

Negotiating the Streets: Hidden Resilience among Grown-Up Street Children in Manila

Daniel Wartenweiler

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Little is known about the developmental processes involved in the lives

minutes. The initial interview primarily focused on the life narratives of the participants by asking open non-leading questions. During the elicitation of the narratives, the researcher took the role of an active listener, not interrupting the narratives. During subsequent interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the initial data analysis, in order to explore the themes emerging in more depth (appendix A). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data analysis was based on a naturalistic approach to narrative research employing the thematic model, thus focusing on what the participants experienced, how they coped, and what their life experiences mean to them (Esin, 2011; Riessman, 2008). After the initial interviews, the narratives of the participants were re-storied by the researcher into a chronological sequence using the original words of the participants (Allen et al., 2014). The narratives were then coded according to thematic units utilizing MAXQDA Version 10, and emerging themes and subthemes were then identified. The initial themes were verified with the participants before the follow-up interview and overwhelming agreement was found. From the initial themes, follow-up questions were formulated. The data from the follow-up interviews was included into the chronological stories. A second round of thematic analysis yielded themes and overarching processes, paying attention to similarities and differences of the experience of the two research participants. The output of the second phase of analysis was again verified with the participants in order to establish trustworthiness of the results (Williams & Morrow, 2009). As acknowledgment for their participation, a bag of groceries was given to each participant.

RESULTS

This section describes the results as they emerged from the narratives and the participant observation, including the socio-cultural context, adversities experienced, the resilience processes, and resilience outcomes. Names used in this section are pseudonyms; quotations are translated from Tagalog.

The Socio-Cultural Context

The inner city of Manila where the study was conducted is a melting pot of different religions and cultures. A famous catholic church represents

the Roman Catholic population, to which the two participants belong. A large mosque serves the Muslims, while Chinatown represents the Filipino-

and through the sudden death of a parent they ended up in severe poverty: “Only the two of us were left, that’s why life became very difficult for my mother. She was just a laundry woman” (Meryl); “... life was very difficult for us then... we experienced eating only fish sauce and rice sometimes, only salt [and rice]” (Ricky).

Meryl’s father ended up in jail when she was three years old and subsequently died in jail. When she was eleven years old, her mother was also put in jail for running drugs. Being a single child, Meryl was left on her own on the streets. Ricky’s mother died of tuberculosis when he was 1 year old. Losing his mother was the greatest challenge he had experienced: “It was so difficult to accept that she was gone. I wondered how I could survive.” His father had been taking drugs ever since he remembered. He did not take responsibility for his family when the mother died. Due to the early loss of their parents, both participants were left on the streets to fend for themselves: “I didn’t have a place to stay... I and my friends slept wherever we were, on the street, on the sidewalk, anywhere” (Meryl).

Both participants got involved in work at a young age. Meryl began to work after her father had died, to supplement the income of her mother. She worked as dishwasher at food stalls, sold plastic bags at the market, and cleaned windshields of cars. When her mother was put in jail, she began to run drugs, as this was a lucrative and easy way to generate income. Ricky began to work after he had dropped out of school, helping out in food stalls, slaughtering chicken, or collecting garbage. At 12 years old, he already

worked as a helper on construction sites (Both participants) (Both participants)

second mother. She is now gone, she is dead [cries, pause] ... First I was angry. Whoever was nice to me was taken away [cries]". One year ago her third husband died: "I feel pity for my twins, because I was only pregnant with them, and they have never met their father... It was a big tragedy when he died. It felt like one of my wings was cut off."

Resilience Processes

The thematic analysis of the narratives yielded six processes that fostered resilience in the participants (Table 1). Even though these pathways are presented as separate processes, they interact with each other.

"Sya ang nagmulat sa mata ko" ("She opened up my eyes"; Ricky). Both participants recalled significant adults in their lives who were a resource for them. For Ricky it was the example of his mother who became his inspiration once she had died. He remembers his mother as hardworking and sacrificial in providing for her family. He gained his survival skills from the example of his mother: "She opened up my eyes how to survive... she persevered for us to live. she made all the sacrifices... even when she was sick, she still sold on the market. That's where I focused myself." After his mother died, he began to emulate her. "I strive to live an honest life. Because of our mother, even though we were poor, she brought us up not taking advantage of our neighbours" (Ricky). By observing other people, he was able to verify the lessons that he learned: "My mother had already told me. But sometimes I learned from the people around me these things. I did not do it anymore because I knew it would harm me." Based on these learnings, he is now able to provide advice to others and is respected because of his clean and honest way of life: "Even if they are older than myself, I tell them off... but they respect me." What he has learned from his mother, he now also imparts to his own children: "Whatever my mother did with me, that's the best we can now teach our children" (Ricky).

Meryl recalls adults, who, even though they were not able to support her financially, advised her to stay away from vices and to not emulate the example of other youth: "What they said was carved into my mind." She made a promise to never touch drugs, and she kept it. Similar to Ricky, she arrived at the conclusion that their advice was true by observing other youth, and she gained a strong conviction to stay away from drugs: "Because I saw it with others, that was the effect [of taking drugs]." She now provides advice to children in a similar way that the adults did to her:

“That is the biggest help that I have ever received, the advice of these elderly people... I am now able to advise children of whom others think they don't have a future. This is the biggest help that I ever received, because I can share it now with others.” Finally, she imparts her learnings to her own children: “That's why I am so happy about Liezel, these are signs that the dreams I have for her are being planted [in her].”

“Hindi pa dapat talaga, dahil sa murang edad ko rin (It should not have been, because I was still young”; Meryl). Getting involved early in work was not only an adverse experience, but served as a pathway towards adaptation. Both participants got involved in work as children: “When I came from school, I had a sideline. I helped out at stalls, to whomever I could be of help. So that [my mother] did not have difficulties to provide for me” (Ricky). When they were left alone on the streets, they were able to utilize their learned work skills to provide for their needs, but they also recognized the detrimental effects of their labour: “I pressed hard in my work... did my best, agreed to everything, until I learned things that were not appropriate for my age [referring to running drugs]. It should not have been, because I was still young” (Meryl).

Both participants did not only provide for their own needs, but also took on responsibility for their younger siblings. Meryl recalls how a younger girl who lived with them gave her strength to cope with her situation: “Now girl, she served me as an inspiration.”

Table 1 Themes and Subthemes for the Resilience Processes arising from the Narratives.

Process	Subthemes	Description
<p>“Sya ang nagmulat sa mata ko” (Ricky) (Significant Adult)</p>	<p>“Dahil nga iyung payo sa akin ng mga matatanda noon, iyon ang naging inspirasyon ko.” (Meryl) (Inspiration)</p> <p>“Itatanim ko talaga sa utak ko iyan. Dahil nakikita ko din sa iba. Iyan, kung ano ang epekto.” (Meryl) (Verification through observation)</p> <p>“Ang ginawa sa akin ng mga matatanda, iyon din ang ginagawa ko sa iba, binabahagi ko din sa ibang bata.” (Meryl) (Emulation of Example)</p> <p>“Kaya natutuwa naman ako kay Angela, eto yata ang mga signs, sabi ko, ung mga pangaral ko sa kanya...tumatanim na sa utak niya.” (Meryl) (Impart lessons to own children)</p>	<p>This process revolves around the participants having one or two significant adults in their lives who become a resource leading to more resilient functioning. The developmental process starts with being inspired by them and learning from their example, verifying what they say by comparing it with the experience of others, emulating their example, and later imparting the lessons to their own children in a similar way than the significant adults did to them.</p>
<p>“Hindi pa dapat talaga, dahil sa murang edad ko noon” (Meryl)</p>		<p>This process is related to the</p>

(Early involvement in child work)	<p>“Sa mga kapatid ko... sila din ang naging ilaw ko ... sinakripisiyo ko talaga ang sarili ko para lang sa kanila.” (Ricky) (Inspiration through early responsibility)</p> <p>“Iyung ginawa ka sa sarili ko, pinrusige ko nalang ang sarili ko... sapaghahanapbuhay(Ricky) (Perseverance)</p> <p>“Sila lang ang iniintindi ko, kung anu-ano ang trabaho pinasok ko.”(Meryl) (Hard work to provide for own children)</p>	<p>their siblings because they took on responsibility early on due to the loss of their parents. Their siblings served as their inspiration, they learned to persevere, and finally they continue to work hard in order to provide for their own children.</p>
<p>“Ang pag-babarkada, kung minsan nasa maganda, kung minsan nasa pangit“ (Ricky) (Tension between needing support and distancing self from peers)</p>	<p>“Mga kaibigan ko, tinutulungan din ako, pag may sobra silang pera.”(Meryl) (Seeking support from peers)</p> <p>“Hindi ko masasabi, talagang masama rin sila. Isang beses yinayaya nila ako, pag sabi ko, ayoko, hindi na nila ako pipilitin.” (Meryl) (Resisting vices)</p> <p>“Hindi ako lumalapit, kundi ako rin ang umiiwas.” (Ricky) (Distancing self from peers)</p>	<p>This process illustrates the tension between looking to peers for support but then distancing self from them because of their negative influence. Both participants initially sought the support from peers when they were left on the streets on their own, but then began to resist their vices and finally distanced themselves.</p>

Process	Subthemes	Description
<p>“Iyon ang pinakamatinding leksyon na naransan ko” (Meryl) (Delinquency as turning point)</p>	<p>“Kaya kung minsan may nagawa na hindi maganda. Dahil sa sobrang higpit ng buhay.” (Ricky) (Illegal work as a means of survival)</p>	<p>This process is related to participants’ involvement in delinquent activities such as running drugs or committing hold-ups as a means of survival. Realizing the consequences of delinquency for example being put to jail, was a turning point that led them to the conviction to stay away from further delinquency</p>
	<p>“Nahuli din ako. Pero hindi ko pinagsisihan iyon, kasi nga, alam ko yung pinasok ko.” (Meryl) (Realization of consequences)</p>	
	<p>“Kaya sabi ko ganoon, naiisip ko sa paraan na tumigil na lang. Mas ma-igi pa maghanap nalang ng trabaho.” (Ricky) (Deriving learning from the experience)</p>	
	<p>“Hindi na ako pumasok sa lugar na iyon, dahil takot na talaga ako.” (Meryl)</p>	
<p>“May nagtatawag na tatay, may gumagabay sa iyo.” (Ricky) (Early partnership and parenthood)</p>	<p>“Siya nagiging karamay ko” (Ricky) (Early partnership as positive experience)</p>	
	<p>“Sasabihin ko sa sarili ko, hindi ko kailangan ng asawa.” (Meryl) (Early partnership as negative experience)</p>	

(Children as inspiration)

“Ang pangarap ko na hindi natupad, sana sa iyo matupad.”(Meryl)
(Projection of dream to children)

draw their meaning of life from their children, and to project their own unachieved dreams to their children.

“Dasal lang ako ng dasal... doon nalang naging malinaw ang takbo ng isip ko”
(Meryl)
(Spirituality)

“Ikaw nalang ang magsisilbing magulang ko.”
(Meryl)
(God as parent)

“Sa kulungan... natuto ako doon magay, humawak ng bible, magbasa.”(Meryl)
(Jail as turning point)

“Malaki ang paninidigan, pananampalataya sa

Likewise, Meryl narrated how she has worked hard in order to provide for her children: “I only care about them, I entered any kind of work. I worked as parking attendant and on the market, where ever I could find work.”

“Ang pag-babarkada, kung minsan nasa maganda, kung minsan nasa pangit” (“Sometimes peers are helpful but sometimes a nuisance”; Ricky). This process involves seeking and receiving support from peers, but then acknowledging the negative influence of the peers, resisting their vices, and finally distancing oneself from the peers. Meryl narrated how she was supported by her peers when her mother was in jail: “My friends helped me when they had some spare money. They gave it to me and told me: [Meryl] buy some food. They put money together for me, they helped me.” However she began to see the negative effects of their drug use both by listening to the advice of adults and by observing them. It led to a tension of resisting the vices of her peers and the associated group pressure: “I couldn’t say they were really bad. They repeatedly invited me, but when I refused, they didn’t force me. They said: [Meryl], we are going to do drugs, just stay away for a while.”

For the same reasons, Meryl kept her distance from the relatives of her father: “I didn’t want to ask for help from [them], because most of them had vices. I was afraid that I could be influenced and that I could not resist them.” Finally she narrated how being taken in by a concerned adult provided an escape: “I said to myself: this is now my big chance... to distance myself from the bad examples... because my friends had vices, they sniffed solvent and took marihuana.”

Similarly, Ricky sought the support of his peers after his mother had died: “I had many vices then... I took marihuana... got involved with a gang, used to hang out on the streets.” But realizing the effects of drug use, he began to distance himself from his peers: “I didn’t want to grow up like this. It was difficult... Sometimes peers are helpful but sometimes a nuisance. That’s why I kept my distance. The strategy of distancing himself led him to continuously avoid vices. He is now imparting his own experience to his children by urging them to stay away from drugs: “I stopped with my vices, I tell them. I don’t want you to experience what I experienced. I don’t want to get involved with vices, because it is very difficult.”

“Iyon ang pinakamatinding leksyon na naransan ko” (“This is the biggest lesson I ever experienced”; Meryl). Both participants got involved

in petty crimes in order to generate income and as means to survive on the streets. Ricky joined his peers only a few times on hold-ups. Unlike Meryl, he was not caught, but he realized the consequences that such behaviour might have through his personal reflection: "Doing these things can have huge consequences, you can be put to jail, or something may happen to you." He also empathized with the people who were their victims: "I said to myself: I felt pity on the victims. I thought: how would it be if that happens to us." As a consequence, he decided to stay away from delinquency: "That's why I said, what I do is too difficult, and I stopped."

Meryl started running drugs when she was only 12 years old, but after she separated from her first husband and was left with a child to care for she began to depend on this kind of livelihood in order to survive. At age 19, she was caught and put in jail for three years. She recalls how her jail time became a turning point for her that led to her decision to stay away from delinquency: "Maybe the Lord did not allow me to become like that. That I would run drugs. That's why he gave me a lesson. This is the biggest lesson I ever experienced. That's why I said, when I get out, I will not go back to this place, whatever happens. So that this will not happen to me again."

"May nagtatawag na tatay may gumagabay sa iyo" ("They call me dad, they guide me"; Ricky). Both participants got together with their partner at 15 or 16 years of age. For Meryl, her early partnership was a negative experience from which she derived her learning, while for Ricky it was a source of strength. After having her first child at 16 years, Meryl got separated from her partner. She thought that the partnership would give her the security and care she was looking for, but she learned that her young husband did not really care for his young family and was busy with his own friends: "My living-in early on did not help me. My husband... was a nuisance. I thought my life would change for the better, but that was not the case. It got hard, harder even." Getting separated led to a sense of emancipation. She narrated her advice to one of her peers: "I would not stay long with such a husband. He makes life even harder, he fights with you, even hurts the children. I would say to myself: I don't need a husband." She decided that if ever she would find a partner again, he should be older than her. Her next partner and father of her second and third child was older indeed. Even though he was industrious, she found out that he was taking drugs. Thus, she got separated again. Her last partner was a responsible security guard and fifteen years older than her, but he died after they had four children together. Her children are now her inspiration and strength that keep her

For Meryl, spirituality is less a communal experience, but rather personal-relational. She narrated how prayer helped her to keep her mind clear and to stick with her convictions when she was left on the streets on her own. In the absence of her mother, God became her substitute parent: "I prayed and prayed... I said, I have lost my father and my mother is in jail, you are now my parent. Help me, don't neglect me, I wish my life will not be wrecked. There my mind became clear that I should not let people without direction influence me." Her jail time became not only a turning point regarding her delinquent behavior but also strengthened her faith. Reading the bible became a personal spiritual exercise for her: "In jail I met people who really trust the Lord, I learned to pray the rosary read the bible... there I understood everything. How important it is to use the bible... I couldn't forget what I read there: My parents may send me away but the Lord will take care of me. I never forgot that." Back on the streets, she recalled how she had put all her trust in God, how he answered her prayers, and how she experienced him as her provider when her family did not have enough to eat: "He never neglected us. When I had nothing to cook, I said, my God... my children are hungry today what should I do? Help me. Then somebody called me: can you help me with this work. Wow, thank you, he heard me immediately I have enough to buy food and milk for my children." Meryl has also learned to ask for forgiveness, and she shared that she is daily praying for other people: for forgiveness for those who have sinned, for freedom for those in jail, for healing for those in hospital, and for help for

is not a static outcome but dynamic and still evolving. The outcomes cannot be assigned to anything singular among the processes above, but rather are the result of their interaction.

Currently both participants show a sense of generativity expressed in their care for their children: "I say to myself I am able to support my children. That's what I do, I concentrate myself on them" (Ricky). These processes contribute to the participants' desire and effort to impart their experience and lessons learned to their own children. Their children provide them with meaning in their daily struggle, and with a sense of hope for the future. Furthermore, they are not only concerned with their own families, but also with other people. They expressed how they have come to respect and even love others, and provide help to those in need: "Hence it is better to help your neighbours no matter how poor we are" (Ricky).

In order to provide for their children's needs, both participants have shown perseverance in the face of severe poverty. Their present attitude of hard work and sacrifice is an indication of their resilience in facing the hardships of poverty, as illustrated in the following excerpt: "I worked in construction, when I was done, I pedalled [my side car] again. Then I worked in construction again. And now, pedal again. Pedalling and pedalling, that's my livelihood [laughs]. Pedalling through life [laughs]. There is sacrifice, sweat, life in poverty means people live off their sweat. If you don't exert all your effort, nothing will happen to you." (Ricky)

For the same reason, they both continuously stay away from vice and crimes: "I prefer to work and work hard for my children, in an honest way I want to work, in order that [our sustenance] does not come from bad things" (Ricky). Being able to provide for their families through a 'clean' livelihood provides them with a sense of pride, achievement, and agency despite poverty: "We are burdened with poverty but it feels good. In spite of it all, you can see positive outcomes from your struggle" (Ricky). Their sense of agency can also be seen in the way they face their problems instead of avoiding them: "You should not run away [from your problems], or take drugs in order to forget. Tomorrow your problems are still here. Why don't you face them, find a way out, so that you will be able to solve your problems" (Meryl).

Finally, the way the participants have dealt with their experience provides evidence for their meaning making. They have arrived at a "sense of having made sense", acceptance, integration of the adversities into their identities

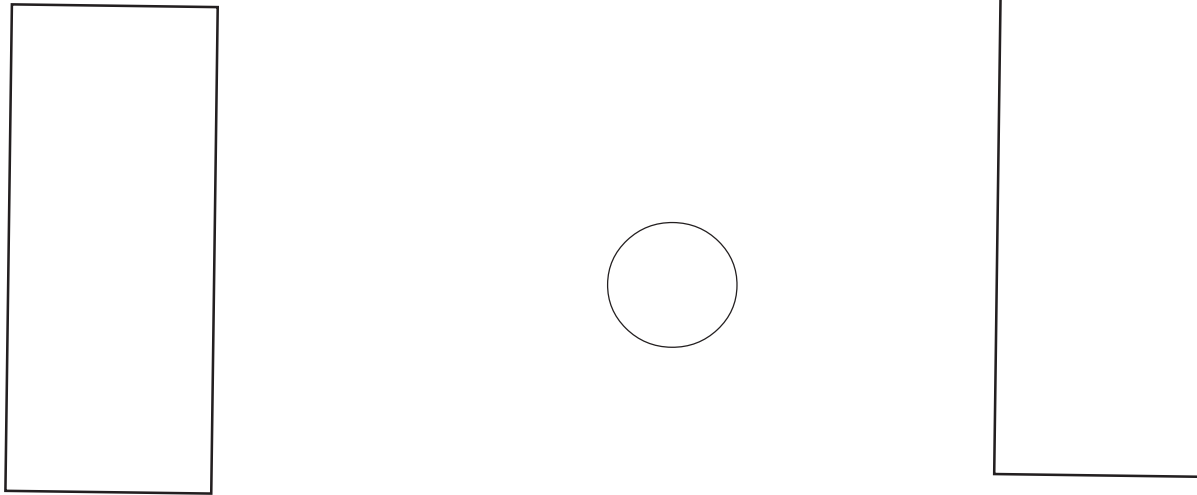
(Park, 2010) and a sense of cohesion (Ungar et al., 2007). Both participants expressed contentment with their lives: “We are able to live here in Manila, we are able to earn our living, I have a side job and we are content. Despite everything, we are able to eat three times a day” (Ricky). Their contentment leads to a sense of thankfulness: “I learned to be thankful ... for what I have received today” (Meryl). They have not only come to accept their past, but their past has become a resource for them as they face their future. They are able to account for the lessons they have learned, and imparting these learnings to their children provides them with a sense of continuity and anticipation of a better future. Meryl narrated how the process of making meaning led to a sense of maturity and integration as observed by others: “That’s why some elderly people tell me that I am like an older person. They say my mind is broad. I tell them, with the depth of what I have gone through, with all my experience, no wonder I have become mature.”

DISCUSSION

The participants were able to narrate their life experience in a very challenging context, focusing on what contributed to who they are now. Their narratives yielded six interacting resilience processes, leading from the experience of non-normative adversity to positive developmental outcomes, and providing evidence for hidden resilience among them (Figure 1).

The most significant finding of this study is the way in which the three processes revolving around distancing self from peers, engagement in delinquency and early parenthood contributed to resilience. These findings are unique for this context and atypical or hidden inasmuch as they are not conventionally considered as resilience promoting processes. Street children usually are not able to find supportive relationships within the context of their families and turn to their peers (Malindi & Theron, 2010). Peers also provided support for the participants in this study; however, they were also drawing them towards risk behavior. With a growing awareness of the

Figure 1. Six interacting resilience processes throughout the life trajectories of the



provided cohesion, fostered meaning making, and led to respect and care for others. Spirituality as a resilience process has not been given much attention in western contexts, but it is a very natural component in Philippine culture.

Some of the resilience processes identified relate closely to previous findings across other cultures, while other processes seem to be highly context specific, providing further evidence for the importance of understanding resilience as an interactional process negotiated by the individual with his or her socio-cultural context (Ungar 2006, 2008). Each resilience process sets on in childhood or adolescence, continues to promote resilience into adulthood, and leads towards imparting the experience to their children. In other words, the continuous negotiation towards positive adaptation begins in the past and reaches into the future. Therefore, resilience, as it arises from the narratives of the participants, has to be seen as a dynamic, on-going and context specific process, rather than a static, universal trait (Rutter 2007). The narratives of the street dweller participants provide illustration for

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