Dissertations

Graduate College

5-2021

Psychological Wellbeing and Sense of Community Among African Americans: Does Purpose In Life Matter?

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PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG
AFRICAN AMERICANS: DOES PURPOSE IN LIFE MATTER?

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Western Michigan University
May 2021

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PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG
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This dissertation examined the relationships between sense of community, purpose in life, and psychological wellbeing among African Americans. It investigated whether purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. Although previous studies have linked a sense of community and purpose in life with wellbeing, few studies have examined these relationships among African Americans using a multidimensional model. The data for the current analysis were drawn from the third wave of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States study (MIDUS 3), collected between 2013–2014. The sample included 98 African American men (n=32) and women (n= 66) between the ages of 39–84 who completed the MIDUS 3 interview and self-administered questionnaire.

Psychological wellbeing was assessed using five subscales from Ryff's (1989) Multidimensional Wellbeing Instrument (i.e., autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance). The sixth subscale, purpose in life, was used to examine the relationship between purpose and the five domains of psychological wellbeing and to investigate whether purpose moderated the relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. Keyes' (1998) Social Integration Scale was used to assess a sense of community. Data were analyzed using ordinary least squares regression analysis.

The results showed significant positive relationships for each of the five psychological wellbeing domains (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance) and both sense of community and purpose in life. Additionally, purpose in life significantly moderated the relationship between a sense of community and the wellbeing domain of self-acceptance. These results are consistent with previous research and underscore the value of a sense of community and purpose in life for psychological wellbeing among African Americans. This study also contributes to the body of literature that demonstrates the influence of purpose in life as a moderator between various psychological constructs.

I dedicate this work to my beloved father and best friend,

Hiram Leon Robinson, Sr.

For your unwavering commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, enlightenment,

health, personal growth, and community change

I stand on your shoulders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgments – Continued

me to a conference in 1995, where they encouraged Black and Brown youth to earn a Ph.D.—
and now, here I am. Thank you to the Western Michigan University Ronald E. McNair Scholars
Program and my mentor, Dr. Mark Orbe, for helping to prepare me for my Ph.D. studies as an
undergraduate—specifically the valuable lesson to engage in research about which you are
passionate, as your passion will carry you when the going gets tough.

Thank you, Tony Dennis, who recruited me to WMU at 18 years old and has been an
encouraging force during my whole adult life. Thanks to my best friend, Sarailuchea, for your
sisterhood, protection, support, and fun adventures. And last but not least, thank you to all of my
Brown and Robinson family and my friends in Southwest Detroit, Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, and
beyond!

Yatesha D. Robinson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents—Continued

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of psychological wellbeing is interdisciplinary and relevant among professionals in the allied health professions, business, neuroscience, and sociology (Morin et al., 2017; Settley, 2020; Zhong et al., 2016). Though there is no universal definition for wellbeing, it generally describes the perception that one's life is going well in terms of mental and physical health, quality relationships, and one's ability to realize their potential (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018). The CDC has associated wellbeing with numerous health, job, family, and economic benefits, combined with decreased risks of disease, illness, and injury (CDC, 2018). As such, research on wellbeing has grown to have a meaningful influence on public policy in areas such as health, economics, and the environment (Diener et al., 2009).

The exploration of wellbeing commonly falls within two traditions: (1) the hedonic tradition, which focuses on the experience of happiness, pleasure, and enjoyment, combined with the avoidance of pain and distress; or (2) the eudaimonic tradition, which goes beyond happiness and positive affect and focuses on the experience of life in a meaningful and deeply satisfying way (Deci & Ryan, 2008a). Although they are not mutually exclusive, hedonia is more associated with attending to one's own pleasure or satisfaction with life and is more individualistic in nature; as opposed to eudaimonia, which is associated with actualizing one's potential, virtue, and the development of meaning in service to the collective (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Huta, 2015; Ryff & Singer, 2008). This project focused on eudaimonic wellbeing by examining the relationship between psychological wellbeing and a sense of community in a sample of African Americans. It also explored whether purpose in life had a moderation effect on that relationship.

Background

  The promotion of wellbeing is a core focus within the fields of social work, community psychology, and social psychology, especially as it relates to mental health and social justice (Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Jason et al., 2015; Roberts, 1985; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2020). According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, "enhancing human wellbeing is the central and primary focus of the social work profession, on both the individual level, as well as within broader social contexts and society" (NASW, 2017, preamble). Social workers have a professional obligation to work to end oppression and discrimination while addressing issues related to cultural diversity and enhancing the capacity for people to address their own needs (NASW, 2017, ethical principles).

  Nurses, teachers, community psychologists, and an array of other professionals have similar interests in the advancement of wellbeing, especially among marginalized or disenfranchised groups (Munger et al., 2016; Pendergast et al., 2018; Weitzel et al., 2020). For example, the Community Psychology, Division 27 of the American Psychological Association, Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA), states: "The Society for Community Research and Action will have a strong, global impact on enhancing wellbeing and promoting social justice for all people by fostering collaboration where there is division and empowerment where there is oppression" (SCRA, 2010, para. 2). These acknowledgements speak to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject of wellbeing and the value of focusing on African Americans, a historically marginalized and oppressed population in the United States.

  Among African Americans, factors related to racial identity are commonly associated with positive or negative functioning (Hughes et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2018; Willis & Neblett, 2020). For example, racial identity in African Americans has been positively associated with

psychological wellbeing, greater self-esteem, and self-mastery (Hughes et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2018). However, when one's evaluation of their race is negative, racial identity has been associated with lower self-mastery, poor mental health outcomes, and internalized racism (Hughes et al., 2015). These studies demonstrate that the experience of wellbeing may be more nuanced among African Americans compared to those from the White majority in America. Other studies have documented the complex dynamics and influences of adverse experiences or beliefs on psychological wellbeing in African American samples (Lee et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2018).

Notably, at the end of the 20th century, wellbeing scholars began shifting their focus from psychological disease and distress towards optimal human functioning (Fowler et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1995; Seligman, 1999). Yet, despite this evolution in the field, wellbeing studies featuring African Americans continued to be rooted in pathology-based research (Bethea, 2020; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017). As a result, African Americans have been largely underrepresented in wellbeing research that focuses on positive attributes such as thriving, flourishing, or what makes life worth living (Clark et al., 2019; Mattis et al., 2016). The partial or complete exclusion of this population limits the ability to generalize research findings to this group. It may inhibit the development of innovative interventions to address the unique challenges faced by African Americans in their pursuit of optimal wellbeing.

Furthermore, few researchers have used a multidimensional model to investigate eudaimonic wellbeing, even in pathology-based studies. Instead, wellbeing measures were determined using either depression scales or hedonic attributes such as positive affect, negative emotions, and life satisfaction (Hardeman et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2018). The use of hedonic attributes is concerning because scholars have argued that judgments of

hedonic wellbeing may be influenced by confounding factors, such as mood; thus, these measures alone may not be sufficient to understand one's state of wellbeing (Newman et al., 2020; Ryff, 1989; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Yap et al., 2017).

Ryff (1989) developed a multidimensional model of wellbeing to operationalize eudaimonic wellbeing using six theory-guided dimensions. Ryff's (1989) model included key aspects of positive functioning that were not included in previous hedonic wellbeing assessment indexes. The resultant multidimensional psychological wellbeing model consisted of six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. Table 1 provides Ryff's definitions for high and low scorers of each dimension.

Wellbeing research on African Americans rarely uses a multidimensional approach. As previously noted, hedonic measures are commonly used. However, Ryff and colleagues (2003) conducted a study exploring multidimensional wellbeing in a sample of African Americans and Mexican Americans and found that minority status was a consistent positive predictor of eudaimonic wellbeing, even when facing race-related adversity. Their study also revealed that the dimensions of purpose in life and autonomy increased with education among African Americans while remaining the same among White Americans. This finding is an important demonstration of how variables may affect the dimensions of wellbeing differentially.

Table 1

High and Low Scorer Definitions of Ryff's Dimensions of Wellbeing

Dimension	Characteristics of a High Scorer	Characteristics of a Low Scorer
Self-acceptance	Positive attitude towards self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life.	Feels dissatisfied with self; disappointed with what has occurred in past life; is troubled about personal qualities; wishes to be different than what they are.
Positive relations with others	Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; concerned about the welfare of others; is capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give-and-take of human relationships.	Has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned with others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; is not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.
Autonomy	Is self-determining and independent; is able to resist social pressure to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards.	Is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments from others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressure to think and act in certain ways.
Environmental mastery	Has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; is able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.	Has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks a sense of control over the external world.
Purpose in life	Has goals in life and sense of directedness; feels there is meaning in past and present life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living.	Lacks sense and meaning in life; has few goals or aims; lacks a sense of direction; does not see the purpose in past life; has no outlooks or beliefs that give life meaning.
Personal growth	Has the feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has a sense of realizing their potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness.	Has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks a sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors.

Note. This table was adapted from Ryff and Keyes (1995, Appendix).

Sense of Community

The aspect of positive relationships in Ryff's multidimensional model of psychological wellbeing also speaks to the value of community as a contributor to optimal living. Bartram and Boniwell (2007) argue that developing positive relationships with others is one of the most essential elements of wellbeing as it enables individuals to develop a sense of community, trust, and belonging with others. Their assertion aligns with ecological theories and perspectives that emphasize the role of physical and social contexts in psychological wellbeing (Bronfenbrenner,

1979). Social and geographic communities are often sources of support that can be used to buffer challenges that individuals face (Pretty et al., 2007). Customarily, membership in a community engenders a feeling of mattering to the group, with the understanding that members are reliable and will have their needs met through their shared commitment (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Central to sense of community is a strong feeling of belonging, which has been established as a basic human need for optimal development (Allen, 2020; Hagerty et al., 1992; Nette & Hayden, 2007).

Sense of community among African Americans has been linked to the Africultural ethos that describes how traditional African values, such as communalism, affect, and spirituality thrives among African Americans today (Boykin, 1986; Johnson & Carter, 2020). Africultural ethos highlights the value of social interdependence, spirituality, ethics, and orality (knowledge from storytelling, joke-telling) as a means to share information, promote collectivism, and survive when facing hardships, systematic injustices, and/or oppression (Johnson & Carter, 2020; Mattis et al., 2016; Metz, 2014). The Africultural ethos recognizes that living in a spiritually grounded, interconnected society with communal self-knowledge is the key to mental health and wellbeing (Nobles, 2013). It also acknowledges that one's sense of self is inclusive of ancestors, future generations, and the community as a whole (Myers, 2013).

From this cultural perspective, a sense of community is inextricably tied to indicators of wellbeing among African Americans. This type of wellbeing moves beyond hedonic ideals, which are associated with pleasure, happiness, and pain avoidance (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015; Higgins et al., 2003). Instead, it is more closely tied to eudaimonic wellbeing, which is focused on Africultural principles such as spirituality or self-realization, purpose in life, authenticity, meaningful existence, growth, positive relationships with others, and human

6

fulfillment that is profoundly influenced by the social context (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Vaughan, 2002).

Purpose in Life

Another key element of psychological wellbeing is purpose in life. Purpose in life has been described as a driving force that helps individuals be resilient, pursue challenging goals, endure hardships, and feel that their lives have meaning. The experience of meaning in one's life is mostly influenced by a broader social context informed by personal relationships, cultural factors, and stability in one's broader environment (Heintzelman, 2018b). Social connections and inclusion are two aspects of a sense of community that have been positively associated with purpose in life (Hong et al., 2018; Stavrova & Luhmann, 2016). These findings build upon previous research reporting that a strong feeling of belonging in social relationships predicted and caused individuals to perceive high levels of meaning in their lives (Lambert et al., 2013).

Purpose in life has also been shown to have positive associations with various domains of psychological wellbeing (Baxter et al., 2019; Heintzelman, 2018a; Martela & Steger, 2016; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2018). It is believed to be the most existential element of wellbeing, specifically as it pertains to meaning and direction (Ryff et al., 2003). Among African Americans, purpose in life has been shown to buffer the effects of adversities related to racism, discrimination, stigma, and community stressors (Lamis et al., 2014; Ryff et al., 2003; Sumner et al., 2015). However, similar to wellbeing research, mid-life African Americans have been underrepresented in purpose in life studies (Ko et al., 2016). Thus, the current analysis is a meaningful contributor to the body of literature on purpose among African Americans.

Existing research shows positive relationships between *purpose in life* or *sense of community* and psychological wellbeing. Still, no studies have been found to date that examines

the interplay between these constructs and whether purpose may have a moderating effect on the relationship between *sense of community* and *psychological wellbeing*. Furthermore, purpose in life has been documented as a protective factor among African Americans in multiple studies related to mental health, cognitive decline, aging, stress, and illicit drug use (Hill et al., 2018; Hong et al., 2018; Irving et al., 2017; Kim, Ryff, et al., 2020). This evidence suggests that purpose may be an influential attribute related to wellbeing among African Americans; thus, the current analysis may glean valuable insights, especially regarding a sense of community and psychological wellbeing.

Problem Statement

One consistent limitation in psychological wellbeing research on optimal functioning is the underrepresentation of African American individuals and cultural values in study designs, participant sampling, and research methodology (Clark et al., 2019; Mattis et al., 2016; Watson et al., 2016). For example, an examination of wellbeing research methods in numerous studies revealed that convenience sampling was used in university settings where participants were recruited from predominantly white academic institutions (Bersamin et al., 2014; Emmons & Diener, 1985; Lench et al., 2019; Steger & Frazier, 2005). Although the use of college students as convenience samples may garner useful insights into the lives, thoughts, and behaviors of those represented, students remain a specialized population. Therefore, the ability to empirically replicate the results from the research is uncertain, calling into question those studies' generalizability, reliability, and validity (Peterson & Merunka, 2014).

Furthermore, despite the recent shift in wellbeing research, which focuses more on positive attributes such as thriving, being in flow, optimal health, and flourishing, research focused on African Americans remains highly imbedded in the pathology-driven framework

examining depression, anxiety, toxic stress, psychosis and psychological dysfunction (Assari, 2018; Duncan & Gogineni, 2020; Hudson et al., 2016; Mouzon & McLean, 2017). Knowledge gained from these topics is crucially valuable for the scientific community and society, yet a gap remains for the scholarship that focuses on psychological flourishing and how African Americans may find higher functioning that goes beyond the absence of disease.

This current study addresses the problems of the underrepresentation of African Americans in wellbeing research by investigating a national sample of African Americans who participated in the 2013–2014 MIDUS study. It also explores wellbeing using a eudaimonic model that focuses on multiple dimensions of positive functioning, as opposed to psychological dysfunction.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between sense of community and wellbeing among African Americans and to determine if purpose in life had a moderating effect on the relationship. A cross-sectional secondary data analysis was performed to examine the relationships between sense of community, purpose in life, and wellbeing among a sample of African American men and women who participated in the Midlife in the United States study from 2013–2014. Ryff's (1995) multidimensional wellbeing scales were used to allow for a more complex analysis of the dimensions of wellbeing and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between sense of community, purpose in life, and each dimension.

The purpose in life subscale was extracted from the overall instrument to explore whether it had a moderating effect on the relationship between a sense of community and the dimensions of psychological wellbeing. Other scholars have used similar approaches to explore purpose in

life in their studies (Kim et al., 2014). For example, Hill et al. (2018) used Ryff's purpose in life subscale to measure if purpose moderated the relationship between daily stressors and daily wellbeing among MIDUS study participants. They found positive relationships between purpose in life and positive affect, lower negative affect, and fewer daily physical health symptoms when participants experienced stressful days.

Keyes's (1998) social integration scale was used to measure sense of community. The social integration scale was chosen to capture multiple levels of sense of community, including both place-based and relational communities (i.e., "My community is a source of comfort"). This approach was important because even though sense of community has been a central construct and subject of multitudinous research studies (Chioneso & Brookins, 2015; Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Halamova, 2016; Thomas & Bowie, 2016; Thomas et al., 2020), measuring sense of community can be challenging due to the differential applications and interpretations of the concept (Jason, et al., 2016). The use of the social integration scale broadens the scope of community to be defined and interpreted by the participant. This study does not attempt to narrow the concept beyond the participants' feelings and experience of community, from their own perspective.

The analysis was completed using the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model to determine the relationships between sense of community and purpose in life as independent variables and the dependent variable psychological wellbeing, as measured by each of its five dimensions. The moderation effect was tested using a multiplicative interaction between purpose in life and sense of community to determine if purpose moderated the relationships between sense of community and the dimensions of psychological wellbeing. As is consistent with previous research on psychological wellbeing and sense of community, each model was adjusted

for potential confounding factors of age, sex, education (Dissanayake, 2016; Ryff et al., 2003),

years in the neighborhood, years in the state, and homeownership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Research Questions

To investigate whether purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of

community and psychological wellbeing, this study was guided by the following research

questions.

Research Question One

Is there an association between *sense of community* and psychological wellbeing among

this sample of African Americans?

Research Question Two

Is there an association between *purpose in life* and psychological wellbeing among this

sample of African Americans?

Research Question Three

Does purpose in life moderate the relationship between sense of community and

psychological wellbeing among this sample of African Americans?

Definition of Terms

1. *Hedonic wellbeing:* the pursuit of happiness or wellness in terms of pleasure attainment
   and pain avoidance (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

2. *Eudaimonic wellbeing:* the degree to which a person is fully functioning and the pursuit
   or attainment of meaning and self-realization (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

3. *Community*: a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings (MacQueen et al., 2001).

4. *Sense of community*: a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to being together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

5. *Purpose in life or purpose*—used interchangeably: as a central, self-organizing, life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

Outline of Dissertation

The current analysis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provided background research on the constructs of psychological wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose in life, specifically among African Americans. The chapter concludes with the problem statement, study rationale, research questions, and definition of terms. Chapter two begins with the theoretical framework and conceptual model for the current analysis and provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature related to psychological wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose in life. Chapter three provides details of the 2013–2014 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS 3) dataset and procedures, followed by the research methods used in the current cross-sectional, secondary data analysis. The chapter includes information on the study sample, measures, and approach to statistical analysis. Chapter four reports the analysis results and includes descriptive statistics, tables, and figures illustrating the study's findings for each of the three research questions. Chapter five discusses the overall findings and includes implications for future research and practice, study limitations, and ends with the conclusion.

Summary of Chapter One

      Chapter one provided an introduction to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing and described how this study used eudaimonic wellbeing, as measured by Ryff's (1995) multidimensional psychological wellbeing scales, to explore sense of community and wellbeing among African Americans. It included an explanation of why race is a fundamental consideration when exploring wellbeing, yet among African Americans, these studies are primarily centered on pathological experiences, as opposed to optimal functioning. This chapter also highlighted how the constructs of a sense of community, purpose in life, and wellbeing have been associated with previous literature. Chapter two follows with the theoretical framework, conceptual model, and a review of relevant literature for psychological wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide the theoretical framework for this study and present the conceptual foundations for psychological wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose in life. With "wellbeing" being such a broad term with robust contextual considerations, a significant portion of this review is devoted to outlining the research that has contributed to the development of wellbeing theories and operationalization. This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section describes the theoretical framework, followed by an illustration of the conceptual model used for this study. The second section provides extensive background on psychological wellbeing, beginning with its historical foundations, followed by its modern theory and conceptualization, and ending with literature focused on African Americans' wellbeing. The third section describes the conceptualization of sense of community, including the complex relationship between a sense of community and wellbeing. The fourth and final section presents relevant research findings on purpose in life. It includes a discussion on how purpose has been shown to moderate the relationship between numerous psychological constructs in previous studies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is comprised of two theories: Ryff's (1989, 1995) Multidimensional Model of Wellbeing and McMillan and Chavis's (1986) Sense of Community Theory. These seminal works are frequently cited in psychological wellbeing and sense of community literature (Brodsky, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Disabato et al., 2016; Halamova, 2016; Jason et al., 2016) and may help to explain the relationships between the sense of community, purpose, and psychological wellbeing. An integration of these theories formed the

basis for the conceptual model used to explore whether purpose in life had a moderation effect on sense of community and the dimensions of psychological wellbeing. The conceptual model (see Figure 1) was adapted from Baron and Kenny's (1986) moderator model and illustrates the three relational paths between a sense of community and psychological wellbeing (path A); purpose in life and psychological wellbeing (path B); and the effect of the multiplicative interaction of sense of community AND purpose in life on psychological wellbeing (path C). It also includes a list of control variables.

Figure 1

Sense of community, purpose in life and psychological wellbeing conceptual model
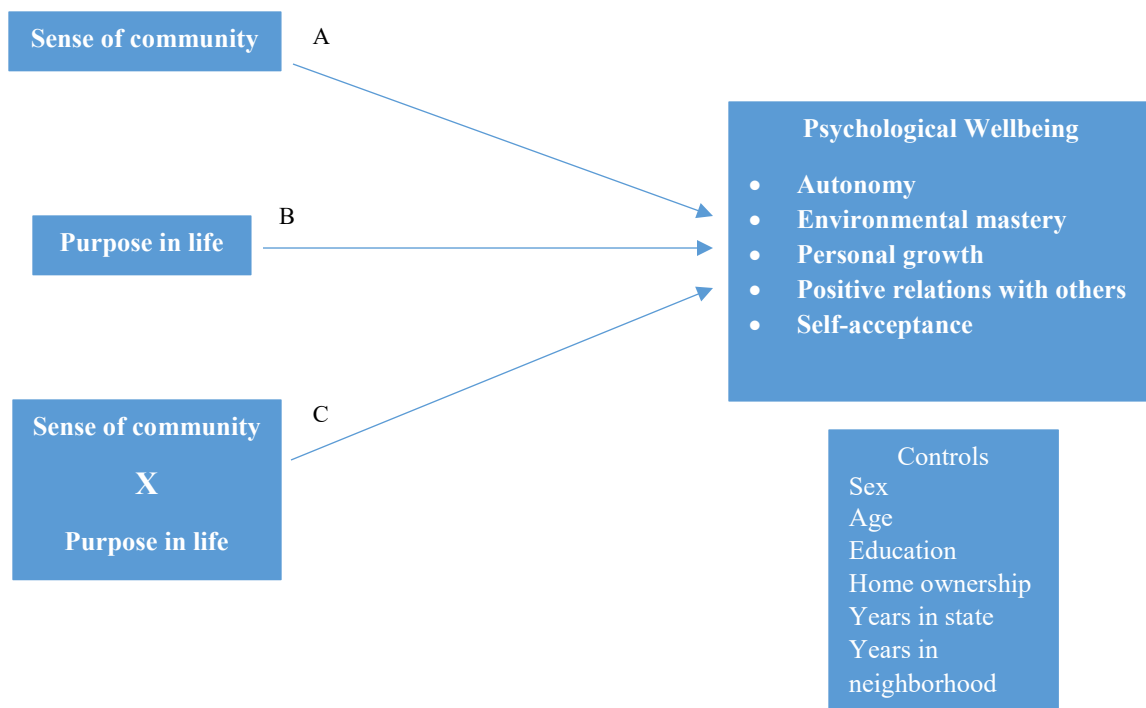
Multidimensional Psychological Wellbeing Theory

Ryff's (1989) theory of multidimensional psychological wellbeing was developed to address the need for a research-informed definition of the basic structure of psychological wellbeing. This process included the formulation of theory-guided conceptions of six new

dimensions of positive functioning (*autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and purpose in life*) to broaden wellbeing inquiry to include domains beyond positive or negative affect and psychological dysfunction (Ryff, 1989, 1995). An alternative approach was used by scholars who explored subjective wellbeing, which was measured by life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect (Diener, 1984). This approach was influenced by Bradburn's (1969) classic work, where he used Aristotle's assertion that *the highest of all good ... is happiness* (eudaimonia) to set the foundation for his conceptualization of positive and negative affect (Diener, 1984).

However, Ryff (1989) argued that the translation of the Greek word "eudaimonia" moves beyond hedonic, or pleasure-based happiness and instead refers to the more existential task of individuals realizing their true potential and finding meaning in life. Drawing from mental health research and theories in developmental and clinical psychology, Ryff (1989, 1995) conceptualized the six dimensions above of wellbeing as self-acceptance (positive attitude towards self; acceptance of both good and bad traits), positive relations with others (quality, fulfilling relationships), autonomy (sense of self-determination; strong locus of control), environmental mastery (influence and management of one's life and surrounding world), personal growth (self-improvement and personal advancement), and purpose in life (sense of meaning and directedness).

African Americans have often been excluded from studies using a multidimensional model of wellbeing (Ryff et al., 2003). Hence, some of the differences in the constructs have not been evaluated. Instead, it is common for hedonic measures or mental *illness* scales (i.e., depression scales) to be used to examine wellbeing (Goodman, Doorley, et al., 2018). The current analysis is less concerned with psychological dysfunction or pleasure and more focused

on eudaimonic wellbeing and thriving. Therefore, Ryff's multidimensional psychological wellbeing model was the best fit to examine wellbeing among African Americans.

Furthermore, the use of Ryff's psychological wellbeing domains was a departure from the prevailing pathology-based approaches mentioned in the previous chapter (Caldwell-Colbert et al., 2009; Goodman, Doorley, et al., 2018; Keyes et al., 2002). Ryff's (1989, 1995) model also incorporates aspects of the environment and quality relationships, which are valuable in assessing sense of community. However, it does not offer guidance into the complex influences and supports associated with geographic and relational communities. Therefore, McMillan and Chavis's (1986) sense of community theory was added to the theoretical framework to explain the relationship between a sense of community and psychological wellbeing.

Sense of Community Theory

Conceptually, the term "community" encompasses both geographic location, where proximity is important, and relational groups, where members share a psychological sense of solidarity or common experiences (Gusfield, 1975; Hutchinson et al., 1996). McMillan and Chavis (1986) incorporated both forms of community into their theory. They operationalized sense of community as a feeling of belonging, of mattering to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to one another. This theory complements the theoretical framework for this dissertation project because sense of community was measured in this study using broad terms that could refer to either relational or geographic communities.

The elements of sense of community theory are *membership, influence, the fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections or history.* Each of these elements is characterized by essential features that are salient among African American communities. For example, membership and shared emotional connections are based on a shared history and common

experiences. They include the feature of investment, a concept that describes the financial, emotional, and personal investment that is made within a community that contributes to their feeling of belonging. Examples of investment may include homeownership or supporting fellow community members around the loss of a loved one, creating a community garden, or rebuilding the local playground for children.

A notable element of sense of community theory for African Americans is a sense of mattering (influence). It describes the feeling that members matter to the community, as well as the community mattering to its members. Historically, African Americans have faced hardships that would suggest that they do not matter, such as systematic oppression, discrimination, and human rights violations, which have persisted through modern times (Watson et al., 2020). The culmination of mass incarceration, aggressive policing, health disparities, and the murders of unarmed African American men and women has resulted in the Black Lives Matter movement (Watson et al., 2020). The movement is a call for justice and acknowledgement that ALL lives will *not* matter until Black lives matter (Agozino, 2018). Therefore, the element of influence, or mattering, in the sense of community theory is particularly noteworthy among African Americans.

The sense of community theory combined with the psychological wellbeing theory (which is inclusive of purpose in life) provides the theoretical and conceptual foundations that informed the present work. The next section discusses the historical foundations of wellbeing.

Historical Foundations of the Study of Wellbeing

The teachings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are dominant influences on modern wellbeing theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Huta, 2015; Ryff, 1995; Seligman, 2011). Plato, Socrates' student, famously captures Socrates' philosophy and teachings on morality, justice, and

the pursuit of happiness (eudaimonia) in his dialogues *The Euthydemus, The Symposium,* and *The Republic*. Quoting from Plato's *The Republic* (c.380 B.C.E.), Socrates espoused that even if all men naturally desire happiness, only the just person will be authentically happy: *"… a just man will live well; the unjust will not… living well involves wellbeing and happiness … only the just man is happy; injustices will involve unhappiness"* (Cornford, 1974, p. 39).

Forty years later, Plato's student Aristotle continued to link happiness with justice while expounding upon the important role of virtue. In his work *Nichomachean Ethics* (c. 340 B.C.E.), Aristotle declared that all knowledge and every human pursuit aims to develop happiness (eudaimon), the highest of all good achievable by action (Book 1, chapter 4). He clarifies that pleasure-based happiness is superficial and worthless because it can be marred by vulgarity, resembling a life suitable to beasts. Instead, the embodiment of virtues such as courage, excellence, and living at one's highest potential is described as ideal for achieving eudaimonia. He promoted the cultivations of a life of contemplation combined with virtuous action for ultimate wellbeing beyond sensory pleasures. The next section presents literature on how the concept of wellbeing continued to evolve over time, from earlier conceptions to modern approaches.

Modern Theory and Conceptualizations of Wellbeing

The concept of "eudaimonia" that was introduced by Greek philosophers has greatly influenced current research and theory on wellbeing (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011). However, "eudaimonia" was originally translated from Greek into the word "happiness," a more pleasure-based interpretation (Bradburn, 1969). This understanding of wellbeing prompted researchers to operationalize the concept using hedonic measures, which focused on happiness and defined "wellbeing" in terms of pleasure attainment

and pain avoidance (Disabato et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The topic of modern wellbeing emerged as a problem of state and sociopolitical interest during the aftermath of World War II. During this era, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) was created to address sustainable development for countries around the world, and wellbeing was named as a strategic global and national goal (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2016).

As a global priority, wellbeing theory and research became the focus of various sociopolitical, economic, and cultural research agendas (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2016), although African Americans were primarily underrepresented in these studies. For example, Wilson (1967) conducted a meta-analysis of wellbeing research to determine correlates of avowed happiness. He concluded that happy people were young, religious, married, and intelligent; they also possessed modest aspirations and high self-esteem and job morale. This new focus on wellbeing facilitated the emergence of happiness and life satisfaction on global polls, and the use of social indicators as measures of human welfare, instead of economics (Frankenhaeuser, 1977; Stoll, 2014). Researchers used a multitude of happiness-related measures that focused on hedonic dimensions of pleasure, pain, and discomfort.

In 1969, Bradburn introduced the Affect Balance Scale to assess positive and negative affect in his seminal article *The Structure of Psychological Wellbeing.* It is a 10-item scale that rates subjective wellbeing by assessing the difference between positive and negative feelings. He examined how macro-level social changes affected life situations and psychological wellbeing (Bradburn, 1969; Ryff, 1989). Henceforth, the hedonic traits of positive and negative affect became central in wellbeing research as indicators of life satisfaction, quality of life, and general wellbeing (Stoll, 2014). Later, *The World Values Survey* of 1990 would use the Affect Balance

20

Scale, garnering positive and negative affect data from 42 countries worldwide (Glatzer & Gulyas, 2014).

As interests in wellbeing research continued to blossom, some behavioral and social scientists began shifting their focus from pathology and unhappiness to positive subjective wellbeing (Diener, 1984). In 1973, *Psychological Abstracts International* began listing happiness as an index term, and in 1974, a new interdisciplinary journal, *Social Indicators Research*, was published to examine all aspects of quality of life. It became an important publication outlet for research on subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction (Stoll, 2014). This journal appeared to be ahead of its time; according to the *World Database of Happiness* (Veenhoven, n.d.), another journal dedicated to happiness and quality of life would not be published until 1997 with *Quality of Life Research*. However, between the years 2000 and 2017, thirteen new journals were founded on happiness and wellbeing (Veenhoven, n.d.).

In Diener's (1984) seminal article, *Subjective Wellbeing*, he reviewed the literature on subjective wellbeing, compared psychometric data for measuring wellbeing, discussed theoretical approaches to happiness, and presented his own model of subjective wellbeing, which included life satisfaction, high positive affect, and low negative affect. Diener's (1984) findings over-turned earlier assertions made by Wilson (1967) that linked youth and modest aspirations with increased happiness. Diener (1984) grouped past attempts at defining wellbeing into three categories: (1) virtue-based, established by normative cultural values, (2) life satisfaction, and (3) positive and negative affect based on Bradburn's (1969) theory.

Diener (1984) pointed out that because eudaimonia is based on normative values and must be judged through an external value framework, it does not represent happiness that is based on subjective judgments of the individual. The presence of happiness or wellbeing depends

on society's interpretation of what is right or virtuous, instead of what an individual may attribute to their own happiness, which may not be in alignment. Diener (1984) attested that subjective wellbeing must reside within the individual's experiences and does not include objective measures such as health, wealth, comfort, or virtue—even though these things may influence subjective wellbeing.

This argument conflicts with Ryff (1995), who challenged the common assumption in wellbeing research that Aristotle's assertion, *happiness is the highest of all good,* was in reference to hedonic measures such as affect, life satisfaction, or quality of life (Ryff, 1989). Ryff (1989) contended that the common translation of *eudaimonia* to *happiness* undermined the requirement of morality and virtue associated with eudaimonia, which gives meaning and direction to one's life. Ryff believed that a better translation for Aristotle's eudaimonia would have been *the realization of one's true potential* (Ryff, 1995). Furthermore, Ryff (1989) identified the absence of theory-based formulations of wellbeing, which lead Ryff to explore essential features of psychological wellbeing and develop the *Multidimensional Psychological Wellbeing Theory* (Dodge et al., 2012; Ryff, 1989), which engendered a shift in wellbeing research toward eudaimonia at the end of the twentieth century.

To further the discourse on wellbeing, Seligman (2011) developed a model for wellbeing that is widely used in Positive Psychology with its emphasis on *what makes life worth living* (Bethea, 2020; Duncan & Gogineni, 2020; Goodman, Disabato, et al., 2018; Huta, 2015). Seligman (2011) described five components that are essential to wellbeing: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). His model is unique in that it integrates features from both Ryff's multidimensional model and Diener's subjective wellbeing, combining elements from hedonic (positive emotions) and eudaimonic (relationships,

meaning, and accomplishment) traditions (Goodman, Disabato, et al., 2018). However, Goodman, Disabato et al. (2018) found that PERMA does not represent a different type of wellbeing than Diener's (1984) model of subjective wellbeing. Later, Keyes and colleagues (2002) showed psychological wellbeing (eudaimonia) to be empirically distinct from subjective wellbeing (hedonia).

Wellbeing Among African Americans

Relatively few studies have examined psychological wellbeing among African Americans. As mentioned previously, wellbeing studies with this population have commonly employed hedonic measures or constructs that reflect psychological dysfunction such as depression, suicide, or stress (Chan et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2018; Hudson et al., 2016; Marco et al., 2016). For example, Pierce et al. (2018) used life satisfaction, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms in their exploration of wellbeing in a sample of African Americans. In part, their study used the presence of stress and depressive symptoms to draw conclusions upon participants' *wellbeing*. Furthermore, life satisfaction has been critiqued as a measure of wellbeing because the scale was originally designed for the purpose of differentiating persons who were aging successfully from those who were not (Ryff, 1989).

Racism and/or racial discrimination are frequently explored in wellbeing studies that feature African American participants (Cobbinah & Lewis, 2018; Hardeman et al., 2016; Mouzon & McLean, 2017). However, many of these studies also used life satisfaction or hedonic measures for wellbeing. Ryff et al. (2003) were among the first to examine the effects of racial and/or ethnic inequalities and discrimination on psychological wellbeing. They found that minority status was positively associated with multiple dimensions of psychological wellbeing (personal growth, self-acceptance, and environmental mastery), whereas perceived discrimination was negatively associated in the areas of personal growth, self-acceptance,

23

autonomy, and environmental. To contrast this approach, Lee et al. (2020) examined how racial discrimination can influence psychological wellbeing in a sample of African Americans, as measured by depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and perceived lack of control.

To better understand wellbeing outcomes among African Americans, it is important to integrate measures of *wellbeing* as opposed to *ill*-being. By designing studies around wellbeing constructs such as personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, meaning in life, and self-acceptance, scholars can work to expand the body of knowledge on flourishing, thriving, flow, and optimal functioning among African Americans. Although valuable insights may also be gained from a scientific inquiry into depression, anxiety, mental illness, and other psychological distress, it is important to recognize that researchers cannot assume that the presence of psychological distress is exclusive of wellbeing. To address this gap, this dissertation study used Ryff's (1989, 1995) psychological wellbeing scales to explore multiple dimensions of wellbeing among African Americans.

Furthermore, this study controlled for sociodemographic variables such as sex, age, and education to reduce their potential influence on psychological wellbeing. For example, education is positively correlated with higher reports of purpose in life among African Americans (Ryff et al., 2003). Researchers have also demonstrated that various experiences have differential wellbeing outcomes for African American men and women (Baxter et al., 2019; Cutrona et al., 2000; Ryff et al., 2003). Time in the neighborhood and homeownership have also been shown to influence community and psychological wellbeing (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Ross et al., 2019).

Sense of Community

Sense of community is a central construct in community social work, sociology, community psychology, and social psychology (Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Halamova, 2016; Jason et al., 2016; Roberts, 1985; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2020). Its conceptual foundations can be linked to the early works of sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who described the emerging shift from community (*gemeinschaft*) to society (*gesellschaft*) in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Cicognani, 2014; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Tönnies (1887) distinguished the theory of *gemeinschaft* as the essence of community, characterized by close-knit neighborhoods, family, connectedness, kinship, collectivism, and interdependence. On the contrary, *gesellschaft* represents individualism and commercial exchanges, where personal advancement in a market economy is pursued at the expense of close intimate relations with others.

Tönnies believed that *gesellschaft* was significantly influenced by the shift to modern, industrialized societies and the resultant mass migration into detached communities where the needs of "*self*" superseded that of the whole (Tönnies, 1887; Tönnies & Harris, 2001). It is a society where many individuals live alongside but independent of one another. In *gemeinschaft, people stay together in spite of everything that separates them; whereas, with gesellschaft, people remain separate in spite of everything that unites them* (Tönnies, 1887). The breakdown of community that results from *gesellschaft* is thought to engender negative attitudes towards others, lack of trust and deep intimacy, and superficiality.

Although Tönnies (1887) used *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* to describe the alienation, competition, and degeneration that was occurring among European migrants, *gemeinschaft* has since been used in observance of African and African American values of interdependence, collectivism, kinship, and communal ties (Griffith, 1995; Ling, 1991). However, contrary to

Tönnies (1887) assertions, Nash (1987) argued that because African Americans were denied respect and equal access to jobs, education, and political rights, they experienced an increase in *gemeinschaft* as they migrated to urban centers. He observed that African Americans established their own schools, churches, printing presses, and community organizations that made them stronger as a culture, produced a Black elite class, and enhanced the survival of even the most destitute among them (Nash, 1987).

Similar to Tönnies, Sarason (1974) believed that the *gemeinschaft* community was an essential element for mental health and wellbeing. He proposed the concept of sense of community as the feeling that one is part of a readily available, mutually supportive, and dependable structure (Cicognani, 2014). He believed that the dilution or absence of the sense of community is the most destructive dynamic in people's lives in society (Sarason, 1974, p. 96). In Sarason's (1974) seminal book, *Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology,* he discussed the value that sense of belonging, sense of responsibility, and purpose in life have in overcoming social problems that individuals face in communities. He pointed out that a sense of community was the key to understanding and overcoming society's most pressing problems, which stemmed from the dark side of individualism, manifested alienation, selfishness, and despair (Cicognani, 2014; Sarason, 1974).

In this regard, the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements are two clear examples that illustrate African Americans' use of the community to combat alienation, racial violence, despair, and a multitude of other social injustices (Countryman, 2007; Ghose, 2019; Nash, 1987). Community organizations and the Black church were instrumental platforms used to garner traction and mobilize the Black community during this era (Calhoun-Brown, 2000). For example, Chandler (2017) provided a historical lens of how African American spirituality played

a crucial role in shaping the Civil Rights Movement. Chandler described how the Black church emerged as a place where the community sought guidance and refuge as they persevered through pain and suffering in their pursuit of freedom and justice for all people.

Sarason (1974) would describe the use of the community to advance the plight of African Americans as a probable outcome. His conceptualization of a sense of community highlights how individuals from similar backgrounds or interests are naturally attracted to each other; thus, a sense of community emerges as an inherent positive consequence (Sarason, 1974). However, Brodsky (2017) contends that homogeneity is not necessarily a requirement for a sense of community. Contrarily, Brodsky (2017) suggests that the values of diversity, social justice, and social change espoused by fields such as community psychology and social work are not in conflict with the sense of community, but rather central in the promotion of inclusion, which contributes to key components of sense of community such as belonging, mutual influence, shared emotional connection, and fulfillment of needs (Brodsky, 2017; McMillan & Lorion, 2020).

Although several scholars have attempted to define and operationalize a sense of community (Bess et al., 2002; Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Jason et al., 2016), McMillan and Chavis's (1986) proposed theory and definition (i.e., membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection or history) are the most widely accepted and almost universally cited (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Halamova, 2016). Their framework illustrated how these elements work dynamically together to create a sense of community, which also engenders experiences, such as emotional safety, security, spiritual bonds, and positive interactions, that generally support individuals' mental health and wellbeing. One might glimpse a person's sense of community as they share stories of their home place, their land, or their families.

McMillan and Chavis's (1986) contention that sense of community is associated with wellbeing has been supported by recent research asserting that sense of community is associated with various favorable outcomes, including wellbeing, hope, social justice, quality of life, and decreased loneliness (Brodsky, 2017; Jason et al., 2016; Mannarini, 2014; Stevens et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). Halamova (2016) affirmed that physical and mental health, acceptance, self-actualization, self-esteem, meaningfulness, competence, trust, freedom, and interpersonal relationships were the most frequently espoused benefits of having a strong sense of community.

However, some aspects of sense of community, such as the creation of boundaries, may also include adverse outcomes for community members (Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019). For example, some communities may subscribe to the practice of banishing those who do not fit the norm, creating outsiders to build a sense of belonging for insiders, loss of freedom/individuality in adherence to community norms and expectations, or the practice of humiliation for those who bring shame to themselves or the community (Lardier et al., 2020; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

In this regard, sense of community may not always be viewed as a positive experience that supports wellbeing (McMillan & Lorion, 2020). This phenomenon was conceptualized by Brodsky (1996) as a negative sense of community. Mannarini et al. (2014) developed and tested a negative sense of community scale to measure the reverse of the sense of community components (membership, emotional connection, mutual influence, and needs fulfillment), which were conceptualized as distinctiveness, alienage, abstention, and frustration of needs. Halamova (2016) described these undesirable effects as the paradox of sense of community, where despite being associated with a large number of positive outcomes, there exist effects that run contrary to such benefits for some individuals, resulting in more harm than good. They found that McMillan

and Chavis's (1986) sense of community scale was negatively associated with Mannarini and co-author's (2014) negative sense of community and its subscales, including wellbeing.

Sense of Community Among African Americans

An examination of literature exploring sense of community among African Americans found that many studies have investigated how African Americans experienced a sense of community as *outsiders* within a larger social structure. Numerous studies explored the relationship between sense of community and success in predominately White academic institutions among African American youth or college students (Strayhorn, 2018); however, these populations are beyond the scope of this study. In regards to middle-aged adults, Lambert and Hopkins (1995) explored the relationship between occupational conditions and workers' sense of community. They found that African Americans, especially African American women, had difficulty experiencing a sense of community at work.

Some literature indicates that African American women have unique concerns that may affect their sense of community, such as feelings of isolation, multiple roles, and responsibilities, and managing stress or life challenges—all while maintaining the archetype of *the Strong Black Woman* (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011; Watson & Hunter, 2016). Researchers have explored culturally relevant support groups for African American women (i.e., Sister Circles) as a means of expanding supportive networks and fostering a sense of community and empowerment through friendships and fictive kin (Forenza & Lardier, 2017; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2010).

Minimal research has been found that examines sense of community among African American men beyond those studies that focus on adolescents, college students, and men who have sex with men, all of which are outside the scope of this study. Previous research has

acknowledged that social support among African American men have been largely understudied (Watkins & Jefferson, 2013). This author would argue that the lack of research on sense of community among Black men is not for lack of need. On the contrary, Plowden and Young (2003) suggested that kinship and other social support networks are important influences for African American men's health. Kinship and social support networks were also described in Watkins' (2012) research on social determinants that influence depression among African American men (Booker, 2016; Reed & Miller, 2016).

On the other hand, African American women have been featured in sense of community research based on social relationships, as well as geographic location (Chioneso & Brookins, 2015; Walker & Brisson, 2017). For example, in their sample of African American women, Cutrona et al. (2000) reported that those who reported elements of strong community bonds (e.g., relationships with neighbors, dependability, and working together to maintain community standards) also had a high positive outlook, quality relationships, and personal resources, and low negative affectivity and life events. Contrarily, Brodsky (1996) suggested that the positive effect of sense of community depends on the perceived safety and competence of that community. Brodsky (1996) reported that in a sample of African American single mothers, negative sense of community was demonstrated to have positive psychological outcomes as it served to moderate the potentially negative effects of the community on themselves and their families.

In concluding this section, it is clear that the effect of sense of community can be varied and dynamic. Coulombe and Krzesni (2019) described the complex relationship between sense of community and wellbeing, noting that the relationship varies amongst different groups of people. Although causal assumptions have not been made, it is clear that sense of community

and wellbeing are intricately connected, with nuanced contextual factors determining whether that connection is positive or negative. This study sought to explore this relationship by examining how sense of community is related to multiple dimensions of wellbeing among African Americans who participated in the MIDUS study from 2013–2014. Furthermore, it investigated whether the contextual factor of having a sense of purpose influenced that relationship.

Purpose in Life

Purpose in life has been defined as a central, self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). It is suggested that those who identify with a purpose in life derive a deep sense of meaning via the pursuit and attainment of valued goals (Goodman, Doorley, et al., 2018). In his classic novel, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959), Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl described the search for meaning as an essential, instinctual human need (Frankl, 1959). "…Success, like happiness, cannot be pursued, it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself (Frankl, 1959, p. 116).

In previous research, purpose in life has been used interchangeably with meaning in life (George & Park, 2013; Reker et al., 1987). However, scholars have recently begun to note distinctions between the two, namely that meaning in life is inclusive of purpose, as it represents three facets (1) life making sense, (2) sense of purpose, and (3) life being worth living (Martela & Steger, 2016).

Purpose in life has been positively associated with multiple dimensions of wellbeing (Hill et al., 2018; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Ryff, 1995), including those who experience

psychopathology (Goodman, Doorley, et al., 2018). Among African Americans, purpose in life has been associated with many positive outcomes such as mental health, resilience, substance use recovery, coping, hope, positive aging, health behaviors, and decreases in morbidity and mortality (Alim et al., 2008; Baxter et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020; Ryff et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 2017). Several studies have integrated religion, faith, and spirituality into their exploration and found that some African Americans assign spiritual significance to their lived experiences and pursuit of purpose (Frazier et al., 2005; Jackson & Coursey, 1988; Mattis & Grayman-Simpson, 2013)

These studies are consistent with other research which has found significant correlations between physical, mental, and spiritual health outcomes and purpose in life. For example, Ryff and Singer's (1998) study demonstrated that having a purpose in life and quality connections with others was central to positive health. Furthermore, Kashdan and McKnight (2009) showed that purpose in life could mitigate decreased wellbeing during times of adversity and high-stress conditions. However, these authors clarify that no single agent alone is sufficient in determining a causal relation with health and wellbeing. Instead, purpose in life, combined with an interplay of other higher and lower-level constructs, work together dynamically to influence mental and physical health.

Purpose in life has demonstrated positive effects across the life span, including a range of improved health outcomes, health behaviors, and overall wellbeing (Alimujiang et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2019; Irving et al., 2017; Kim, Shiba, et al., 2020). Among older adults, Zaslavsky and colleagues (2014) reported that those who maintained an engaged, purpose-driven life experienced lower risks of death, chronic morbidity, disability and were more likely to survive into an advanced age.

Purpose in Life as a Moderator

The previous section outlined the demonstrated benefits of purpose in life for psychological and general health outcomes. The literature helps to inform this study's examination of the direct relationship between purpose in life and psychological wellbeing. Yet, a central interest in this study was whether purpose in life had a moderation effect on the relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. Numerous studies have explored purpose in life as a moderator and provide support for this line of questioning in the present study.

Purpose in life has been shown to moderate the relationships between various psychological and health constructs. Its influence as a moderator has been seen in studies on wellbeing, sense of belonging, suicide, self-esteem, depression, physical health, and stress, to name a few (Beach et al., 2020; Burrow & Rainone, 2017; Chan et al., 2019; Krok, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Marco et al., 2016); thus purpose in life has been demonstrated as a significant moderator.

Hill et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between daily stressors and daily wellbeing. The authors reported that purpose in life moderated this relationship, with participants with higher sense of purpose reporting less negative affect, more positive affect, and fewer daily symptoms of stress. Their study confirmed the findings of Lamis et al. (2014), who found that purpose in life moderated the effect of life stress on psychological adjustment in a sample of African American women who were navigating parenting and environmental stressors. With the fore-knowledge that purpose has demonstrated moderation effects in numerous studies, the present study sought to examine whether purpose may be a moderating factor in the relationship between sense of community and wellbeing. To date, no studies have examined whether purpose

33

in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing among African Americans.

Summary of Chapter Two

Chapter two presented a literature review related to the theoretical and conceptual foundations for wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose in life. It explained the shift from the hedonic to eudaimonic wellbeing perspective, highlighting the multidimensionality of the construct. Despite the proliferation of wellbeing studies since the 1960s, this review found a notable underrepresentation of African Americans in most studies. The section on sense of community offered insights into the conceptual foundations of sense of community, spawned by the shift from *gemeinschaft* community (togetherness) to *gesellschaft* (alienated), as noted by sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887). However, even though *gemeinschaft* has been observed among African Americans, they did not experience *gesellschaft* during migrations to the same extent due to their need to "stick together" in order to survive racial violence, oppressive systems, discrimination, and other injustices.

This section revealed that a sense of community is associated with various components of wellbeing; however, in some instances, some of the elements that may be a part of building community, such as creating boundaries, shaming those who violate group norms, or punishing individuals who hurt the group, may also lead to a negative sense of community which may be tied to poor mental health outcomes.

The final section discussed the similarities and differences between *purpose in life* and *meaning in life* and how these constructs have been used interchangeably in the past to describe their positive associations with multiple dimensions of wellbeing. It highlighted studies among African Americans that reported positive correlations between purpose in life and resilience,

substance use recovery, hope, health behaviors, and physical health. A key finding was the

influence of purpose in life as a moderator in numerous studies examining various psychological

constructs.

CHAPTER 3 METHOD

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology used in this secondary data analysis exploring associations between a sense of community, purpose in life, and psychological wellbeing among African Americans. The chapter is organized into the following sections (1) MIDUS study data characteristics, (2) sample population and characteristics, (3) data measures, (4) data analysis, and (5) chapter summary.

MIDUS Study Data

Data for this dissertation were drawn from the 2013–2014 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS 3), a study series that focuses on physical and mental health and wellbeing (Ryff et al., 2016). The study began in 1995–96 (MIDUS 1) with an interdisciplinary team of researchers within the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network, who carried out a national survey of middle-aged Americans (aged 25-75). The purpose of the study was to explore the role of behavioral, psychological, and social factors on physical and mental health. The MIDUS Study has been described as the longest and most comprehensive human health research project in the world (Midlife Development in the United States, n.d.).

During MIDUS 1, a sample of non-institutionalized, English-speaking mid-life adults in the United States, aged 25 to 74 ($N = 7,108$) was recruited using random digit dialing from telephone banks. Based on the study's success, the National Institute on Aging awarded a grant to the Institute on Aging at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, allowing for a follow-up study, MIDUS 2, with data collection from 2004–2006. The second wave was able to gather data from 4,963 of the MIDUS 1 participants. The study was extended for a third wave of data

collection (MIDUS 3), from in 2013–2014 and included 3,294 middle-aged adults aged 39-93. Like the previous waves, MIDUS 3 used a multidisciplinary approach to explore numerous psychological constructs, including wellbeing, satisfaction with life, sense of community, social support, mental health, and a vast array of other psychosocial and demographic factors (Brim et al., 2004).

The current analysis used only the MIDUS 3 data to conduct a cross-sectional analysis because it is the most recent wave of data collection. In addition, the MIDUS 3 study used a 42-item scale to measure psychological wellbeing as opposed to the 18-item scale used in the original study, which has a low internal consistency and is not recommended for high-quality assessment of psychological wellbeing (Seifert, 2005; Springer & Hauser, 2006). The dataset is openly available to the public through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) website managed by the University of Michigan at the Ann Arbor Institute for Social Research.

MIDUS 3 began by tracing potential participants from MIDUS 2 to invite them to participate in the third study. After accounting for persons who were deceased, withdrawn, or cognitively unable to participate, 4,460 cases were deemed eligible; thus, a newsletter was sent to alert them of the third wave of the study. The study protocol included: (1) sending an advanced letter with a brochure explaining the study, along with a $2 bill as a pre-incentive; (2) conducting a 30-minute computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI), followed by a $25 post-incentive and thank you; (3) sending a 100-page self-administered questionnaire for participants to complete (with return postage) and a $10 pre-incentive; (4) upon receiving the returned questionnaire from participants, sending them a $25 post-incentive and thank you, followed by a 25-minute CATI cognitive interview. Of the 4,460 eligible cases, 3,294 completed the initial 30-

minute interview, which included 122 African Americans who were drawn from the 229 African American participants in MIDUS 2 (a decrease from the 1995 original MIDUS 1 study, which had 321 African Americans [of 4,963 total participants]). It was observed that African Americans are even underrepresented in the MIDUS study, with only 321 African Americans of 7,108 original participants. This fact is noted in Chapter 5 under Study Limitations.

Sample Population for Current Analysis

The inclusion criteria for the current analysis were: (1) participants who completed the 100-page questionnaire, and (2) participants who identified as African American. Of the sample of 3,294 who completed the 30-minute CATI interviews, 2,924 returned the 100-page questionnaire (which contained the constructs analyzed in this study). From that number, 101 individuals identified as African American; however, three of these individuals did not complete the instruments of interest (see Figure 2). The final analytic sample (N= 98) included African-American men ($n = 32$) and women ($n = 66$) between the ages 39–84. A comparison of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of those with missing data and those in the analytic dataset showed no statistical difference between the two groups (see Table 2).

Complete case analysis was used to explore missing data and found that all data points were available for all participants, except for two individuals who had missing data for the variables *years in the state* and *years in the neighborhood* (less than 1%). With such a low percentage, no additional steps were taken to address missing data (i.e., imputation), as the effect would have been minimal. Prior to being made publicly available, all MIDUS 3 study data had been de-identified to protect the confidentiality of respondents. This study received approval under the exempt category of review by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C).

Figure 2

Data Exploration for Final Analytic Sample
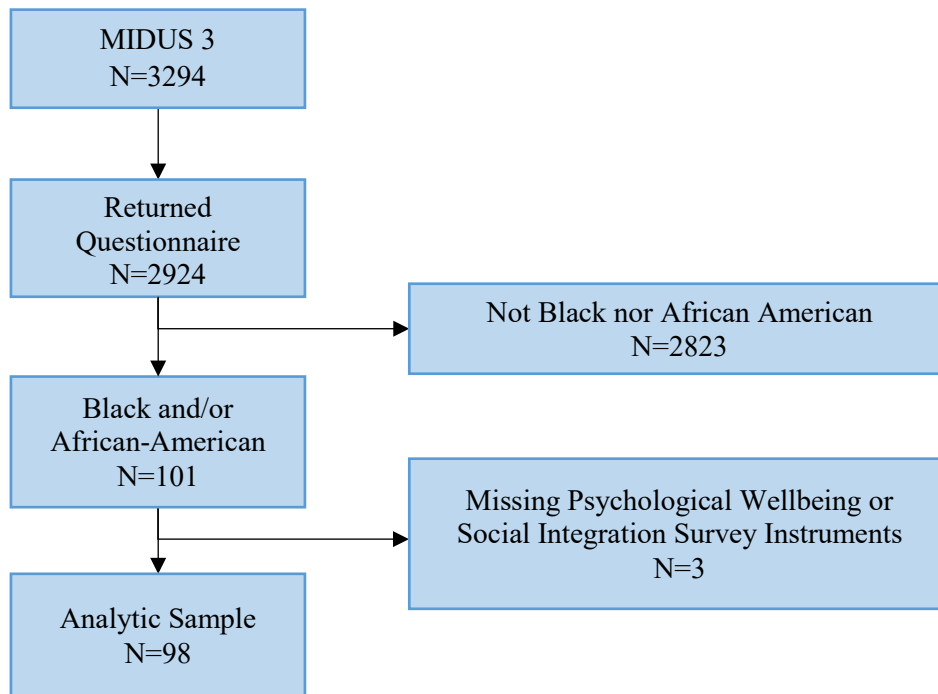
Table 2

Sample Characteristics, Comparing Missing Data with the Analytic Dataset

	No SAQ (N=21) or IOI (N=3)	Analytic Dataset	*p*-value
N	24	98	
Age	60.0 (11.8)	62.6 (10.5)	0.330
Female	58.3% (14/24)	67.3% (66/98)	0.474
Education			0.750
Less Than High School Graduate	4.2% (1/24)	7.1% (7/98)	
High School Graduate	33.3% (8/24)	23.5% (23/98)	
Some College	20.8% (5/24)	28.6% (28/98)	
College Graduate	41.7% (10/24)	40.8% (40/98)	

Note. SAQ denotes a self-administered questionnaire. IOI denotes instruments of interest.

P-values are from Fisher exact tests for categorical variables and t-test for age, comparing those excluded or included in the analytic dataset.

Measures

Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing was assessed as the dependent variable using five of Ryff's (1995) psychological wellbeing domains (see Appendix A). The purpose in life subscale was extracted to be examined independently for direct effects and as a potential moderator (Hill et al., 2018). Ryff's (1989, 1995) multidimensional wellbeing scales have been used widely to garner more complex analyses of wellbeing in more than 350 publications and have received favorable evaluations of reliability and validity in over 25 publications (Akin, 2008; Ryff, 2017; Saajanaho et al., 2020). In the current analysis, each of the five domains—autonomy (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$), environmental mastery ($\alpha = .72$), personal growth ($\alpha = .63$), positive relations with others ($\alpha = .70$) and self-acceptance ($\alpha = .77$)—were measured using a seven-item scale where participants were asked to rate each statement from (1) *strongly agree* to (7) *strongly disagree*. Some items were reverse-coded so that high scores reflect higher standing on the scale (e.g., "It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters" [reverse-coded]).

Sense of Community

Sense of community was assessed as an independent variable using the social integration scale (Keyes, 1998; see Appendix B), where participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with three statements on a seven-point scale, with one being "strongly agree" and seven being strongly disagree," with higher scores representing a stronger sense of community. The social integration scale was chosen to capture multiple levels of sense of community, including both place-based and relational communities (i.e., "My community is a source of comfort"). The social integration scale demonstrated lower internal consistency as estimated by Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha = .49$), which is a limitation for this study.

Purpose in Life

Purpose in life was examined as an independent variable using the seven-item purpose in life subscale from Ryff's (1989, 1995) psychological wellbeing scales (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to rate each statement from (1) *strongly agree* to (7) *strongly disagree* (Appendix A). Some items were reverse-coded so that high scores reflect higher standing on the scale (i.e., "I have a sense of direction and purpose in life." [reverse-coded]). Purpose in life is an important variable to explore because African Americans, especially those who are educated, have been shown to have a more heightened sense of purpose when compared to other groups. Furthermore, purpose in life has significant implications for eudaimonic wellbeing (Ryff et al., 2003). Ryff's purpose in life scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .71$).

Control Variables

This study controlled for multiple variables that could potentially confound the relationships between sense of community, purpose in life, and psychological wellbeing. Following is a description of the measures used as control variables in the current analysis. Demographic variables such as sex, age, and education are all factors that have the potential to influence one's experience of psychological wellbeing.

Demographic Variables

Sex was reported as a dichotomous variable, and age was continuous. Education was assessed using 12 categories and collapsed into four: (1) less than high school graduate, (2) high school graduate (including GED), (3) some college, and (4) college graduate (including associate degree, bachelor's degree, and graduate or professional degrees).

Home Ownership

Homeownership was examined as a categorical variable that assessed whether participants owned or rented their homes. Homeownership was controlled for because the sense of community theory suggests that homeownership is a highly significant factor in sense of community and wellbeing (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Time in the Neighborhood and State

These variables were gathered from write-in responses. The mean number of years in the current neighborhood was 13 years, with a range of 4–25 years. The mean number of years in the state was 48 years, with a range of 30–60 years. Time in the neighborhood and state was controlled for because McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested that time in the community may influence the sense of community and wellbeing.

Data Limitations

Similar to many wellbeing studies, African Americans are underrepresented in the MIDUS study data. The original MIDUS 1 sample included 7,108 participants, of which 321 identified as African American. The second wave (MIDUS 2) included 4,963 participants from MIDUS 1, including 229 of the 321African Americans. That number decreased further during MIDUS 3, where only 122 of the 3,294 study participants identified as African American. The final sample that met the criteria of this analysis ($N=98$) represented less than 3% of the MIDUS 3 study sample, limiting the ability to generalize the results of this analysis. Furthermore, the instruments in this study are all self-report assessments; thus, responses may be biased. Lastly, the internal consistency for the social integration and psychological wellbeing scales ranged from low to acceptable, demonstrating a need for more reliable measures.

Data Analysis

A secondary cross-sectional analysis of data from the 2013–2014 MIDUS study was performed to examine the relationship between sense of community, purpose in life, and psychological wellbeing. Using the statistical package *R*, version 4.0.2, descriptive statistics (e.g., means, frequencies, and standard deviations) were completed to explore the distributions of the study data. OLS regression was used to examine the relationships between independent and dependent variables and to determine if the purpose in life moderated the effect of a sense of community on wellbeing.

The first stage of the regression analysis explored the primary relationship between sense of community as the independent variable and the five dimensions of psychological wellbeing as the dependent variables. Each model was adjusted for potential confounding factors of age, sex, education, years in neighborhood, years in state, and homeownership in the second stage. Similarly, the relationship between purpose in life as the independent variable and each of the five dimensions of psychological wellbeing as the dependent variables were explored in separate unadjusted and adjusted models. Finally, the moderation effect was tested using a multiplicative interaction between purpose in life and sense of community to determine if purpose moderates the relationships between sense of community and the dimensions of psychological wellbeing. A *p*-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Summary of Chapter 3

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to describe the data and methods used in this study. The chapter reported the data characteristics for the MIDUS study, the analytic sample, measures for the dependent, independent, and control variables, and the research methods. The chapter

concluded with data limitations and a summary of how the data was analyzed. Chapter four reports the research findings.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This dissertation examined the relationships between sense of community, purpose in life, and psychological wellbeing among African Americans. It investigated whether purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. Although previous studies have linked a sense of community and purpose in life with wellbeing, few studies have examined these relationships among African Americans using a multi-dimensional model. The data for the current analysis were drawn from the third wave of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States study (MIDUS 3), collected between 2013–2014. The sample included 98 African American men (n=32) and women (n= 66) between the ages of 39–84 who completed the MIDUS 3 interview and self-administered questionnaire. This chapter explains the results from the secondary analysis that was conducted to answer the three research questions from this study:

> **Research Question One**: Is there an association between *sense of community* and psychological wellbeing among this sample of African Americans?

> **Research Question Two**: Is there an association between *purpose in life* and psychological wellbeing among this sample of African Americans?

> **Research Question Three**: Does *purpose in life moderate* the relationship between *sense of community* and *psychological wellbeing* among this sample of African Americans?

The chapter begins with a descriptive summary of the study sample and a report of the descriptive statistics and distributions for the dependent variable (i.e., domains of psychological wellbeing) and independent variables, sense of community (social integration scale), and purpose in life. The following section explains the results of the analyses used to answer each research question. Included in the chapter are tables and figures to complement the summary of results.

Descriptive Statistics

A descriptive analysis was performed to gain a better understanding of the analytic

sample characteristics, including all control variables (see Table 3). The analytic sample ($N = 98$)

consisted of mostly African American women (67.3%), with ages that ranged from 39–84 years

and a mean age of 62.6 years (SD=10.5). Education levels varied; however, most participants

had higher education experience, with 40.8% having earned at least a college degree and 28.6%

having some college education; 23.5% were high school graduates, and 7.1% had not earned

their high school diploma or GED.

Table 3

Sample Characteristics of Analytic Dataset with Control Variables

	% (N) or mean (SD) or median (IQR)
N	98
Age	62.6 (10.5)
Sex	
Female	67.3% (66/98)
Male	32.7% (32/98)
Education	
Less Than High School Graduate	7.1% (7/98)
High School Graduate	23.5% (23/98)
Some College	28.6% (28/98)
College Graduate	40.8% (40/98)
Years in Neighborhood	13 (4-25)
Years in State	48 (30-60)
Own Home	60.4% (58/96)

Note. N Missing: age (0), years in the *neighborhood (2), years in state (2).*

Table 4 lists the mean ratings for each of the independent and dependent variables.

Table 4

Mean Scores of Wellbeing, Purpose in Life, and Sense of Community

Dependent Variables	Mean (SD)
Autonomy	39.0 (6.9)
Environmental Mastery	39.0 (7.6)
Personal Growth	39.6 (6.6)
Positive Relations	40.8 (6.6)
Self-Acceptance	39.3 (7.9)
Independent Variables	
Social Integration	15.3 (3.4)
Purpose in Life	39.6 (7.4)

Note. Possible range for wellbeing domains and purpose in life is lowest 7- highest 49. Possible range for social integration is lowest 7- highest 21. SD denotes standard deviation.

Figure 3 depicts the distributions of the psychological wellbeing scales (dependent variable) and includes the ranges and Cronbach's alpha on each histogram. Each scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's alphas that ranged from .63 to .77. Distributions for the independent variables, sense of community (social integration scale), and purpose in life are illustrated in Figures 4 and 5, featuring the same details. The results show that scores for each psychological wellbeing scale were skewed to the higher end of the scale, indicating that the majority of respondents had higher scores for wellbeing. Scores were also relatively higher for purpose in life; however, the social integration scale was more normally distributed. Although purpose in life demonstrated an acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$), sense of community (social integration scale) had a low Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .49$).

Figure 3

Distributions of Psychological Wellbeing scales
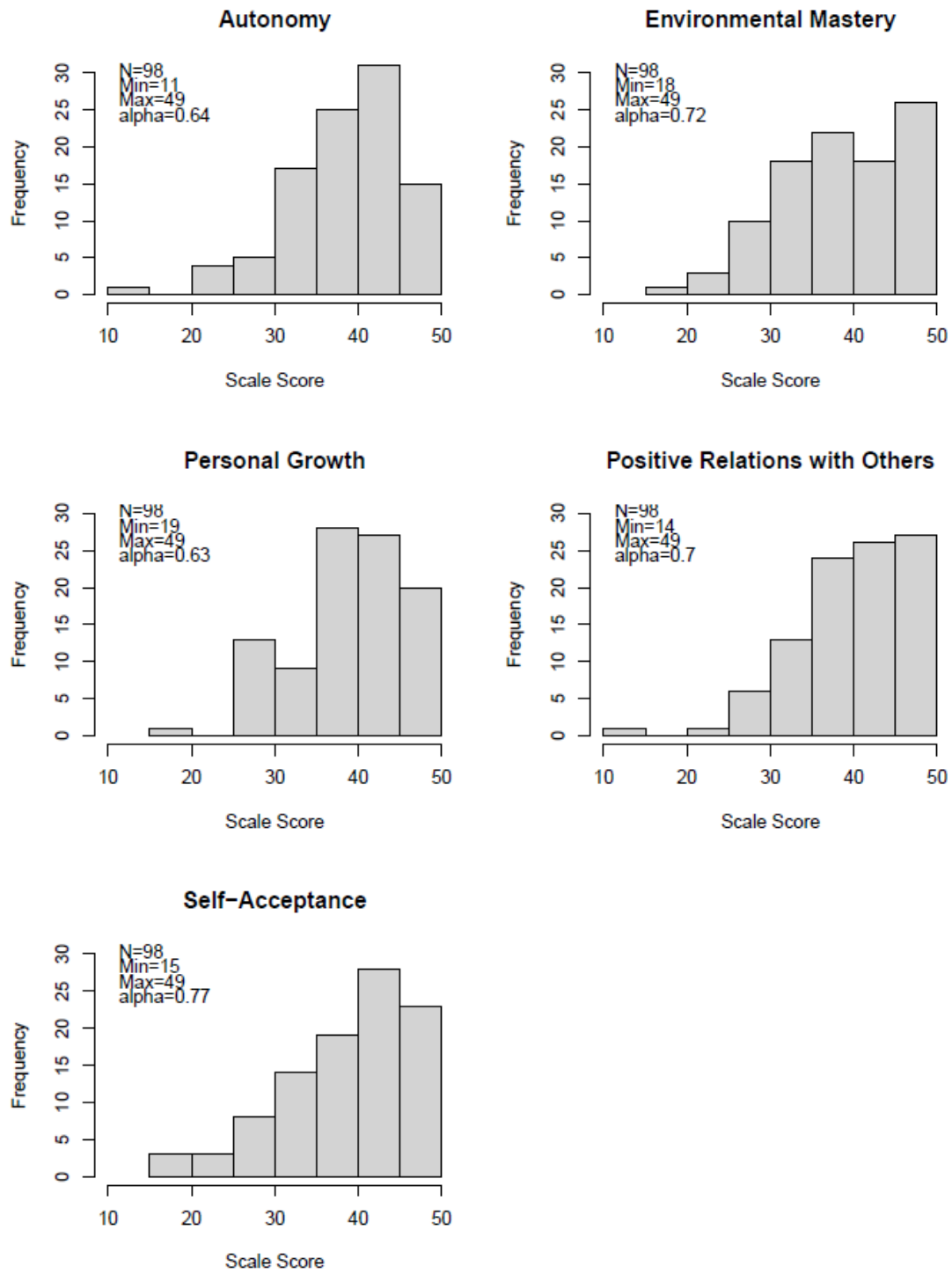
Figure 4

Distribution of Social Integration

**Social Well−Being
Social Integration Scale**

N=98
Min=7
Max=21
alpha=0.49

Scale Score
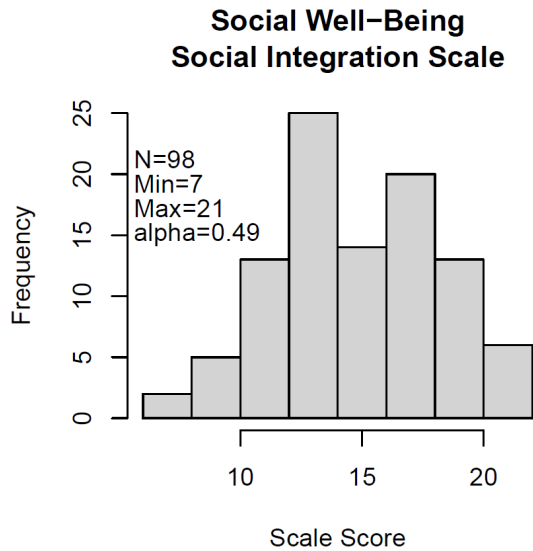
Figure 5

Distribution of Purpose in Life

Min=18
Max=49
alpha=0.71

Scale Score
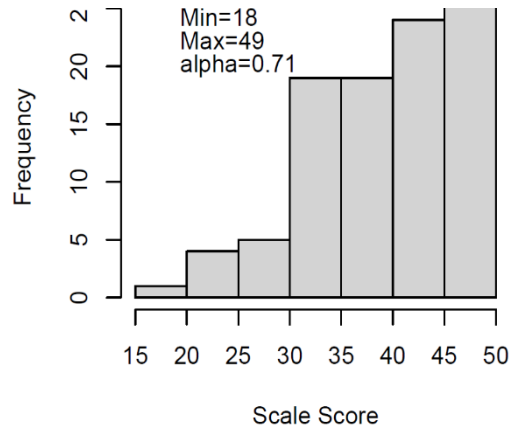
OLS Regression Results

Research Question One: Is there an association between *sense of community* and psychological wellbeing among this sample of African Americans? Table 5 shows the unadjusted and adjusted associations between sense of community, as measured by the social integration scale, and the five dimensions of psychological wellbeing, with 95% confidence intervals. There was little difference between the unadjusted and adjusted models, demonstrating that age, sex, education, homeownership, time in the state, and time in the neighborhood had little confounding effects on the relationships between sense of community and the five domains of psychological wellbeing. The results indicated positive associations between sense of community (social integration scale) and each of the five domains of psychological wellbeing (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, and self-acceptance), holding all else constant. The findings showed that for every one-unit increase of social integration, increases

49

were seen across all dimensions of wellbeing, with averages of .55 units for autonomy, 1.12 for environmental mastery, .75 for personal growth, .87 for positive relations, and 1.08 for self-acceptance. The coefficient estimate for autonomy had a *p*-value of 0.010, whereas the coefficients for all other dimensions of wellbeing had *p*-values of <0.001. Figure 6 depicts the scatterplots that illustrate the positive relationships between social integration and each of the psychological wellbeing scales.

Table 5

Unadjusted and Adjusted Associations Between Social Integration and Each Psychological Wellbeing Scale, with 95% Confidence intervals (CI)

	Autonomy		Environmental Mastery		Personal Growth		Positive Relations		Self-Acceptance	
	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value
Unadjusted Model										
Social Integration	0.61 (0.21,1.00)	0.003	1.02 (0.61,1.42)	<0.001	0.80 (0.44,1.17)	<0.001	0.93 (0.58,1.27)	<0.001	1.12 (0.70,1.54)	<0.001
Model R^2	*0.089*		*0.204*		*0.166*		*0.224*		*0.224*	
Adjusted Model										
Social Integration	0.55 (0.13, 0.96)	0.010	1.12 (0.72, 1.53)	<0.001	0.75 (0.39, 1.10)	<0.001	0.87 (0.54,1.19)	<0.001	1.08 (0.67, 1.48)	<0.001
Age	-0.01 (-0.15, 0.13)	0.918	-0.03 (-0.17, 0.11)	0.674	-0.01 (-0.13, 0.11)	0.899	0.08 (-0.04,0.19)	0.181	1.08 (0.67, 1.48)	0.407
Female	-3.56 (-6.51,-0.62)	0.018	-3.86 (-6.76,-0.96)	0.010	-1.72 (-4.26, 0.81)	0.180	-0.39 (-2.71,1.93)	0.741	-3.31 (-6.24, -.39)	0.027
Education		0.523		0.972		0.197		0.049		0.947
Less than H.S. Graduate	0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)	
H.S. Graduate	4.08 (-2.00,10.16)		-0.32 (-6.30, 5.66)		-1.50 (-6.73, 3.73)		-3.06 (-7.85,1.73)		-0.65 (-6.69, 5.38)	
Some College	3.83 (-2.10, 9.77)		-0.76 (-6.61, 5.08)		0.80 (-4.31, 5.91)		-1.50 (-6.18,3.18)		-1.48 (-7.37, 4.42)	
College Graduate	5.01 (-1.02,11.03)		-1.53 (-7.46, 4.39)		1.37 (-3.81, 6.55)		0.50 (-4.24,5.25)		-0.49 (-6.47, 5.49)	
Years in Neighborhood	0.08 (-0.02, 0.19)	0.111	-0.01 (-0.11, 0.09)	0.815	0.03 (-0.06, 0.12)	0.491	-0.04 (-0.12,0.05)	0.386	0.00 (-0.11, 0.10)	0.942
Years in State	-0.06 (-0.13, 0.01)	0.112	-0.07 (-0.14, 0.00)	0.065	-0.08 (-0.14,-0.02)	0.013	-0.05 (-0.11,0.00)	0.062	-0.07 (-0.14, 0.01)	0.069
Own Home	-0.34 (-3.59, 2.91)	0.836	2.17 (-1.03, 5.36)	0.181	-2.02 (-4.82, 0.77)	0.154	0.39 (-2.17,2.95)	0.764	1.60 (-1.62, 4.83)	0.325
Model R^2	*0.218*		*0.354*		*0.302*		*0.364*		*0.332*	

Figure 6. Scatterplots comparing sense of community (social integration) to each wellbeing scale.
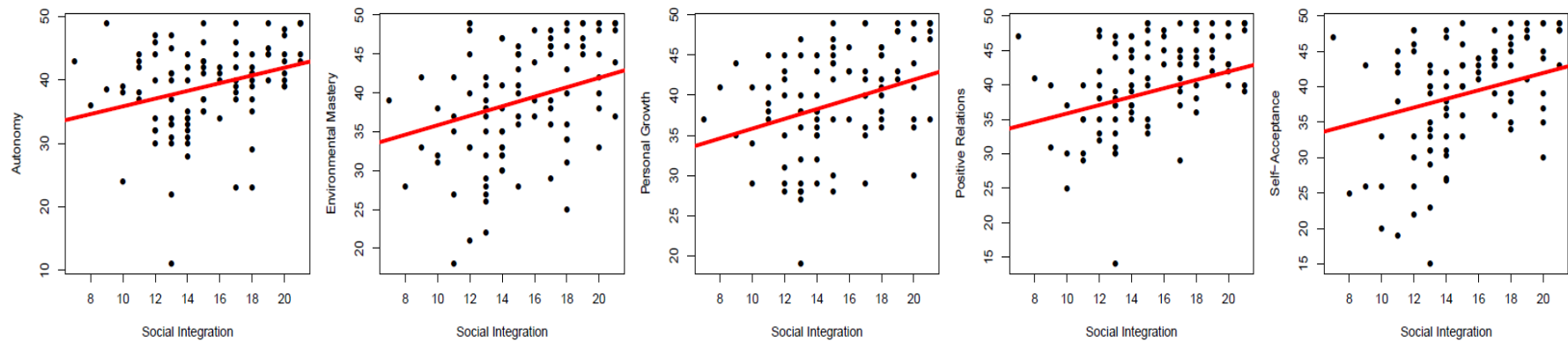
Research Question Two: Is there an association between *purpose in life* and psychological wellbeing among this sample of African Americans? Table 6 shows the unadjusted and adjusted associations between purpose in life and the five dimensions of psychological wellbeing, with 95% confidence intervals. Again, there was little difference found between the unadjusted and adjusted models, showing that demographic and socioeconomic variables had minimal confounding effects on the outcome. There were positive associations between purpose in life and each of the five domains of psychological wellbeing (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, and self-acceptance), holding all else constant. The findings showed that for every one-unit increase of purpose in life, increases were seen across all dimensions of wellbeing, with averages of .40 units for autonomy, .63 for environmental mastery, .56 for personal growth, .45 for positive relations, and .66 for self-acceptance. Tests of the hypothesis that these β coefficients were non-zero all had *p*-values of <0.001. Figure 7 depicts the scatterplots that illustrate the positive relationships between purpose in life and each of the psychological wellbeing scales.

Table 6

Unadjusted and Adjusted Associations Between Purpose in Life and Each Psychological Wellbeing Scale, with 95% Confidence Intervals (CI)

	Autonomy		Environmental Mastery		Personal Growth		Positive Relations		Self-Acceptance	
	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value
Unadjusted Model										
Purpose in Life	0.43 (0.26,0.59)	<0.001	0.62 (0.45,0.78)	<0.001	0.58 (0.44,0.71)	<0.001	0.48 (0.33,0.63)	<0.001	0.63 (0.46,0.81)	<0.001
Model R²	*0.213*		*0.367*		*0.424*		*0.294*		*0.355*	
Adjusted Model	0.40 (0.22, 0.57)	<0.001	0.63 (0.47, 0.80)	<0.001	0.56 (0.42, 0.69)	<0.001	0.45 (0.31,0.59)	<0.001	0.66 (0.50,0.82)	<0.001
Purpose in Life										
Age	0.02 (-0.11, 0.15)	0.790	0.02 (-0.10, 0.14)	0.746	0.03 (-0.07, 0.12)	0.593	0.11 (0.01,0.22)	0.034	0.11 (-0.01,0.23)	0.080
Female	-3.05 (-5.80,-0.30)	0.030	-2.96 (-5.56,-0.35)	0.027	-1.01 (-3.06, 1.04)	0.328	0.28 (-1.92,2.49)	0.800	-2.40 (-4.92,0.12)	0.061
Education		0.793		0.444		0.398		0.118		0.442
Less than H.S. Graduate	0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)	
H.S. Graduate	3.65 (-2.01, 9.32)		-0.58 (-5.95, 4.80)		-2.12 (-6.34, 2.11)		-3.13 (-7.67,1.42)		-1.07 (-6.26,4.12)	
Some College	2.23 (-3.38, 7.84)		-2.81 (-8.14, 2.51)		-1.45 (-5.63, 2.73)		-2.83 (-7.33,1.68)		-3.78 (-8.92,1.36)	
College Graduate	3.63 (-2.03, 9.29)		-3.04 (-8.41, 2.33)		-0.58 (-4.80, 3.64)		-0.38 (-4.93,4.16)		-2.30 (-7.48,2.89)	
Years in Neighborhood	0.09 (-0.01, 0.18)	0.069	0.00 (-0.09, 0.10)	0.915	0.04 (-0.03, 0.11)	0.296	-0.02 (-0.10,0.06)	0.581	0.01 (-0.08,0.10)	0.808
Years in State	-0.05 (-0.12, 0.02)	0.128	-0.06 (-0.12, 0.00)	0.064	-0.07 (-0.12,-0.02)	0.007	-0.05 (-0.10,0.00)	0.066	-0.06 (-0.12,0.00)	0.062
Own Home	-1.06 (-4.07, 1.95)	0.484	0.78 (-2.08, 3.64)	0.589	-3.02 (-5.26,-0.77)	0.009	-0.66 (-3.08,1.75)	0.587	0.25 (-2.51,3.00)	0.859
Model R²	*0.319*		*0.477*		*0.544*		*0.426*		*0.505*	

Figure 7.

Scatterplots comparing Purpose in Life to each Wellbeing Scale.
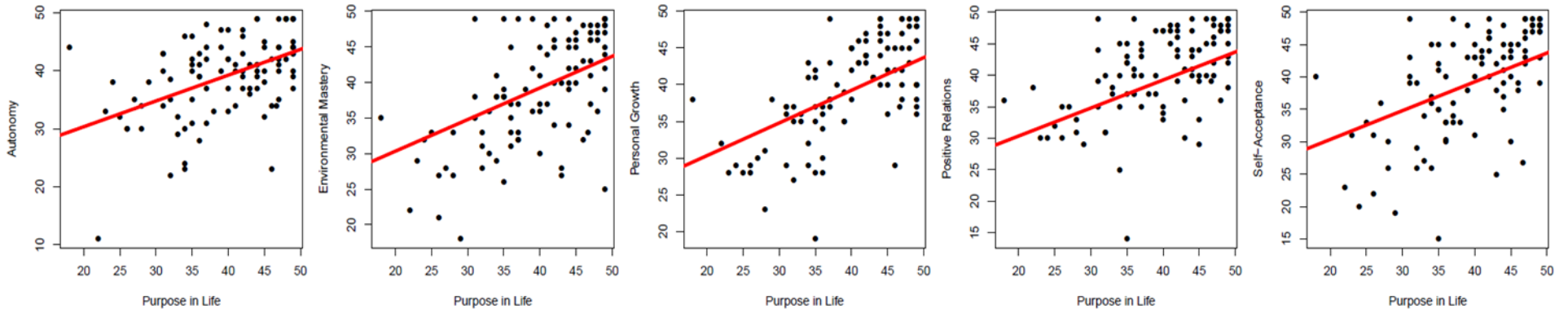
Research Question Three: Does *purpose in life moderate* the relationship between *sense of community* and *psychological wellbeing* among this sample of African Americans? An interaction effect was statistically significant for the wellbeing domain of self-acceptance, $p = 0.032$ after adjusting for potential confounders, but not the other four domains of wellbeing (see Table 7). This finding demonstrated that purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and self-acceptance. There was little difference found between the unadjusted and adjusted models, showing that demographic and socioeconomic variables had minimal confounding effects on the outcome. In models that included both purpose in life and sense of community, the effect of purpose in life on psychological wellbeing remained relatively similar for the four dimensions of wellbeing that did not show a significant moderation effect, indicating little confounding influence by a sense of community (see Table 8). However, the impact of sense of community (social integration) decreased after controlling for purpose in life for the four dimensions of wellbeing that did not show a significant moderation effect (autonomy [.55 to .27], environmental mastery [1.12 to .72], personal growth [.75 to .35], and positive relations with others [.87 to .59]).

Table 7

P-values From Tests of Whether Purpose in Life Moderates the Effect of Social Integration on Each Wellbeing Scale

	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relations	Self-Acceptance
Unadjusted Model	0.935	0.846	0.643	0.15	0.025
Adjusted Model	0.903	0.766	0.502	0.266	0.032

Notably, despite the decreases above in sense of community, the effects for all dimensions of wellbeing remained positive and statistically significant, with the exception of the association between sense of community and autonomy, which had a *p*-value of .201. This

finding implies that although purpose in life may be somewhat confounding the effect of sense of community on psychological wellbeing, both purpose in life and sense of community were *independently* affecting the psychological wellbeing domains of environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relations with others. Figures 8 and 9 depict models that illustrate the confounding effects of the sequential levels of adjustment.

Purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and self-acceptance in a way that suggested that for every unit increase of purpose in life, the effect of sense of community on self-acceptance decreases by -.05. To better elucidate this effect, Figure 10 shows the result of a model that splits purpose in life into categories based on tertiles. Using tertiles allowed the effect of sense of community on self-acceptance for participants in each of those tertiles to be quantified. Categorizing purpose in life was necessary to address the challenge of interpreting interaction effects when both variables are continuous. Among participants in the lowest category (purpose in life score between 18–36), the effect of sense of community on self-acceptance was 1.27 (i.e., a one-unit increase in social integration implies a 1.27-unit adjusted increase in self-acceptance, on average). However, when purpose in life scores are higher, the effect of social integration on self-acceptance is not as strong.

Table 8

Unadjusted and Adjusted Associations Between Social Integration, Purpose in Life, and Each Wellbeing Scale, with 95% Confidence Intervals (CI)

	Autonomy		Environmental Mastery		Personal Growth		Positive Relations		Self-Acceptance	
	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value	β (95% CI)	p-value
Unadjusted Model										
Social Integration	0.31 (-0.08,0.70)	0.122	0.60 (0.23,0.97)	0.002	0.39 (0.07,0.71)	0.016	0.62 (0.29,0.96)	<0.001	3.26 (0.99, 5.54)	0.005
Purpose in Life	0.38 (0.20,0.55)	<0.001	0.52 (0.35,0.69)	<0.001	0.51 (0.37,0.66)	<0.001	0.38 (0.23,0.53)	<0.001	1.41 (0.61, 2.21)	<0.001
Social Integration X Purpose in Life									-0.06 (-0.12,-0.01)	0.025
Model R²	*0.233*		*0.429*		*0.458*		*0.382*		*0.461*	
Adjusted Model										
Social Integration	0.27 (-0.14, 0.68)	0.201	0.72 (0.36, 1.08)	<0.001	0.35 (0.05, 0.65)	0.021	0.59 (0.28, 0.89)	<0.001	2.89 (0.81, 4.96)	0.007
Purpose in Life	0.36 (0.17, 0.54)	<0.001	0.52 (0.35, 0.68)	<0.001	0.50 (0.36, 0.63)	<0.001	0.35 (0.21,0.49)	<0.001	1.33 (0.60, 2.05)	<0.001
Social Integration X Purpose in Life									-0.05 (-0.10, 0.00)	0.032
Age	0.01 (-0.12, 0.14)	0.920	-0.01 (-0.12, 0.11)	0.875	0.01 (-0.08, 0.11)	0.807	0.09 (-0.01,0.19)	0.074	0.06 (-0.06, 0.17)	0.315
Female	-3.18 (-5.92,-0.43)	0.024	-3.31 (-5.72,-0.89)	0.008	-1.19 (-3.19, 0.82)	0.242	-0.01 (-2.06,2.05)	0.995	-2.82 (-5.13,-0.51)	0.018
Education		0.836		0.284		0.309		0.077		0.305
Less than H.S. Graduate	0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)		0 (ref)	
H.S. Graduate	3.36 (-2.31, 9.02)		-1.37 (-6.35, 3.61)		-2.51 (-6.64, 1.62)		-3.78 (-8.01,0.46)		-1.28 (-6.06, 3.51)	
Some College	2.02 (-3.58, 7.62)		-3.40 (-8.32, 1.53)		-1.74 (-5.82, 2.34)		-3.31 (-7.49,0.88)		-4.01 (-8.73, 0.71)	
College Graduate	3.24 (-2.44, 8.91)		-4.10 (-9.09, 0.89)		-1.11 (-5.24, 3.03)		-1.25 (-5.49,2.99)		-2.95 (-7.73, 1.83)	
Years in Neighborhood	0.08 (-0.01, 0.18)	0.096	-0.02 (-0.10, 0.07)	0.718	0.03 (-0.04, 0.10)	0.434	-0.04 (-0.11,0.03)	0.295	-0.01 (-0.09, 0.07)	0.857
Years in State	-0.05 (-0.12, 0.02)	0.145	-0.05 (-0.11, 0.00)	0.072	-0.07 (-0.12,-0.02)	0.008	-0.05 (-0.10,0.00)	0.075	-0.04 (-0.10, 0.01)	0.127
Own Home	-0.79 (-3.82, 2.24)	0.605	1.52 (-1.15, 4.18)	0.261	-2.65 (-4.86,-0.44)	0.019	-0.06 (-2.32,2.20)	0.959	0.80 (-1.75, 3.35)	0.533
Model R²	*0.333*		*0.56*		*0.572*		*0.512*		*0.596*	

Figure 8

Model Results for the Effect (and 95% Confidence Interval) of Purpose in Life on Wellbeing with Sequential Levels of Adjustment. Note: The *model results for Self-Acceptance adjusted for both Purpose in Life and Social Integration are not shown because there was a significant interaction.*

Effect of Purpose in Life on Wellbeing
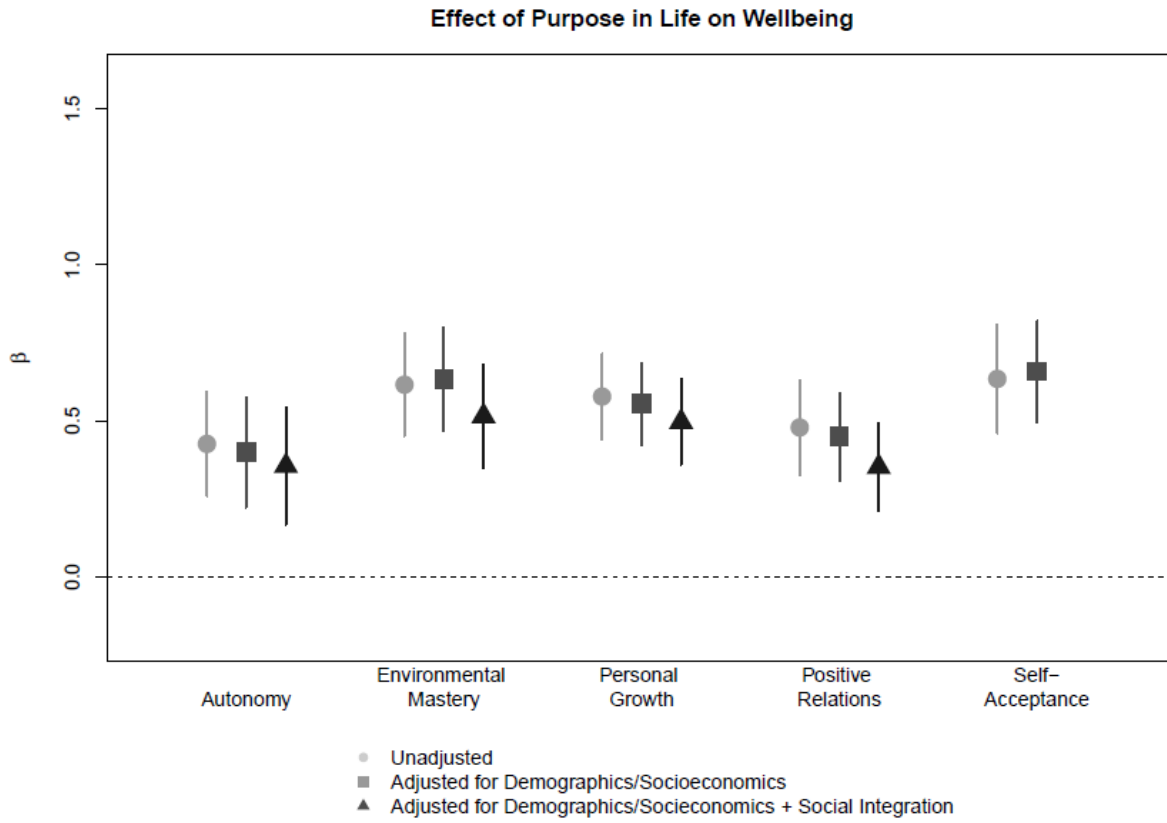
Figure 9

Model Results for the Effect (and 95% Confidence Interval) of Social Integration on Wellbeing with Sequential Levels of Adjustment. Note model results for Self-Acceptance adjusted for both Purpose in Life and Social Integration are not shown because there was a significant interaction.

Effect of Social Integration on Wellbeing
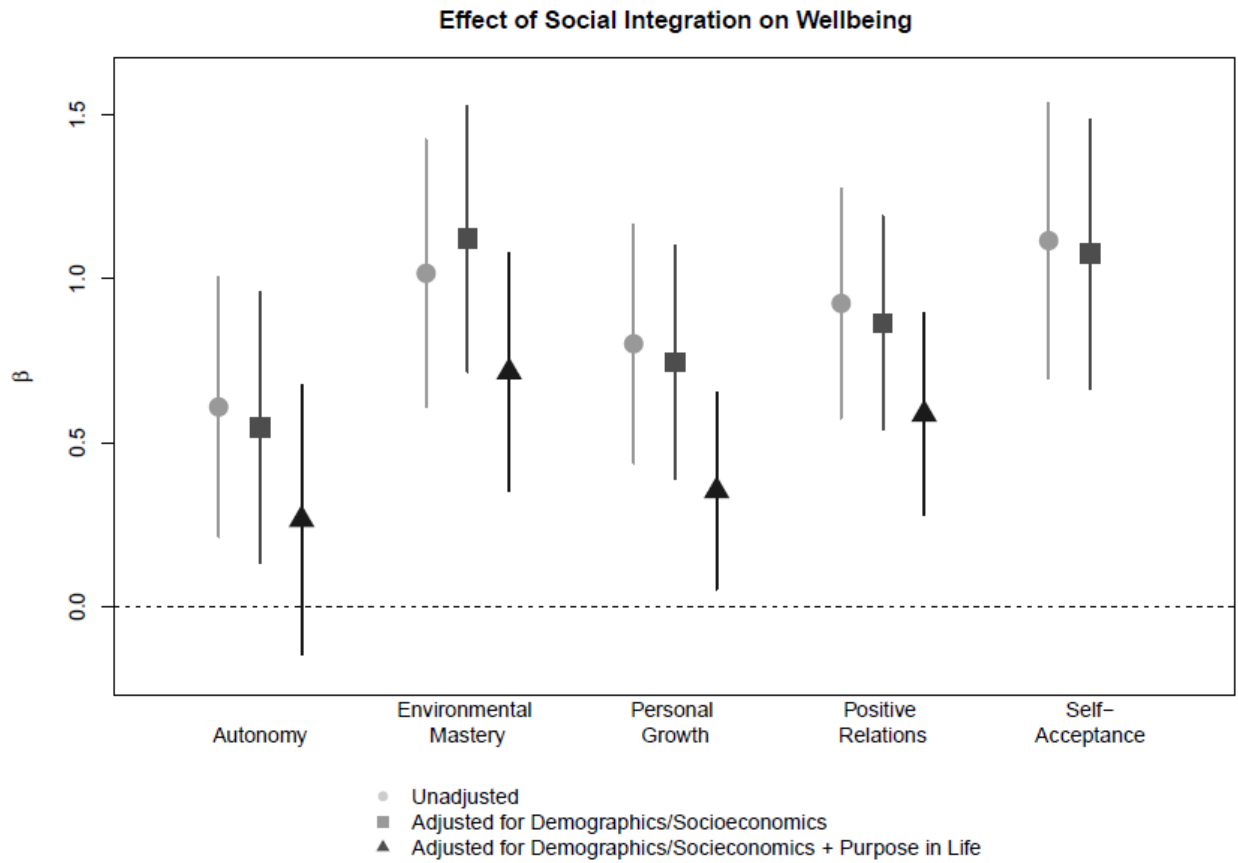
Figure 10

Adjusted Model Results for the Effect (and 95% Confidence Interval) of Social Integration on Self-Acceptance at Different Levels of Purpose in Life. This model was adjusted for demographics/socioeconomics and included an interaction between social integration and tertiles of Purpose in Life. For reference, the point estimates are 1.27, 0.66, and 0.37 for Purpose in Life values of [18,36], (36,44], and (44,49], respectively.

Effect of Social Integration on Self−Acceptance
at Different Levels of Purpose in Life
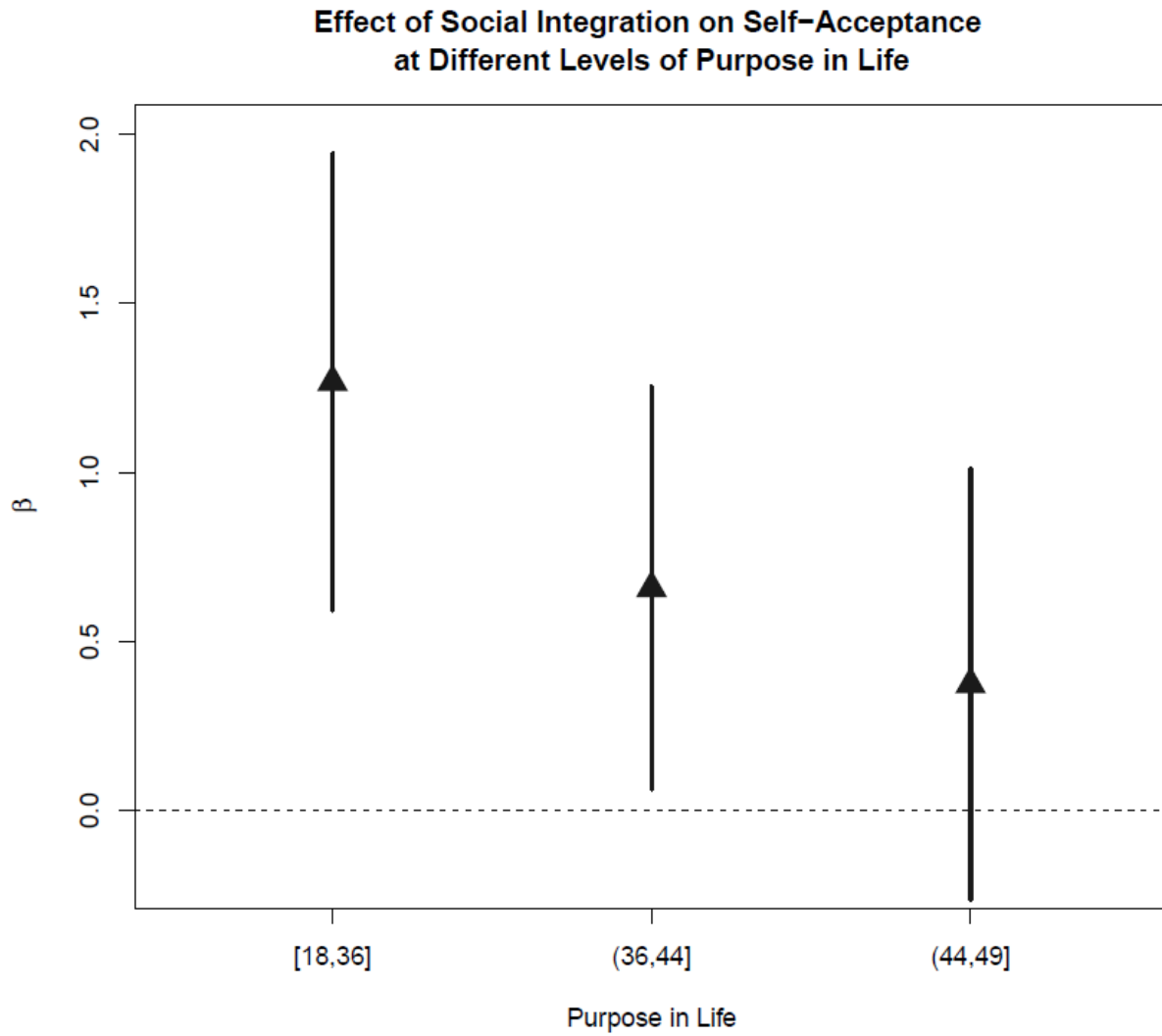
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This dissertation project explored the relationships between psychological wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose in life in a sample of mid-life African Americans. The research questions explored eudaimonic wellbeing using a multidimensional model (Dissanayake, 2016), an approach that has scarcely been seen in previous research with this population. A fundamental interest in this study was whether purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. The following section elucidates how this investigation's findings fit into the larger schema of psychological wellbeing research among African Americans. The chapter also presents an overall summary of findings, implications for future research, practical implications, and study limitations, followed by a brief conclusion.

Sense of Community and Psychological Wellbeing Among African Americans

The first research question explored whether there was an association between sense of community and psychological wellbeing. In this examination, sense of community had significant positive relationships with all five dimensions of wellbeing—autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. These findings support the conceptual underpinnings of sense of community as outlined by Sarason (1974), which emphasized the essential and causal relationship between sense of community and wellbeing. Davidson and Cotter (1991) also inferred a causal relationship in their study, which found strong positive correlations between sense of community and hedonic wellbeing.

However, other scholars have posited that sense of community and wellbeing may reciprocally influence each other, as well as individuals' experience with the community (Coulombe & Krzesni, 2019; Glynn, 1981); thus, further investigation is needed to establish if

causal relationships can be made. Although this study did not examine cause and effect, it did demonstrate that sense of community and wellbeing are interconnected. This finding aligns with Nowell and Boyd's (2010) work which suggests that elements of sense of community (e.g., the emotional history and/or concerns shared among many African Americans) play an essential role in maintaining or enhancing psychological wellbeing.

The results from this current study also echo the findings of Coulombe and Krzesni (2019), who demonstrated that sense of community was associated with multiple dimensions of psychological wellbeing in a Canadian sample that included mid-life adults. However, Coulombe and Krzesni (2019) found that demographic controls explained the variance in their results for psychological wellbeing, which is not the case for the present study where the unadjusted and adjusted models for sense of community and psychological wellbeing garnered similar results.

In summary, this study's findings affirm that there is a significant positive relationship between sense of community and psychological wellbeing among African Americans, as measured by autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. Notably, no studies have been found to date that examines associations between sense of community and multidimensional wellbeing among African Americans. Therefore, these findings contribute to this body of research by filling a gap in scholarship on this topic and among this population. The next section discusses findings from research question two.

Purpose and Psychological Wellbeing

The second research question examined whether there was an association between purpose in life and psychological wellbeing. The results showed that purpose had significant positive relationships with all five dimensions of wellbeing, previously named. Ryff (1989) and

Ryff and Singer (1995) postulated that purpose in life was a component of positive functioning and mental wellness essential for psychological wellbeing. This current study used Ryff's purpose in life subscale and found evidence to support Ryff and Singer's assertions. Similarly, McKnight and Kashdan (2009) espoused the benefits of purpose in life in describing the consequences of purposeful living. The authors attest that purpose in life is related to positive outcomes such as psychological, physical, and social wellbeing, with potential improvements in behavioral consistency and occupational routines.

Garcia-Alandete's (2015) and Zika and Chamberlain's (1992) studies mirror the findings of the present study in international samples. They examined purpose and meaning in life and psychological wellbeing in Spain and New Zealand, respectively. Similar to this current project, Garcia-Alandete used Ryff's (1989, 1995) psychological wellbeing scales, and the results yielded strong associations between meaning in life and all dimensions of psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) used hedonic measures of wellbeing, yet they still found strong positive correlations for the relationship between meaning in life and psychological wellbeing. The present examination of purpose and psychological wellbeing contributes to this scholarship by presenting evidence that the positive effects found in previous studies extend beyond the international and predominately White American samples and includes mid-life African Americans.

Ryff and colleagues (2003) reported that among their African American sample, education heightened the experience of purpose in life, and men garnered higher wellbeing scores than women. This information was a supportive factor in the decision to control for sex and education in the present study. However, the confounding effects witnessed by Ryff et al. (2003) were not evident in this project, as purpose in life scores were nearly identical in the

unadjusted model as for the model adjusting for the social-demographic factors of sex, age, education, homeownership, and time in neighborhood and state. It is unclear why there was such little confounding in this study, but one clear difference is that the participants in Ryff and colleagues' sample all lived in New York City, whereas the sample in the present study represents African Americans from across the United States.

The Moderating Effect of Purpose on Sense of Community and Psychological Wellbeing

The third research question investigated whether purpose in life moderated the association between sense of community and psychological wellbeing among African Americans. The findings from this exploration resulted in purpose in life moderating the effect of the relationship between sense of community and the psychological wellbeing domain of self-acceptance. Multitudinous studies have demonstrated the influence that purpose in life has as a moderator between numerous constructs (Beach et al., 2020; Burrow & Rainone, 2017; Chan et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2018; Krok, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Marco et al., 2016). Therefore, this finding was not unexpected, especially when considering that Lamis and colleagues (2014) had demonstrated that purpose in life moderated the effect of neighborhood or community disorder on stress in a sample of African American women. The findings from the present study mirror their outcome where purpose in life moderated the relationship between sense of community and the wellbeing domain of social acceptance.

Notably, the effect of sense of community on psychological wellbeing *decreased* after controlling for purpose in life, demonstrating that purpose in life was confounding the relationship between *sense of community* and *psychological wellbeing* (see Figures 7 and 8). However, this decrease was not found in the relationship between *purpose in life* and *psychological wellbeing*, where the effect of purpose on wellbeing remained similar when

controlling for sense of community. Yet, despite these observations, each construct remained statistically significant, demonstrating that both sense of community and purpose in life had independent effects on psychological wellbeing in this African American sample. These findings support works previously cited in this paper, including Johnson and Carter (2020), Mattis and colleagues (2016), Metz (2014), and Hong and colleagues (2018).

In Machell and colleagues' (2016) exploration of purpose in life as a moderator between poverty and antisocial behaviors among youth, they found that purpose attenuated the relationship between poverty and parent-reported bullying behavior and antisocial disobedience. The authors believed prosocial behaviors positively influence personal and societal wellbeing. Although Machell and colleagues focused on youth in their study, this current study supports their assumption that purpose in life can influence wellbeing outcomes, specifically within the domain of self-acceptance.

Summary of Findings

In this study, both purpose in life and sense of community had significant positive relationships with psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, purpose in life moderated the effect of sense of community on the psychological wellbeing domain of self-acceptance. Previous studies have shown that a lack of purpose and meaning in life contributes to increased risks of psychopathology (Heisel & Flett, 2004; Hong et al., 2018; Kim, Shiba et al., 2020). This study complements these findings by demonstrating that the purpose in life is associated with multiple dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing and moderates the relationship between sense of community and the wellbeing domain of self-acceptance.

Unexpectedly, the moderating effect of purpose was seen only in the relationship between sense of community and the domain of self-acceptance. A possible explanation for the

intermingling of the effect of sense of community and purpose may be related to the experience of racial socialization and Black identity. Black identity has been previously associated with wellbeing outcomes (Lewis et al., 2018), particularly self-acceptance (Wilson et al., 2017). Hence, Keyes' (2009) suggestion that racial socialization and Black identity facilitates purpose and meaning in life may explain how the racial socialization that occurs in communities is inter-related with the experience of purpose.

Another noteworthy observation is how the adjusted scores for autonomy were the lowest of the five dimensions (sense community, .55; purpose in life, .40; and the interaction, .36). Although the autonomy values remained significant, the lower values were noticeable. As a reminder, some of the characteristics that describe high scorers of autonomy are *independent; self-determining; able to resist social pressure; and evaluates self by personal standards*. Low scorers of autonomy are *concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments of others to make important decisions; and conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways* (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 719).

There are several factors that may contribute to this finding, particularly among African Americans. First, the results may illustrate the Africultural ethos that persists among many African Americans (Nobles, 2013), reflecting the value of collectivism and social interdependence (Johnson & Carter, 2020; Mattis et al., 2016). In this case, African Americans may consider it a strength to value the opinions and expectations of respected individuals within their network of kinship and family supports (i.e., parents, aunts, uncles, clergy, and significant others) (Watkins & Jefferson, 2013). For example, Watkins (2012) cited evidence that high levels of critical and intrusive behaviors by family members predicted better mental health outcomes among African Americans (compared to Whites) as the confrontation is viewed among

Black families as an expression of concern. If this is the case, autonomy, as defined by Ryff (1989, 1995), may not be the best indicator of psychological wellbeing among African Americans.

Fotiadis and colleagues (2019) relates autonomy to the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan et al., 2008) and describes autonomy as "the capacity of an individual to make informed and uncoerced decisions … the extent to which an individual has control over their options and choices and meets their desires accordingly." Although remarkable strides have occurred to advance justice and opportunity for African Americans, many continue to face racial microaggressions, violence, and discrimination (Watson et al., 2020), which may affect individuals' sense of autonomy. The significantly positive yet lower scores for autonomy may reflect this dissonance of unprecedented cultural advancements in the face of continued stigma, threats, and slights that persist among African Americans.

One final observation to note is the lack of confounding influence of the sociodemographic variables. Previous research indicated that age, sex, and education had differential influences on various dimensions of wellbeing (Dissanayake, 2016; Ryff et al., 2003). Therefore, it was surprising to find that the results for the adjusted and unadjusted models were nearly identical. This finding may be partially explained by Assari (2018) and Assari and colleagues (2018), who found that sociodemographic factors affect wellbeing in African American samples differently than White Americans. In their studies, sociodemographic factors that commonly predict wellbeing in White Americans did not have the same effect among African Americans due to contextual factors and health and wellbeing disparities that exist between African Americans and Caucasians. The lack of confounding influence in the present

study may be reflective of Assari and colleagues' findings. Further exploration is warranted to understand these dynamics in future studies fully.

Study Limitations

The sample size for this study is relatively small, with 98 African Americans representing less than 3% of the 3,294 respondents; this challenge will persist in future waves of the MIDUS study due to death, frailty, and other types of attrition (Lein, 2018). Another limitation is that post-stratification weights were provided by the MIDUS study researchers. However, this project did not use them to generalize to all African Americans, as 98 individuals would not be sufficient to capture the diversity and complexities that exist across all African Americans living in a broad array of environments and settings in the United States. This limits the generalizability of this current analysis and warrants a large-scale wellbeing study with a nationally representative African American sample to maximize the rigor of the study and results.

Concerning instrumentation, the internal consistency for the self-reported assessments used in this analysis ranged from low to acceptable, demonstrating a need for more reliable measures. Furthermore, the use of self-reported instruments alone may produce biased results; thus, the inclusion of observational or survey data from others may provide more robust insights into participants' wellbeing. On a final note, sense of community was examined using the social integration scale in order to capture both relational and geographic sense of community. However, using scales explicitly designed to measure relational and geographic communities would eliminate ambiguity around the type of community the respondents are referencing. This information would provide essential insights for future directions for research and practice (i.e., the development of individual and/or community-level interventions).

With these limitations, the present analysis should be considered a small-scale exploratory investigation, specific to the African American participants in the MIDUS study. A further examination across a larger sample of African Americans with more robust measures is warranted to garner more firm conclusions.

Implications for Future Research

This investigation illustrated that the independent variables had differential outcomes on psychological wellbeing, based on Ryff's (1989, 1995) five dimensions. For example, the wellbeing dimension of autonomy had the lowest scores for both sense of community and purpose in life. Additionally, it is unclear why purpose moderated the relationship between sense of community and self-acceptance and not the other dimensions. These results are evidence that study constructs may distinctly influence various aspects of wellbeing. Therefore, future studies on wellbeing may benefit from using multidimensional models of wellbeing, which may capture these subtle distinctions and garner more potent insights (Dissanayake, 2016).

The results also highlight the value of community for the sample of African Americans in this study, as demonstrated in previous literature that describes Africultural values, which include social interdependence and connectedness (Boykin, 1986; Johnson & Carter, 2020; Mattis et al., 2016; Metz, 2014). However, it is unclear whether the participants in this study shared those values and, if so, how much those values were factors in the results. This uncertainty is partially due to the broad measure of sense of community using the social integration scale. Therefore, future research is needed to examine themes of sense of community within the African American context using more robust measures of both relational and geographic communities. The inclusion of qualitative research methods may also be valuable to explore nuances that cannot be detected using standardized instruments.

Lastly, examining how contextual factors may influence the experiences of psychological wellbeing, sense of community, and purpose in life in a nationally representative sample of African Americans may be foundational for future research. For example, Ryff and colleagues (2003) indicated that education and sex were influencers on purpose and wellbeing in their sample of African Americans living in New York City. However, Assari and colleagues (2018) found that sociodemographic factors do not predict wellbeing among African Americans as they have been shown to do among White Americans. Therefore, it may be insightful to understand the extent to which income, education, marital status, and other social demographic factors affect the aforementioned constructs in a nationally representative sample of African Americans. Studies exploring contextual factors relating to geographic communities (i.e., type of neighborhood, cohesion, poverty levels, etcetera) may also reveal valuable information that could inform community practice.

And finally, this study has demonstrated how African Americans are underrepresented in the MIDUS study, which is consistent with assertions by other scholars pointing out that African Americans are underrepresented in wellbeing research that focuses on constructs related to psychological flourishing (Clark et al., 2019; Mattis et al., 2016). To address this gap, wellbeing scholars can be intentional about integrating the use of African American individuals and cultural values into their research designs and sampling strategies. Generally speaking, wellbeing scholarship could be significantly enhanced if researchers worked to be inclusive of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color in their methodological approaches.

Practical Implications

This research demonstrated how sense of community and purpose in life are interrelated and valuable constructs for psychological wellbeing for this sample of 98 African Americans. The results suggest that the development and implementation of interventions designed to enhance a sense of community and purpose in life may produce favorable outcomes across multiple dimensions of wellbeing. Furthermore, this study's findings indicate that programs targeting psychological wellbeing may want to consider whether participants have experienced any disruptions in their sense of community. It is not uncommon for individuals and communities to experience transience in modern society, whether through changes in geographic location, experiences with online education, homelessness, or shifts in social identities (Stewart & Townley, 2020). These disruptions could interfere with important familial customs, social ties, and traditions, which may negatively affect psychological wellbeing (DuCros, 2019; Sharkey, 2015).

Programs focusing on wellbeing may also benefit from intentional community-building and activities that support community members with purposeful engagement. However, it should be noted that neither causality nor direction can be inferred from this current project. Thus, it is possible that the dimensions of psychological wellbeing may be key in developing a sense of purpose or strengthening one's sense of community. Because of this uncertainty, it may be most beneficial to develop a comprehensive approach that supports multiple levels of wellbeing.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between sense of community and wellbeing among African Americans and to determine if purpose in life had a moderating effect on the relationship. A cross-sectional secondary data analysis was performed to examine

the relationships between sense of community, purpose in life, and wellbeing among a sample of African American men and women who participated in the Midlife in the United States study from 2013–2014 (Lein, 2018; Ryff, Almeida, Ayanian et al., 2016). The results from this study contribute to the body of knowledge on psychological flourishing among African Americans. In doing so, it addresses the underrepresentation of African Americans in wellbeing research that deviates from psychopathology, focusing instead on constructs that contribute to thriving among African Americans. Specifically, this study presented preliminary evidence showing that among African Americans, both sense of community and purpose in life are positively associated with multiple dimensions of psychological wellbeing. It also showed that purpose in life might moderate the relationship between a sense of community and the wellbeing domain of self-acceptance. Although this study does not make any causal inferences, it does demonstrate the crucial connections that community and living a meaningful life have on psychological wellbeing among African Americans.

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Psychological Wellbeing Scale

(Ryff & Keyes, 1995)

Including Purpose in Life

Directions: The next set of items explore your wellbeing. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Agree				**Disagree**		
Strongly	Somewhat	A little	Neither agree nor disagree	A little	Somewhat	Strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Autonomy

a. I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people. (R)

g. My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing. (R)

m. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.

s. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus. (R)

y. It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.

ee. I tend to worry about what other people think of me.

kk. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important. (R)

Environmental Mastery

b. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live. (R)

h. The demands of everyday life often get me down.

n. I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.

t. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life. (R)

z. I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.

ff. I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.

ll. I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking. (R)

Personal Growth

c. I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.

i. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world. (R)

o. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.

u. I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time. (R)

aa. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth. (R)

gg. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.

mm. I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.

Positive Relations with Others

d. Most people see me as loving and affectionate. (R)

j. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.

p. I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.

v. I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members and friends. (R)

bb. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others. (R)

hh. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.

nn. I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me. (R)

Self-Acceptance

f. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out. (R)

l. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself. (R)

r. I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.

x. I like most aspects of my personality. (R)

dd. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.

jj. My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.

pp. When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am. (R)

Purpose in Life

e. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.

k. I have a sense of direction and purpose in life. (R)

q. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.

w. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.

cc. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality. (R)

oo. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them. (R)

qq. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.

(R) indicates a reverse-scored item.

Appendix B

Social Integration Scale

(Keyes, 1998)

Directions: The next set of items explore your wellbeing. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Agree				**Disagree**		
Strongly	Somewhat	A little	Neither agree nor disagree	A little	Somewhat	Strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Social Wellbeing Social Integration Scale ($\alpha = 0.787$):

      a. "I don't feel I belong to anything I'd call a community"

      b. "I feel close to other people in my community" (R)

      c. "My community is a source of comfort" (R)

(R) indicates a reverse-scored item.

Appendix C

WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: November 24, 2020

To: Kieran Fogarty, Principal Investigator
Yatesha Robinson, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 20-11-29

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Sense of Community and Wellbeing Among African Americans - Does Purpose Matter?" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., *add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.*). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

A status report is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) November 23, 2021 and each year thereafter until closing of the study. The IRB will send a request.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at https://wmich.edu/research/forms.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.