Picked an argument with someone	1	2	3	4	5
33. Picked a physical fight	1	2	3	4	5
34. Made fun of at least one person	1	2	3	4	5
35. Had sex	1	2	3	4	5
36. Touched someone's private parts	1	2	3	4	5
37. Had someone else touch your private parts	1	2	3	4	5
38. Beaten someone up	1	2	3	4	5
39. Took part in a robbery	1	2	3	4	5
40. Been suspended from school	1	2	3	4	5
41. Been expelled from school	1	2	3	4	5
42. Thought about killing someone and planned how you would do it	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX G
COPING SCALE

COPING SCALE

When you are faced with a problem at school or at home (for example: if you get into a fight, if you fail a test) what do you do?

Read each question and circle the number that seems most like what you would do.

1 = almost always or always true, 2 = often true, 3 = sometimes true, 4 = seldom true, and 5 = almost never or never true.

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I think about what information is most important or necessary | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Talk with an adult | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Tell myself it will all be over in a short time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Let out my feeling with someone I feel close to | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Drink beer or wine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Work it off with exercise | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Get mad at people | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Hang out with other kids | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Go walking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Talk with my mom or dad | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Pray for guidance or strength | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Think about choices before doing anything | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Talk with a teacher or counselor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Tell myself it is not worth getting upset over | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Look for a person who might understand the problem | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

16. Smoke pot	1	2	3	4	5
17. Think about possible consequences of different choices	1	2	3	4	5
18. Play sports	1	2	3	4	5
19. Go to an after school program	1	2	3	4	5
20. Blame or criticize others	1	2	3	4	5
21. Go to a party	1	2	3	4	5
22. Read books or magazines	1	2	3	4	5
23. Watch T.V.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Worry a lot about a problem	1	2	3	4	5
25. Get information needed to deal with the problem	1	2	3	4	5
26. Try to notice only the good things in life	1	2	3	4	5
27. Make a deal to get something positive from the situation	1	2	3	4	5
28. Wait and hope that things will get better	1	2	3	4	5
29. Find someone special to share my problem with	1	2	3	4	5
30. Go to a club like the boys or girls club	1	2	3	4	5
31. Take pills to feel better	1	2	3	4	5
32. Go to the gym and work out	1	2	3	4	5
33. Do something bad or cause trouble	1	2	3	4	5
34. Go to the movies	1	2	3	4	5
35. Get away from things for awhile	1	2	3	4	5
36. Think about different ways to handle a problem and which one is best	1	2	3	4	5

37. Go on as if nothing happened	1	2	3	4	5
38. Try to put it out of my mind	1	2	3	4	5
39. Talk with one of my friends	1	2	3	4	5
40. Go running or jogging	1	2	3	4	5
41. Do something your parents/guardian would not approve of	1	2	3	4	5
42. Look at the problem in a different way so that it is not as big a problem	1	2	3	4	5
43. Go shopping	1	2	3	4	5
44. Listen to music	1	2	3	4	5
45. Think about what might happen if you tried different ways of solving the problem	1	2	3	4	5
46. Eat	1	2	3	4	5
47. Remind myself that things could be worse	1	2	3	4	5
48. Talk with my brother or sister	1	2	3	4	5
49. Do something active like bike riding or skate boarding	1	2	3	4	5
50. Change a behavior so that the problem is not as big a problem	1	2	3	4	5
51. Avoid being with people	1	2	3	4	5
52. Sit quietly and relax	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX H
STUDENT DEBRIEFING

STUDENT DEBRIEFING

Thank you for your participation. We are grateful for your time and effort. The questionnaire you just completed will help us understand the stress that children encounter at home, at school and in their communities. Your answers will also help us understand why some children are successfully dealing with stress and others are not. If you are interested in the results of this study or have any questions about the study, please contact Ms. Keller and she will contact us.

If you feel uncomfortable about answering some of the questions, I want you to stay and talk to one of us about your concerns. We enjoyed meeting you, and we know that you have provided us with very important information.

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