eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

2012

A Qualitative Exploration of the Influence of Racism on Identity Development for African American Adolescent Males

John Corey Steele
Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation
Steele, John Corey, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Influence of Racism on Identity Development for African American Adolescent Males" (2012). *Dissertations.* Paper 395.
http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/395

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2012 John Corey Steele

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF RACISM ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY

COREY STEELE

CHICAGO, IL

DECEMBER 2012

Copyright by Corey Steele, 2012
All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support during this process. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Anita Thomas and committee members, Drs. Elizabeth Vera and Carolyn Mildner, for being such willing and outstanding professional role models for me over the past six years. I am not sure where I would be in my journey without their support. Finally, I sometimes struggle with making distinctions between ability, luck, and the mercy/blessings of a higher power. I can say with certainty that during this academic journey I have benefited from all three.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT vi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1
Oppression and African American Men 3
Statement of Problem 5
Background and Rationale 6
Purpose of Study 13
Significance of Study 17

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITIQUE 19
Identity and Self-Concept during Adolescence 20
Racial Identity Development 23
Racial Identity and African American Adolescents 31
Racial Socialization 38
Individual and Institutional Racism 42
African American Men and the Unique Intersection of Race and Gender 48
Visibility of African American Men 53
Microaggressions 56
Stereotypes and Societal Messages 60
Internalized Racism 63

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS 69
Participants 69
Focus Group Script 70
Procedures 70
Analysis 71
Self of the Researcher 73

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS 76
Being an African American Young Man 77
Influence of Life Experiences and Societal Messages on Perceptions of Being an African American Adolescent Male 81

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION 85
The Experience of Being an African American Adolescent Male 85
Influence of Life Experiences and Societal Messages 93
Implications 99
Limitations 100
Future Directions for Research 101

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT 104

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS 107

REFERENCES 110

VITA 125

ABSTRACT

The life circumstances facing African American adolescent males are reported with a fair amount of frequency by numerous media outlets in our society. Reports generally communicate negative circumstances facing African American adolescent males in the educational, economic, social, and political arenas. These sorts of life experiences have the potential to have a tremendous impact on the lives and development, particularly identity developmental process of young African American men; however, few research efforts have been devoted to specifically exploring the identity development process of African American adolescent males. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of being a young African American man and to explore how the types of experiences and socialization messages contribute to the perception of being a young African American man. A series of focus groups were conducted with African American adolescent males aged 14-18 (N=17). Participants were asked questions about what comes to mind when they think about African American young men, when was the first time that they realized that they were African American, and what do others think about African Americans. Several themes emerged from this investigation including, lives consistently filled with struggle, an appreciation for the history of struggle and sacrifice by African Americans, early encounter experiences that made participants aware of their Blackness, and negative stereotypes and perceptions of young African American men. Suggestions for future research and clinical implications

regarding the life experiences and identity development process for African American adolescent males are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While we celebrate the individuality of Black boys and Black men living in America and the diversity of perspective, talents and experiences that exist among them, we also acknowledge a shared experience that in some cases has resulted in triumph, and in others, tragedy. In many ways, two different worlds exist for African American men. In one world, the number of Black men graduating from college has quadrupled since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; in the other, more Black men are earning high school equivalency diplomas in prison each year than are graduating from college. In one world, Black families consisting of a father and a mother have a median family income nearly equal to White families; in the other, more than half of the nation's 5.6 million Black boys live in fatherless households, 40% of which are impoverished. The existence of these two worlds is both an example of what is possible, and a warning about the consequences of racism, inequality, and marginalization. After decades of neglect, the glaring disparities and injustices faced by Black males in America are finally beginning to receive the national attention they deserve (Hanson, McArdle, & Wilson, 2007).

That national attention, largely created by researchers and statisticians, has proclaimed findings that speak much more to distressing situations and outright tragedy than triumph. Boyd (2007) reports several disturbing findings/statistics that includes:

- A black man is more than six times as likely as a white man to be slain. The trend is most stark among black men 14 to 24 years old; they were implicated in a quarter of the nation's homicides and accounted for 15% of the homicide victims in 2002, although they were just 1.2% of the population.
- Black men are nine times as likely as white men to die from AIDS, and life expectancy for black men is 62.9 years - more than six years shorter than that of white men.
- The suicide rate among young black men has doubled since 1980.
- One in four black men have not worked for at least a year, twice the proportion of non-Hispanic white or Latino men. And trends suggest one-third of black males born today will spend time in prison.

These findings are just the “tip of the iceberg” so to speak when it comes to examining the difficult life circumstances that young African American men face. Thirteen percent of our nation’s adolescents live in poverty. Whereas, nine percent of White American adolescents live in poverty, thirty percent of African American adolescents’ lives are impacted by poverty, more than double the national average (Dolgin, 2011). It has been widely reported that African American urban students, particularly males have some of the poorest rates of high school completion. In Chicago for example, less than forty percent of African American males entering the ninth grade will graduate four years later, compared to fifty-five percent of their female counterparts and fifty-eight percent of White students (Roderick, 2003). If the statistics that have been referenced thus far are not disturbing enough, we have not even started to discuss

potentially one of the greatest perils facing young African American men, racism. Racism can have a devastating impact on one's emotional state and sense of self.

Oppression and African American Men

It seems that we are in the midst of an era in which researchers are putting forth more effort in regards to attempting to achieve a better understanding of African American men. In any attempt to achieve a solid understanding of the life circumstances of African American men, it is essential that we understand the concept of racial oppression, and its influence on psychological functioning and racial identity development.

Racism

Scholars and researchers have hypothesized that racism embedded in American society and enacted by individuals, institutions, and systems can act as chronic or life event stressors for Blacks and that the experience of racism may play a role in high rate of stress-related mental and physical illnesses prevalent among Blacks (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007). The effects of racial oppression are far reaching. Racism is pervasive, operating at the interpersonal and institutional levels simultaneously, its effects are cumulative, spanning generations, individuals, time, and place—encompassing much more than discrete acts. Consequently, psychological injury that is due to racism is not limited to that caused directly by one perpetrator, at one time, in one place (Speight, 2007).

Bulhan (1985) defined racism as a system of oppression that is based on racial categories and domination that designate one group as superior and the other(s) as

inferior and then uses these perceived differences to justify inequities, exclusion, or domination. According to Jones (1997), racism may occur at three levels as follows: (a) individual (i.e., person against person), (b) cultural (i.e., devaluation of a racial group's cultural practices or products), or (c) institutional (i.e., discriminatory laws and social practices).

Although racism has been found to have detrimental effects on people of color, researchers have suggested that interpersonal racism has decreased, exemplified by the fact that race-based hate crimes are viewed as socially unacceptable and have reduced significantly over the past few decades (Nadal, 2008). Many authors have posited that because the United States has become more politically correct, most individuals are much more aware of racism and tend to avoid engaging in racist acts (Sue, 2010). However, although individuals may not be consciously racist, their biases and prejudices may manifest in more subtle and unconscious ways. For example, although most people self-report that they are not racist and uphold egalitarian values, they may unconsciously maintain negative feelings toward racial and ethnic minority groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2006). As a result, although interpersonal racism may no longer be as overt as it may have been in the past, racism may now take on more subtle forms (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). This new form of discrimination has been identified as symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), modern racism (McConahay, 1986), aversive racism (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002) and racial microaggressions (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzales, & Willis, 1978).

Microaggressions

In recent years, there has been an increase in the appearance of the term microaggressions, in the field of psychology, education, and counseling (Nadal, 2011). Sue and colleagues (2007) have described several categories of microaggressions that exist, including racial microinsults (i.e., verbal and nonverbal behaviors that send denigrating messages to people of color) and racial microinvalidations (i.e., unconscious verbal statements in which the perpetrator may have good intentions, but which convey negative messages to people of color). Research and literature support the notion that people of color and other minority groups experience a number of microaggressions in their everyday lives and that these microaggressions have negative impacts on their lives, particularly their mental health (Nadal, 2011).

Statement of Problem

It can be hard to establish a positive identity and sense of self in the face of oppression and marginalization. However, if possible, the establishment of a positive identity and sense of self is "more than essential." Dolgin (2011) asserts that one of the most important tasks an adolescent faces is to form an identity. This is of course monumentally relevant as the current study focuses on African American adolescent males. Hopefully, we can now begin to see how the prospect of developing a positive and healthy identity can be uniquely difficult for members of racial minority groups, particularly during the developmental period of adolescence, which is already a challenging time of life, as individuals attempt to move from childhood identity to an adult identity status. Experiences of racism do not just have the power to act as life

stressors, they can cause the victims of racism to believe the negative perceptions that exist about his or racial group.

Research on internalized racism seems to be shedding more light on the effects of oppression. As psychologists and researchers move forward in their in studies of racism, particularly the injurious affect of racism, they must give ample attention to the elusive, yet nonetheless damaging effects of believing that one deserves his or her own oppression (Speight, 2007). According to Williams and Williams-Morris (2000), internalized racism refers to the acceptance, by racial marginalized populations, of negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves. The notion that oppression is internalized is commonly acknowledged and found in most conceptualizations of psychological dynamics underlying oppression (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1999; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). One can assume that experiences of discrimination, racial harassment, and discriminatory harassment contribute to the internalization of racism and experiences of discrimination and harassment need not be "blatant or necessarily traumatic" for oppression to be internalized. The internalization of racism may arguably be the most damaging psychological injury that is due to racism. Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) speculated that "images of personal inferiority are formed following experiences of shame and humiliation that erode self-confidence" (p. 132).

Background and Rationale

I've established that the development of self-concept and- identity is important for all. Identity development is particularly important during adolescence, when youth are distancing themselves from parents through increasing expressions of autonomy

(Erikson, 1968). In exploring who they are as individuals, adolescents depend on cues from the social environment (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). For youth who are members of racial minority groups the prospect of developing a healthy and positive identity can be particularly complex and challenging due to the potential influence of racism. In regards to the development of healthy and positive identities for African American youth, particularly African American adolescent males, there are several key concepts that must be considered; racial identity, stereotypes and media images of African American men, microaggressions, the intersection of race and gender for African American young men, cultural contexts that influence identity, and racial socialization messages.

At this point, it is important to establish basic understandings of self-concept and identity. Self-concept is often described as a global entity: how someone feels about himself or herself in general. Self-concept is similarly composed of beliefs about different aspects of the self, such as social skills, intelligence, and morality. These conceptions of different aspects of the self may differ, which helps explain how behavior varies in different circumstances. Whether individuals' self-concept is accurate is significant. People tend to have "multiple selves": the person they are, the person they think they are, the person others think they are, the person they think they will become, and the person they think others want them to become. Self-concepts may or may not be close approximations of reality, and self-concepts are always in the process of change, particularly during childhood and adolescence (Dolgin, 2011). McAdams (2001) states that identity is an understanding or way in which the self can be arranged and configured.

To the extent that a person's self-understanding is integrated synchronically and diachronically such that it situates him or her into a meaningful psychosocial niche and provides his or her life with some degree of unity of purpose, that person has identity.

Racial identity

Racial identity development can be thought of as an aspect of identity development. Numerous researchers have described the development of racial identity as an essential human need. Racial identity is defined as the significance and meaning of race to an individual's self-concept (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Racial identity can provide a sense of belonging. It can influence academic achievement, helps individuals stand up to the strains of discrimination, and bolsters psychological well-being (Arellano & Pedilla, 1996; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Umafia-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002). Several models of racial identity development have been created to articulate the process by which individuals develop attitudes and beliefs about the significance and meaning of racial group membership (Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers, 2006). Prestigious contributions to conceptions of the process of racial identity development have been offered by Cross (1971, 1978) and Sellers et al. (1998). These models of racial identity development explore the importance of race in the individual's conception of self and the meaning of being a member of a particular racial group. While studies of racial identity and the models of development that are associated with racial identity development have primarily focused on the experiences of adults, the process of racial identity related to the experiences of African American adolescent males is virtually non-existent. I find this notion to be alarming. Again, we've established that

the development of identity is important and that the development of racial identity is important for members of racial minority groups. How is it and why is that we don't know more about how African American adolescent males form identity, including racial identity? Adolescence is already a critical period for identity development (Erikson, 1968) and the prospect of developing an identity is arguably made more difficult for African American young men due to a long history of oppression, marginalization, and invalidation due to the combination and racial and gender group membership. In order to help change the life circumstances of young African American men, we need to know more about their identity development process and their perceptions of what it means to be young, Black, and male, and how they are influenced by messages from others about what it means to be young African American men.

Masculinity and Gender Identity

For better or worse, the intersectionality of race and gender for African American men demands that this group occupy arguably the most unique position in U.S. society. Several theorists have attempted to describe masculinity in African American culture, and how the traditional male role norms of American society can cause strain or conflict for African American men. African American men are subject to a very different set of socializing influences than White men and they live in a different social reality and have a different masculinity (Wade, 1996). Majors and Billson (1992) identified traditional West African culture and a history of slavery and oppression as influential in the constructions of masculinity in African American culture. Racism, in particular has been emphasized as having particular psychological consequences for the masculine identity of

African American men. Gender role conflict (GRC) is a construct that in recent times has been used to describe many African American men's struggle to achieve a masculine identity. GRC is particularly relevant for African American men due to their experiencing two sets of gender conflicting gender role messages, one stemming from African American culture and the other stemming from Euro American culture (Wester, Vogel, Wei, & McLain, 2006). What can be described as "traditional African culture" or African American culture is widely undervalued in U.S. society, while what some may consider aspects of Euro-American culture (i.e., individual success and economic achievement) are not always attainable for African American men due to the massive societal barrier that is racism (Wester, Vogel, Wei, & McLain, 2006). It is no stretch to imagine that some African American men's attempts to cope with racism and achieve personal success can lead to tremendous frustration and identities that seem undervalued and incomplete.

Stereotypes

Any understanding of how African American Adolescent male youth form identities would be incomplete without considering the stereotypes, messages, and media images that exist in our society about young Black men. Research suggests that by middle school, racial minority students are aware of and sometimes endorse societal stereotypes (McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Rowley et al., 2007).

Much of the research on race-related stereotypes has focused on stereotype threat, a concept that was introduced by Steele (1997), who proposed that awareness of a social stereotype that reflects negatively on one's social group can negatively affect

performance of group members. Stereotypes of Black men in the educational arena have long assisted in hampering the school experiences of young African American men. Due to an internalized belief in racial stereotypes and the influence of the social label of the Black man as a "villain," many teachers, White and Black, hesitate to engage and interact in a close and nurturing way with Black boys and often fail to provide them with superior educational service (Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 1997). Statistics seem to support the idea that the U.S. education system has largely failed African American young men and that this failure is at the least partially driven by stereotypes. According to the U.S. Census of 1900, 57% of Black males were illiterate. One hundred years later, the literacy rate among Black men persists at a high level of forty-four percent (Jenkins, 2006).

While still somewhat scarce, more investigations are being conducted that focus on media-driven stereotypes that haunt and harm Black men. In Rome's (2004) book, he asserts that African American men are depicted as "Black Demons" by the U.S. media. As "Black Demons" African American men are stereotyped as prone to criminality and violence and unable to fit into society. This stereotype serves as a justification for increased society created difficulties for Black men, including high rates of incarceration and close scrutiny. Jenkins (2006) states that one of the prevailing negative societal images has been that of the Black man as a perpetrator of violence. From his being stereotyped as an animal and brute in the years of American enslavement to his current stereotypical image as a gangster and thug, the Black male has maintained the stereotypical status of menace to society.

Across the life course, experiences in different cultural contexts (i.e., home, school, peer group, community) influence how one perceives oneself. The processing of phenomena and experiences not only influences how one feels valued or valuable (i.e., self-esteem), but it also influences how one gives meaning and significance to different aspects of oneself (i.e., abilities, physical attributes, behaviors, and activities).

Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is a framework that emphasizes and integrates individuals' intersubjective experiences (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). PVEST is a theoretical framework that combines Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The PVEST model asserts that it is not merely the experience, but one's perception of experiences in different cultural contexts that influences how one perceives oneself. These self-perceptions will influence whether one uses or downplays certain abilities, emphasizes or drains attention away from certain physical attributes, adopts or suppresses certain behaviors, engages in or shies away from certain activities (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). These self-perceptions at work can become evident when cultural stereotypes become self-fulfilling prophecies. For instance, a young African American male may take advantage of the knowledge that he is perceived by the larger society as violent and mischievous. That male may begin to behave more aggressively if he also perceives that aggressive behavior may increase his status among his peers (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997).

Socialization Processes

Another important element to consider related to how African American adolescent males form identity involves the socialization process and messages that this

group receives about race, specifically their race. Racial socialization prepares children to cope with racism through the development of a positive racial identity. Racial socialization also includes the process of raising children to be physically and emotionally healthy in an oppressive environment (Peters, 1985; Stevenson, 1993; Thomas & Speight, 1999). The family context is obviously important in the racial socialization process as parents prepare their children to be responsible members of society. Racial socialization messages may focus on racial pride, African American heritage, and familial and cultural history (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Racial socialization that emphasizes racial issues and prejudice, whether tacitly or explicitly, is argued to be of critical importance for African American adolescents (Miller, 1999; Scott, 2003; Ward, 1999). Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, and Bishop (1997) suggested that African American adolescents who do not possess an "internalized awareness of racism and their unique cultural heritage" are handicapped in terms of their ability to cope effectively with racism-related experiences and the accompanying stress. Research suggests that African American adolescent male youth tend to receive socialization messages related to coping with racism (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2005; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Racial socialization messages can play an important role in helping African American adolescent males secure a healthy racial identity.

Purpose of Study

The current study aims to explore the meaning of being an African American young man and the types of experiences that contribute to the perception of being an

African American male youth. While some generalizations can be made about the life experiences of all African Americans, African American men certainly encounter some unique experiences that potentially are not as salient for say, African American women. For example, there is some evidence that Black men experience more intense discrimination than Black women across several domains, including education, criminal justice, and retail sales (Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). As an African American man in my early 30s, I can relate to "two worlds" that tend to exist for Black men; the triumphs and the tragedies. The successes of African American men do not receive nearly the amount of attention in our society as the struggles this group encounters. While I will say that we can stand to learn from successes that many Black men obtain, we should not ignore the despair that is representative of the lives of so many. In the eyes of some, African American men tend to occupy the lowest levels of social stratification (Marger, 2003).

This study will focus on the experiences of young African American men between the ages of 14 and 18. The 14 to 18 age range represents a critical period in human development known as adolescence (Dolgin, 2011). "The psychological aspect of adolescencing" has been described as an identity "crisis" in which one is to re-examine and reinterpret one's childhood self and begin to craft the adult one will become (Erikson, 1968; Oyserman & Bybee, 2006). Needless to say, experiences that influence identity development during adolescence can potentially have long lasting effects. As this study explores meaning of being African American for young Black men and the types of the experiences that contribute to the perceptions of being an African American

young man, identity development will be a central focus. As this study will explore the meaning of being an African American young man and the experiences that contribute to the perceptions of being an African American young man, it should be noted that the unique intersection of gender and race, vital aspects of identity, will be examined. Some have asserted that there is a lack of information in the literature pertaining to the intersection of multiple identities such as race and gender. A lack of information in the literature on this topic seems to suggest a lack of consideration of the enormity and salience for their potential interaction (Constantine, 2001). Racial identity will be a key concept in this study. Racial identity has been defined as attitudes and beliefs an individual hold about his or her particular racial or ethnic group (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987; Thomas & Speight, 1999).

Qualitative research methods will be used to conduct this study. Qualitative research methods represent useful approaches to understanding the meanings people make of their experiences and can be used in situations where there is little or no previous research or when a process or phenomenon is not well known (Walker & Myrick, 2006). A primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. Qualitative methods can enable researchers to better understand the meanings that oppressed peoples make of their experiences and give voice to people who have been traditionally marginalized, made invisible, or silenced (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

The time to address the circumstances facing young African American men and the potential influence that these circumstances may have on this groups' identity

development process is more critical than ever. The election of now President Barack Obama, who identifies as African American has provided hope to many U.S. citizens from many different backgrounds. President Obama's election has also prompted some to point to him as evidence that the powerfully negative life circumstances that have historically plagued many African American men are no longer an issue and those who reference these circumstances are merely using hollow excuses. While it is important to acknowledge social progress that has been made in the United States, particularly, progress related to race relations, it is in this writer's humble opinion that the glaring disparities and struggles that exist within the educational, social, political, and economic arenas for young African American men are alive and well. So, with the understanding that there is still much work to do, this study will address the following research questions:

1) What is the meaning of being a young African American man? (It is hypothesized that young African American men will identify positive and negative meanings associated with being young, African American, and male. It is also hypothesized that messages that circulate throughout greater society regarding the meaning of being young, African American and male will influence young Black men's thoughts about themselves).
2) What types of experiences and socialization messages contribute to the perceptions of being a young African American man? (It is hypothesized that young African American men will identify stereotypes and experiences of racism as contributing to their perceptions of being a young African American man).

Significance of Study

This study is highly significant because African American men, particularly as young African American men continue to struggle to achieve full participation and value in our society. While research related to the experience of being African American and male is growing, one could argue that we still know relatively little about how African American young men are impacted by the messages that they receive about the meaning of being a young Black man. This study has also important implications for the field of counseling psychology. For close to two decades issues related to multiculturalism and diversity have been at the forefront of counseling psychology (Vera & Speight, 2003). In addition to its commitment to multiculturalism and diversity, counseling psychology has also proclaimed its commitment to social justice. This social justice perspective emphasizes societal concerns, including issues of equity, self-determination, interdependence, and social responsibility (Bell, 1997; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2008). The social justice perspective as it relates to the field of counseling psychology demands that psychologists move beyond multicultural competence and become agents social change for clients (Ivey & Collins, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003). How could this social justice perspective not apply to the life circumstances of young African American men? African Americans have historically been relegated to the margins of society. As we have discussed, African American young men continue to struggle to obtain full participation in the educational, economic, vocational, and social arenas.

The negative life circumstances that African American young men face have been well documented. The inequalities and injustices that African American young men face in the educational, political, economic, and social arenas can make establishing positive and healthy identities extremely difficult. As research and public discourse continue to stimulate conversation related to the disturbing realities for African American young men, the need to address circumstances many young Black men face is more important than ever. The current study aims to add to understandings of the young African American male existence in the U.S.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

This section of the paper presents the literature and research on factors related to identity development for young African American men. Identity development is process that can be described as continuous and lasts throughout the life-span. As the exploration and development of identity can be challenging at any stage of life, the prospect of developing identity can be particularly daunting during adolescence, as one begins to transition from his or her childhood self to his or her adult self. The African American adolescent identity process can be particularly unique and challenging due to the prospect of racial identity development. Racial identity development is an area of research that continues to gain more attention, particularly as it relates to the experiences of African Americans. In regards to race and identity, the genetic and/or phenotypic makeup of minority youth may expose young people to particular stereotypes or discrimination, and in turn challenge the search for positive self identity (Brittian, 2012).

As this study is related to the experiences of existing as an African American adolescent male youth and the influence of life experiences and societal messages on perceptions of being African American, this chapter will review and critique the existing literature on various aspects of identity that may be relevant for young Black men. In addition to identity development, other factors that could influence identity will be reviewed in this chapter including, self-concept, racial identity, individual and

institutional racism, microaggressions, the intersection of race and gender, the visibility of African American men, stereotypes and societal messages, internalized racism, race and mental health, and racial socialization, and contextual factors. The review and critique of the literature associated with the above factors will assist in strengthening the justification of my qualitative study that will explore the meaning of being an African American adolescent male and examine the experiences and societal messages that may influence perceptions of being young, African American, and male.

Identity and Self-Concept Development during Adolescence

Even before young people have developed identities, they have developed certain views of themselves. A critical developmental task of adolescence is the formation of a cohesive and positive sense of self (Mandara, Gaylord-Harden, Richards, & Ragsdale, 2009). Self-concept is a conscious, cognitive perception and assessment by an individual of himself or herself; it is one's thoughts and opinions about oneself. We will talk more about identity shortly; however it is worth mentioning that self-concept is more limited in scope than identity. Self-concept implies a developing awareness on a person's part of who and what he or she is. It describes what individuals see when they look at themselves, in terms of their self-perceived physical characteristics, personality skills, traits, roles, and social status. It might be described as a system of attitudes they have about themselves. It is the sum total of their self-definitions or self-images (Dolgin, 2011; Harter, 1990). Self-concept is important because it can motivate and direct one's behavior. There are a number of factors that can contribute to the development of positive self-concept; including family, socioeconomic status, and race. The self-concept

of African American Adolescents is enhanced if they have a positive racial identity (This will be discussed more fully later) (Dolgin, 2011; Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Cortez et al., 2007). Before we talk more specifically about the African American adolescent experience, it is worthwhile to talk more generally about the development of identity, particularly during adolescence.

Adolescence is a time of major transitions. At every stage of development, it is important to understand what leads to healthy development (Brittian, 2012). During adolescence there are a myriad of changes involving for example, changing cognitive abilities, rapid physiological growth, changing expectations from family, school, and society, and increasing social opportunities for the young person to assert his or her independence (Brittian, 2012; Eccles, Brown, & Templeton, 2008; Steinberg, 2005). Thus, individuals may identify themselves by their physical appearance, their gender, their social relationships, and membership in groups. Identity is personal because it is as sense of "I-ness," but it is also social, for it includes, "we-ness," or one's collective identity. Identity is intrinsically both an individual and social process (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Dolgin, 2011). Adolescents who have a positive identity have developed a sense of accepting themselves. Identity achievement helps people grow. Erikson suggested that when an adolescent achieved an identity, he or she would know how to successfully navigate the demands of different social contexts (Dolgin, 2011). In addition to Erikson's (1980) ideas on identity achievement (i.e., going through an active search for identity and finding one that fits ones social characteristics) and identity confusion or role confusion (i.e., failure to achieve and identity), James Marcia (1966,

1980) noted that two other identity statuses exist. Foreclosure occurs when there is no search but an identity exists. People with foreclosed identities usually assume the identity of their parents or guardian (Dolgin, 2011). Moratorium occurs when an active search for an identity takes place, but the individual forms no commitment. Marcia agreed with Erikson that identity achievement is the mature identity status. Marcia's ideas about general identity development did not seem to extend to the inclusion of racial identity development. Marcia's ideas about identity statuses have given rise to a large literature on differential aspects of identity, such as racial identity.

For African Americans, adolescence is a time when they begin to consider themselves with regard to race and ethnicity. The development of a racial identity has been described as an essential human need. Racial identity can provide a sense of historical continuity and a sense of belonging (Dolgin, 2011; Smith, 1991). Tatum (1997) suggested that in early adolescence, individuals begin to differentiate friendships by racial group and to show increased group esteem and ethnic exploration. While the development of identity has been universally regarded as essential, it has also been said that the attainment of identity, specifically positive identity may be particularly challenging for African American youth, because issues of race may complicate the search for an adaptive identity (Dolgin, 2011; Erikson, 1968). African American youth are undeniably charged with undertaking the monumental task of defining themselves in relation to their social status and racial group association.

Researchers have suggested that concepts of identity development, particularly the models developed by Erikson and Marcia have been tremendously beneficial in

regards to enhancing our understanding of human development. However, some limitations have been identified as well (Brittian, 2012). Erikson and Marcia's concepts of identity development, two highly regarded models, have been criticized for falling short in their regard to their explanations of the process of identity development. Brittian asserts that to Erikson, the identity process is controlled by inner biological pressures and affected by outer sociocultural ones. However, the young person is not an active agent in his or her own development. Brittian criticizes Marcia's model for leaving the process of identity development largely unspecified in that he does not discuss how individuals form a given identity status or move from one status to another. Therefore, Erikson and Marcia present views of identity that describe its role in contribution to healthy adolescent development, but it is unclear if or how adolescents can play a central role in navigating this developmental period. It is also worth noting that as previously stated, Erikson noted that race can make for a unique and challenging identity development process for young people of color, these models of identity development are absent of any consideration of racial identity development. Models that specifically consider racial identity development have to be examined to achieve some sort of understanding of how race can influence human development.

Racial Identity Development

Consistent with the historical and current emphasis placed on race within U.S. society, racial identity has been deemed a significant and influential factor for human development (Worrell & Gardner-Kitt, 2006) and is now a widely accepted construct within psychological literature (Carter, Pieterse, & Smith, 2008). In fact, racial identity is

perhaps the most explored dimension of African American life and functioning (Scott, 2003). Racial identity is defined as the significance and meaning of race to an individual's self-concept (Rowley, Burchinal, Roberts, & Zeisel, 2008; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Some scholars have contended that racial identity is a construct inherently distinct from ethnic or cultural identity, however, whereas ethnic or cultural identification may be covert and may vary over time, race, for the most part, remains overt and constant (Burrow, Tubman, & Montgomery, 2006). Racial identity includes but is not limited to, the extent to which an individual defines himself or herself in terms of race (racial centrality), one's sense of pride in group membership and evaluation of the relative merits of the group (private regard), and beliefs about how others view the group (public regard) (Rowley et al., 2008). Typically ascribed to individuals belonging to historically marginalized racial groups, the process of racial identity development is thought to be influenced by several factors, including individuals' emotional status, sociopolitical norms, and the degree to which individuals internalize social prejudices and racism (Worrell & Gardner-Kitt, 2006).

The importance of racial identity development has been detailed extensively in the literature and while it seems that racial identity development has been universally deemed as important, particularly for African Americans, there is some debate as to exactly how racial identity is important. Racially identity has consistently been conceptually linked with the psychological functioning of African Americans (Azibo, 1983; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Parham, 1989) and has been conceptualized as having both a direct and an indirect link to psychological well-being (Sellers, Copeland-

Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). While some have asserted that the empirical evidence for a direct link between racial identity and psychological functioning is inconclusive, others have argued that a strong identification with being Black and embracing a definition of Blackness that focuses on a specific African value orientation is a necessary component of healthy psychological functioning among African Americans (Sellers et al., 2006). Positive racial identity has been empirically linked to increased psychological adaptation and functioning, increased self-esteem and achievement (Carter, 1991; Parham & Helms, 1985; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Ward, 1990). Negative racial identity in African Americans has been theoretically linked to low self-esteem, problems with psychological adjustment, low school achievement, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, gang involvement, eating disorders, drug abuse, and involvement in crime. Due to the potential consequences of negative racial identity, it is imperative that African Americans develop a positive sense of self that includes a sense of racial pride (Thomas & Speight, 1999).

Several theories of racial identity development have been put forth to articulate the process by which individuals develop attitudes and beliefs regarding the significance and meaning of racial group membership (Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers, 2006). The seminal contribution to conceptions of the process of racial identity development for African American men was offered by William Cross, Ph.D. Cross's original identity development model consisted of five stages: (a) Pre-Encounter, (b) Encounter, (c) Immersion-Emersion, (d) Internalization, and (e) Internalization-Commitment. In the first stage, pre-encounter, the individual's world view is dominated by Euro-American

determinants (Cross, 2001). Individuals in the pre-encounter stage have low salience to race or may have strong anti-Black and pro-White feelings. During stage two, the encounter stage, the individual may encounter a shocking personal or social event that temporarily dislodges the person from his or her old worldview, making the person receptive to a new interpretation of his or her identity or condition (Cross, 2001). The experience that occurs during the encounter stage may cause individuals to challenge their previously held beliefs and individuals may experience feelings of confusion, alarm, and depression followed by guilt, anger, and anxiety (Cross, 2001). In immersion, the third stage, individuals immerse themselves in Afrocentric culture, including values, beliefs, and activities. This stage is characterized by intense feelings of anger. In the fourth and fifth stages, internalization and internalization/commitment, individuals have internalized their racial identity with their self-concept. The internalization stage signals the resolution of conflicts between the "old" and "new" worldviews. Ideological flexibility, psychological openness, and self-confidence about one's Blackness are evident in interpersonal transactions. Anti-White feelings decline to the point where friendships with White associates can be renegotiated. While still using Blacks as a primary reference group, the person moves toward a pluralistic, non-bigoted perspective (Cross, 2001). The fifth stage, internalization-commitment, is characterized by political activity to end oppression for all people.

A second noteworthy theory of Black racial identity development is the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The MMRI defines racial identity in African Americans as the

significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to their membership within the Black racial group within their self-concepts. This definition can be broken into two questions: “How important is race in the individual’s conception of self?”, and “What does it mean to be a member of this racial group”? The MMRI attempts to answer these questions (Sellers et al., 1998). With these questions in mind, four assumptions serve as the foundation for the MMRI. First, the MMRI assumes that identities are situationally influenced as well as being stable properties of the person. The MMRI takes a position similar to that of Stryker and other identity theorists, in that identity has both properties (Sellers et al., 1998; Stryker & Serpe, 1982,1994). Specifically, racial identity in African Americans has dynamic properties that are susceptible to contextual cues and allow the stable properties of identity to influence behavior at the level of the specific event. At the same time, there are also stable properties of racial identity that allow us to see differences in qualitative value and significance individuals place on the role race plays in how they define themselves (Sellers et al., 1998).

A second assumption of the MMRI is that individuals have a number of different identities and that these identities are hierarchically ordered (Sellers et al., 1998; Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994). Although a number of different criteria can be identified in the literature as placing various identities within a hierarchy, the MMRI uses criteria that are most consistent with those used by Rosenberg (1979). In examining the hierarchy of identities, the MMRI focuses on the importance that the individual places on race in defining him or herself. By explicitly conceptualizing racial identity as only one of many identities within self-concept, the MMRI provides the opportunity to investigate race

within the context of other identities such as gender and occupational identity. The relative importance of race compared to other identities may have important implications for the qualitative meaning that a person ascribes to being African American (Sellers et al., 1998). A third assumption of the MMRI is individuals' perception of their racial identity is the most valid indicator of their identity. Although the MMRI recognizes the role that societal forces plays in shaping the self, the emphasis is clearly on the individual's construction of his or her identity. Thus, the MMRI takes a phenomenological approach towards studying racial identity that focuses on the person's self-perceptions (Sellers et al., 1998).

Finally, the MMRI is primarily concerned with the status of an individual's racial identity as opposed to its development. The MMRI focuses on the significance and the nature of an individual's racial identity at a given point in time in the individual's life as opposed to placing an individual in a particular stage along a particular developmental sequence. In this way, the MMRI differs from developmental models, such as those proposed by Cross (1971, 1991) and Phinney (1992). The difference in emphasis does not place the MMRI in direct conflict with these models; instead it provides a potential compliment. Developmental models characterize individuals' racial identity according to where they reside on these developmental trajectories, while the MMRI provides a rubric from which to describe the significance and meaning of race at various points along the developmental trajectory. Using the MMRI along with some of the existing developmental models could help validate assumptions associated with both approaches

and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and development of racial identity in African Americans (Sellers et al., 1998).

With these assumptions as its foundation, the MMRI proposes four dimensions of racial identity that address both the significance and qualitative meaning of race in the self-concepts of African Americans. These four dimensions consist of racial salience, the centrality of identity, the regard in which the person holds the group associated with the identity, and the ideology of the identity. The MMRI considers racial centrality, regard, and ideology to be cross-situationally stable constructs. They should remain relatively the same over time and across different situations. According to the MMRI, racial salience is contextually influenced and variable dimensions influence behavior at the level of the particular event. Specifically, in situations where race becomes a salient identity, individuals' stable beliefs about the meaning of their racial identity (racial regard and racial ideology) are more likely to influence their interpretations of and subsequent actions during the event (Sellers et al., 1998; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). On the other hand, in situations where race is not salient, individuals racial regard and ideology beliefs are less likely to influence their interpretations and behaviors (Sellers et al., 1998). While these two models of racial identity are highly regarded as they are related to understanding racial identity development in African Americans, they do not specifically address the racial identity development process during adolescence during adolescence. Racial identities are learned early in life and they can function as a framework for interpreting experiences. Racial identities can serves as a means of understanding our connections with others. Experiences that we have according to our racial identities can

influence the way we see ourselves and experience the world around us. Research on African American identity continues to be a very popular topic in counseling psychology as evidenced by the increasing number of theses and dissertations devoted to the topic (Cokley, 2005). However, more research is needed that goes beyond the models that identify stages in the process of racial identity development. More research that fully explores the ways in which African Americans actually construct their racial identity is now needed (Cokley, 2002). For example, more research is needed that explores the relationship between racial identity development and other variables such as mental health, job performance/satisfaction, and academic achievement (Cokley, 2005).

Research on racial identity development also seems somewhat limited in that in the study of this process with different segments of the African American population has not been in abundance and has included numerous relatively small, individual samples. Seemingly, the bulk of racial identity investigation has been done with African American adults. Society could benefit from more research related to the process of racial identity development for African American children and adolescents, for example. This issue will be discussed in more detail later. Finally, the development of interventions or programs that might produce positive impact and movement in the racial identity development process is needed. This may prove to be particularly important to the field of counseling psychology, given its long standing interest in promoting positive change (Quintana, 2007).

Racial Identity and African American Adolescents

The salience of race and ethnicity in American society, racial group identification is particularly significant to African American youth (Townsend & Lanphier, 2007). Research reveals that there is consistent evidence to support the notion that identity exploration is a normative component of racial-ethnic minority adolescents' development. Specifically, across several longitudinal studies, there is evidence that African Americans manifest a gradual increase in racial identity exploration during adolescence (Quintana, 2007). At least two components of racial identity are salient and stable for individuals by the time they reach adolescence; awareness and identification. As related to racial identity development, awareness refers to the ability to distinguish between members of different races according to commonly accepted norms. Identification refers to the ability to correctly name one's own race (Byrd, 2012).

Mandara et al. (2009) suggests that there are two related perspectives on African American racial identity development that helps to guide most research in this area, which also help to make sense of African American racial identity development during adolescence. The cognitive perspective suggest that as children mature into early adolescence, they begin to process societal messages about certain phenotypic features, race-based hierarchies in wealth and academic tracks, and the plethora of racial stereotypes they will encounter. These messages are either challenged or reinforced by parents' racial socialization strategies, peers, teachers, and media. Thus, one's cognitive readiness determines when they are capable of developing a more sophisticated notion of racial identity, but the social context will determine the form of racial identity they will

develop (Mandara et al., 2009). A second set of theories propose stage or status models of racial identity development similar to Erikson's (1968) stages of identity development, although they have a few different assumptions (Cross, 1991; Helms, 2007; Mandara et al., 2009). These models suggest that one is in the first stage when parental and societal beliefs about one's race and racial identity are accepted without critical reflection. African American parents can raise their children to have positive racial pride, but this period is usually described as a time of uncritically accepting negative stereotypes and beliefs about African Americans (Mandara et al., 2009; Phinney, 1989). This initial stage is usually followed by some period of exploration, where individuals question their earlier, usually negative views and assumptions about African Americans. This exploration, which is similar to the immersion stage in Cross's (1991) model, is characterized by a great desire to learn about one's heritage and connect with members of their group. During this stage, individuals tend to focus on the positive stereotypes of their group while downplaying and often reacting to negative stereotypes. According to the stage models, the best outcome is for one to reach an achieved stage in which they have attained a more secure sense of oneself as a member of their racial group. This final stage is characterized by a lack of defensiveness regarding racial matters and a genuine comfortableness with racial aspects of their identity (Cross, 1991; Mandara et al., 2009; Phinney, 1989).

Although little evidence exists regarding the age at which one typically enters each stage, a few studies have shed light on this question. For instance, Phinney and Tarver (1988) found that almost 30% eighth grade students could be classified in the

exploration stage. Another study of tenth grade, non-White students found that 55% could be classified as being in pre-exploration stages, 23% in exploration, and 22% in achieved stage of racial identity (Mandara et al., 2009; Phinney, 1989). Also consistent with most stage models, Pahl and Way (2006) followed a small group of African American and Latino adolescents throughout high school and found that exploration began to decelerate after the tenth grade.

Another model of racial identity development that more specifically details the experience of African Americans during adolescence was developed by Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001). Cross and Fhagen-Smith developed a model that suggest that African Americans pass through six sectors across their life spans: (a) infancy and childhood, (b) preadolescence, (c) adolescence, (d) early adulthood, (e) adult nigrescence, and (f) identity refinement. Cross and Fhagen-Smith suggested that as African American children enter preadolescence, variable social identities begin to emerge, namely, low race salience, high race salience, and internalized racism. Among those with low racial salience, race and Black culture are irrelevant facets of their identity. Rather, significance is placed on other dimensions of their emerging identity such as religious orientation, social status, or unique talents and abilities. As implied, race emerges as a central feature of the self-concepts among African American preadolescents with high racial salience. Last, Cross and Fhagen-Smith suggested that some African American preadolescents may begin to internalize the negative stereotypes, messages, and images of Black people and Black culture. Hence, their emerging identities may be “riddled with confusion, alienation, negativity, and lack of coherence. Upon entering adolescence,

African American teens possess emerging identities with variable salience to race and Black culture. Cross and Fhagen-Smith assert that during adolescence African Americans will continue a process of development that involves a testing and sorting of ideas and issues concerning race and Black culture. These researchers continue by stating that self-concepts that emerge from this process may be more or solely focused on areas that have very little racial or cultural content.

It has been argued that due to the seemingly perpetual and permeating issue and problem of race in American society, it seems likely that race will be central to the self-conceptions of many African Americans throughout their lives (Scott, 2003). While the model proposed by Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) does address racial identity during adolescence, it also seems to account for African Americans who never make race or African American culture a central aspect of their self-conceptions, yet arrive at an achieved identity and enjoy psychological and social health. What of those African Americans, particularly those African American adolescents who incorporate race as a central aspect of their identities? How do these young people "make sense of their racial identities", particularly as they presumably continue to have race-related encounters and experiences?

African American youth in the United States are not only expected to undergo the typical developmental experiences that are the hallmark of adolescence, but they are also coping with a world in which they may be expected to experience racial prejudice (Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). African American teens possess emerging identities with variable salience to race and Black culture (Cross &

Fhagen-Smith, 2001). Cross and Fhagen-Smith assert that during adolescence African Americans will continue a process of development that involves a testing and sorting of ideas and issues concerning race and Black culture. These researchers continue by stating that self-concepts that emerge from this process may be more or solely focused on areas that have very little racial or cultural content.

It has been argued that due to the seemingly perpetual and permeating issue and problem of race in American society, it seems likely that race will be central to the self-conceptions of many African Americans throughout their lives (Scott, 2003). While the model proposed by Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) does address racial identity during adolescence, it also seems to account for African Americans who never make race or African American culture a central aspect of their self-conceptions, yet arrive at an achieved identity and enjoy psychological and social health. What of those African Americans, particularly those African American adolescents who incorporate race as a central aspect of their identities? How do these young people "make sense of their racial identities", particularly as they presumably continue to have race-related encounters and experiences?

The prospect of undergoing racial identity development makes the identity development process all the more delicate and challenging, some may argue. African American youth in the United States are not only expected to undergo typical development experiences that are the hallmark of adolescence, such as physical growth, but they are also coping with a world in which they may be normatively expected to experience racial prejudice (Brittian, 2012; Sellers et al., 2003). The identity

development process, particularly the development of racial identity for African American youth in a society where racism and discrimination continue to exist, may cause these young people to experience a continuous state of conflict. Indeed, discrimination and prejudice may prompt youth of color to develop negative identities, which may consequently, lead to deviant behaviors and poor psychological functioning (Brittian, 2012; Davis & Stevenson, 2006). The task of developing healthy racial identity may also be challenging for African American adolescents because they must negotiate mainstream, minority, and Black cultural and community experiences (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002).

There are areas of future study/considerations related to the development of racial identity for African American adolescents, specifically African American adolescent males are similar to the future considerations previously detailed for racial identity development in general. The meaning that adolescents draw from their developmental experiences and the type of identity that is formed are embedded within complex systems ranging from the family context to societal-level influences, and in particular historical frame of reference (Brittian, 2012). For example, one may consider what effect the election of the first African American president of the United States will have on this generation of African American adolescents and how African American adolescents will interpret this historical event. The contemporary study of African American adolescents' identity has largely ignored the complexity of this facet of human development. Aspects of one's identity become more prominent depending on the context. Differing aspects of identity serve different functions for various adolescents and for their healthy

development (Brittian, 2012). The varying aspects of identity may work together to promote positive functioning among African American adolescents, or the contrary may be true in that varying aspects of identity may be in conflict within a single individual (Juang & Syed, 2008). More research is needed to examine the relationship between different aspects of one's identity, such as racial and gender or racial and religious (Brittian, 2012). For instance, attending an African American church may provide positive reinforcement and support for one's ideas about being African American and prepare adolescents to deal with negative events. However, one's racial identity may be in conflict with other aspects of identity, such as one's sexual orientation (Brittian, 2012; Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002; Zamboni & Crawford, 2007), depending on the level of acceptance in the community. It is also worth noting that the nature of African American's racial identity development during adolescence is less clear than general racial identity development because very few studies have assessed changes in racial identity development during this period (Mandara et al., 2009). More investigations that explore the complex meaning of racial identity for African American adolescent males are needed. Studies that investigate the process of racial identity development for African American adolescents are not abundant and there are even fewer studies that specifically examine this process for African American adolescent males. Such investigations would help in understanding the context, challenges, and assets that are a part of the lives of African American adolescent males (Sellers et al., 2006). Achieving an understanding of and helping young African American men understand

their race-related experiences can have long lasting implications in regards to self-concept and quality of life**.**

Racial Socialization

The family context is most important in the early development of the child's self-concept, personal identity, and racial identity (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Spencer, Dobbs, & Swanson, 1988) and parents serve as the primary socializing agent for children (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Socialization has been defined as the preparation of children to accept adult roles and responsibilities in society through the teaching and learning of conventional beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Socialization serves to transmit values, beliefs, and ideas around lifestyles, and is derived from cultural knowledge of adult tasks and the competencies needed for adequate functioning within society (Thomas & Speight, 1999). Racial socialization, in particular, prepares children to cope with racism through the development of a positive racial identity, and is the process of raising children to be physically and emotionally healthy in an oppressive environment (Stevenson, 1993; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Racial socialization occurs through both implicit and explicit teachings (Greene, 1992). Socialization in African American families differs according to the types of messages taught to children. Parents who possess a mainstream orientation are not likely to emphasize race, but more so emphasize self-confidence, personal self-esteem, competence, and hard work to defend against societal insults and racial barriers. Those who possess a minority orientation are more likely to emphasize the significance of race in society and the institutional barriers their children will likely

confront due to their racial and ethnic background. Parents who possess a Black cultural orientation are more likely to emphasize the history and achievement of African Americans. Parents possessing this orientation attempt to instill a sense of racial pride in their children (Scott, 2003; Thornton, 1997).

In their study on racial identity and racial socialization attitudes of African American parents, Thomas and Speight (1999) found that the overwhelming majority (96%) of parents felt that racial socialization was important in order to prepare their children to cope with the reality of racism. The parents indicated that they are the ones who must socialize their children, as peers and teachers may give children misinformation or no information because Black history is not often taught in the school system. In the Thomas and Speight (1999) study, parents were able to list a plethora of specific racial socialization messages given to their children. Specific messages included the importance of achievement, the presence of racism, coping strategies, African heritage, religion and spirituality, racial pride, self-pride, moral values, and egalitarian messages. Thomas and Speight reported that African American parents give both boys and girls messages on racial pride, self-pride, the importance of achievement, negative societal messages, overcoming racism, moral values, and the importance of family. Girls, however, where given messages that encouraged them to pursue a good education, whereas boys were given more messages on overcoming racism. Stevenson et al. (2002) found that boys reported significantly greater racial socialization around alertness to discrimination than girls did. Stevenson, McNeil, Herrero-Taylor, and Davis (2005) found in their study on the influence of perceived neighborhood diversity and racism

experience on the racial socialization of Black youth that African American male youth are getting more messages about how to manage adversity. This finding is supported by the greater heightened awareness of Black male endangerment that many parents are worried about, and even in the absence of a reported racist event, parents of boys may be more inclined to communicate additional coping strategies than parents of girls (Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Stevenson et al., 2002; Stevenson et al., 2005; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Stevenson et al. (2005) also found that in high culturally diverse neighborhoods boys with a history of personal racism report very high levels of coping with antagonism socialization compared to their male counterparts who have not experienced racism. Parents may feel that their sons are endangered and stigmatized in culturally diverse neighborhoods as problems given the societal images of criminalized Black males (Meeks, 2000; Stevenson, 2004; Stevenson et al., 2005). To compensate for this potential insult, teaching /boys to manage the onslaught of racial and nonracial antagonism is a protective coping strategy. Moreover, Black male youth (and their parents) who have experienced racism may not question the reality of this social hostility and accept the need for protective response (Stevenson et al., 2005).

There are at least a couple of areas of future study that will potentially broaden our knowledge of racial socialization, particularly related to the life experiences of African American adolescent male youth. The studies previously cited suggest that parents are instrumental in their sons and daughters development of personal and racial identity and can serve as their children's primary socialization agent. Studies cited also indicate that parents who are influential in their children's identity development and serve

as important socialization agents can provide young people with crucial information regarding the realities of racism. This can be very beneficial to African American adolescent males, as research suggests that parents tend to provide boys with messages about how to manage adversity and overcome racism. These kinds of messages can prove invaluable for young Black men in a racist society. However, what about those African American male adolescents who do not have parental figures available or whose parent(s) do not invest in their identity/racial identity development or prepare them for the realities of racism? Do these young men receive messages that help them strengthen their personal identities and prepare them for a racist society? Oliver's (2006) research on "the streets" asserts that negative messages and a history of oppression can prompt some African American males to seek identity and validation in street culture. Are all African American adolescent males who don't have parents or parental figures available to help them develop a positive identity and prepare them for the realities of racism destined for "the streets"? More research is needed that explores the outcomes for young Black men who do not receive assistance with positive identity/racial identity development and important socialization messages. In addition to more research that explores the experiences of young Black men who do not have parental figures available to attempt to positively influence identity development and provide important socialization messages, African American young men and society at large for that matter can benefit from the development of interventions that can enhance community, family, and individual resilience processes (Stevenson et al., 2005) and promote positive outcomes regarding racial identity development and racial socialization practices.

Individual and Institutional Racism

Racial groups in the United States have a long history of encountering racism. Those of African descent have a long record of harsh oppression rooted in legally sanctioned slavery and segregation (Fischer, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). In spite of phenomenal progress made over the past 400 years by America's former enslaved captives, racism remains as a major barrier to actualization of the American dream for the majority of African Americans. Even for those fortunate enough to have achieved a high level of professional standing and economic security, being Black in America still exacts a heavy psychological, emotional, and somatic toll. Because racism is embedded in the social, psychological, cultural, and institutional structure of American society, for most African Americans, there is little chance of completely escaping from its deleterious effects (Hacker, 1992; Utsey, 1998). Racism has been defined as an ideology of racial superiority followed by discriminatory and prejudicial behavior in three domains: individual, institutional, and cultural (Jones, 1997; Neville & Pieterse, 2009). Jones and Carter (1996) defined racism as

> The transformation of racial prejudice into individual racism through the use of power directed against racial groups and their members, who are defined as inferior by individuals, institutional members, and leaders, and which is reflected in policy and procedures with the intentional and unintentional support and participations of the entire race and dominant culture. (p. 3)

Racial stratification and systemic racism have been and continue to be endemic and ingrained in all aspects of American life: in customs, laws, and traditions (Carter, 2007). Given the history of race relations in the United States, it is inevitable that African Americans are routinely exposed to discriminatory employment and educational

practices as part of their daily life and career experience (Allman-Brissett & Turner, 2010; Evans & Herr, 1994). Researchers (Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999) suggest that in any given year, 98% of African Americans experience some type of racism. For many African Americans, the consequences of experiencing racism on a daily basis can be severe.

Due to the social construct known as race and the presence of racism in the U.S., social scientists have consistently reported that, as a group, Blacks tend to be at the lowest levels of social stratification (Marger, 2003) and continue to experience significant disparities in the areas of health, education, and wealth (Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Williams & Collins, 2004). Marginalization characterizes the African American experience, particularly for Black men. Social scientists often reference two indicators of social participation, namely rates of incarceration and employment, when discussing the current status of Black men within American society (Western & Pettit, 2005). Mauer (2003) reported that almost one in three young Black men, ages 20-29, were under some form of criminal justice supervision. Moreover, half of all prison inmates are Black, a statistic that is significantly disproportionate to the percentage of Blacks in the general population. When one looks at employment rates, it is evident not only that Black men experience higher rates of unemployment, but that even when they .are employed, their incomes are significantly less than those of their White counterparts (Western & Pettit, 2005). These types of statistics reflect the profound impact of structural racism (Pieterse & Carter, 2007).

It is critical to remember that racism, a particular form of oppression, is not only interpersonal but also cultural and structural. Racism is not just people mistreating others through avoidance, name-calling, stereotyping, or racial profiling. Racism is "systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions," and it operates through "the normal processes of everyday life" (Speight, 2007). Sue (2005) details three forms of racism that impact all of us. Individual racism is the form of racism that we most associate with personal acts of racial prejudice and discrimination. Individual racism is any attitude or action, whether intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, which subordinates a person or group because of their color (Sue, 2003). The implication here is that individual racism may be manifested in well-intentioned people who are unaware that their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors may oppress people of color (Ridley, 1995; Sue, 2003). Thus, it is the outcome, subordination because of color, that is the important element.

A second form is called institutional racism. Rather than residing in people, it is present in many organizations in our society. Institutional racism is any organizational policy, practice, and structure in government, business, unions, schools, churches, courts, and law enforcement agencies by which decisions are made as to unfairly subordinate persons of color while allowing other groups to profit from such actions (needs citation). Examples include housing patterns, segregated schools, discriminatory employment and promotion policies that ignore and distort the history of minorities (Sue, 2005). Cultural racism is the third form of racism. Cultural racism is the umbrella that influences and allows individual and institutional racism to flourish (Sue, 2001a). Cultural racism is the

belief that one group's history, way of life, religion, arts and crafts, language, values, and traditions are superior to others makes up this particular category (Sue, 2005).

It is the belief of some, that the more insidious, damaging, and harmful forms of racism are the everyday, unintentional, and unconscious ones perpetrated by ordinary citizens who believe they are doing right. Although deliberate, overt acts of racism injure, frighten, and kill innocent people, they are perhaps less detrimental to people of color than what psychologists label modern or contemporary racism. Certain features of modern racism that allow people to remain oblivious to its existence have been identified through research. It is often subtle, indirect, and unintentional. It operates outside the level of conscious awareness. Unlike people who commit hate crimes, many ordinary citizens may not possess an underlying belief in the inferiority of minorities, but their bigotry is most strongly expressed by a belief in the superiority of White culture and values. Modern racism is more likely expressed in a failure to help rather than in a conscious desire to hurt (Sue, 2005).

Though somewhat limited, research has demonstrated that racism affects its targets in significantly negative ways. Existing research efforts identify racism as a health risk of major proportions for African Americans (Darity, 2003). The chronic strain associated with the experience of racism has been implicated in the development of several stress-related diseases (e.g., high blood pressure, stroke, cardiovascular disease), psychiatric disorders (e.g., substance abuse and depression), low self-esteem, and lower levels of life satisfaction (Broman, 1997; Utsey, 1998). Harrell (2000) asserted that when examining the life stress of people of color, experiences of racism must be considered.

Other scholars and researchers have hypothesized that racism embedded in American society and enacted by individuals, institutions, and systems can act as chronic or life event stressors for Blacks and that the experience of racism may play a role in high rate of stress-related mental and physical illnesses prevalent among Blacks (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007). The effects of racial oppression are far reaching. Racism is pervasive, operating at the interpersonal and institutional levels simultaneously, its effects are cumulative, spanning generations, individuals, time, and place—encompassing much more than discrete acts. Consequently, psychological injury that is due to racism is not limited to that caused directly by one perpetrator, at one time, in one place (Speight, 2007). The impact of racism on African Americans' mental health will be discussed in more detail later.

Studies that have examined the impact of racism on the life experiences of adolescent African American boys suggest that personal experience with racism are related to lower self-concept and higher levels of hopelessness. Nyborg and Curry (2003) state that these findings parallel the findings in the adult literature, which includes feelings of avoidance, feelings of inadequacy, somatic complaints, and low self-esteem. Nyborg and Curry also report that findings from their study also support Simons et al. (2002), who found that racial discrimination was related to depressive symptoms. It is possible that personal incidents of racism are more directly tied to the self than are perceptions of institutional racism and therefore have a strange effect on one's self-concept and feelings of hopelessness. In sum, Nyborg and Curry (2003) assert that the results of their study suggest that the experience of racism is a real phenomenon for

African American boys and is correlated with measures of their psychological well-being. While the research on the impact of racism on the life experiences of adolescent African American males is not vast, a few other related studies, particularly studies on the impact of racism on the mental health of urban Black youth reveal that psychological distress, depression, and anger are natural responses to racially hostile environments (Hawkins, Hawkins, Sabatino, & Ley, 1998; Stevenson et al., 2005). Other studies that examine the impact of racial oppression on African American adolescents have established that racial oppression is also associated with conduct problems, risky behavior, and the undermining of academic success (Brody et. al., 2006; Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Nyborg & Curry, 2003).

Unfortunately, there is still a great need for continued research concerning the impact of racism on young African American men and based on existing research in this area, there are some implications to be considered related to young African American men and racism. Improving the life circumstances of young African American men and continuing to diminish the impact and presences of racism seem to go “hand-in-hand”. Included in improving the life circumstances of young African American men, is the need of a collective effort to re-adjust society’s views and values of young Black men and re-invest and begin to view this group as a vital asset to society and tied to the growth of local economies and social order (Jenkins, 2006). Another closely related area of needed of additional research should include examining the role of support as a buffer against the negative influence of racial oppression (Brown, 2008). There is currently a need for more research that investigates how Black adolescents may process race-related messages

(Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). These studies could include investigations that explore how coping and emotional responses to racism can influence psychological well-being among African American boys (Nyborg & Curry, 2003). A better understanding of the complete range of psychological consequences associated with societal racism and oppression can prove to be a significant factor in developing the appropriate interventions for improving African American's quality of life (Utsey, 1998).

African American Men and the Unique Intersection of Race and Gender

We are all aware of the power the media possesses in its portrayal of certain segments of our society. Some researchers have asserted that little has been said through research regarding a comparison of White and Black men via the media. What is known is that the portrayal of these two groups of men tends to be stereotypical and the stereotypes concerning White and Black men differ. White men are often stereotypically presented as possessing the characteristics of the ideal man. Black men are stereotypically defined as intimidating, aggressive, or even hostile. Black have also been overrepresented as musicians, athletes, and oversexed (Hazell & Clarke, 2008). African American men have paradoxically been cast as both overly masculine (they indulge in their desire for women too much and out of proper bounds) and not masculine enough (they fail to enact the patriarchal role of breadwinner and family enforcer) (Ross, 1998). Juxtaposed with the construction of both Whiteness and maleness, Black masculine identity is incessantly subjected to the demands of validating itself against the dominant discourse: White-masculine identity. For this reason the shared experience of Black masculine identity, through both the personal formation of one's identity and the effects

of social interaction, produces imagined notions of the ways Black men should and do exist (Johns, 2007). The social categorization of Black maleness, Black masculinity, Black male identity or any term which we seek to understand the implications of being both Black and male, in the United States, is an imagined social construct with real consequences (Fields, 1990; Johns, 2007). The concept of Black masculine identity was fashioned during and codified after the formal collapse of the American institution of slavery. Thus, Black masculine identity is a product of American history. It has been socially constructed from narrowly defined understandings of White maleness (Johns, 2007). Black masculine identity is heavily imbued with pernicious stereotypes introduced to strip enslaved Africans of humanity. These stereotypes are still prevalent in contemporary U.S. society and this prevalence is at least one factor contributing to the cycle of Black male disengagement, alienation, and misrepresentation (Ogbu, 2003). Black men continue to occupy the lowest rungs of most, if not all, quality of life indicators. The negative implications of how Black men are identified and tracked by society deserve critical attention (Johns, 2007). This discourse on race and gender continues to result in portrayals of Black men as "problem people."

Little research exists exploring the intersection of race and gender or male gender role conflict and racial identity, particularly related to the experiences of African American men (Wester, Vogel, Wei, & McLain, 2006). It is interesting that, as far back as 1981, Pleck suggested that the intersection of race and gender may cause minority men to be particularly vulnerable to gender role identity distress, but it was not until 10 years later that Stillson, O'Neil, and Owen (1991) first demonstrated a relationship between

race and such vulnerability. In 1995, Lazur and Majors theorized that "to be a man of color means confrontation between racial identity and gender role demands from popular culture." Gender role conflict is particularly relevant for men of color due to their experiencing two sets of conflicting gender role messages, one stemming from African American culture and the other stemming from Euro American culture, while at the same time living in a society that often presents them from meeting either set of expectations (Canales, 2000; Wester et al., 2006). African American men in particular, seem caught in a conundrum. If they attempt to meet one set of gender roles (i.e., Euro-American), they likely frustrate the other set of gender roles (i.e., African American) while societal racism often does not allow them to fully meet either set. Hence, they find themselves in situations where they must violate one, fail to meet the other because of oppression, and experience subsequent discrepancy between both sets of gender roles as well as their own developing self-concept (Wester et al., 2006). Lazur and Majors (1995) provide a powerful description of this experience:

> If an African American male acts according to his culture, those in dominant culture view his as "different", bar his access to resources and may even engage in acts of violence against him. If he acts according to the prescriptions of the dominant culture, he ascribes to a system that, in effect, negates him, and he is considered by his own people to have "sold out."

In 2006, Wester et al. explored African American men's experiences with gender role conflict. Some of their findings included that African American men experienced psychological distress due to gender role conflict. Examples of psychological distress included negative views about their racial group (Black people) and "self-hating". Findings from Wester et al. also suggest that racial identity partially mediated the effects

of gender role confusion on psychological distress for African American men. African American men who internalized a racist understanding of themselves as men of color suffered more from their attempts to navigate the male gender role than did men who internalized a racial identity based on an appreciation of their African American heritage (Wester et al., 2006).

There are few studies that examine the intersection of race and identity for African American men and even fewer for African American adolescent males. However, Johns (2006) did explore how African American adolescent males at an elite self-selecting school understand and respond to perceptions and expectations of Black men projected on them by teachers in school and families at home. Johns contends that most African American male adolescents struggle on some level with pejorative images of "bad Black boys." Johns found that the young men involved in this study struggled to maintain their sense of self. While the young men involved in this study understood the benefits of attending an elite self-selecting school and believed that they owed it to their parents to do well, they ultimately struggled to cope with the de facto culture of an elite self-selecting school. Some believed they had something to prove to friends and family at home, but also articulated the difficulty of being in classrooms and a school where they were the minority and were frequently reminded of that fact. Johns found that the young men who participated in his study clearly understood how teachers and school personnel perceived them. Most of the young men from the study spoke of being labeled as troublemakers and they felt that they stood out. Many expressed awareness that they were "watched," always "on the minds of their teachers," and perceived as "trouble"

(Johns, 2006). For the African American young men in this study, being in trouble or labeled a trouble maker had been such a frequent experience that it was no longer significant when talking about their experiences in school. However, despite stating as much, many of them spoke in detail of disappointment and frustration with the reality that they, as Black male students, were subject to expectations, perceptions, and punishments that their non-Black male counterparts were not.

The existence of dominant and often negative images of Black men is undeniable. The Johns (2006) research is significant and unique, in that it explores young African American men's perceptions of themselves. Frequently, research related to the experiences of African American men have focused on attending to, contextualizing, or simply highlighting the litany of problems associated with and attributed to Black males, which ultimately revitalizes socially constructed notions of Black males as beyond love (Duncan, 2002). For far too many Black men, negative conversations, about the things Black men are believed to do, or not do, negatively impact opportunities and shape life courses in profound ways (Johns, 2007).

As previously indicated, current research continues to expand on the largely negative information related to the life experiences of African American men, however it seems critically important that we now seek solutions to crises that envelop Black males. There is a lack of research that explores ways to challenge, disrupt, and supplant negative and harmful images of African American men. By first identifying and then continually challenging stereotypes about the things we expect from Black men and the ways we interpret individual performance of masculine traits, we can begin the process of re-

imagining African American male identity. The current study aims to help in this effort, for instead of going down the well traveled path of simply reporting the many negative life circumstances that African American young men face, the goal here is to seek to help bring more understanding to young African American men's ideas about being Black and how life experiences and societal messages influence their perceptions of what it means to be young, African American, and male.

Visibility of African American Men

Franklin (1999) has brought much attention to the concept of invisibility syndrome. Franklin offers the concept of invisibility syndrome as a potential detrimental psychological effect of existing as a Black man in a society where African Americans have historically been marginalized. Invisibility is defined as an inner struggle with feeling that one's talents, abilities, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism (Franklin, 1999). There are seven dynamic elements to the invisibility syndrome paradigm that represent the intrapsychic process in feeling invisible; (a) one feels a lack of recognition or appropriate acknowledgment; (b) one feels there is no satisfaction or gratification from the encounter (it is painful and injurious); (c) one feels self-doubt about legitimacy – such as "Am I in the right place; should I be here?"; (d) there is no validation from the experience – "Am I a person of worth?" – or the person seeks some form or corroboration of experiences from another person; (e) one feels disrespected (this is led to by previous elements and is linked to the following); (f) one's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged; (g) one's basic identity is shaken; if not uprooted.

Franklin's theory of invisibility provides more insight into the experience of existing as an African American man. What becomes of an individual who questions whether he is a person of worth, suffers from a compromised sense of dignity, and has had his basic identity uprooted? In addition to much suffering, one might seek alternate sources of validation. Oliver (2006) has referred to "the streets" as being socially significant in that it potentially serves as an alternative site for Black male socialization. It is important to understand that "the streets" can serve as site that offers validation and recognition for men who are largely "invisible" to the greater part of society. Oliver mentions that most lower and working class Black men do not center their lives in "the streets" and street related activities. Indeed, the majority of lower and working class Black men are resilient and conform to a decency orientation in response to adverse structural conditions that tend to lime their capacity to successfully compete with White men in the arenas politics, education, economics, and maintenance of a stable family life. However, there are a substantial number of Black men who lack the resiliency and the personal and social resources that are necessary to cope effectively with the adverse structural conditions directed against them. Consequently, it is this population of marginalized lower and working class Black men who are most prone to seek respect and social recognition by constructing their identities in the social world of "the streets" (Oliver, 2006).

The importance of "the streets" as an alternative Black male socialization institution is related to the manner that macro-level, life sustaining institutions (e.g., the political system, the economic system, the educational system, the criminal justice

system, and the mass media) have historically been managed by the White majority and particularly White men, to prevent African American men from achieving political, educational, and social equality. The cumulative effect of consistent marginalization has served as a catalyst, leading many African American men to socially construct masculine identities that place emphasis on toughness, sexual conquests, and street hustling as a means of coping with and transcending what some researchers have characterized as "frustrated masculinity" or "fragmented gender identity" (Oliver, 2006; Whitehead et al., 1994). There are three masculine roles that constitute the core of the hierarchy of manhood roles that are valued by Black men who seek social recognition in "the streets"; the tough guy/gangsta (overt displays of tough talk, threats, and actual acts of violence), the player (ritualized sexual conquest as a feature of masculine identity and social practice in the social world of underclass community), and the hustler/balla (one who uses "wits" to aggressively pursue access to legitimate or illegitimate economic opportunities and illicit resources of impoverished communities to improve one's economic and material condition) (Oliver, 2006). While "the streets" have served as alternative site for Black male socialization, due to a history of marginalization, many African American men have also "fallen victim to the streets." There is a criminal element present in "the streets" that leads to incarceration and/or even death for far too many African American men.

Franklin's (1999) theory of invisibility and Oliver's (2006) theory of "the streets" as an alternative institution for African American men serve as important contributions in that they provide a framework for understanding the life experiences of some Black men,

particularly as they give us a glimpse of the potential consequences of marginalization and invalidation for African American men. However, I do believe that there are some questions that are left to be answered, particularly related to the life experiences of adolescent African American males. Franklin's (1999) theory of invisibility does help us to understand the inner struggle that some African American men encounter, due to a feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or recognized. However can the theory be applied to experiences of African American men and adolescent boys? Are African American adolescent male youth susceptible to "the streets" as an alternative site for socialization as African American men? Oliver's (2006) conception of "the streets as an alternative site of Black male socialization is relevant to this study in that it could explain a potential consequence of possible messages that African American adolescent males might receive that would indicate rejection from certain segments of mainstream society (i.e., educational political, and social arenas). However, as Oliver mentioned, many African American males who are exposed to street culture, do not conform to a "street orientation." This finding leaves unanswered questions, including; what type of life events or social processes lead some African American males to reject "the streets" and what compromises resiliency in the face of exposure to "the streets" for some African American males, prompting them to conform to a "street orientation"?

Microaggressions

In recent history, racism in North America has undergone a transformation, especially after the post civil rights era – when conscious democratic belief in equality for

groups of color directly clashed with a long history of racism in society (Jones, 1997; Thompson & Neville, 1999; Sue et al., 2007). The more subtle forms of racism have been labeled modern racism. Modern racism has been described as (a) being more likely than ever to be disguised and covert and (b) evolved from the old fashion form, in which overt hatred racial hatred and bigotry is consciously and publicly displayed, to a more nebulous and ambiguous form that is more difficult to identify and acknowledge (Sue et al., 2007).

In Sue et al.'s (2007) review of the literature on more subtle and contemporary forms of racism, they found the term "racial microaggressions" to best describe the phenomenon in its everyday occurrence. First coined by Pierce in 1970, the term refers to "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges, which are "put downs". Racial microaggressions have also been described as "subtle insults" (verbal, non-verbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solorzano et al., 2000). Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions can be detrimental to persons of color because they impair performance in a multitude of settings by sapping the psychic and spiritual energy of recipients by creating inequities (Franklin, 2004; Sue, 2004; Sue et al., 2007). The power of racial microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator and often times, the recipient (Sue, 2005). Microaggressive acts can usually be explained by seemingly nonbiased and valid reasons. For the recipient of a racial microaggression, however there is always a nagging question of whether it really happened (Crocker &

Major, 1989; Sue et al., 2007). It is difficult to identify a microaggression, especially when other explanations seem plausible. Many people of color describe a vague feeling that they have been attacked, that they have been disrespected or that something is not right (Franklin, 2004; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Sue et al., 2007).

Based on research literature, racial micoraggressions seem to manifest themselves in three distinct forms; micro-assault, micro-insult, and micro-invalidation (Sue et al., 2007). A micro-assault is an explicit racial derogation characterized by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions. Micro-insults are characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. Micro-invalidations are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (Sue et al., 2007).

Research on racial microaggressions has created the suggestion that many African American students experience micoaggressions through invisibility on campus, differential treatment by faculty members, and the feeling of being stereotyped based on pejorative perceptions (Allen, 2010). These microaggressions are impactful as they can psychologically and spiritually affect students' experiences in schools ore in other settings (Franklin, 2004; Sue, 2004). Allen (2010) conducted a study that explored the school experiences of African American middle-class males in Arizona's secondary schools. The African American young men who participated in this study reported that they felt invisible to many of their school teachers and administrators and were treated

"differently" when they were acknowledged. The young men and their families also expressed the feeling of being undervalued or less important than their Latino peers, who represented the majority at the participating schools. These feelings led to tension between Black and Latino students. Allen asserted that this tension, which led to interracial microaggressions demonstrates the endemicity of race in society as racially oppressed groups, in the struggle for power and representation often internalize and appropriate the racist ideology and subordinate techniques historically imposed upon them by Whites. The feeling of not having the same academic and cultural opportunities as their Latino counterparts often resulted in increased tensions between African American and Latino students within the schools (Allen, 2010). While the current research on racial microaggressions has created important contributions for society at large, there are also important questions/areas of concern related to the study of racial microaggressions that need to be addressed. Sue et al. (2007) assert that the study of racial microaggressions have to become more prominent in the study of racism. The omission of subtle forms of racism from research agendas related to the study of racism conveys the notion that covert forms of racism are not as important as racist events that can be quantified and "proven." Studying the long term impact that racial microaggressions have on mental health functioning, self-esteem, self-concept, and racial identity development appears crucial to documenting the harm microaggressions inflict on people of color. Another important question to address in the study of racial microaggressions is, are different racial/ethnic groups more likely to encounter racial microaggressions than others (Sue et al., 2007)? These areas of future study have

important implications for African American male adolescents. Given that it is the belief of some that African American men occupy the lowest levels of the United States' social hierarchy, are Black adolescent male youth more likely to encounter racial microaggressions that other groups? Also, considering that the current study focuses on identity development for African American adolescent male youth, it will be important to know if and how experiencing racial microaggressions impact racial identity development for this population.

Stereotypes and Societal Messages

Many in the U.S. have long since been aware of the presence of stereotypes in our society. It can be argued that the presence of stereotypes for African American men have been in existence as long as Black men have been present in the United States. The mass media has served as a pipeline for stereotypes of African American men for centuries. As previously mentioned, much of the research on race stereotypes has focused on stereotype threat, a concept that was introduced by Steele (1997). Stereotype threat is the threat that members of a stigmatized group experience when they believe that they may by virtue of their performance in a domain of relevance, confirm a negative stereotype about themselves and members of their group (Kellow & Jones, 2005). Researchers have consistently found that in a stereotype threat condition, individuals underperform on cognitive tasks compared with non-group members (Kellow & Jones, 2008; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008; Steele, 1997). Steele and Aronson (1995) proposed that differences in academic performance between minority and non-minority students, as measured by standardized achievement tests such as the SAT, could partially be

explained by anxiety and evaluation apprehension produced by knowledge of negative stereotypes related to group members.

Of course, there are an abundance of stereotypes that exist for Black men outside of the educational arena. Results from qualitative studies suggest that sexual scripts in "Black music videos" reinforce stereotypical images of Black women and men as hypersexual, amoral, and materialistic (Emerson, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2002). Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker (2005) asserted that Black adolescents' exposure to the media's stereotypical images of gender may have grave implications. Due to the popularity of music videos and music artists among Black teens, it is particularly troubling that images available for emulation portray women and men in such limited and frequently offensive ways. For young Black men, these images perpetuate cultural stereotypes of Black men as criminal, sexually promiscuous, and amoral and offer poor models for Black children and adolescents who do not have a father in the home (Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005).

Rome (2004) also addressed media depictions of African American men. As previously stated, in Rome's book, which addresses media depictions of African American men, he asserts that African American men are depicted as "Black Demons" by the U.S. media. As "Black Demons," African American men are stereotyped as prone to criminality and violence and unable to fit into society. This stereotype serves as justification for incarceration and close scrutiny. Rome continues by stating that dominant society has advanced the "Black Demon" stereotype with regard to African

American men to allow the White American dominant group to maintain power over African Americans.

In Oliver's (2006) work on alternative Black male socialization and "the streets," he suggested that there are three masculine roles that constitute the core of the hierarchy of manhood roles that are valued by African American men who seek social recognition in "the streets." These three masculine roles also represent stereotypes that have a dominant presence in U.S. society. These roles include the tough guy/gangsta, the player, and the hustler/balla. Similar to what has already been discussed in regards to the underlying messages that are communicated by the prevalent negative stereotypes that exist for African American men, these three roles place emphasis on toughness, sexual conquest, and economic and material gain through illegal means at times (Oliver, 2006) While one can become quickly and easily familiar with the negative stereotypes that torment African American men through media outlets such as television, magazines, and the internet, current literature is embarrassingly deplete of investigations that offer a more thorough examination of the stereotypes that exist for Black men and the influence that these stereotypes have on the lives of Black men. What does this absence of thoughtful and responsible investigation related to stereotypes and the influence of these stereotypes on African American men say about our society? Are we satisfied with allowing these stereotypes to rampant through our society without putting forth an effort to see how a segment of our society is impacted by these stereotypes? The limited research that exists related to the impact of racism on African Americans is not enough. There is a tremendous need for research that explores the influence of largely negative stereotypes

on African American men. This sort of research may lead to interventions that assist African American men in coping with and navigating these stereotypes.

Internalized Racism

Are there other ways in which racism affect the individual, the person who becomes the target of racism? Racism may not only take an emotional toll on the individual, but it can also have a negative impact on how the individual views self. Research on internalized racism seems to be shedding more light on the effects of race-based oppression. The notion that oppression/racism is internalized is commonly acknowledged and found in most conceptualizations of the psychological dynamics underlying oppression. In recent years, the term "internalized racism" has emerged as a way of referring to the phenomenon of people of African descent, or people of color having taken in and internalized aspects of racism (Watts-Jones, 2002). Bryant (2011) referred to internalized racism as a social psychological process that affects African Americans as a group and individually with variations of its impact that based on several factors, which may include but are not limited to (a) an awareness of a self and group identity that is based on traditional and contemporary African-centered worldviews, philosophies, cosmologies, and achievements; (b) the degree of acceptance of the dominant culture's traditions, beliefs, and rationale for the denigration of people of African descent (Cross, 1978); (c) social economic status; (d) peer subcultures (Thomas, 2005); and (e) education (Woodson, 1999).

Internalized racism for African Americans involves the acceptance of the hegemonic hierarchal stratification of race that places them at the bottom of the social

order. It is also the acceptance of negative stereotypes about African Americans concerning their abilities and intrinsic worth. According to Williams and Williams-Morris (2000), "Internalized racism refers to the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves" (p. 255). Internalized racism is manifested in embracing Whiteness with the devaluation of Black self (Jones, 2000). It is an experience of self-degradation and self-alienation, which incorporates shame of African identity and culture (Watts-Jones, 2002). Although the term is relatively new, the phenomenon has been addressed over many years (Akbar, 1996; Fanon, 1963). Once internalized, it is a formidable foe, requiring "battle on two fronts: the oppressor within and the oppressor without" (Bulhan, 1985, p. 123). Thus, any understanding of the psychological effects of racism would be incomplete without a consideration of internalized racism (Speight, 2007).

Internalized racism is all about the cultural imperialism, the domination, the structure, the normalcy of the "way things are" in our racialized society. The modern version of racism is often more subtle and covert, involving more avoidance than hostility. Racism's contemporary products are contained in media images, language, expectations, and the stuff of daily encounters that might be more easily interjected. The dominant group has the power to define and name reality, determining what is "normal," "real," and "correct." Through its hegemony, the dominant group denigrates, ignores, discounts, misrepresents, or eradicates the target group's culture, language, and history. Thus, the dominant group's culture is imposed (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997) and is seen as normal, while the subordinate group is seen as other—that is, less than, inferior the

oppressed group. The institutionalization and the normalization of racism in daily life necessarily involve the internalization of the dominant group's values, norms, and ideas.

Looking to the larger society to construct a sense of self, members of the target group find negative images that serve to "colonize" and "recolonize" them. Through its internalization, oppression becomes self-sustaining or domesticating (Freire, 1999). The target group members believe the dominant group's version of reality, in turn, ceasing to independently define themselves (Bulhan, 1985). Watts-Jones (2002) explained that "when people of African descent internalize racism it is an experience of self-degradation, and self-alienation; one that promotes the assumptive base of our inferiority" (p. 592). From this position of alienation, target members tragically, often end up colluding with their own oppression. Targets "think, feel, and act in ways that demonstrate the devaluation of their group and of themselves as members of that group" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997, p. 21).

In an effort to illuminate some of the "elements" of internalized racism, some researchers contend that academically successful African American youth/students must cope with the burden of being constantly accused of "acting White" by their peers, which may ultimately hamper academic efforts and lead to social ostracism from African American peers and "African American activities"(Harper, 2006). Ogbu (2004) asserts that the burden of "acting White" includes accusations of being an "Uncle Tom" or "sellout," perceived disloyalty to the Black community and public humiliation. It is worth noting that some researchers dispute these findings related to internalized racism and African American youth's perceptions of academic achievement. Some researchers

report consistent findings that suggest that African American students do not value education or school achievement any less than do their White peers from similar socioeconomic or familial backgrounds and that many high achievers have positive self-esteem, high goal orientation, and strong Black identities (Harper, 2006). While the above information speaks to the impact of internalized racism on African American youth in general, Bryant (2011) focused more on young African American males in his study on internalized racism and its association with African American male youth's propensity for violence. Bryant found that internalized racism was a statistically significant risk factor and key predictor for major components of the propensity for violence, although it was not a significant predictor of violent behavior. Bryant suggests that it is possible that the negative self-concepts and characteristics inherent to internalized racism can become deeply rooted in the minds of African American youth. It is also theorized that if young African American minds are inflicted with negative attributes that are defined as internalized racism, it can distort their developmental pathways and can possibly predispose them toward self-destructive behavior (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996).

There is work left to be done in terms of strengthening an understanding of internalized racism and its impact. As Watts-Jones (2002) noted, "Addressing internalized racism is a newborn baby in our field." Speight (2007) noted that there is plenty of quantitative and qualitative research, preventative intervention, and clinical work yet to be done to complete the puzzle of racism and psychological injury. She continues by mentioning that to fully appreciate the traumatic injury caused by racism, counseling psychologist will need to understand not only the influence of specific

encounters, acts, or racial incidents, but also the detrimental psychological effects of one more piece of the puzzle – internalized racism. Included in strengthening our understanding of internalized racism and its impact, we need to increase our understanding of how African American adolescent males respond to traumatic injury caused by racism. Bryant (2011) suggests that construct of internalized racism may an integral part in the formulation of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of African American male youth and deserves to be further explored to interpret and make sense of all the implications that may be associated with it. This study may serve as a "step forward" in this process, as the aim is to uncover African American adolescent male youth's experiences and societal messages received and how these experiences and messages influence their perceptions of their identity and others from similar racial backgrounds.

This chapter provided a review and critique of the existing literature on various aspects of identity that may be relevant for African American young men. Self-concept, racial identity, racial socialization, individual and institutional racism, racial microaggressions, the intersection of race and gender, the visibility of African American men, stereotypes and societal messages, and internalized racism have been identified as factors that may influence identity development for young Black men. While research on these factors has yielded important information related to identity development for young African American men, the preceding review demonstrates that there are numerous gaps in research that are pertinent in understanding the experience of existing as a young African American man and the ways in which these young men may come to establish their identities. The proceeding study aims to be a positive contributor in an effort to

obtain a better understanding of the meaning of being a young African American man and how life experiences and societal messages may influence young Black men's perceptions of being an African American adolescent male.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Qualitative research methods were utilized in this study as they represent useful approaches to understanding the meanings people make of their experiences and can be used in situations where there is little or no previous research, when a process or phenomenon is not well known, or when one needs to present a detailed and in-depth view of a phenomenon (Walker & Myrick, 2006). A primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. Qualitative methods can enable researchers to better understand the meanings that oppressed peoples make of their experiences and give voice to people who have been traditionally marginalized, made invisible, or silenced. Based on literature reviews, it does seem like there is plenty of work to be done in terms of creating a better understanding of the experiences of young African American men. As previously mentioned in this contribution, some researchers would agree that the African American male is the least understood of all sex-race groups in our society. This serves as further justification for using qualitative research methods to conduct this study.

Participants

The sample consisted of 17 young African American men/boys between the ages of 14 and 18. Frequency of ages were as follows: 18 (1), 17(5), 16 (7), 15 (3), and 14 (1). Nine of the participants were secured from a Catholic high school in a large Midwestern

city. Three participants were secured from a Baptist church in a small Midwestern city. Five participants were secured from a non-profit agency that offers tutoring and mentoring in a large Midwestern city. The participant grade levels were as follows; seniors (1), juniors (9), sophomores (4), freshman (2), middle school/eighth grade (1). Although many of the participants reported being from lower socio-economic to middle class families, more specific information regarding socio-economic standing and academic standing are not available.

Focus Group Script

A focus group script that included open ended questions and standard facilitator prompts that inquired about participants' views about; being an African American young man, coming to the realization that they were African American, and how others perceive African American young men was created for this study. The focus group script contained five questions with at least one prompt for each question. The prompts were included in the focus group script so that in instances were a participant asked for clarification, a standard response could be given across all groups. A copy of the focus group script used is available in Appendix A.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through email notifications, church, school, and program announcements, and teacher and administrator recommendations. Participants were given a brief overview of the goals of the study and were given dates and times of the focus group interviews. After reviewing dates and times of the focus group interviews, participants indicated which focus group interviews they were able to attend.

As an incentive for participating in the focus group interviews, participants were offered/served lunch during the focus group interviews. Six total focus group interviews were conducted. One interview was conducted in a meeting room at a church, three interviews were conducted in the library at a non-profit agency, and two focus groups were conducted in a conference room at a Catholic high school. Each focus group interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The largest focus group consisted of five participants; the smallest focus group consisted of two. Participants were given the option of selecting pseudonyms for themselves to maintain anonymity during the transcription process. Each focus group was audio-taped and later transcribed.

Analysis

As previously mentioned, a qualitative research approach aims to achieve an understanding of the meanings people make of their experiences and can be used in situations where there is little or no previous research, when a process or phenomenon is not well known, or when one needs to present a detailed and in-depth view of a phenomenon (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Qualitative research can be explored in a number of ways, depending on the research question(s) being asked/phenomenon being explored. This study aims to explore any potential experiences of racism that young African American men have had and how these experiences may impact racial identity development.

This study was approached from a phenomenological perspective with a theory oriented purpose. The phenomenological perspective seeks to describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. This approach requires

researchers to work more from the participants' statements and experiences (Creswell, 2007). The basic purpose of this approach is to reduce the experiences of persons with a phenomenon to a description that has been generalized in a way, so that the experiences of many can be understood. The approach used for this study is theory oriented because I am attempting to achieve a greater understanding of how African American young men's identity development process is influenced by life experiences such as racism and societal messages, such as stereotypes. I am looking to formulate a theory about how African American young men's identity development process is impacted by life experiences and societal messages. I used pre-existing literature and theory to create a focus for this study. Within a theory-oriented project, theory serves only as a template (Havercamp & Young, 2007). The data was analyzed using open coding. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) requires the researcher to go through the transcript line by line and identify themes and categories from the participants' statements. This process is followed with axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), wherein the themes and concepts from open coding are grouped. This coding process allows the researcher to contextualize phenomena.

In qualitative research, there is the question of when has enough data been collected to represent a phenomena. The concept of saturation addresses this concern. Saturation occurs when there is redundancy in the data and the addition of more participants would not add to the information provided in the data. Research has not revealed a specific number of participants required to reach saturation. Researchers have suggested that to increase the reliability of qualitative research, outside raters should

review the data and calculate the inter-rater agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To calculate the inter-rater agreement, three outside raters are given themes created by the primary researcher with quotes that were representative of each theme (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes and quotes were presented in random order and raters are to match themes with the representative quotes. Outside raters were not told how many quotes were to be matched with the themes and were not informed if all of the quotes were to be used. The themes were marked with number and letter code combinations and the raters marked the back of each quote with the theme they felt corresponded with it. If the outside raters believed that a quote did not match any of the themes they wrote "none." The agreements and disagreements were counted and the appropriate equation was applied to calculate the inter-rater reliability. According to Miles and Huberman, inter-rater reliability is the number of agreements between raters divided by the sum of the total number of agreements and disagreements. They suggest that an inter-rater reliability of 80 to 90% is acceptable. An inter-ratter reliability of 87% was achieved in this study.

Self of the Researcher

In qualitative research, investigators invariably become part of the research process. For this reason, it is recommended that researchers examine themselves and the role that they play in the participants experience of the inquiry and in the interpretation of the data (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). When examining the meaning of being a young African American male and the potential influence of life experiences and societal messages on perceptions of being young, Black,

and male, my gender, age, and race were of importance in exploring in the research process. As a primary investigator, I identify as a single, African American man, in his early thirties. I am like the participants of this study in that I identify as African American and male. I am different from the participants in that I am in my early thirties as opposed to being a teenager. When planning this project, I wondered if the age difference, coupled with the nature of the topic might cause the participants to respond in ways that they believed would meet my approval as opposed to answering in ways that represented their true beliefs. I am someone who still believes that many negative stereotypes continue exist for African American men and that these messages are more than just mere messages, per se. I believe that these societal communications are used in part to continue to keep Black men marginalized. So, going into this project I wondered if pieces of my story, my experiences would spill out and influence the young men's thoughts about racism. I tried to conceal my views about how young African American men continue to be perceived in the United States, as to avoid coloring their perceptions. This particular effort was very hard at times. During one of the focus group sessions, two young men reported being profiled and harassed by police officers. I could relate to these stories. I had stories of my own and I wanted so badly to share. It has been over 15 years since I had these experiences with police officers, but the emotional scars that I have from those experiences are still with me. I believe that sharing those experiences with the young men would have proven to be too influential for the purposes of this study.

I routinely monitored my emotions during the focus groups and afterwards during analysis. So many of the young men's responses during the focus group interviews

prompted me to reminisce on my own related personal experiences. If it is not obvious at this point, allow me to say that I do have a personal interest in this particular area of research. I believe that we are living during a time when our society, namely non-African Americans are becoming increasingly less sympathetic to the plight of African American men. For examples, I guess I could cite everything from the coverage of news channels like Fox News, to the current reaction to the Trayvon Martin tragedy, to the numerous proclamations I have heard over the last four years of living in a post-racial America since the election of President Barack Obama. Turbulent and uncertain are descriptors that can be used to capture the African American experience in the U.S. Identifying meanings associated with being a young Black man and investigating experiences and societal messages that may influence perceptions of being young, Black, and male have major implications for the well-being and advancement of African Americans and I hope to continue to be a part of a process that addresses these issues in a way that generally impacts the African American community in a positive manner.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning of being a young African American man and explore the potential influence of life experiences and societal messages on perceptions of being young, African American, and male. In an effort to explore the meaning of being a young African American man and the potential influence of life experiences and societal messages on perceptions of being young, African American, and male, focus groups were formed to interview the young men. A total of seventeen young men participated in the focus group interviews and six focus groups were formed. Five focus group questions were used to address two research questions. Three of the questions asked the young men to reflect on their experiences of being African American. Two of the questions inquired about the young men's beliefs about how others view African American young men. The three questions that asked the young men to reflect on their experiences of being African American were: (1) What does being an African American young man mean to you?; (2) Can you describe the first time that you realized that you were African American?; and (3) What comes to mind when you think about African American young men as a group or as a people? The questions that inquired about the young men's beliefs about how other view African American young men were: (1) What do you think others think about African American young men? and (2) What do you think non-African Americans think about Black young men?

Transcripts were coded by the primary investigator using the axial coding and the codes and raw data were then reviewed by outside reviewers to calculate interrater agreement. The themes that were developed and sample statements that support the themes are presented in this section. The results will be presented using the percentage of participants that responded in accordance with that particular themes as well as presented with the number of the six focus groups that the theme was cited. Participants are identified by the names they provided for themselves at the time of data collection.

Being an African American Young Man

As previously mentioned, three focus group questions were used to address the first research question; what is the meaning of being a young African American man. The first focus group question, which asked the young men to reflect on their beliefs about what it means to be an African American young man, generated 23 codeable responses. Thirty-five percent of the responses suggested that being African American involves life circumstances consistently riddled with difficulties and struggles. Another 35% reported that being an African American young man is synonymous with having an understanding and appreciation for the history of and strength demonstrated by older African Americans in struggling and sacrificing through seemingly more overt forms of racism, widespread marginalization, and forced second class citizenship status, so that younger African Americans may benefit (socially, economically, academically, etc). Responses that reflected a life of difficulties and struggles included Jeremiah (15) who stated, “It’s not easy being an African American man, because there are a lot of expectations and many of them aren’t good like being dead or in jail. It motivates me to

do better, but it's not easy." Steaven (17) said, "I think a lot of it depends on where you are from. I'm from what some people would call a bad neighborhood. I was poor. I didn't know my father much. He was a drug dealer. He got in trouble out there on the streets. So, I do agree with strength, but I think being Black also means struggle, going through hard times."

In regards to the appreciation for history suffering and sacrificing and older African American's strength in the face of seemingly more overt forms of racism, widespread marginalization, and forced second class citizenship status, Brian (16) stated, "I just think about our history. A lot African Americans in the past went through a lot so that things could be better for us today." Tim (17) said, "I think it is important to know what happened back then. I think knowing what happened back then helps us now." Charles (17) offered similar sentiments in mentioning, "Well um, I think it means being strong, strong willed. There's a long history of slavery, but we are kinda past that. You can be anything now."

In continuing to explore the participants experiences of being African American, a second focus group question was presented, can you describe the first time that you realized that you were Black. Eighty-six percent of the participants reported encounters with others from apparently different racial backgrounds that somehow brought these young men to the realization that they were Black and somehow different. Steven (16) reported:

> I don't know, it was different for me because I'm biracial. My dad is Black and my mom is White. On my mom's side of the family, nobody talks about race. Nobody talks about being Black or White. Everybody on my mom's side of that family refers to you by your name. So, like if

> your name is Brian, everybody is like hi Brian. But, on my dad's side of the family it is different. Like my uncle, every time he sees me it's like what's up nigga. So, I guess maybe, I started thinking about race when I started being around my dad's family more.

Tim (17) stated, "The first time that I noticed, I guess I was like seven. I noticed that the man that I called father was White and so were other people in my family. I asked my grandmother about this and she said that my skin was darker than other people in my family because I was Black."

While Steven and Tim seemed to report an awareness of racial and perhaps physical differences based upon these encounters with seemingly no emotional reaction or appraisal of these experiences as positive or negative, other participants reported similar encounters, accompanied with negative or at least less than desirable appraisals. For example, in response to the question, can you describe the first time that you realized that you were African American, Alexander (16) reported "When I went to an all White school. It was like three Black people at the whole school." Alexander went on to say, "The teachers, they had their ways. They talked to me like I was slow." Alexander would later report being acutely aware of his "Blackness" after developing romantic feelings for one of his White, female peers. He stated, "There was this time that I liked this girl, who was White. At that time, I wished I was White." After briefly reflecting on this experience, Alexander continued with, "Yeah, it kinda seemed like it wouldn't be accepted (to reveal his feelings to the young woman that he was attracted to). You know, because my skin is dark and hers wasn't."

A third focus group question was asked to explore the meaning of being a young, African American man. This particular question was what comes to mind when you

think about African American young men as a people or group. This focus group question generated 20 codeable responses. Seventy percent of the participants reported negative views about African American young men as a group or people and/or the awareness of negative views of African American young men by society at large. Alexander (16) responded with, "Negative views, thugs." Latrell (17) stated, "I mean when you think about Black people as a whole, a lot of it isn't good. I mean most Black people can't get along. Always trying to out-do each other. It's true!" Kurterry (16) offered a particularly thoughtful response:

> Sometimes it's bad stuff. Like getting locked up. Not all Black people are bad. It's just that sometimes you have to do things to survive. When you don't have any money and you're trying to take care of your family. Sometimes it's not our fault. Sometimes it's like people are out to get us.

Kurterry seems to infer that while African American men "sometimes do bad things," not all African Americans are "bad" and that sometimes there are justified reasons for doing "bad things." Kurterry also indicates that African American men are sometimes targeted. Perhaps Kurterry was implying young African American men are coerced into doing "bad things."

Charles' (17) response to this focus group question includes an acknowledgement of greater society's negative views about young African American men, particularly that these negative views are communicated through the media:

> I think music and television portray them as thuggish, but honestly I don't see that myself when I see African American young men. It kinda depends on the people you meet. Like the people I meet, I don't see that, but sometimes you may see people on the street who meet those stereotypes.

Influence of Life Experiences and Societal Messages on Perceptions of Being an African American Adolescent Man

Again, two focus group questions were posed to address the second research question, what types of experiences and socialization messages contribute to the perceptions of being a young African American man. The next focus group question posed was what do you think others think of African American young men? This question was not as clearly posed as it could have been as the question was intended to examine the participants' thoughts about what other African Americans (African American girls/women, older African American men) think about African American young men. Eighteen codeable responses were provided for this focus group question. This question seemed to elicit a number of responses similar to those generated from the third focus group question. Perhaps the participants experienced this question as being similar to the third focus group question. Fifty percent of the responses seemed to again allude to primarily negative stereotypes of young African American men and that these stereotypes are largely driven by media perceptions of young Black men. Raymond (16) stated, "I think the media is saying that we actors, entertainers." Torey (16) said, "The media makes it seem like we all act the same, like when you watch like shows or cartoons with Black people in them, we are all acting crazy, talking all improper." Kurterry (16) offered, "I think the media is saying that like all Black people are drug addicts. Like we are criminals. They make a bad rap for Black people." It is worth noting that 28% of the responses to focus group question number four seemed to focus on other African Americans' (African American girls/women and older African American men) views of

African American young men. These responses seemed to contain the belief that other African Americans do not view young African American men positively. Tim (17) responded with:

> Well, I wonder if older African Americans wonder if we are focused on the right things, like education. Like maybe some of them look down on us. I remember my grandmother told me a story about being on a train and a group of young, Black kids were being I guess, kinda loud and wild. My grandmother was like, is this who is gonna be left to take care of us one day?

Omari (15) offered, "I think the older generation looks at the younger generation as kinda like a waste of potential. I mean you could be so much better, but you don't put effort into education and all that stuff." Lastly, Charles (17) reported, "Older African American men probably see younger African American men as wild and reckless."

The fifth and final focus group question, the third that addresses the second research question asked what do non-African Americans think of young African American men? This question generated 15 codeable responses; 40% of the responses again indicated primarily negative views/stereotypes of African American young men, largely driven by the media. Charles (17) offered:

> I think they portray African American men by what they see on t.v. They seem them in videos with their pants sagging and tons of swear words in their songs. If you grow up and that's all you see, then you are going to think that everyone is like that. That's just simply how humans work. Uh, you're Black and if I met you in a dark alley you would probably try to rob me. People see something and don't want to change their minds about it. People are just really closed-minded nowadays. People are afraid of what they don't know.

Steaven (17) stated, “If we’re talking about people who aren’t Black, they think a lot of stuff about us and none of it is good.” LaSean (14) reported, “Like those from a bad environment might be seen as low class and people might think less of them.”

Interestingly, 30% of the responses to this question indicated that non-African Americans are not well informed about the life experiences of young African American men. Jeremiah (15) stated, “It doesn’t seem like White people understand us.” Tim (17) reported:

> Well, I don’t think other races can really know what happens in the lives of African Americans. I mean they can watch tv or videos or something like that, but you can’t take that kind of information and think that it applies to the whole group. Many don’t know that we work hard and that we do many other things well.

Another 13% of responses indicated that not only are African American young men subjected to negative stereotypes by non-African Americans and that non-African Americans are largely uninformed about the experiences of young African American men, but that African American men are not liked by non-African Americans. Steaven (17) reported, “I mean you can just look in their eyes and tell that they don’t like us.” Jeremiah (18) stated, “White people, they don’t like us. I can tell sometimes that they don’t want me nowhere around them.”

Five focus group questions were posed to address the two research questions guiding this study: what is the meaning of being a young African American man and what types of experiences and socialization messages contribute to the perceptions of being an African American man. A number of findings were obtained from the current study including; being an African American young man involves living a life routinely

filled with difficulties and struggles, being an African American young man is synonymous with understanding and appreciating the sacrifices of older African Americans, encounters with others from different racial backgrounds caused the young men to realize that they were Black and somehow different, participants have negative views about African American young men as a group or people, there is the presence of negative stereotypes of African American young men and that these stereotypes are largely driven by the media, and non-African Americans are not well informed about the lives of young African American men and are not well liked. The results from this study demonstrate that participants associate positive and negative meanings with being a young African American man and that life experiences and societal messages such as racism and stereotypes influence perceptions of being young, Black, and male.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to address the relative absence of research related to the identity development experiences of African American adolescent males. This study also aimed to give some young African American men an opportunity to voice their own opinions about existing as a Black man. A series of five questions were asked to obtain information about young African American men's experiences and identity development process. Each question will be discussed as they individually contribute to two research questions. This section will conclude with implications of the study's findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

The Experience of Being an African American Male Adolescent

The first research question was developed to explore the meaning that African American male adolescents make of being young, Black, and male. Three questions were asked during the focus group interviews to explore the participants' meanings of African American adolescent males. Those three questions: (1) what does being an African American young man mean to you, (2) can you describe the first time you realized that you were African American, and (3) what comes to mind when you think about African American young men as a group or a people?

In regards to addressing the first focus group question, results suggest that African American young men have an appreciation for struggles that older African American

encountered in the past. It seems that these young men believe that while fighting for full inclusion in the U.S., older African Americans had to deal with more intense and overt forms of racism and generally more difficult life circumstances. It also seems that these young African American men believe that the struggles and life difficulties that older African Americans encountered paved the way for younger African Americans to have more opportunities and achieve a greater degree of inclusion in society. In regards to relating this question to existing research, this particular finding seems related to findings that are associated with research on racial socialization. Research related to racial socialization suggest that socialization in African American families differs according to the types of messages taught to children and that African American families can be classified into three categories according to the type of messages transmitted; mainstream, minority socializing, and Black cultural (Boykin & Toms, 1985). Black cultural families transmit Afrocentric values related to West African traditions of the importance of spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, affect, communication, expressive individualism, orality, and social time perspective (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Thornton (1997) and Scott (2003) report that parents who possess a Black cultural orientation are more likely to emphasize the history and achievement of African Americans. Parents possessing this orientation attempt to instill a sense of racial pride in their children. While again, research on racial socialization messages delivered by parents claims that parents with a Black cultural orientation are more likely to emphasize the history and achievement of African Americans to their children, other studies that suggest that parents might deliver specific racial socialization messages to

youth based on gender, however this line of research has not been well examined and there are mixed results (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Randolph & Nickerson, 2002; Scott, 2003). Bowman and Howard (1985) as well as Thomas and Speight (1999) found that African American boys received more messages about negative stereotypes, whereas girls received more messages related to the importance of achievement and racial pride. The current research did not explore how African American young men are impacted by racial socialization messages, specifically those messages that communicate racial pride and appreciation of a history of sacrifice by African Americans. It is possible that racial socialization is one of many family protective factors for child maladjustment (Stevenson et al., 2005). Future research can help uncover how racial coping and pride strategies are socialized differently by gender and more specifically, how racial socialization messages and interventions based on racial socialization studies may help African American adolescent males develop positive and healthy identities in a society still soaked in racist beliefs and practices.

The second noteworthy result from the first focus group question is that participants believe that existing as an African American young man is generally a difficult existence, as one participant stated, “going through hard times.” This belief that being African American, young, and male is synonymous with difficult life circumstances seems to be consistent with research documenting painful and troubling life circumstances young African American men face. For example, Feagin (1991/2001) reported that among Black adults in the United States, it is fairly well discussed that

sizable members encounter stressful life conditions, including consistent exposure to various forms of racism.

In consideration of the participants' of this study reporting that the experience of being a young African American man includes "struggles" and "difficulties," it is worthwhile to mention DuBois (1903) captured this experience with precision more than a century ago when he wrote, "The history of the American Negro is the history of strife – the longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better, true self." Sellers et al. (2006) stated that research suggests that experiencing racial discrimination is common, particularly among Black populations. In a large-scale national survey of 25-74 year olds, approximately 49% of Black respondents reported experiencing on major racist event (i.e., hassled by police, denied/received inferior service, discouraged by a teacher from seeking higher education) in their lifetime (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Sellers et al., 2006). In terms of day-to-day experiences of discrimination (i.e., being treated as inferior, called names or harassed, responded to with fear), 81% of African American respondents reported that they have experienced at least one incident of day-to-day discrimination. These findings are consistent with a number of other studies that indicate that racial discrimination is common and pervades many aspects of life for African Americans (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Sanders-Thompson, 1996; Sellers et al., 2006). There is existing research that focuses on African American adolescent's experiences with racism and discrimination.

Fischer, Wallace, and Fenton (2000) found that a large proportion of African American youth in their sample reported that they had personally experienced incidents

of discrimination, such as being harassed by store personnel and police, and being perceived as not smart. Sellers et al. (2006) also found that the vast majority of African American adolescents in their sample reported experiencing racial hassles in their daily lives and that the most frequent occurrences of discrimination involved others perceiving them as a threat or incompetent (i.e., being accused of something or treated suspiciously; being treated as if you were "stupid" and "being talked down to"). Findings from the current study related to the participants' experience of being young African American male align with Jenkins' (2006) powerful summation of the experience of being Black in the United States of America:

> On one hand, society espouses rhetoric of concern and desire to elevate Black males, but on the other hand, society practices a policy of oppression, prejudice, and disregard. Put differently, the experience of the Black man in American seems to be one in which he is called "mister" but is treated with a "niggardly" regard. The result is the positioning of Black males at the lower rungs of society and their experiencing underachievement in almost all aspects of life.

Similar to findings stated at the beginning of this offering, other findings have highlighted the difficulties that capture the experience of existing as an African American man. One in five Black men lives in poverty as opposed to one in 12 for White men. Black men hold an unemployment rate that is over two times higher than White men (Jenkins, 2006). Within the professional arena, Black men earn 73% of the income of White males, with the average Black male with a college degree earning less than the average White male with a high school diploma (Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 1997). Death is another factor consistently confronting African American men. African American men are fourteen times more likely to die of murder than White men. Additionally, the rate of

homicide among Black men ages 15 to 24 is the highest for any group within the U.S. population, and the suicide rate has surpassed that of White men in the U.S. (Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 1997).

While the current study did not focus on psychological implications of existing as a young African American male in the U.S., we do know that there is a growing body of literature that examines the relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning in African American adolescents. A significant portion of the research on the impact of racial discrimination on adolescents has been conducted outside of the United States. Research conducted with adolescents from immigrant groups in Finland indicates that experiencing discrimination has an adverse impact on self-esteem (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001). Findings from the few studies conducted in the United States that examined the relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning among adolescents are consistent with the findings from Finland (Clark, Coleman, & Novak, 2004). Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) found that perceived discrimination at school (i.e., peers and teachers) was negatively related to adolescents' reports of achievement motivation, self-competency beliefs, psychological resiliency, and self-esteem in their sample of African American junior high school students. The young men who participated in the current study reported difficult life experiences that are rather unique to African American men and these experiences presumably have a psychological cost. Thus, more studies that highlights the racial identity development process and explores the relationship between racial discrimination and psychological functioning for

African American adolescent males would benefit the young men who participated in my study and young African American men across the country.

The second focus group question asked, was can you describe the first time that you realized that you realized that you were African American? An astounding 86% of responses indicated that there first experience of becoming aware of their racial identity, their "Blackness" if you will, came as a result of having some sort of encounter with someone else of a different racial background. Twenty-six percent of these responses indicated that their first experience with becoming aware of their racial identity was negative. In Cross' (1971,1978) examination of Black racial identity development, he described these initial experiences with becoming aware of one's racial identity as encounters. Cross said that the encounter stage "describes a shocking personal or social event that temporarily dislodges the person from his old worldview, making the person vulnerable to a new interpretation of his identity and his condition." Participant Alexander's comments related to his experience with developing romantic feelings for one of his White peers seems to mirror experiences associated with the encounter stage. Based on his experiences of socialization, he quickly surmised that it was unacceptable to share his feelings with the young woman who was the target of his affection, due to racial differences. Other models of racial identity development also seem to help to explain the participants' initial experiences with realizing that they were African American. Sellers et al.'s (1998) multidimensional model of racial identity suggest that racial identity consists of a two part definition and second part of this definition attempts to answer the question; what does it mean to be a member of this racial group? It seems like the

participants of this study were introduced to some meanings/messages associated with being African American during the initial encounters with race, particularly their own. Based on participant's reporting, these messages ranged from we are alike or similar because of our skin color to we are not alike and therefore there are certain boundaries that must exist between us because of differences in our skin color.

In regards to the third focus group question, the results were again that majority of participants indicated negative perceptions of young African American men. While the majority of responses to the third focus group question allude to the negative stereotypes, these responses speak more to an awareness of the negative life circumstances that African American men face. Social scientists have consistently reported that, as a group, Blacks tend to be at the lowest levels of social stratification (Marger, 2003) and continue to experience significant disparities in the areas of health, education, and wealth (Williams & Collins, 2004).

The third focus group question focus on the kinds of experiences and socialization messages that influence African American male adolescents' perceptions of being a Black man. The findings from the third focus group question suggest that societal messages about African American men are prevalent and that negativity really captures most of these messages. Also keep in mind that the third research question called for the participants to report their beliefs about African American men. Does the fact that the majority of participants in this study indicated negative beliefs about African American men as a group or people speak to the presence of internalized racism? This seems to be a possibility. As previously established internalized racism for African Americans

involves the acceptance of the hegemonic hierarchal stratification of race that places them at the bottom of the order. It is also the acceptance of negative stereotypes about African Americans concerning their abilities and intrinsic worth. Internalized racism is manifested in embracing Whiteness with the devaluation of the Black self (Jones, 2000). It is an experience of self-degradations and self-alienation, which incorporates shame of African identity and culture (Watts-Jones, 2002).

Influence of Life Experiences and Societal Messages

The second research question was developed with intentions of exploring the influence that life experiences and societal messages may have on African American adolescent males' perceptions of being young, African American, and male. Two focus group questions were asked to help explore this question: (1) what do you think others think of African American young men, and (2) what do you think non-African Americans think of young Black men? As was previously mentioned, the fourth focus group question may not have been as clearly posed as it could have been. This question was intended to gauge participants' views of what other African Americans (girls/women and older men) think of young African American men. While some of the participants addressed this question in the context of what other African Americans think about African American young men, most seemed to communicate beliefs about what non-African Americans think about young Black men, making responses to this question similar to responses to the fifth focus group question, which will be covered later. Fifty percent of responses to the fourth focus group question indicated that others have negative stereotypes of African American young men and that these stereotypes are

largely driven by the media. Many have long since been aware of the stereotypes of Black men perpetuated by the media. Boles (2007) wrote, "It is not surprising that many of our young Black men are so intent on achieving instant gratification, getting paid and pursuing the 'bling'. Millions of African American men take care of their business every day. They build strong families, pay their taxes, and give back to their communities. But too many of our young Black men do not see these role models portrayed in the media, but are instead bombarded with images that reinforce and promulgate stereotypes and negatively impact the development and expectations of young African American males" (p. 239). Boles continued the point by stating, "This media distortion provokes two distinct outcomes, resulting in further exacerbation of existent social and cultural inequities: an insatiable desire for immediate financial gratification and he overshadowing and devaluation of attainable, positive role models." Boles goes even further with his point and asserts, "Given Black children's increased exposure to the media, the promulgation of negative images of their older selves is likely to have an even more detrimental impact on their perspectives and their futures."

Sadly, many of the responses to the question of what do you think others think of African American young men included themes/phrases such as negative views, thugs, wild, reckless, acting crazy, waste of potential, actors, entertainers, drug addicts, and criminals. Again, the literature available on stereotypes of African American men align with what the African American young men who participated in this study had to say. Rome (2004) reflected on the role of media portrayals of Black men: "African American men are portrayed as aggressive and impulsive individuals more prone to violent crimes."

In terms of the presence of these sorts of stereotypes in our society, they are pervasive, limiting, and irresponsible, in that African American men and their identities are complex and more diverse than what our mass media tends to offer. In what ways are these young African American men affected by these beliefs about young African American men?

These young men reported that beliefs other African Americans have about young Black are also largely negative. With such strong, unrelenting, and overwhelmingly negative stereotypes of young African American men, it may not be hard to imagine one having such strong negative views of members of his or her own race. One final focus group question was posed (what do you think non-African Americans think about Black young men). As has already been mentioned, the responses to this question were similar to the responses received for focus group question four. The majority of responses to focus group question five also indicated negative perceptions of young African American men and again mentioned the powerful influence of the media. What proved to be unique about responses to the fifth focus group question is that some of the participants reported that not only are perceptions of young Black men by non-African Americans largely negative, but were explicit in saying that young Black men are not liked by individuals of other racial backgrounds. These beliefs prompt me to think about what Franklin (1997) has said about the invisibility syndrome that plagues Black men. The specific elements of the invisibility syndrome paradigm that seem particularly relevant here are: (c) one feels self-doubt about legitimacy – such as "Am I in the right place; should I be here?; (e) one feels disrespected; and (f) one's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged. It seems as if participants believe that African American young men are chronically

undervalued and are consistently denied opportunities to present themselves in ways that are contrary to the negative stereotypes that society uses to define them.

It is hard to know exactly how the young African American men from this study are affected by the overwhelming amount of negative perceptions and stereotypes that exist for Black men. As previously stated, some of the young men who participated in this study acknowledged the difficulties that exist for young African American men. Some of the young men from my study reported that they are not negatively affected by these negative perceptions. During one of the focus group interviews, the young men were asked if they are affected by so many negative images of young Black men. This question was met with a quick response, "no". Not only did the young men say that they are not personally affected by the many negative images our society produces of young Black men, but they also shared that they have high expectations for themselves. The message that seemed to be communicated by the young men was that they will not be derailed from their goals by societal obstacles that have historically existed for Black men. These young men presented themselves as resilient in the face of sizable societal obstacles that continue to exist for Black men. They are worthy of one's admiration for their determination and confidence in pursuing their goals. It is to be hopeful for these young men, their current life situations and future possibilities. What is interesting about these responses to whether or not they are affected by the negative images of Black men is that while some of them endorsed their own negative beliefs about African American young men, there was no verbal indication that they have internalized these beliefs for themselves. It is almost as if they were communicating that they are the exceptions, that

due to personal resiliency and a positive and unwavering belief in self that they would rise above the societal perceptions of Black men that can be so constraining and reach their goals and have positive beliefs about themselves as individuals. There is some existing research that may help explain how young African American men may maintain positive views of themselves in the face of so much negativity present in society in regards to their racial and gender reference group. The multidimensional model of racial identity proposes four dimensions of racial identity attitudes. The racial regard dimension is most relevant here. Again, racial regard refers to a person's affective and evaluative judgment of his or her race (Sellers et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 2006). The regard dimension consists of both a private and a public component. Private regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively toward African Americans and their membership in that group. Public regard refers to the extent to which individuals feel that others view African Americans positively or negatively (Sellers et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 2006). Sellers et al. (2006) found that African American adolescents regard beliefs seem to serve as significant resilient factors against the impact of racial discrimination. More positive attitudes toward African Americans (positive private regard beliefs) were associated with more positive psychological outcomes regardless of the level of discrimination the adolescents reported. This finding is consistent with other research that has found a link between positive attitudes toward one's racial group and positive psychological functioning and well-being (Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998).

It is possible that the participants of this study may have additional positive beliefs about African American young men as a group that were not uncovered due to the structure of the study. Perhaps it is these positive beliefs that allow the young men who participated in this study to stay resilient. Again, the hope is that the young men from this study will remain as resilient and resolute as they seem now. Personal resiliency and support from those that care can prove to be tremendously important and helpful for the young men that participated in this study and for African American young men across the nation for that matter. As we discuss the results of the current study, many are still reeling from the Trayvon Martin tragedy. The Trayvon Martin tragedy has presumably delivered a powerfully negative message to many young African American men about their worth and value in this society. This recent happening has served as a reminder and reinforcer for this writer that there is a need for those who value social justice, compassion, and humanity to continue to take on the responsibility and commitment of being a part of a positive and persistent effort to oppose the societal messages and treatment that can be so damaging to Black men.

This study serves as an important contribution to research concerning the lives of young African American men. Existing research related to the lives and experiences of young African American men as can be described as sparse and very little of this existing research gives young Black men the opportunity to speak to their own experiences. Much of the existing research seems be commentary, speculation, and second-hand analysis on what others have had to say about young African American men, without accounting for their perspectives. While the current study just scratches the surface in

terms of achieving an understanding of the life experiences of young African American men, it does provide some information about the beliefs this group has about Black men and the types of experiences and socialization messages that contribute to perceptions of being young, African American, and male. There are numerous factors that influence how African American adolescent males generate positive and negative meanings associated with being a Black man. A number of life experiences and socialization messages such as racism, stereotyping, and communicated beliefs about Black culture contribute to perceptions of being a young African American man. More rigorous studies related to the development of identity and various forms or components of identity are needed to help improve our understanding of how young African American men view themselves and their racial group.

Implications

Important clinical implications for individual, family, and group counseling, and prevention work can be derived from the findings in this study. Therapists who may encounter young Black men in counseling may use considerations and information regarding the process of African American male identity development to better assist and help improve the quality of life and social standing of young Black men. Clinicians may also use information obtained from the study of identity development for African American men to help others provide young Black men with valuable support through family and group counseling. Information obtained from the study of identity development for African American men may also help in the development preventative measures that can be used to combat oppressive practices that have plagued young Black

men in the U.S. for centuries. It is worth mentioning, that continued research efforts are needed to not just increase our understanding of the life experiences that many young African American men encounter, but to also develop the appropriate interventions that may prove helpful in changing the life circumstances that many young Black men face. These sorts of interventions may prove useful in a number of arenas of U.S. society. For example, the development of such interventions may assist primary and secondary educators in addressing the unique educational and social needs of many young Black men. Again, these implications are important to the field of counseling psychology, given its commitment to social justice and the promotion of positive change

Limitations

This qualitative study sought to explore how experiences of racism impact the identity development process for young African American men. Qualitative research allows the researcher to pursue and in-depth exploration in an attempt to achieve an understanding of the experiences of others and the meaning they make of these experiences. Typically, the in-depth explorative nature of qualitative research allows for a smaller sample along the way to achieving saturation. A focus group method was used for this study with 17 young African American between the ages of 14 and 18. However, there are roughly 42 million African Americans in the U.S., between 7 and 8 million are African American young men (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The information obtained from interviewing 17 young men does not allow for generalization to all African American young men. However, it is important to note that by the time of the fifth focus group, the same themes that presented in previous sessions repeated without the

significant addition of new themes. This is an indication of saturation. The fact that the researcher was an African American man may have also influenced the way participants responded to questions. Due to my apparent racial identity, some of the participants may have assumed that I was looking for certain answers to questions posed and responded accordingly, even though, I attempted to conceal my personal reactions to questions and issues addressed during the focus group interviews. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that many of the young men interviewed were from the Chicagoland area and a number of them stated that at least a portion of their childhoods were spent living in lower socio-economic status neighborhoods. African American men across the nation come from diverse backgrounds, not just the Midwest and all do not maintain a lower socio-economic status. The geographical limitations that are apparent in this study are very important to consider as location within the U.S. can have a tremendous influence on how young Black men make meaning of being African American. For example, the southern region of the United States has a rather strong and unique reputation for being a "hotbed" for racism and racial discrimination. This history of racism in the southern region of the U.S. may influence African American young men from this region in vastly different ways compared to how African American young men from the Midwest may have experienced racism. The demographics present in this study are narrow and cannot be generalized to all African American young men.

Further Directions for Research

This study presented data that suggest that some African American young men view life hardships and struggle, as well as an awareness of the history of African

American struggle and sacrifices as essential to the experience of being young, African American, and male. Findings from this study also suggest that some African American young men believe that Black men are generally portrayed negatively in our society and that these negative messages and stereotypes have potentially prompted some African American men to also think negatively about Black men as a group, however some African American young men also report that they do not view these stereotypes and negative messages as inhibitors to their life pursuits or as having a negative influence on how they view themselves.

There are numerous directions for researchers to take in regards to conducting future research in an effort to achieve a better understanding of the lives of African American young men. Some of those future directions have been mentioned throughout this study. Being that this study attempted to explore the experience of being an African American adolescent male and influence of life experiences and societal messages on young Black men's perceptions of being African American, more research related to racial identity development is needed. While the body of research for racial identity development for African Americans continues to grow and more study is being devoted to the racial identity development process for African American adolescents, it is critical that some studies related to racial identity development be specifically devoted to the experiences of African American adolescent males. There is much criticism, speculation, and fear directed towards African American men in our society. The types of racism, discrimination and stereotypes that African American young men are subjected to are some the most intense and unique that that our society has to offer.

More studies related to racial identity development may provide us with more important information about young Black perceive their race, perceive themselves in relation to their race, develop racial identities in the face of continued racism and discrimination, use or do not use their thoughts about their race as means of coping with racism and discrimination, and how other aspects of their identities emerge, along with racial identity. A second future direction in terms of understanding the life experiences of African American young men would include addressing the distressing low amount of research available related to the stereotypes and societal messages that are directed at young Black men. We simply need to know more about how young African American men are influenced by the largely negative stereotypes and societal messages that are directed at them. Finally, it is interesting that some of the young men who participated in this study reported that they are not personally influenced and deterred by the negative societal messages that exist for young African American men. More research needs to be devoted to investigating how these young men are able to stay resilient while being bombarded with so many negative and hurtful messages. Can the resiliency that these young men seem to communicate be a product of some aspect of racial identity, racial socialization, or personal strength? The future directions for research that I have detailed may not only provide us with valuable information, but as previously mentioned, we may also be able to use this information to develop interventions that will improve the quality of life and social standing of young African American men.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Focus Group Script - African American young men

Introduction-

Thanks for coming to participate in the focus group. As the letter and flyers explained, this is a study that *explores the role of experiences of oppression on identity development for African American young men.* I will be meeting for about 60 minutes today. I have a series of questions that I would like to ask you. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to know the thoughts that you have about each of the questions or topics. I hope to allow each of you the chance to answer the questions. But as this is voluntary, do not feel as if you have to answer each question. If you are not comfortable with a question, please let me know. Also, if you do not understand a question, let us know that as well.

There may be times when you have an answer for a question, but the person in front of you says what you wanted to say. It is fine if you repeat what was said before you if that is how you wanted to answer the question. We hope that as you listen to each other , that new ideas and responses will come to you. If that happens, feel free to answer each question more than one time.

Why don't we start with introductions. **(Facilitator introduce himself) (Young men will be given or can select fake names with nametags. Have them introduce themselves according to their fake names).** Feel free to share something about yourself with the group if you wish.

Welcome and thank you. Are we ready to start the group? Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

1)What does being an African American young man mean to you?

2) Can you describe the first time you realized that you were African American?

Prompts:

Have you thought about these ideas before? Consider some experiences you've had that may have caused you to change your thoughts about ethnicity, race and gender?

3)What comes to mind think about African American young men as a group or a people?

Prompts:

When you think of African American young men, what comes to mind?

4) What do you think others think about African American young men?

Prompts:

What messages have you received from media outlets like television?
What kind of images do you see on television, in movies, or in magazines?

5)What do you think non-African Americans think about Black young men?

Prompts:

Have you heard these opinions from non-Black teachers or students at your school? If so, what have you heard?

What kinds of feelings come up for you when you have these thoughts?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS

Name	Focus Group	Age	Grade	Site
Alexander	June 11, 2011	16	Junior	Shiloh Baptist Church
Latrell	June 11, 2011	17	Junior	Shiloh Baptist Church
Tyrone	June 11, 2011	17	Junior	Shiloh Baptist Church
Savon	February 15, 2012	17	Junior	Cabrini Connections
Charles	February 15, 2012	17	Junior	Cabrini Connections
La Sean	February 15, 2012	14	8th Grade	Cabrini Connections
Tim	February 22, 2012	17	Junior	Cabrini Connections
Omari	February 22, 2012	15	Sophomore	Cabrini Connections
Jeremiah	March 9, 2012	15	Freshman	Holy Trinity High School
Jemarcus	March 9, 2012	15	Freshman	Holy Trinity High School
Kurterry	March 9, 2012	16	Sophomore	Holy Trinity High School
Torey	March 9, 2012	16	Sophomore	Holy Trinity High School
Raymond	March 9, 2012	16	Sophomore	Holy Trinity High School
Jeremiah	March 16, 2012	18	Senior	Holy Trinity High School

Steaven	March 16, 2012	17	Junior	Holy Trinity High School
Brian	March 16, 2012	16	Junior	Holy Trinity High School
Steven	March 16, 2012	16	Junior	Holy Trinity High School

REFERENCES

Adams, G. R., & Marshall, S. K. (1996). A developmental social psychology of identity: Understanding the person in context. *Journal of Adolescence, 19*, 429-442.

Akbar, N. (1996). *Breaking the chains of psychological slavery*. Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions & Associates.

Allen, Q. (2010). Racial microaggressions: The schooling experiences of Black middle-class males in Arizona's secondary schools. *Journal of African American Males in Education, 1*(2), 125-142.

Arellano, A. R. & Pedilla, A. M. (1996). Academic invulnerability among a select group of Latino university students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 18*, 485-507.

Azibo, D. A. (1983). Some psychological concomitant and consequences of the Black personality. *Journal of Non-White Concerns, 11*(2), 59-66.

Barr, S., & Neville, H. (2008). Examination of the link between parental racial socialization messages and racial ideology among Black college students. *Journal of Black Psychology, 34*(2), 131-155.

Blake, W., & Darling, C. (1994). The dilemmas of the African American Male. *Journal of Black Studies, 24*(2), 402-415.

Boles, M. (2007). Breaking the "hip hop" hold: Looking beyond the media hype. In S. Jones (Ed.), *The state of Black America* (pp. 239-241). Maryland: Beckham Publishing Group.

Bowman, P. J., & Howard, C. (1985). Race-related socialization, motivation, and academic achievement: A study of Black youths in three-generation families. *Journal of American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 24*(2), 131-141.

Boyd, H. (2007). It's hard out here for a Black man! *The Black Scholar, 37*(3), 1-9.

Brittian, A. S. (2012). Understanding African American adolescents' identity development: A relational developmental systems perspective. (2012). *Journal of Black Psychology, 38*(2), 172-200.

Brody, G. H., Chen, Y., Murry, V. M., Ge, X., Simons, R. L., & Gibbons, F. X. (2006). Perceived discrimination and the adjustment of African American youths: A five year longitudinal analysis with contextual moderation effects. *Child Development, 77*, 1170-1189.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. J. (1994). Nature-nuture reconceptualization in developmental perspective: A bioecological model. *Psychological Review, 101*, 568-586.

Brown, C. S. (2008). Children's perceptions of racial and ethnic discrimination: Differences across children and contexts. In S. Quintana, & C. McKown (Eds.), *The handbook of race, racism, and the developing child* (pp. 133-153). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Bulhan, H. A. (1985). *Frantz Fanon and the psychology of oppression*. New York: Plenum.

Burrow, A. L., Tubman, J. G., & Montgomery, M. J. (2006). Racial identity: Toward an integrated developmental psychological perspective. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research, 6*(4), 317-339.

Byrd, C. M. (2012). The measurement of racial/ethnic identity in children: A critical review. *Journal of Black Psychology, 38*(1), 3-31.

Carter, R. T. (1991). Racial identity attitudes and psychological functioning. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 19*, 105-114.

Chavous, T. M., Rivas-Drake, D., Smalls, C., Griffin, T., & Cogburn, C. (2008). Gender matters, too: The influences of school racial discrimination and racial identity on academic engagement outcomes among African American adolescents. *Developmental Psychology, 44*, 637-654.

Clark, R., Coleman, A., & Novak, J. (2004). Initial psychometric properties of the everyday discrimination scale in black adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 27*, 363-368.

Cokley, K. (2002). Testing Cross's revised racial identity model: An examination of the relationship between racial identity and internalized racialism. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 49*(4), 476-483.

Cokley, K. (2005). Racial(ized) identity, ethnic identity, and Afrocentric values: Conceptual and methodological challenges in understanding African American identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 517-526.

Constantine, M. (2001). Addressing racial, ethnic, gender, and social class issues in counselor training and practice. In D. B. Pope-Davis, & H. L. K. Coleman (Eds.), *The intersection of race, class, and gender in multicultural counseling* (pp. 341-350). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Constantine, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions against African American clients in cross-racial counseling relationships. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*(1), 1-16.

Constantine, M., & Blackmon, S. (2002). Black adolescents' racial socialization experiences: Their relations to home, school, and peer self-esteem. *Journal of Black Studies, 32*, 322-335.

Crawford, I., Allison, K. W., Zamboni, B. D., & Soto, T. (2002). The influences of dual-identity development in psychosocial functioning of African American gay and bisexual men. *Journal of Sex Research, 39*, 179-189.

Creswell, J., Hanson, W., Clark, V., & Morales, A. (2007) Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 236-264.

Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review, 96*, 608-630.

Cross, W. (1971). The Negro to Black conversion experience: Toward a psychology of Black liberation. *Black World, 20*, 13-27.

Cross, W. (1978). The Thomas and Cross models of psychological nigrescence: A review. *Journal of Black Psychology, 5*, 13-31.

Cross, W.E. (1991). *Shades of Black: Diversity in African American identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Darity, W. (2003). Will the poor always be with us?: Review of social economy. *Taylor and Francis Journals, 61*(4), 471-477.

Davis, G., & Stevenson, H. (2006). Racial socialization experiences and symptoms of depressive symptoms among Black youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 15*, 293-307.

Demo, D. H., & Hughes, M. (1990). Socialization and racial identity among Black Americans. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 53*(4), 364-374.

Dolgin, K.G. (2011). *The adolescent: Development, relationships, and culture*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., Kawakami, K., & Hodson, G. (2002). Why can't we all just get along? Interpersonal biases and interracial distrust. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 8,* 88-102.

DuBois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folks*. New York: New American Library.

Eccles, J. S., Brown, B. V., & Templeton, J. (2008). A developmental framework for selecting indicators of well-being during the adolescent and young adult years. In B. Brown (Ed.), *Key indicators of child and youth well-being* (pp. 197-236). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Emerson, R. A. (2002). "Where my girls at?": Negotiating Black womanhood in music videos. *Gender and Society, 16*(1), 115-135.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle: A reissue*. New York: Norton.

Evans, K. M., & Herr, E. L. (1994). The influence of racial identity and the perception of discrimination on the career aspirations of African American men and women. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 44,* 173-184.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Feagin, J. R. (1991). The continuing significance of race: Anti-Black discrimination in public places. *American Sociological Review, 56,* 101-116.

Feagin, J. R. (2001). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future directions*. New York: Routledge.

Fischer, A. R., & Shaw, C. M. (1999). African Americans' mental health and perceptions of racist discrimination: The moderating effects of racial socialization experiences and self-esteem. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 46,* 395-407.

Fischer, C. B., Wallace, S. A., & Fenton, R. E. (2000). Discrimination distress during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 29*(6), 679-695.

Ford, J. D. (2008). Trauma, post traumatic stress disorder, and ethnoracial minorities. Toward diversity and cultural competence in principles and practices. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 15,* 62-67.

Franklin, A. J. (1999). Invisibility syndrome and racial identity development in psychotherapy and counseling African American men. *The Counseling Psychologist, 27,* 761-793.

Franklin, A. J. (2004). *From brotherhood to manhood: How Black men rescue their relationships and dreams from the invisibility syndrome.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Franklin-Jackson, D., & Carter, R. (2007). The relationships between race-related stress, racial identity, and mental health for Black Americans. *Journal of Black Psychology, 33*(1), 5-26.

Freire, P. (1999). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2006). Understanding and addressing contemporary racism: From aversive racism to the common in group. *Journal of Social Issues, 61,* 615-639.

García-Coll, C., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H. P., Crnic, K., Wasik, B. H., & Garcia, H. V. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development, 67*(5), 1891-1914.

Gardner-Kitt, D. L., & Worrell, F. C. (2007). Measuring nigrescence attitudes in school-aged adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 30,* 187-202.

Greene, B. A. (1992). Racial socialization as a tool in psychotherapy with African American children. In L. A. Vargas, & J. D. Koss-Chioino (Eds.), *Working with culture: Psychotherapeutic interventions with ethnic minority children and adolescents* (pp. 63-81). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hanson, R., McArdle, M., & Wilson, V. (2007). Invisible men: The urgent problems of low-income African American males. In *The state of Black America*. New York: Beckham Publications Group, Inc.

Hardiman, R., & Jackson, B.W. (1997). *Conceptual foundations for social justice courses, teaching for diversity and social justice.* New York: Routledge.

Harper, S. R. (2006). Peer support for African American male college achievement: Beyond internalized racism and the burden of ‘acting White.’ *Journal of Men’s Studies, 14*(3), 337-358.

Harris-Britt, A., Valrie, C. R., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Rowley, S. J. (2007). Perceived racial discrimination and self-esteem in African American youth: Racial socialization as a protective factor. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 17*, 669-682.

Harter, S. (1990). Self and identity development. In S. S. Feldman, & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the thresholds: The developing adolescent* (pp. 352-387). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Haverkamp, B., & Young, R. (2007). Paradigms, purpose, and the role of literature: Formulating a rationale for qualitative investigations. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *35*(2), 265-294.

Hawkins, W. E., Hawkins, M. J., Sabatino,S., & Ley, S.(1998). Relationship of perceived future opportunity to depressive symptomatology of inner-city African American adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *20*, 757-764.

Hazell, V., & Clarke, J. (2008). Race and gender in the media: A content analysis of advertisements in two mainstream Black magazines. *Journal of Black Studies, 39*, 5-21.

Helms, J. E. (2007). Some better practices for measuring racial and ethnic identity constructs. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*, 235-246.

Hocoy, D. (1999). The validity of Cross's model of Black racial identity development in the South African context. *Journal of Black Psychology, 25*(2), 131-151.

Ivey, A. E., & Collins, N. M. (2003). Social justice: A long term challenge for counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*(3), 290-298.

Jenkins, T. S. (2006). Mr. nigger: The challenges of educating Black males within American society. *Journal of Black Studies, 37*(1), 127-155.

Jones, J. M. (1997). *Prejudice and racism* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: McGraw-Hill.

Jones, J. (2007). Exposure to chronic community violence: Resilience in African American children. *Journal of Black Psychology, 33*(2), 125-149.

Juang, L., & Syed, M. (2008). Ethnic identity and spirituality. In R. M. Lerner, R. Roeser, & E. Phelps (Eds.), *Positive youth development and spirituality: From theory to research* (pp. 262-284). West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Kellow, J. T., & Jones, B. D. (2005). Stereotype threat in African-American high school students: An initial investigation. *Current Issues in Education, 8*(20).

Kellow, J. T., & Jones, B. D. (2008). The effects of stereotypes on the achievement gap: Reexamining the academic performance of African American high school students. *Journal of Black Psychology, 34*(1), 94-120.

Kessler, R. C., Mickelson, K. D., & Williams, D. (1999). The prevalence, distribution, and mental health correlates of perceived discrimination in the United States. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 40*, 208-230.

Klonoff, E. A., Landrine, H., & Ullman, J. B. (1999). Racial discrimination and psychiatric symptoms among Black. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 5*(4), 329-339.

Landrine, H., & Klonoff, E. A. (1996). The schedule of racist events: A measure of racial discrimination and a study of its negative physical and mental health consequences. *The Journal of Black Psychology, 22*(2), 144-168.

Lazur, R. F., & Majors, R. (1995). Men of color: Ethnocultural variations of male gender role strain. In R. F. Levant, & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), *A new psychology of men* (pp. 337-358). New York: Basic Books.

Majors, R., & Billson, J. (1992). *Cool pose: The dilemmas of Black manhood in America*. New York: Lexington Books.

Mandara, J., Gaylord-Harden, N.K., Richards, M.H., & Ragsdale, B.L. (2009). The effects of changes in racial identity and self-esteem on changes in African Americans mental health. *Child Development, 80*(1),1660-1675.

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*, 551-558.

Marcia, J. E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (pp. 159-187). New York: Wiley.

Marger, M. (2003). *Race and ethnic relations: American global perspectives* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press.

Mauer, M. (2003). Race in incarceration. In S. Plous (Ed.), *Understanding prejudice and discrimination* (pp.178-181). New York: McGraw-Hill.

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology, 5*, 100-122.

McConahay, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the Modern Racism Scale. In J. F. Dovidio, & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91-126). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. (2003). The development and consequences of stereotype-consciousness in middle childhood. *Child Development 74*(2): 498-515.

Meeks, K. (2000). *Driving while Black: What to do if you are a victim of racial profiling*. New York: Broadway Books.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mizell, C. (1999). African American men's personal sense of mastery: The consequences of the adolescent environment, self-concept, and adult achievement. *Journal of Black Psychology, 25,* 210-231.

Monroe, C. (2005). Why are "bad boys" always Black?: Causes of disproportional in school discipline and recommendations for change. *The Clearing House, 79*(1), 45-50.

Nadal, K. L. (2008). Preventing racial, ethnic, gender, sexual minority, disability, and religious microaggressions: Recommendations for promoting positive mental health. *Prevention in Counseling Psychology: Theory, Research, Practice, and Training, 2,* 22-27.

Nadal, K. L. (2011). The racial and ethnic microaggressions scale (REMS): Construction, reliability, and validity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58*(4),470-480.

Neal, L., McCray, A., Webb-Johnson, G., & Bridgest, S. (2003). The effects of African American movement styles on teachers perceptions and reactions. *The Journal of Special Education, 37*(1), 49-57.

Neblett, E. W., Jr., Philip, C. L., Cogburn, C. D., & Sellers, R. M. (2006). African American adolescents' discrimination experiences and academic achievement: Racial socialization as cultural compensatory and protective factor. *Journal of Black Psychology, 32,* 199-218.

Noguera, P. (1997). Responding to the crisis confronting Black youth: Providing support without marginalization. In *Motion Magazine.*

Nyborg, V. & Curry, J. (2003). The impact of perceived racism: Psychological symptoms among African American boys. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology,32,* 258-266.

Ogbu, J. U. (2003*). Black American students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Oliver, W. (1989). Black males and social problems: Prevention through Afrocentric socialization. *Journal of Black Studies, 20*(1), 15-39.

Oliver, W. (2006). The streets: An alternative Black male socialization institution. *Journal of Black Studies, 36*(6), 918-937.

Oyersman, D., Bybee, D., & Terry, K. (2006). Possible selves and academic outcomes: How and when possible selves impel action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 91*(1), 188-204.

Oyserman, D., Gant, L., & Ager, J. (1995). A socially contextualized model of African American identity: Possible selves and school persistence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(6), 1216-1232.

Pahl, K., & Way, N. (2006). Longitudinal trajectories of ethnic identity among urban Black and Latino adolescents. *Child Development, 77*, 1403-1415.

Paradies, Y. (2006). A systematic review of empirical research on self-reported racism and health. *International Journal of Epidemiology, 35*, 888-901.

Parham, T. A., & Helms, J. E. (1985). Attitudes of racial identity and self-esteem of Black students: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of College Student +Personnel, 26*(2), 134-147.

Pascoe, E. A., & Richman, L. S. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 135*, 531-554.

Payne, Y. (2008). A gangster and a gentlemen: How street life oriented, U.S. born African men negotiate issues of survival in relation in their masculinity. *Men and Masculinities, 8*(3), 288-297.

Peters, M. F. (1985). Racial socialization of young Black children. In H. P. McAdoo & J. L. McAdoo (Eds.), *Black children: Social, educational, and parental environments* (pp. 159-173). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Phinney, J. S. (1989). Stages of ethnic identity development in minority group adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 9*(1-2), 34-49.

Phinney, J. S., & Chavira, V. (1995). Parental ethnic socialization and adolescent coping with problems related to ethnicity. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 5*, 31-63.

Pierce, C., Carew, J., Pierce-Gonzales, D., & Willis, D. (1978). An experiment in racism: TV commercials. In C. Pierce (Ed.), *Television and education* (pp. 62-88). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Pieterse, A. L., & Carter, R. T. (2007). An examination of the relationship between general life stress, racism-related stress, and psychological health among Black men. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*(1), 101-109.

Pieterse, A. L., Evans, S. A., Risner-Butner, A., Collins, N. M., & Mason, L. B. (2009). Multicultural competence and social justice training in counseling psychology and counselor education: A review and analysis of a sample multicultural course syllabi. *The Counseling Psychologist, 37*(1), 93-115.

Pieterse, A. L., Todd, N. R., Neville, H. A., & Carter, R. T. (2012). Perceived racism and mental health among Black American adults: A meta-analytic review**.** *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 59*(1), 1-9.

Pleck, J. H. (1981). *The myth of masculinity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Plummer, D. (1995). Patterns of racial identity development of African American adolescent males and females. *Journal of Black Psychology, 21*(2), 168-180.

Ponterotto, J., & Grieger, I. (2007). Effectively communicating qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(3), 404-430.

Prilleltensky, I., & Gonick, L. (1996). Politics change, oppression remains: On the psychology of politics and oppression. *Political Psychology, 17*(1), 127-148.

Quintana, S. M. (2007). Racial and ethnic identity: Developmental perspectives and research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 4*, 259-270.

Reid, L. D., & Radhakrishnan, P. (2003). Race matters: The relations between race and general campus climate. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 9,* 263-275.

Ridley, C. R. (1995). *Overcoming unintentional racism in counseling and therapy: A practitioner's guide to intentional intervention.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Roderick, M. (2003). What’s happening to the boys?: Early high school experiences and school outcomes among African American male adolescents in Chicago. *Urban Education, 38*(5), 538-607.

Rome, D. (2004). *Black demons: The media's depiction of the African American male criminal stereotype*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rosenberg, M. (1979). Group rejection and self-rejection. *Research in Community Mental Health, 1*, 3-20.

Rotheram, M. J., & Phinney, J. S. (1987). Introduction: Definitions and perspectives in the study of children's ethnic socialization. In J. S. Phinney, & M. J. Rotheram (Eds.), *Children's ethnic socialization: Pluralism and development* (pp. 10-28). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Rowley, S. J., Sellers, R. M., Chavous, T. M., & Smith, M. A. (1998). The relationship between racial identity and self-esteem in African American college and high school students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(3), 715-724.

Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 769-802). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sanders-Thompson, V. L. (1996). Perceived experiences of racism as stressful life events. *Community Mental Health Journal, 32*(3), 223-233.

Schmader, T., Johns, M., & Forbes, C. (2008). An integrated process model of stereotype threat effects on performance. *Psychological Review, 115*, 336-356.

Scott Jr., L. (2003). The relation of racial identity and racial identity and racial socialization to coping with discrimination among African American adolescents. *Journal of Black Studies, 33*(4), 520-538.

Sears, D. O. (1988). Symbolic racism. In P. A. Katz, & D. A. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 53-84). New York: Plenum Press.

Sellers, R. M., Caldwell, C. H., Schmeelk-Cone, K. H., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2003). The role of racial identity and racial discrimination in the mental health of African American young adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 44*, 302-317.

Sellers, R. M., Copeland-Linder, N., Martin, P. P., & Lewis, R. (2006). Racial identity matters: The relationship between racial discrimination and psychological function in African American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 16*, 187-216.

Sellers, R. M., Smith, M., Shelton, J. N., Rowley, S., & Chavous, T. M. (1998). The multidimensional model of racial identity: A reconceptualization of African American racial identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2*, 18-39.

Shelton, J. N., & Sellers, R. M. (2000). Situational stability and variability in African American racial identity. *Journal of Black Psychology, 26*(1), 27-50.

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Simons, R. L., Murry, V., McLoyd, V., Lin, K. H., Cutrona, C., & Conger, R. D. (2002). Discrimination, crime, ethnic identity, and parenting as correlates of depressive symptoms among African American children: A multilevel analysis. *Development and Psychology, 14*, 371-393.

Smith, E. J. (1991). Ethnic identity development: Toward the development of a theory within the context of majority/minority status. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 770*, 181-188.

Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000, Winter). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*,60–73.

Speight, S.L. (2007). Internalized racism: One more piece of the puzzle. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(1), 126-134.

Spencer, M. B. (1988). Self-concept development. In D. T. Slaughter (Ed.), *Perspectives on Black child development: New directions for child development* (pp. 59-72). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Spencer, M. B. (2006). Phenomenology and ecological systems theory: Development of diverse groups. In W. Damon, & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology* (6th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 829-893). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Spencer, M. B. (2008). Phenomenology and ecological systems theory: Development of diverse groups. In W. Damon, R. M. Lerner, N. Eisenberg, D. Kuhn, & R. S. Siegler (Eds.), *Child and adolescent development: An advanced course* (pp. 696-740). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Spencer, M. B., Dupree, D., & Hartmann, T. (1997). A phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST): A self-organization perspective in context. *Development and Psychopathology, 9*(4), 817-833.

Spencer, M. B., & Tinsley, B. (2008). Identity as coping: Youths' diverse strategies for successful adaptation. *Prevention Researcher, 15*(4), 17-21.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape the intellectual identities and performance of women and African Americans. *American Psychologist, 52,* 613-629.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(5), 797-811.

Steinberg, L. (2005). Cognitive and affective development in adolescence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 9*(2), 69-74.

Stephens, D. P., & Phillips, L. D. (2003). Freaks, gold diggers, divas and dykes: The socio-historical development of African American adolescent females' sexual scripts. *Sexuality and Culture, 7*, 3-47.

Stevenson, H. C. (1993). Validation of the Scale of Racial Socialization for African American Adolescents: A preliminary analysis. *Psych Discourse, 24*(1), 7-10.

Stevenson, H. C. (2004). Boys in men's clothing: Racial socialization and neighborhood safety as buffers to hypervulnerability in African American adolescent males. In N. Way & J. Chu (Eds.), *Adolescent boys in context* (pp. 59-77). New York: New York University Press.

Stevenson, H. C., Reed, J., Bodison, P., & Bishop, A. (1997). Racism stress management: Racial socialization beliefs and the experience of depression and anger in African American youth. *Youth and Society, 29*, 197-222.

Stevenson, H. C., Cameron, R., Herrero-Taylor, T., & Davis, G. Y. (2002). Development of the Teenage Experience of Racial Socialization Scale: Correlates of race-related socialization from the perspective of Black Youth. *Journal of Black Psychology, 28*, 84-106.

Stevenson, H. C., McNeil, J., Herrero-Taylor, T., & Davis, G. (2005). Influence of perceived neighborhood diversity and racism experience on the racial socialization of Black youth. *Journal of Black Psychology, 31*(3), 273-290.

Stillson, R. W., O'Neil, J. M., & Owens, S. V. (1991). Predictors of adults gender role conflict: Race, class, unemployment, age, instrumentally-expressiveness, and personal strain. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 38,* 458-464.

Sue, D. W. (2003). *Overcoming our racism: The journey to liberation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sue, D. W. (2005). Racism and the conspiracy of silence. *The Counseling Psychologist, 33,* 100-114.

Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life*: *Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. New York: Wiley & Sons.

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist, 62*(2), 271-286.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stryker, S., & Serpe, R.T. (1982). Personality, roles, and social behavior. In W. Ickes, & E. S. Knowles (Eds.), *Commitment, identity salience and role behavior: Theory and research example* (pp. 199-218). New York: Springer Verlag.

Stryker, S., & Serpe, R. T. (1994). Identity salience and psychological centrality: Equivalent, overlapping, or complementary concepts? *Social Psychology Quarterly, 57,* 16-35.

Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race.* New York: Basic Books.

Thomas, A., & Speight, S. (1999). Racial identity and racial socialization attitudes of African American parents. *Journal of Black Psychology, 25*(2), 152-170.

Thompson, C. E., & Neville, H. A. (1999). Racism, mental health, and mental health practice. *The Counseling Psychologist, 27,* 155-223.

Thornton, M. C. (1997). Strategies of racial socialization among Black parents: Mainstream, minority, and cultural messages. In R. J. Taylor, J. S. Jackson, & L. M. Chatters (Eds.), *Family life in Black America* (pp. 201-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Townsend, T. G., & Lanphier, E. R. (2007). Family influences on racial identity among African American youth. *Journal of Black Psychology, 33,* 278-298.

Umafia-Taylor, A. J., Diversi, M., & Fine, M. A. (2002). Ethnic identity and self-esteem of Latino adolescents: Distinctions among the Latino populations. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 17,* 303-327.

United States Census Bureau. (2010). Retrieved April 10, 2012 from: http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf

Utsey, S. O. (1998). Assessing the stressful effects of racism: A review of instrumentation. *Journal of Black Psychology, 24,* 269-288.

Vera, E. M., & Speight, S. L. (2003). Multicultural competence, social justice, and counseling psychology: Expanding our roles. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*(3), 253-272.

Wade, J. C. (1996). African American men's gender role conflict: The significance of racial identity. *Sex Roles, 34,* 17-34.

Walker, D. ,& Myrick, F. (2006). Grounded theory: An exploration of process and procedure. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(4), 547-559.

Ward, J. V. (1990). Racial identity formation and transformation. In C. Gilligan, N. D. Lyons, & T. J. Hammer (Eds.), *Making connections: The relational world of adolescent girls at Emma Willard School* (pp. 215-232). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ward, L. M., Hansbrough, E., &Walker, E. (2005). Contributions of music video exposure to Black adolescents' gender and sexual schemes. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 20,* 143-166.

Western, B., & Pettit, B. (2005). Black-White wage inequality, employment rates and incarceration. *American Journal of Sociology, 111,* 553-578.

Wester, S. R., Vogel, D. L., Wei, M., & McLain, R. (2006). African American men, gender role conflict, and psychological distress: The role of racial identity. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 84,* 419-430.

Whitehead, T., Peterson, J., & Kaljee, L. (1994). The hustle: Socioeconomic deprivation, drug trafficking, and low-income African American male gender identity. Pediatrics, 93, 1050-1054.

Williams, D. R., & Collins, C. (2004). Reparations: A viable strategy to address the enigma of African American health. *American Behavioral Scientist, 47,* 977-1000.

Williams, D. R., & Mohammed, S. A. (2009). Discrimination and racial disparities in health: Evidence and needed research. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 32,* 20-47.

Williams, D. R., & Williams-Morris, R. (2000). Racism and mental health: The African American experience. *Ethnicity and Health, 5*(3/4), 243-268.

Woodson, C. G. (1999). *The mis-education of the Negro.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Wong, C. A., Eccles, J. S., & Sameroff, A. (2003). The influence of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identification on African American adolescents' school and socioemotional adjustment. *Journal of Personality, 71*, 1197-1232.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zamboni, B. D., & Crawford, I. (2007). Minority stress and sexual problems among African American gay and bisexual men. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 36*, 569-578.

VITA

Corey Steele is a first generation college graduate; the first child born to John and Serena Steele. He graduated from Texas Christian University where he earned a degree in Psychology in 2001. Corey also obtained a master's degree in education from Texas Christian University.

During his time as a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Program at Loyola University Chicago, Corey worked on numerous research projects and served as the Doctoral Advisory Committee president. He also participated in volunteer work and prevention and outreach initiatives at several schools throughout the city of Chicago.

Corey completed his pre-doctoral internship at the University of Illinois at Chicago Counseling Center. He plans to secure a full-time faculty position. Corey's primary research is the development of identity for African American young men.