



*LIFE HISTORIES OF PEOPLE
SUCCESSFUL AT OVERCOMING
VULNERABILITY*

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Overview of Presentation

- Background for the original study
- Significance of the study
- Methodology
- Results
- Students' work



Original Study

- South Carolina funding-SC African Americans
- Dispute with team over “Racism” as key concept
- Replicating study across U.S.
- Students’ work



Significance as Seen in Results

- “It is not the cards you are dealt-it is how you play the game.”
- “Don’t tell me how weak I am-tell me how to get strong.”
- “Can’t keep me down.”
- “If I can get through this, I can take anything God throws at me.”



Methodology

- Design-life history is a technique drawn from ethnography to interpret a person's life within the cultural context in which it took place
- Sample-anyone who has successfully overcome some type of vulnerability
- IRB statement
- Setting-private place



Methodology (cont'd)

- Instrumentation
 - The researcher as instrument
 - Genogram
 - Time line
 - Semi-structured interview guide
- Data analysis-content analysis of field notes, genograms, time lines, and interviews



Important Results

- Resilience
- Persistence
- Hope-expectation that things will get better (sometimes but not always tied to religion or spirituality)



Resilience

- Adapting well to adversity
- Bouncing back
- Maintaining hope
- Refusing despair
- Reframing negative to positive (glass half empty or half full)



Students' Work

- Edwina Skiba King-incest survivor
- Lesley West-incest and rape survivor
- Renee Rassilyer-Bomer-ostomy
- Rebecca Wharton Peil-bereavement
- Chris Pamp-African American FNP
- Jessica Webb-multiple sclerosis
- Marfe Paluga-Filipina war bride
- Laura Clark-substance abuse
- Leigh Anne Chandler-Poole-rural AfrAmer



Renee Rassilyer-Bomers

- Olivia, a 54 y/o white woman who had colostomy done a year previous to interviews
- Open about experience-active participant in group
- Constructing a brochure to help others
- Strong-willed personality with family support
- Key concepts: knowledge, confidence, adaptability



Jessica Webb

- Florence, a 46 y/o white woman who had MS since age 30
- Created intervention to help others
- Intact nuclear family
- Key concepts: motivational styles, MS-related fatigue, Coping, self-worth from productivity



Rebecca Peil

- Kate, a mid-40s white woman who had lost her husband suddenly
- Developed a counseling service for the bereaved
- “Move through the pain”
- Key concepts: expressing grief, seeking social support, spirituality, helping others



Key Results in Common

- Coping
- Persevering
- Support
- Helping others
- Spirituality –fighting despair, gathering hope



Summary

- Life history is a viable research technique to study vulnerability
- Life history can itself be therapeutic – paper at anthropology meeting on “Cathartic Effect of Naturalistic Research”



Summary (cont'd)

- Life history can be used with a variety of key informants-any gender, race, or ethnicity
- Life history is fun for both researcher and key informant-never had a student not have fun with this methodology