Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

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"I Been Through a Storm a Lot of People Wouldn't Have Came Out Of": Examining Resiliency Among Black Men Exposed to Violence (ETV)

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Time: 9:00 am. CST
Place: Remote

Abstract
According to the Centers of Disease Control (2020), Black males are 10 times more likely to be killed due to gun violence than White Americans, with homicide as the leading cause of death among Black males aged 15-34 (CDC, 2020). In addition to interpersonal violence, Black men are also exposed to multiple sources of stress and trauma (e.g., poverty, discrimination, police violence, loss of friends and family to violence, incarceration) over the course of their lives. Although the stress literature has demonstrated a strong relationship between stressors and adverse health consequences (Pearlin et al., 2005), little attention has been paid to understanding how low-income Black men experience trauma and adversity and they ways they enact resiliency when faced with these experiences.

To address this gap in the literature, I analyze interviews with 20 Black men who reported exposure to 'street violence' as well as other forms of adversity to address three research questions. First, drawing on Pearlin and colleagues' (2005) sociological work on stress over the life course, which acknowledges how social structure shapes who is disproportionately exposed to stress, the importance of timing of stress, and understanding how stress proliferates across generations and over the life course, I examine how low-income Black men describe their experiences with stress and trauma from childhood to adulthood. Second, building on Payne’s (2011) sites of resilience (SOR) framework I examine how Black men enact resilience amid chronic exposure to violence and stress. Payne’s SOR framework describes all Black men as resilient and contextualizes their behaviors as responses to individual (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) and structural conditions that perpetuate inequality (e.g., poverty, social injustice). Finally, I explore how Black men have made meaningful lives in the face of adversity, rooting this exploration in Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) post-traumatic growth framework.

Results obtained using qualitative methodology revealed that Black men in this study experienced multiple and enduring stressors throughout their lives starting in early childhood that had lasting detrimental psychological and behavioral outcomes. As structure shapes limited options for enacting resilience, in absence of supportive resources, Black men developed creative ways to cope with structural violence. Unfortunately, in some circumstances, reliance on these strategies led to additional adversities. By providing a complex and nuanced discussion of how Black men persevere despite seemingly insurmountable structural barriers, the findings from dissertation can advance theoretical frameworks of stress and resilience and inform policy to adequately address the needs of trauma exposed Black men.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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