

Exploring the Role that Religiosity and/or Spirituality Plays in the Appraisal and
Coping Processes of Low-Income, African American, Adolescent Males Who Have
Been Exposed to Community Violence: A Phenomenological Approach

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Counseling Psychology)

at the

University of Wisconsin-Madison

2016

Date of final oral examination: 05/05/2016

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ABSTRACT

Community violence exposure comes in many forms—including direct exposure, indirect witnessing and hearing stories shared among the community. This dissertation is a study that raises questions about the level of exposure to community violence experienced—specifically, among low-income, urban, African American, adolescent males within the United States. There are numerous stressors that impact the lives African American males, especially those who are living in communities that have high levels of violence. Interventions provided in schools and in community agencies (e.g., recreational facilities) may provide some form of respite from community violence. However, gang activity, aggression, decreased academic performance and concerns with conduct are salient within African American sub-culture, despite best efforts within the community. Due to the lack of psycho-socio-cultural exposure and understanding of African American culture, historically, there are greater observations of the externalized manifestations of these risk factors (i.e., community violence). Thus, conceptualization of intervention and prevention has been limited in scope. By contrast, the exploration of resilience factors that may moderate the impact of violence exposure on African American youth, has received far less research attention.

Knowledge of factors that promote adaptation among Black, urban youth is necessary for the targeting of those at risk for negative behavioral and psychological sequelae as a result of their exposure to violence. Resilience research also offers an opportunity to emphasize affirmative, rather than pathologic, processes and outcomes. Spirituality and religion are two, well-known components of African American culture and

identity. Traditionally, spirituality and religiosity have operated as individual and collective sources of refuge, purpose, forgiveness, hope, and liberation—especially in instances of sociopolitical injustices. As a result, a way to possibly address the epidemic of adolescent, African American exposure to community violence is through focused exploration of the role spirituality and religiosity could potentially serve in African American communities. To capture often-unheard thoughts and feelings of young, African American men and the unique challenges they face in their particular sociocultural environment, the study sampled seven, adolescent, African American males between the ages of 14 and 16 who were from a large, Midwestern city.

Overall, the results supported the notion that African American, male adolescents frequently experience pervasive, negative exposure to violence, fear and transgressions within their communities, which can impact building and maintaining interpersonal relationships and personal self-efficacy. Moreover, the autonomy of the participants has habitually felt compromised or challenged by others. Socially constructed labels of inferiority challenge the adolescent's ego-syntonic beliefs and further perpetuate a distorted sense-of-self. As a result, a sense of safety is a critically essential component required for change to occur in these communities. Safety—as described by the participants—was not necessarily confined to a physical building or location, but more so expressed through the associated encouragement found in another. These findings do not intend to generalize across all adolescent, African American male experiences. Instead, they seek to provide a richer understanding of the issues that participants have experienced.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A violent event itself may lead to psychological and emotional distress as well as the replication of violent behaviors. However, the detrimental impact of this distress is not the event itself, but the result of an individual's unique appraisal and coping process to the event in addition to the individual's community and social support systems (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). This dissertation is a study that raises questions about the level of exposure to community violence experienced, specifically, among low-income, urban, African American, adolescent males within the United States. A general overview of the prevalence, risk factors and resources among this population, in the context of community violence exposure, coping and appraisal, is discussed in this chapter.

Background

Prevalence. Despite a relative decline in violence victimization rates since their peak in the early to mid 1990s (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002), homicide rates among youth remain "unacceptably high" according to federal public health officials (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). For example, in 2000, homicide was the second leading cause of death for youth 15-24 years of age and the fourth leading cause of death in children 1-14 years of age in the United States (Tuma, Loeber, & Lochman, 2006).

A growing concern, Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman (1994) estimated that between 20% and 50% of children living in America are victims of violence

at school, within their homes, and in their communities. Specific to racial and gender groups, the National Center for Health Statistics (2010) cited homicide as the leading cause of death for Black males in the United States in 2007. At a rate of 85.3 homicides per 100,000 males aged 15 to 24 years, these rates nearly quadrupled the number of homicides for all males of similar age group, 22.1 per 100,000 (Center for Health Statistics, 2010).

Contextualization. Johnson (2006) noted that research regarding adolescents and violence prevention is also complicated as it engrosses several scientific disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, medicine, nursing, economics, architecture, criminology and civil engineering), as well as numerous professional jurisdictions (e.g., public health agencies, education, law enforcement, legislatures and the judiciary system). Despite incongruent definitions of community violence across different literature bases, Osofsky (1995) defined exposure to community violence as, "... frequent and continual exposure to the use of guns, knives, and drugs, and random violence" (p. 782).

Risk Factors

Community violence exposure comes in many forms, including knowing victims of community violence, witnessing community violence, and being victimized. Actual rates of exposure to community violence in childhood and adolescence vary depending on the definition used (i.e., witnessing vs. victimization) and the population studied (Overstreet, 2000). Stein et al. (2003) described victimization, or direct exposure, as "exposure in which the violence is

targeted at the child” (p. 248) such as being robbed at gunpoint. Furthermore, Stein et al. (2003) described indirect exposure as “violence that is not directly witnessed” (p.248) by the child or adolescent (e.g., hearing gun shots). Although individuals from various social backgrounds (e.g., racial, SES, regional, spiritual) are vulnerable to experiencing some form of community violence, there are specific populations who are at greater risk of exposure. The following paragraphs will highlight those individuals who are at the greatest risk.

At-risk demographics. A number of scholars have analyzed community violence exposure for young boys from low-income, urban, minority communities in comparison to youth from other settings, and as a result, indicated that children and adolescents from urban, low-income, and predominantly African American communities are exposed to higher rates of community violence (Anderson et al., 2001; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Jaycox et al., 2002; Overstreet, 2000; Schahinfar et al., 2000; Schwab-Stone et al., 1995; Singer et al., 1995; Stein, et al., 2003; Weist et al., 2001). Furthermore, urban, African American adolescents are commonly portrayed as individuals who grow up in families that are economically-burdened and entrenched within impoverished communities (Li, Nussbaum & Richards, 2007).

Victimization. Prior victimization may serve as an indicator for subsequent victimization, even after controlling for patterns of habitual activities and lifestyle characteristics that may also present opportunities for victimization (Lambert et al., 2010). Four types of risks that increase the likelihood of crime and

victimization are: 1) exposure to criminal activities; 2) proximity to crime areas; 3) low guardianship or parental monitoring; and 4) target attractiveness (Lambert et al., 2010). Furthermore, routine activities and lifestyle theories (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Hindenlang et al., 1978) suggest that adolescents with these traits are more likely to find themselves in dangerous situations and settings with increased occurrence of violence (Lambert et al., 2010).

Previous research has displayed that greater associations with criminal activity, significant amounts of unsupervised and unstructured time, as well as affiliation with deviant peers, has lead to increased exposure to community violence among adolescents (Lambert et al., 2010). In order to develop further understanding about the latent moderators and mediators of community violence and its impact on African American youth, it is necessary to identify how exposure to this form of violence impacts the course of development.

Development of African American Adolescents

Ecological perspective. Origins of community violence are “multi-leveled” and “complex” (Thomas et al., 2012). Coinciding variables function at multiple levels and include: a) individual factors (e.g., decreased academic achievement, aggression, emotion dysregulation and cognitive distortions; Johnson, 2006); b) family dynamics (e.g., parental practices and supports; Hammack, Richards, Luo, Edlynn, & Roy, 2004); and c) neighborhood contexts (e.g., the effects of pervasive, chronic poverty, access to weapons, and the prevalence of drugs and gangs; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Systemically, social cognitive development also has important implications for African American children's understanding of inter-racial and intra-racial interactions (Quintana & Smith, 2012). By being able to consider a social perspective, African American adolescents can better appreciate the contemporary relevance of the role of race in their lives by understanding the social consequences of race and racial group membership. Also, they are able to look beyond appearances and hypothesize or intuit others' intentions, attitudes, and feelings in inter-racial interactions (Quintana & Smith, 2012).

This important milestone allows African American adolescents to infer racial prejudice that may lie behind social facades or posturing. Additionally, they are able to reason more complexly about social interactions and understand the social implications of racial group membership. They understand that race is not only about one's heritage or history, but influences mundane social behavior, such as dialect, manner of speaking and behaving, and worldviews (Quintana & Smith, 2012). Moreover, African American children are exposed to the notion of oppression and injustice that is perpetuated by the dominant culture in U.S. society.

This awareness is fostered at a time in which children's social cognitive development encourages the notion of egalitarianism and some trust in authority. For African American adolescents, they are able to appreciate the injustice that derives when a group of people is treated unfairly (Quintana & Smith, 2012). The challenge for African American adolescents is how to reconcile the awareness of

historical injustices perpetuated by the dominant culture and a developmentally congruent notion of respect and deference to authority. There are several ways in which African American adolescents construct racial narratives that resolve this dilemma, but many appear to develop racial narratives that include gross injustices that happened historically (Quintana & Smith, 2012).

Appraisal and Coping Process of African American Adolescents

African American adolescents who experience high levels of stress in low-income communities (e.g., exposure to economic hardships, familial loss, inadequate schools, and violence) may use various types of strategies as a way to cope (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2010). Racial narratives involve repeated patterns of inter-racial and intra-racial interactions in which members of those interactions manifest familiar characteristics and in which the person may have had similar interactions before. Racial narratives represent intergroup perceptions and attitudes into interpersonal contexts. Constructing racial narratives from previous inter-racial and intra-racial experiences allows for new interactions to be anticipated and allows for efficient recognition of current interactions that reflect the basic features of a racial narrative (Quintana & Smith, 2012).

Young, African American men, especially during times of economic crises and increased disparities related to poverty, tend to exhibit a greater preservation of one's self-worth, dignity, and respect (Cox, 2010). Historically, Black males have often struggled to attain their niche in a society that is susceptible to racial bias and frequently marginalizes them (Wilson, 2009b). When young, African American

males feel disrespected for what they possess and are discriminated against as a people, they may turn to violence and crime as a way to earn credibility (DeGruy, Kjellstrand, Briggs, & Brennan, 2011). Thus, African American adolescents sometimes rationalize that respect is earned through aggression and force, which eventually leads to an experience of power (Mattaini, Twyman, Chin, & Lee, 1996). Consequently, through learned experiences, adolescents derive that money and power comes through aggression. Furthermore, power provides an escape from personal poverty and social shame (i.e., increased self-worth). Violence (i.e., antisocial actions) provides an opportunity to attain the “respect” of others (Hemmings, 2002; Giligan, 1996). Feelings of disrespect may also be correlated to the extent to which adolescents experience failure or hopelessness, both of which are positively connected with exposure to and participation in violence (Bolland et al., 2005; Drummond et al., 2011).

Consequences of Community Violence

Behavioral and psychological distress. Exposure to community violence significantly contributes to the morbidity and mortality of adolescents (Cheng et al., 2003). Furthermore, Lynch (2003) identified behavioral problems as both a predictor and a consequence of community violence exposure in youth. Several, well-documented studies have examined the extensive range of negative sequelae of community violence exposure for adolescents such as: a) posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Jaycox et al., 2002; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Stein et al., 2001); b) other anxiety disorders (e.g., nightmares,

fearfulness, sleep disturbance, and avoidance; Finkelhor, 1995; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993); c) dissociation, “a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, identity, memory, or perception of the environment” (American Psychological Association, 1994, p. 477; Putnam, 1997); d) depression (Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin, & Johnson, 1998; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Overstreet, 2000); e) impairment in school functioning (Hurt, Malmud, Brodsky, & Giannetta, 2001); f) decreased rates of high school graduation (Grogger, 1997); g) decreased IQ and reading ability (Delaney-Black et al., 2002); and h) aggression (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Farrell & Bruce, 1997).

Additional consequences of African American adolescents—in addition to high rates of homicide—are lack of access to employment, a decrease in human and civil liberties through corrections involvement, and the depletion of social capital within Black communities due to incarceration (Bell, 1997; Mauer, 2002). Among adolescents who had been victimized, psychological distress was greater than those who had not experienced victimization. However, along with risk factors, child adjustment can also be impacted by protective factors.

Empowerment

Positive individual, family and community resources offer opportunities to diminish both externalizing and internalizing symptoms. A sense of confidence, positive family interactions and a cohesive neighborhood environment can enhance urban youths' adjustment. Self-esteem has also been found to have significant moderating effects and protective in several different samples of youth (Blocker &

Copeland, 1994; Dumont & Provost, 1999).

Religiosity and spirituality. One way that African Americans have traditionally established a sense of communalism, self-esteem, and of purpose has been through a deeply rooted sense of spirituality derived from the African legacy (Mbiti, 1990). Today, the Black church is one institution that offers role models to Black children, a vehicle for bolstering self-esteem by making positions of leadership and responsibility, as well as an extended family of community, available for emotional and financial support (Richardson, 1991). Conceptually, the Black church is possibly "the most organized, visible, and nurturing institution" in the lives of African Americans (Hopkins, 1993, p. 1).

One way that African American adolescents may become more hopeful regarding their future and belief in their own self-worth is with strong support from their families and communities (DeGruy et al., 2011). Moreover, knowledge of factors that promote adaptation (i.e., religiosity and spirituality) among Black, urban youth is necessary for the targeting of those at risk for negative behavioral and psychological sequelae as a result of their exposure to violence.

Summary

There are numerous stressors that impact the lives African American males, especially young African American males who are living in communities that have high levels of violence. Interventions provided in schools and in community agencies (e.g., recreational facilities) may provide some form of respite from community violence. However, gang activity, aggression, decreased academic

performance and concerns with conduct are salient within African American sub-culture, despite best efforts within the community. Due to the lack of psycho-socio-cultural exposure and understanding of African American culture, historically, there are greater observations of the externalized manifestations of the risk factors (i.e., community violence). Thus, conceptualization of intervention and prevention has been limited in scope. One way to address community violence in which adolescent, African American males are exposed is through focused exploration of the role spirituality and religiosity could potentially serve in African American communities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Over the past 20 years, researchers have examined adolescents and their experiences with violence in their communities. Multiple scholars such as Kennedy (2007), Haber and Toro (2004), and Saunders (2003) indicated that exposure to violence has been associated with numerous unfortunate outcomes among adolescents such as mental and physical health problems, delinquency, substance use, increased risk of victimization, teenage pregnancy, and poor academic performance. Kennedy (2007) observed that few studies have surveyed the cumulative exposure to family and community violence among adolescents.

To contextualize and situate the processes of community violence exposure, this chapter will explore theories of distal factors—historical, societal, and cultural variables—in addition to proximal factors— specifically family, community, and religiosity and spirituality— for low-income, African American, adolescent males. Next, theories of identity development among African American, adolescent males are examined. Additionally, this chapter will explore the religiosity, spirituality, and psychological well-being for low-income, African American, adolescent males who are exposed to community violence, which will set the stage for this study. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the study's goals and research questions.

Terminology

Prior to the literature review, this section addresses the terminology used

throughout the dissertation. In particular, the terms *African American*, *Black*, *White*, *racial/ethnic minority*, and *religiosity and spirituality* are defined and briefly discussed.

African American. The term *African American* refers to individuals of African ancestry who self-identify or is identified by others as African American. Although the term African American has been utilized, at least, since the 1920s, it has been the preferred term in the United States since the 1970s (Agyemang, Bhopal, Bruijnzeels, 2005). It should also be noted that the term African American is most commonly associated with individuals from sub-Saharan Africa and is not necessarily applied to Africans from northern African countries (e.g., Tunisia; Agyemang, Bhopal, Bruijnzeels, 2005).

The majority of African Americans are descendants of persons brought to the Americas as slaves between the 17th and 19th century (i.e., distant ancestry) and are often linked homogeneously with others who came from the Caribbean or Africa during the 20th and 21st centuries (i.e., recent ancestry), despite differences in language, culture, health and migration history (Agyemang, Bhopal, Bruijnzeels, 2005). The term *African American* was the preferred, inclusive term used throughout this study, yet was also used interchangeably with *Black* to describe individuals of African ancestry.

Black. The term *Black*, by in large, also refers to individuals of African ancestry. Usually in politics or issues pertaining to social power, the term *Black* is

representative of all non-White minority populations (Agyemang, Bhopal, Bruijnzeels, 2005). Frequently observed in social, political, and day-to-day life, the term Black also has psychosocial significance (Agyemang, Bhopal, Bruijnzeels, 2005).

White. Within the United States, the term *White* or *Caucasian* is generally representative of the socio-culturally dominant or what is referenced as “mainstream.” More specifically, the majority group is frequently characterized as White, middle-class males (Ponterotto, Lewis, & Bullington, 1990). Additionally, Helms and Piper (1994) defined White Americans as “those Americans who self-identify or are commonly identified as belonging exclusively to the White racial group regardless of the continental source (e.g., Europe, Asia) of that racial ancestry” (p. 126). Thus, the terms used in this study, with reference to the majority group, were *White* and *Caucasian*.

Racial/ethnic minorities. Despite the utilization of *race* and *ethnicity* used interchangeably, there is a specific difference and distinction between the two terms. *Race* encompasses the biological and hereditary classification of people based on phenotypical characteristics; *ethnicity* categorizes individuals based on their particular socio-cultural heritage and is often differentiated through regional ancestry (Atkinson, 2004; Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993). *Ethnicity* also includes the cultural practices (e.g., language, values, and customs) of a collective group, which might not be part of the same ascribed racial group (Helms, 2007). For the purpose of this study, African Americans are referred to collectively as

racial/ethnic minorities (REMs) as they are often placed in positions of inferior power based on perceived cultural characteristics and phenotypical traits within the United States.

Religiosity and spirituality. The terms *spiritual* and *religious* are difficult to distinguish as they have similar and overlapping definitions (Hage et al., 2006). Although often used interchangeably, the terms religion and spirituality are not necessarily defined by a precise and formal definition in the literature (Hage, 2006). Spirituality has been defined as the more inclusive of the two terms and generally refers to “one’s meaning and purpose in life” and “a relationship with a transcendent being” (Hage, 2006). In contrast, religion is broadly referred to as the participation in an organized system of traditions, rituals and beliefs (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). For purposes of this study, both terms will be used contextually.

Situating the Approach of the Study

According to the World Health Organization (2013), violence is defined as the “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (p. 1). Furthermore, Stein et al. (2003) described that 50% to 96% of American children and adolescents who live in urban neighborhoods are consistently exposed to some form of violence. The following section provides an overview of the need for a closer examination of the various types of community violence, as well as the theoretical approaches that observe

the social, psychological and cultural consequences of perceived exposure to violence.

Types of community violence. Prior to reviewing community violence from a theoretical perspective, it is important to contextualize the multiple subtypes of community violence. In particular, Buka et al. (2001) noted that there are three subtypes of community violence: a) victimization, b) witnessing, and c) vicarious exposure/hearing about exposure to violent events. *Victimization* refers to being the object or target of intentional acts of violence (e.g., being threatened, robbed, chased, beaten, stabbed, shot, or otherwise assaulted) that has been initiated by another person to cause harm (Fowler et al., 2009). *Witnessing* refers to eye-witnessing an incident of community violence (e.g., threat of physical injury, actual injury, loss of property, or death). *Hearing* about community violence refers to learning of another person's victimization (e.g., hearing that a friend's property was stolen) within the community (Fowler et al., 2009).

Exposure to community violence in youth has been associated with difficulties in emotional, behavioral, and adaptive functioning including depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, aggression, poor academic functioning and achievement, and health problems (Lambert, Ialongo, Boyd, & Cooley, 2005). Given the pervasiveness of community violence, examination of risk factors for community violence exposure is critical for identifying targets for preventive interventions with youth (Lambert, Ialongo, Boyd, & Cooley, 2005). As a way to better understand the impact that community violence may have on

adolescents, it is important to assess the timing, severity, frequency and type of violence to which the youth are exposed. For example, Lambert et al. (2010) expressed those individuals who experience an acute (i.e., single) episode of violence may have differing experiences than individuals who are chronically exposed.

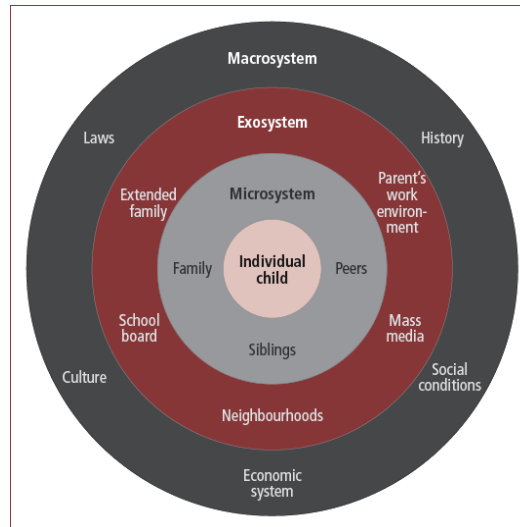
Ecological Theory of Community Violence

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to human development. To conceptualize adolescents' exposure to community violence across multiple domains, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach to human development is utilized in this paper. The ecological theory highlights the enduring interaction of developing adolescents within several, integrated contexts (Kennedy, 2007). The integrated contexts purported to assist in an individual's development include: a) the microsystem; b) the mesosystem; c) the exosystem; and d) the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The microsystem is the most direct developmental domain and includes the day-to-day activities, relationships, roles, families, and schools of adolescents. The relationships or linkages between these microsystems comprise the mesosystem (e.g., the relationship between an adolescent's family and church). Exosystems are the settings in which the developing adolescent does not actively participate, yet shape the development of the child (e.g., parent's workplace). Lastly, the macrosystem is believed to be the all-encompassing 'blueprint' for these integrated systems, modeling the behavioral patterns and beliefs of the

adolescent (Kennedy, 2007). See Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. Ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)



Variables that Increase Exposure to Community Violence

Community violence affects all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Individuals who are poor (i.e., from low socioeconomic backgrounds), from urban settings and young minorities, however, are impacted the most substantially (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). For example, violent victimization rates among adolescents between ages of 12 and 19 are higher than all other age groups in the years 1976-2000 (Klaus & Rennison, 2002). Moreover, although reported rates of exposure to crime-related violence varies significantly from community to community, rates of community violence involving weapons, on average, are greater in high-risk populations (Stein et al., 2003). The following paragraphs will examine variables that increase exposure to community violence such as race, ethnicity, SES, social support, previous encounters with the legal system, and

individual health.

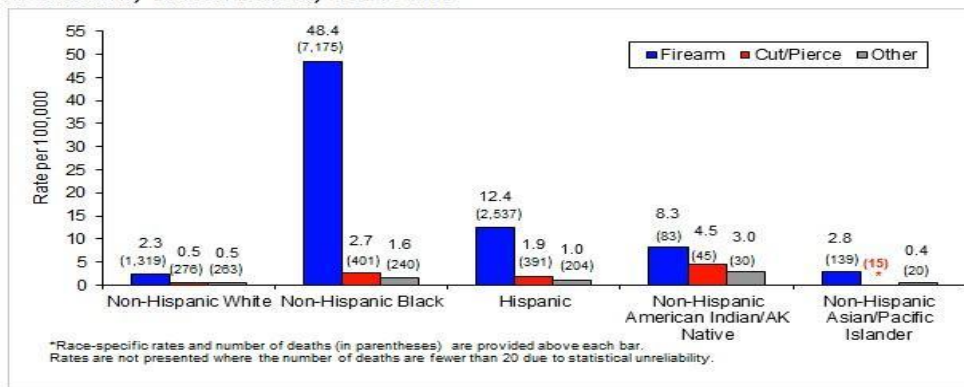
Race/ethnicity. Adolescents living in environments characterized by chronic violence are at risk for psychosocial distress and maladaptive behaviors, including their future use of violence. Many adolescents, particularly African American adolescents living within inner-cities, report witnessing or having been otherwise exposed to violence (Howard, 1996). Attempts have been made to assess the pervasiveness of posttraumatic stress symptoms for African American adolescents, along with other emotional disturbances and adjustment difficulties (Howard, 1996). Even after controlling for demographic characteristics (e.g., age and gender), African American youth more often witness and are victims of community violence than their White youth counterparts (Lambert, Ialongo, Boyd, & Cooley, 2005).

Figure 2.2. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010)

Youth Violence: National Statistics

Homicide

Homicide Rates Among Males Ages 10-24 Years, by Race/Ethnicity and Mechanism, United States, 2008-2010



From 2008 to 2010, firearms were the leading mechanism for homicide among males age 10 to 24 years. The firearm homicide rate among males ages 10 to 24 years was highest for Non-Hispanic Blacks with 48.4 deaths per 100,000 population. The firearm homicide rate among males ages 10 to 24 years was lowest for Non-Hispanic Whites with 2.3 deaths per 100,000.

Family. Moreover, ecological theory posits that African American men have historically had to cope with challenges related with being victimized by institutional arrangements that have been designed to hinder their capacity to obtain economic and political equality with White men (Franklin, 1984; Hampton, 1980). As a result, patterns of racial discrimination (i.e., exosystem variables) are responsible for racial disparities in educational, income, and employment equality among Whites and African Americans, which subsequently can create extreme stress within families (Hampton et al., 2003). As family is a primary space for adolescent socialization, those adolescents who are exposed to violence within their respective families and subsequent communities may interpret violence as an acceptable, normative, or even effective method for resolving conflict, as social learning theory proposes (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Malik et al., 1997).

Importantly and consistent from an ecological framework, the interactions experienced in one domain (e.g., family microsystem) will influence adolescents' functioning within other domains (e.g., community or interpersonal relationships) (Kennedy, 2007). Scholars such as Proctor (2006) and Salzinger et al. (2006) similarly supported this conceptualization and endorsed the notion that negative parenting cultivates an aversive environment at home, which in turn encourages participation with peers who engage delinquent behaviors and actions and may eventually place the adolescent at greater risk for community violence victimization.

Poverty. Distress related to financial instability also has a tendency to

exacerbate familial stress, especially among African American households. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2006), more than one-third of African American adolescents live in families with incomes below the national poverty line. Viewed comparatively, this is more than twice as many Caucasian children living in poverty in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Children who live in low-income families also experience other social disadvantages (e.g., unsafe neighborhoods and single-parent households) in addition to living in poverty. Due to the disparity among low-income, African American children, gaps remain with regard to the cumulative effects of multiple risk and protective factors on the development of internalizing and externalizing problems of low-income, African American youth (Gabalda, Thompson & Kaslow, 2009).

Health. Youth from disadvantaged areas of large cities also face a multitude of obstacles to healthy development. Specifically, African American youth are disproportionately exposed to the detrimental effects of poverty and its concomitant conditions such as drugs, crime, and violence (Weist et al., 2000). Furthermore, expanding evidence has indicated exposure to community violence experienced by adolescents is significantly associated with a detrimental impact on adolescent mental and physical health (Lambert, Ialongo, Boyd, & Cooley, 2005). The consequences of exposure to community violence are far ranging, and include: a) aggression, b) anxiety and depressive disorders; c) growth deficiencies; d) posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD); e) cognitive development delays; and f) decreased ability to accomplish school work (Weist et al., 2000). Additionally, the

co-occurrence of depression and externalizing behavior problems has been linked with increased substance use, suicidal ideation and behavior, and involvement in dangerous, impulsive, and illegal activities, each of which may heighten youth's propensity to be exposed to violence (Lambert et al., 2005). Affiliation with deviant peers has also been identified as a proximal risk factor for youth delinquency (Lambert et al., 2005).

Summary

Victimization rates for homicide and other violent crime are disproportionately high for African American adolescents (Howard, 1996). There has also emerged an urban perception that neighborhoods hold more danger while housing fewer community resources, making violence appear more visible and threatening (Howard, 1996).

African American, Male Adolescents and Exposure to Community Violence

To better understand the reported occurrences of community violence and the disproportionately high rates observed among African American communities, the following paragraphs examine the historical and current contexts in which these communities are exposed, as well as socio-cultural phenomenology of violence within African American communities.

Historical, social and cultural context. Although adolescents from any social class, racial/ethnic group status, or gender could potentially be exposed to community violence, numerous studies have identified young, low-income, urban, African American males as those individuals who are at the greatest risk of

community violence exposure (e.g., Buka et al., 2001; Crouch et al., 2000; Rennison, 2000; Youngstrom et al., 2003). The higher rates of exposure to violence can be partly attributed to the socially constructed institutions that have historically disenfranchised African Americans living in urban settings (e.g., residential segregation, isolation from systemic opportunities, extreme poverty, and chronic unemployment among African American men) and quite possibly, contribute to a male sub-culture that glamorizes toughness and criminal activity (Hampton et al., 2003; McNulty & Bellair, 2003).

Specifically exploring the deleterious impact of racism and its impact on African Americans and the Black community, Jones (1972) identifies three significant culturally racist themes that emerge from a survey of the literature: (1) Blacks are commonly observed to be unattractive and not socially valuable; (2) Blacks are unable to be effective in the world and cannot compete with Whites; and (3) Blacks are sexually and aggressively impulsive and cannot be controlled. As a result, these socio-cultural themes of racism may be fundamental notions to which Black individuals and communities are forced to negotiate (Ramseur, 1991, p. 355).

Moreover, Cross (1984) extensively described that adult unemployment and family poverty rates for African Americans are double those of Whites. He also noted that African Americans also suffer from lower access to quality medical and social services, decreased family income and fewer political and economic resources within the community (Cross, 1984). Cross (1984) also postulated that

these social conditions are inextricably linked to the historic and current institutional racism and discrimination that continues to permeate and frustrate the lives of African Americans.

Socio-cultural environment. African Americans are compelled to live and adapt to a unique socio-cultural environment as well as history (Ramseur, 1991, p. 354). With regard to better understanding psychosocial health and well-being among African Americans—especially those who identify as urban, low-income, and male—it is necessary to recognize the salient characteristics of the environments in which they live: a) white racism; b) the need to adapt to white institutions and culture; c) adapting to the Black community and culture; d) poverty; e) and political powerlessness (Barbarin, 1983; Cross, 1984; Jones, 1972; Pierce, 1974).

The majority of African Americans have to acclimate to both Caucasian American culture and institutions as well the Black community and its culture (Ramseur, 1991, p. 355). Additionally, even though most African Americans have families, friends, and churches within the Black community, they still essentially have to adjust to white-run workplaces, schools, and media. As a result, African Americans frequently have to navigate between different values, aspirations, and behavioral styles (Ramseur, 1991, p.370).

Phenomenology. The most comprehensive way to understand African American adolescents' exposure to community violence is to not assess the events in isolation, but rather conceptualize the incidents through an ecological context, which best reflects the many other critical influences on the developing adolescent

(Hill & Madhere, 1996). Moreover, Hill and Madhere (1996) elaborate upon this notion by explaining that it is erroneous to process the phenomenon of community violence along a single dimension:

Its parameters are both objective and subjective. They are connected to a number of other factors present in the child's environment and social context. Thus, the phenomenon must be analyzed at three distinct levels: (1) the phenomenology of violence from the child's perspective; (2) the chronic environmental risk factors; and (3) the periodic events that constitute a source of daily stress in the lives of children (Hill & Madhere, 1996, p. 27).

Additionally, Hill and Madhere (1996) conceptualized the impact of community violence on low-income, African Americans as a multi-layered and pervasive condition that is overlaid upon other existing life stressors. The cumulative effects from these multiple and simultaneous stressors alter the lens through which adolescents observe the world, distort interpersonal relationships, and blur their perceived future pathways (Hill & Madhere, 1996).

Summary

As previously highlighted, community violence is a common variable in inner-cities within the United States and its origins are steeped in a social-political system that has historically maintained a culture of inequality. Bulhan (1985) also noted that acts of violence among adolescents, who inhabit these particular settings, directly stem from decades of economic and social oppression from mainstream society. Furthermore, he postulated that merely conceptualizing violence as exclusive acts perpetrated upon an identified victim neglects any opportunity to further explore the responsibility of historical oppression and how

it continues to influence low-income, African American communities (Bulhan, 1985). Structurally, McLoyd and Wilson (1991) described violence as a common entity associated with poverty that negatively impacts adolescents and their development by placing additional stressors on parenting and other environmental influences.

Thus far, this study has provided background information related to community violence, variables that increase exposure to community violence, (i.e., low-income, African American, adolescent, and male), and how violence impacts African American males, his family, and his community. To provide additional insight on topic of community violence—specifically in relation to African American, male adolescents—the next section of this study will examine empirical theories that have been widely observed in the literature.

Theories of Identity Development for African American Adolescents

Externalizing and internalizing behavior problems frequently co-occur in youth. This co-occurrence has implications for youth developmental outcomes (Lambert et al., 2005). Consequently, with relation to community violence, youth perceive their experiences through three significant factors: (1) apprehension about violence in their environment; (2) direct witnessing of violence; and (3) a need to retaliate (Hill & Madhere, 1996). To better understand how African American adolescents perceive incidents of community violence, it is important to be familiar with how his or her individual identity ‘color’ the lenses through which they view the world and experiences. For the purpose of this paper, Boykin and

Toms' (1985) Triple Quandary Theory will be used to examine the multiple layers in which African American adolescent identity is developed within the United States.

Triple Quandary Theory. Identity is a subjective sense of wholeness that is achieved during adolescence and is facilitated through an experience of an identity crisis (Erikson, 1968). Boykin and Toms (1985) demonstrated that African American adolescents negotiate three different spheres of experience during their formation of racial identity simultaneously: (1) the mainstream sphere, (2) the Black cultural experience sphere, and (3) the minority sphere. In terms of parenting, African American parents must also negotiate these three realms when choosing how to raise their children (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002).

The Mainstream Culture Sphere. With relation to individual identity and the concept of 'self'—as defined by Western psychology—it is important to understand that the essential nature of this concept is originally derived and steeped in European worldviews (Baldwin, 1985; Dixon, 1976; Nobles, 1976a). Furthermore, the guiding principles in which this philosophical orientation is rooted are: a) "control over nature" and b) "survival of the fittest" (Baldwin, Brown, & Hopkins, 1991, p. 145).

This individualistic emphasis also highlights the concept that the individual is a separate entity apart from the social group or collective and that it is the individual who is responsible for his or her identity and existence (Baldwin et al.,

1991, p. 145). Thus, from a European perspective, the self is oriented to a physical (i.e., race/color), external, and materialistic reality rather than a spiritual or metaphysical orientation (Baldwin et al., 1991, p. 146).

The Black Culture Sphere. Conceptualized through the Afrocentric perspective, the concept of 'self' is defined within the context of guiding principles that establish traditional African cosmology. The origins of this ethos are founded in the African beliefs that the universe, in its entirety, is made up of interdependent components (Baldwin et al., 1991, p.157). The literature also highlights that through this Afrocentric conceptualization, the interdependent connection between the self and the universe has often been labeled as a sense of "harmony with nature" or "oneness of being" (Akbar, 1975; Erny, 1973; Mbiti 1972).

Furthermore, Africans traditionally believe that humans are intimately linked to his or her surroundings (i.e., ecological settings) as well as "bound harmoniously" to his or her biosocial community (Baldwin et al., 1991, p.158). "*I am because We are, and because We are, therefore I am*" (Mbiti, 1970, p. 141). It is through this spiritual (i.e., interconnected) conceptualization of shared responsibility of the collective group that the self has meaning (Baldwin et al., 1991, p.158). Therefore, the collectivistic phenomenology of African people reflects the "spiritual core" of African self (Baldwin et al.,1991 p.158).

Specifically, with regard to Black culture, Black history as well as racial pride is highlighted. In addition, African American parents communicate these messages in several ways (e.g., non-verbally, verbally, deliberately and

unintentionally; Caughy et al., 2002). Hughes and Chen (1999) also noted that racial socialization practices presented by parents are influenced by the child's age and may change over time. However, messages of culture and racial pride seem to remain consistent over time.

The Minority Culture Sphere. Nunn (2001) described adolescence as, “A period of transition from childhood to adulthood, when those yet to become adults gain greater physical and mental abilities than children, but continue to lack the wisdom and judgment possessed by mature adults” (p. 679). Prior to 1830, the term “adolescence” did not exist in the United States. Essentially, children were considered to be property of their parents and were primarily appreciated as a source of cheap labor (Nunn, 2001). Also during this period, adolescent children were not recognized socially and did not receive any social or political rights (Nunn, 2001).

However, due to a number of various factors during the early nineteenth century—increased urbanization, greater industrialization, increased wealth among the American, White middle-class, and the escalation of the transcendentalist thought—new beliefs about children and societal obligation to them began to develop (Nunn, 2001). Specifically, it should also be highlighted that adolescence was a concept that was specifically reserved for White children in 1830 and did not impact African American children who remained slaves and were still considered ‘property’, similar to that of African American adults (King, 1997).

The ‘Other’ Theory. Historically, Black children who lived in slavery did

not have any legal rights. Furthermore, any connection they had to their families was not respected either (Nunn, 2001). Socially, African American children were mainly recognized as a function of hard labor and the economic benefit of Whites. Thus, due to these deep historical roots of discrimination within the United States, African American youth continue to be perceived and treated differently from White youth (Nunn, 2001). As a result of pervasive discrimination experienced by African American youth, Nunn (2001) described the notion of the 'other' self as a way to cope. The 'other' is a concept that is most commonly connected with postmodern thinking and analysis. It is the antithesis or reversed reflection of the self. Whatever qualities the self possesses, the 'other' has the opposite (Nunn, 2001).

It is hypothesized that the reason why the oppression of African American youth "appears to be normal" is because within this country, Americans have been socialized to undervalue the lives and experiences of African American people (Nunn, 2002). In the mainstream sphere, according to Thornton (1997), racial socialization messages are more likely to be shared by older parents who are better educated and will most likely be presented in a context of what is valued by the dominant culture (e.g., academic achievement, fundamental racial equality and morals). Similarly, in the minority sphere, messages of racial socialization are more likely to be communicated by individuals who live in more urban areas, are less likely to be married, and place more emphasis on discussions of discrimination and acceptance of being Black (Caughy et al., 2002).

The Nigrescence Model. The Nigrescence Model (Cross, 1971a, b), as a framework, is the most widely-known model of African American ethnic identity and has had considerable empirical validation, both quantitatively and experientially (e.g., Davidson, 1975; Milliones, 1974; Parham, 1989; Williams, 1975). Thus, this model has contributed to the literature by providing additional insight for a population that has historically, socially, and politically been marginalized. Through exploration and introspection, adolescents examine their personal characteristics, their extracurricular activities/interests, and their interpersonal relationships. For racial/ethnic minorities, this is also a time to explore cultural identity. Although Cross' (1971a, b) model was originally intended to describe identity exchanges among adult populations, it has been used to describe the developmental changes in childhood and adolescence as well.

The Nigrescence model has five stages pertaining to Black racial identity development: (1) Pre-encounter, the stage in which individuals reject his or her culture and accepts the norms of the dominant/White culture; (2) Encounter, the stage where events transpire that expose individuals to his or her own culture and experienced oppression as a collective group; (3) Immersion-Emersion, the stage where individuals immerse themselves in African American culture and reject mainstream/White society; (4) Internalization, the stage where individuals acknowledge other cultures, values, and traditions while also acknowledging his or her own African heritage, and (5) Internalization-Commitment, the stage where positive self-esteem, flexible ideology, and willingness to accept his or her

“Blackness”—similar to stage four—and individuals also participate in activities and commitments as a way to express their identity (Cross, 1971a, b).

A revised version of the Nigrescence model was later conceptualized by Cross and Vandiver (2001), making several significant changes, especially in the pre-encounter and internalization stages. Since the changes, the pre-encounter stage now consists of three unique identity clusters—*pre-encounter assimilation*—identity places modest importance on race and maintains a strong orientation toward national (i.e., American) pride (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The *pre-encounter miseducation* identity internalizes negative stereotypes about being black (e.g., criminal, poor, lazy). Additionally, the *pre-encounter self-hatred* identity possesses excessively negative views about African Americans and is self-hating and anti-Black (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). It should be noted that the immersion-emersion stage consists of two separate identities.

The *immersion-emersion anti-white* identity conceptualizes everything White as evil whereas individuals in the immersion-emersion stage engross him or herself in their Blackness (i.e., anti-White and pro-Black; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Similarly, the revised internalization stage also consists of two identities: (1) *Black nationalism*—pro-Black and Afrocentric perspectives with a worldview that is non-reactive towards individuals who are not Black and (2) *multiculturalist inclusive*—individuals embrace Black identity while also accept the cultures and customs of those who are not Black (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Cognitive Appraisal Theory. In order to best understand the developmental

process of low-income, African American adolescents, researchers have to possess a certain level of knowledge about their experiences, as well as a familiarity of their own phenomenological interpretation of their perceived realities (Spencer, 1984). Cognitive Appraisal Theory, (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) examines the attributions and perceptions of experienced stress help to provide additional insight into how adolescents perceive community violence (Hill & Madhere, 1996). Additionally, it should be recognized that Lazarus and his colleagues asserted that the saliency of individual perceptions, partly determine the impact that a stressor has on an event.

Summary

As a consequence of negotiating with multiple socio-cultural spheres (i.e., Triple Quandary) within the United States, as well as the various dimensions of identity development (i.e., Nigrescence model) and experiential meaning making (i.e., Cognitive Appraisal Theory) African Americans have struggled with the quest to identify an “authentic” self-image that is reflective of self and culture (Cross, Parham, and Helms, 1991, p. 321). Theories of racial identity development suggest that identity exploration serves as a mechanism for minority individuals to work through internalized racism, thus, developing a more positive perspective on his or her group membership (Cross, Parham, and Helms, 1991).

Positive, proximal influences on African American, male adolescents

In addition to having to navigate these external socio-cultural spheres, African American, male adolescents must simultaneously participate in his own

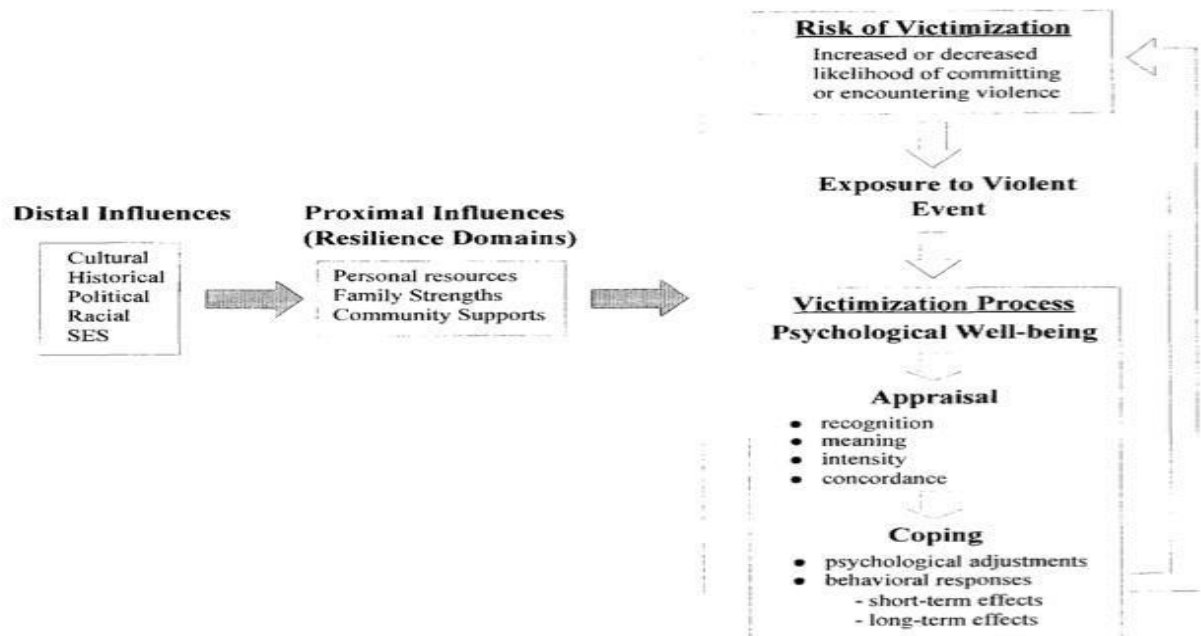
individual development process in order to reach his optimal level of psychological well-being. Fortunately, similar to the numerous, maladaptive variables in which low-income, African American, male adolescents are exposed, positive proximal influences also do not occur in isolation.

Resiliency. By contrast, the exploration of resilience factors that may moderate the impact of violence exposure on African American youth, has received far less research attention (Howard, 1996). Resilient youth—those doing well despite adversity—are autonomous and optimistic, and they possess good problem-solving skills; they have stable extended families that provide rules and routines; and they have contact with other supportive adults, such as teachers, coaches, clergy, and mental health professionals (Weist et al., 2000). Findings suggest that resilience is fostered by factors such as a sense of personal control, good social skills, spirituality, ethnic identity, and family and other forms of social support (Weist et al., 2000).

Appraisal and coping model of violence. Resilience research has led to the identification of a triad of protective factors empirically and theoretically tied to adaptational outcomes (Howard, 1996). The resilience domains include: (1) the modification of stressors by ‘personal resources’ (including temperament, social engagement and cognitive skills) which enable the child to receive positive reinforcement and develop a success orientation; (2) ‘families’, marked by warmth, caring, and cohesion, and characterized by care-giving styles of parents or relatives that reflect competence, provide guidance, and encourage self-

esteem; and (3) the presence of 'external support', in the form of a teacher, neighbor, or institutional structure, that provides support and counsel (Howard, 1996).

Figure 2.3. Appraisal and Coping Model of Violence (Howard, 1996)



Appraisal. Appraisal reflects a cognitive process of evaluating the significance of an event for one's well-being (i.e., threat to well-being; Howard, 1996). The psychological meaning a situation has for a person, reflected in the personal narratives associated with events is an essential determining factor in coping behavior (Howard, 1996). This meaning is derived from idiosyncratic tendencies, age, sex, race, cultural interactions, socialization experiences, and norms, which help determine whether a stimulus becomes a stressor, under what circumstances and with what consequences (Howard, 1996).

In a review of stress and appraisal among African Americans, Barbarin (1983) highlighted three elements that might be essential in their appraisal of stress: (1) religious orientation; (2) causal attributions of undesirable events to racial discrimination; and (3) “paradoxical” control of beliefs. Barbarin (1983) described that personal religiosity and involvement in organized religion can enhance coping by establishing a cognitive framework for processing stressful occurrences. Furthermore, it has been empirically described that African Americans more often interpret negative life events in terms of individual and institutional discrimination than do Caucasians (Barbarin, 1983). Based on this study, Barbarin (1983) claimed that African Americans commonly have “paradoxical control attributions”. Meaning that although African Americans may endorse having a sense of self-efficacy, they also believe that, as a group, they have little control over their destiny (Ramseur, 1991, p. 370).

Coping. Coping has been defined as behavioral or cognitive responses that protect people from being psychologically harmed by problematic social experiences (Howard, 1996). A goal of coping is to restore or achieve a sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and stability in one's life situation (Howard, 1996). Another way, coping refers to processes directed toward attaining or regaining competence in the face of adaptational challenges (Howard, 1996). Coping pertains to the assessment and engagement of one's resources and options, both internal and external (Howard, 1996).

Knowledge of factors that promote adaptation among Black, urban youth is

necessary for the targeting of those at risk for negative behavioral and psychological sequelae as a result of their exposure to violence (Howard, 1996). Resilience research also offers an opportunity to emphasize affirmative, rather than pathologic, processes and outcomes (Howard, 1996). Resilience addresses the capacity for individuals to withstand adversity and maintain adaptive behavior (Howard, 1996). Furthermore, there is a notion that some degree of adversity, most typically in one's personal life and/or proximal environment, exists which is countered by protective factors accessed by the individual, family, or household (Howard, 1996).

Personal resources. Several studies indicate that victims of community violence are more likely to have peers who are perpetrators and victims of crime and violence (Lambert et al., 2005). Consequently, youth who are already at risk for community violence exposure may possess deviant peer affiliations, which may also exacerbate that risk (Lambert et al., 2005). Identification of domains of protective factors could inform intervention efforts aimed at enhancing these resources at the individual and community level (Howard, 1996). At key transitional periods, individuals with certain dispositional qualities and resources may seek out and construct environments which not only provide rewards and reinforcement, but, most important, can reset a trajectory away from maladaptation and despair toward competence and adaptation (Howard, 1996). Resilience research in the area of violence must concentrate on four categories of variables: (1) the type and extent of exposure; (2) protective and vulnerability

factors; (3) appraisal and coping processes; and (4) adaptational outcomes (Howard, 1996).

Family strengths. Inherent in African American family systems are interpersonal patterns and competencies that promote a sense of positive family identity and that have been linked to the survival and advancement of Blacks (Howard, 1996). First is the elasticity or adaptability of households, which reflects the willingness of families to absorb kin, expanding and contracting as a response to pressures on parenting and family resources (Howard, 1996). This pattern is similar to a process known as "child keeping," whereby mothers may temporarily shift the residence of their child in response to changes in their lives (Howard, 1996). The practice of using an extended family framework, common among low-income African American families, functions to ensure continuity of care, nurturance, and adaptation for children, despite the presence of stress and adversity (Howard, 1996).

Connectedness, self-identity and self-esteem. Second is the central role of spirituality and religion in Black life. Many African-Americans are raised with an internalized sense of connectedness to religious values, which provides a sense of purpose, power, and self-identity (Howard, 1996). The third domain describes a racial bicultural experience. Many African Americans are socialized into the dominant culture, yet internalize Afrocentric values (i.e., mainstream culture vs. Black culture). This double consciousness, however, may alternatively create inner-turmoil and conflict, leading to negative consequences (Howard, 1996). Fourth is

the instilling of positive self-esteem and development of ethnic awareness in African American children (i.e., minority domain). The strong work and high achievement orientations of Black families have also been identified as sources of strength (Howard, 1996).

Racial socialization. Socialization through an African American framework has been found to cultivate mental health, coping skills (Miller and Miller, 1990), resiliency, self-efficacy, and academic achievement (Bowman and Howard, 1985). Demographic variables (e.g., marital status, region, gender, age, generation in the United States and racial composition of neighborhood) predict whether parents convey racial socialization messages to their children (Knight et al., 1993a; Thornton et al., 1990). Bowman and Howard (1985) identified four racial socialization messages in which African American children receive: (1) racial pride; (2) racial barriers; (3) self-development; and (4) humanitarian values. When discussing messages pertaining racial pride, family members encourage positive images and strong ties to the Black race. Additionally, messages regarding the historical background of African Americans are also included during this racial socialization process.

Communication of racial socialization. Furthermore, there are four main methods through which racial socialization messages may be communicated: (1) feedback; (2) direct instruction; (3) modeling; and (4) other-generated experience (Knight et al., 1993b). Feedback involves the learning of racial information based on the positive/negative feedback that one receives

about his or her behavior from family members. Direct instruction involves the direct verbal education of racial information. Modeling involves the learning of racial information based on the behavior of family members. Lastly, racial socialization occurs through other-generated experiences when family members selectively expose youth to particular environments (Brega & Coleman; 1999).

Community support. The community, plays a pivotal role in resilience not only by providing avenues for social support to youth, but by guiding and supporting parents in their efforts to be effective partners in child development (Howard, 1996). The different ecologies of the community—defined by school and neighborhood—offer opportunities for facilitating adaptation and safety (Howard, 1996). For African American urban adolescents, the availability of economic opportunities and after school programs which enable tutorial, mentoring, and social support services may be important resources for encouraging competence and resilience (Howard, 1996).

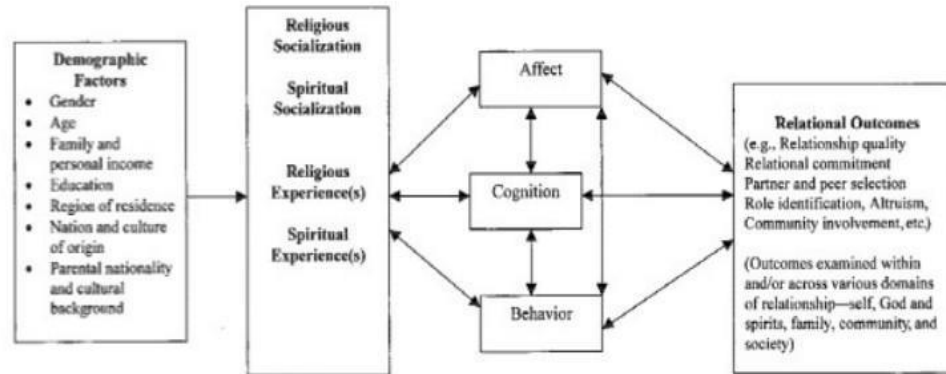
Particularly in minority communities, strong partnerships or coalitions between families, neighborhood associations, churches, and businesses need to be supported for prevention of youth violence (Howard, 1996). Community empowerment—the active participation by individuals from the community in determining priorities, resource allocation, program design, and implementation—can serve to mobilize and engender neighborhoods with a sense of ownership and self-determination, which itself reflects resilience (Howard, 1996).

Social competence has often been used to gauge the overall adjustment or adaptation of individuals and has functioned as a central predictor of resilient behavior (Howard, 1996). Conceived in a broad sense, social competence has been defined as a wide range of social skills, competencies, and coping behaviors, which enable individuals to deal effectively with demands of everyday living (Howard, 1996).

Religiosity and spirituality. Spirituality and religion are well-known components of African American culture and identity. Traditionally, spirituality has operated as an individual and collective source of refuge, purpose, forgiveness, hope, and liberation—especially in instances of sociopolitical injustices (Newlin, Knafl, & Melkus, 2002). Specifically, with regard to political activism, spirituality has helped serve as a catalyst. Similarly, on a more micro-level, spirituality has helped cultivate familial, communal, and individual relationships among the African American community. From childhood, many African Americans have been raised in a belief in God or a higher being (Constantine et al., 2000).

Figure 2.4. Conceptual framework of religion & spirituality in relational life

(Mattis & Jagers, 2001)



Within the religion and spirituality literature (Benson et al, 2003; King & Boyatzis, 2004), there is a rising consensus that both are “multifaceted constructs” (e.g., personality, attitudes, beliefs, rituals and behaviors, emotional phenomena, personal experiences, and varying levels of consciousness and awareness). Especially among racial/ethnic minority children, racial socialization plays an important role in the development of a positive racial self-concept. This socialization serves as one of the primary resources through which African American parents can also help facilitate adaptive experiences to help buffer the dominant culture’s negative messages about their race (Ogbu, 1988; Miller and Miller, 1990).

Racial socialization also includes teaching adolescents strategies for appraising and coping with racial discrimination (Andujo, 1988; Miller and Miller, 1990; Ogbu, 1988). A primary benefit of religiosity, spirituality and participation of within the Black church is the opportunity to provide Black role models and

integration into the Black community for African American adolescents (Brega & Coleman; 1999).

Meaning making. An integral component to nurturing spirituality is by forming a balance between control and spiritual appraisal, such that it is personalized to an individual's history, needs and values (Friedemann, Mouch & Racey, 2002). Friedemann (1995) determined that spirituality embraces several possible ways of finding meaning in life and maintaining a relationship with a power greater than the individual self. Spirituality transcends the environments of individuals as well as the need to control social systems (e.g., individuals, families, and communities) by cultivating a sense of unity with the universe and inner peace (Friedemann et al., 2002). Friedemann (1995) also noted that spirituality is a positive and active way of coping with problems—especially during situations that seem hopeless and unsolvable. Individuals who were never exposed to spirituality—in a true sense—may seek gangs, addictive substances, or abusive partners as ways to satisfy his or her deeply rooted need for belonging and structure (Friedemann et al., 2002).

Summary

Many Americans also consider his or her religion or spirituality to be a fundamental part of their racial identity and worldview (Hage, 2006). Furthermore, some individuals have also expressed that religious and spiritual ties are “more potent social glue than the color of one's skin, gender, or cultural heritage” (Shafranske & Malony, 1990, p. 564). How African American adolescents

appraise and cope with exposure to violent events has implications for social adaptation and resilience (Howard, 1996).

If one conceptualizes violence as a stress-coping paradigm, specification can be made of potential resilience domains during the processes of appraisal and coping. In this schema, the occurrence of community violence is defined as an objective stressor, which is both appraised and acted upon by individuals (Howard, 1996). The next section of the study will discuss the religious and spiritual schemas and active participation that assist African American adolescent, males with their appraisal and coping processes.

Religion and Spirituality as a Way to Assist in the Appraisal and Coping Process of African American, Male Adolescent

Historically, religion and spirituality has played a significant role in the lives of African Americans and the Black community (Ramseur, 1991, p. 371). St. George and McNamara (1984) also noted that for African Americans—far more than for Caucasian Americans—church attendance (i.e., religiosity) was meaningful because it provided as sense of well-being that appears to be noticeably enriched by religious participation and service at all levels of age, income, and education. Although African American adults may not diverge from others in their appraisal of the level of stress encountered during certain events, they may have unique schemas for appraising stress that is expressively different from that of Caucasian Americans (i.e., Religiosity and spirituality) that warrant further exploration.

Schemas. According to Geertz (1974), those who are religiously active are believed to have both emotional and cognitive ‘maps’ which help them make sense out of stressful life events (e.g., suffering, death and “moral bafflement”). Despite numerous misperceptions commonly associated with adolescents (e.g., rebellious, alienated and non-religious), religion has been identified as being a salient component in their lives (Brega & Coleman, 1999). In fact, 95% of American teenagers report believing in God. Furthermore, 93% of American teenagers are affiliated with a religious denomination or group (Benson et al., 1989; Gallup & Bezilla, 1992).

Participation. With comparison to their White counterparts, African American adolescents have been observed to be “consistently more religious” (e.g., church attendance, religious coping strategies, and salience of religious beliefs) within the religiosity and spirituality literature (Benson et al., 1989; Blaine and Crocker, 1995; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Ellison, 1993; Taylor et al., 1987). However, despite this observed difference, few studies have examined the ways in which religion or spirituality may interact or influence the psycho-social processes of African American adolescents (e.g., negotiating racial identity development or social stigmatization).

It is important to continue to examine this gap in the literature as various measures of participation in religious and spiritual acts have been positively associated with: (a) subjective well-being (St. George & McNamara, 1984; Witter et al., 1985); (b) physical health and faith in people (Bahr & Martin, 1983); (c)

happiness (Ellison, 1991); (d) efficacy (Ellison & Gay, 1990; Ellison, 1991); and (e) self-esteem (Hughes and Demo, 1990; & Ellison, 1993). Literature related to religiosity and spirituality, (Hughes & Demo, 1990; Blaine & Crocker, 1995; and Ellison, 1993) indicate that religious organizations help to provide an atmosphere in which adolescents are able to interact with and receive positive feedback from others with similar values and experiences. With respect to self-esteem, religion may have a positive correlation because of decreased, life stress stemming from the infrequent occurrences of “risky behaviors of churchgoers” (Ellison, 1993).

Leadership/mentorship. Taylor et al. (1987) reported that the church may be especially important for African Americans because it has been identified as one of the only institutions in the African American community completely controlled and financed by African Americans. Furthermore, the church also serves as a “powerful institution” in which African Americans can attain positions of admiration and status, as well as other opportunities that may otherwise be unobtainable in mainstream White society (Ellison, 1993; Hughes & Demo, 1990).

As members of the church, African American adolescents also have the opportunity to learn skills that will assist them both personally and professionally, within and outside of the church. Moreover, this setting allows younger African Americans to observe “role models” who may contribute to the African American community (Brown, 1991; Mamiya & Lincoln, 1990; Taylor et al., 1987). With relation to racial socialization within mainstream White culture,

the Black church provides churchgoers with a link to the past, as well as a sense of solidarity and group values through sermons, hymns, and other acts of service (Brown, 1991).

Scholars have noted that the strength of religious and spiritual affiliation is a stronger predictor of subjective well-being in Black members (Blaine & Crocker, 1995; St. George & McNamara, 1984). Additionally, they also observed that African Americans appear to cultivate well-being from their religious involvement more than White members.

With regard to the impact that religious and spiritual involvement has on racial identity development, Hughes and Demo (1990) established that there is a significant association between religious involvement and a strong Black identity. Moreover, Mamiya and Lincoln (1990) indicated that the Black church serves as a buffer for African American adolescents against the negative effects of discrimination, as well as prevent them from internalizing negative stereotypes about their racial group within the mainstream White culture.

Behavioral outcomes. A small body of existing literature (Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003; Smith & Faris, 2003) has focused on the relationship between adolescent religiousness and various behavioral outcomes. These studies suggest that among adolescents, religion likely serves a dual role of promoting positive development as well as offering protection against risky behaviors. Correlations of religion's contribution to adolescent development has been well established within the literature (Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003; Smith & Faris, 2003).

However, many of the existing studies fail to provide theoretical explanation for associated positive effects.

Conceptually, Benson et al. (1989) characterized religion as an influential and persuasive resource in adolescent development. Likewise, religious affiliation functions as a protective factor against delinquent behavior (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Donahue and Benson (1995) also noted that religion helps to reduce the rates of delinquency and violence among youth. Religion not only seems to help protect adolescents from problem behavior, but it also promotes health-related outcomes and prosocial behavior (Dohahue & Benson, 1995). Numerous authors have pointed to the role of religious values in contributing to healthy adolescent development (Bjarnason, 1998; Jessor et al., 1995).

Psychological well-being. Constantine et al. (2000) identified that affiliation with a specific religious or spiritual philosophy is a salient variable of the psychological health of numerous African Americans. According to a concept analysis conducted by Newlin, Knafl and Melkus (2002), African American spirituality can be categorized into four broad socio-emotional contexts: (1) heightened interpersonal connectedness (e.g., altruism, interpersonal learning, and increased love for others); (2) emotional equilibrium (e.g., support, divine protection, attenuation of stress, and peace of mind); (3) divine reciprocity (e.g., strengthened faith, enhanced devotional practices, and increased love and gratitude for God; and (4) empowering change (e.g., active coping, personal growth, better physical health, and positive interpretation of life events). This

study examined all four of these domains to explore how religiosity and spirituality could moderate the appraisal and coping processes of African American, adolescent males.

Religious adolescents also appear to cope more effectively with stress (Donelson, 1999; Frankel & Hewitt, 1994; Mosher & Handal, 1997), possess higher positive self-regard (Fegley, Seaton, & Gaskins, 2002) and socially are observed to exhibit fewer problem behaviors (Dowling et al., 2004; Donahue & Benson, 1995) compared with their nonreligious peers. Communities in which the majority of adolescents attended religious services at least once a month were found to be twice as likely to be identified among the 'healthiest' communities, as were comparable cities in which the majority of youths did not attend religious services. Religious service is one of the primary community strengths found to have a significant relationship to overall community well-being (Blyth & Leffert, 1995).

Additionally, adolescents who believed that religion was important in their lives were almost three times more likely to participate in community service than were those who did not believe religion was important. Hart and Fegley (1995) found religious commitment to be a distinguishing trait of urban youths nominated for their exemplary caring behavior. Moreover, *Social Capital Theory* (Bourdieu, 1985) provides a conceptual model for understanding how positive outcomes are mediated in a social context through interpersonal, associational, and cultural social ties. Bourdieu (1985) described social capital as

the actual and potential resources that an individual has access through a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.

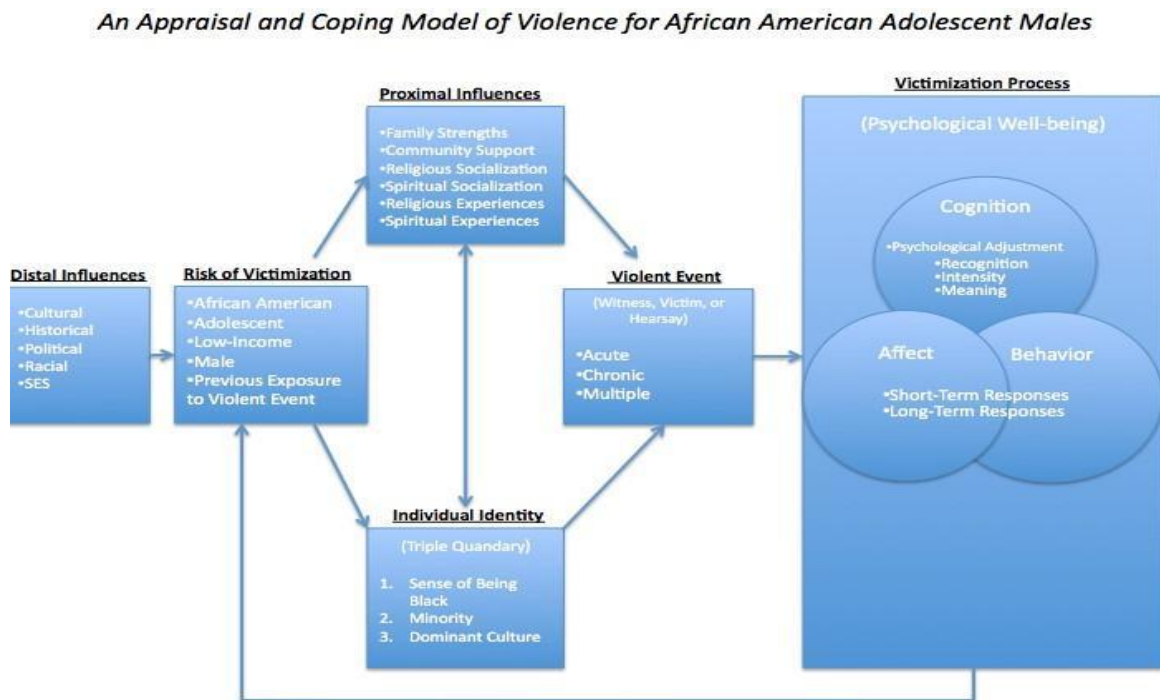
Summary

This chapter examined social, psychological, and cultural theories in understanding the appraisal and coping processes of African American, adolescent males—specifically, those who had been exposed to critical incidents of community violence. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *Ecological Approach to Human Development*, Cross' (1971 a, b) *Nigrescence Model*, and Boykin and Toms (1985) *Triple Quandary* provided insight into both the intra-personal and inter-personal dynamics that African American, male adolescents must navigate, systemically. Furthermore, Howard's (1996) *Appraisal and Coping Model of Violence* provided greater insight into how distal and proximal influences impact the overall appraisal and coping processes of African American, adolescent males.

Missing from the theories, however, is an understanding of how these particular adolescents can most optimally appraise and cope to exposure to community violence in a way that could decrease future incidents and greater psychological well-being for these individuals. Integrating the conceptual framework of religion and spirituality into the relational life (Mattis & Jagers, 2001), in conjunction with the previously reviewed theories, illuminates possible interactions in which African American, adolescent males could holistically benefit from religious and spiritual socialization and participation.

By transforming critical incidents into opportunities for appraisal and coping through a religious and spiritual framework, individuals could develop the critical consciousness, self-regard, and empathetic awareness that are necessary to possibly reducing exposure to community violence and its detrimental effects. Thus, the purpose of this study to examine the appraisal and coping process for African American, adolescent males, their experience with community violence and the impact that religion and spirituality have on their appraisal and coping processes.

Figure 2.5. Religious & Spiritual Appraisal and Coping Model of Violence for African American Adolescent Males



Study's Purpose, Goals and Research Questions

Purpose. Given the intricacies of adolescent development (e.g., R/EM

identity, religious/ spiritual identity, cognitive processes, etc.) and environmental factors (e.g., R/EM socialization, SES, crime), what are some of the ways that community resources, such as the church, assist low-income, male, African American adolescents ascribe meaning (e.g., appraisal and coping) to community violence exposure? Due to the limited number of studies that specifically examine religion and/or spirituality as appraisal and coping resources for this specific population, a phenomenological study devoted to understanding the lived experiences of low-income, African American, adolescent males who were exposed to community violence best lent itself to examining this question.

Goals. The study's purpose was to integrate historical, religious, sociological, psychological, and spiritual literature in providing a culturally-relevant model of appraisal and coping with exposure to community violence that is applicable for specifically low-income, African American, male adolescents. As previous studies have typically utilized academic achievement, persistence, and interactions with the legal system to assess outcome variables for low-income, African American, male adolescents, there is an absence of empirical research that examines psychological well-being—among this population—from a systemic approach.

As a result, there is an additional need to conceptualize the multiple factors that are concurrently present and influence outcome variables for low-income, African American male adolescents—both externally (e.g., community violence, racism, and oppression) and internally (self-worth, identity

development, and psychological health). Thus, this study deconstructed socio-demographic characteristics on race, socioeconomic, and cultural factors to assess the positive interactions that are also present in the lives of low-income, African American, adolescent males and recognized the behavioral and psychological significance that religion and spirituality has on their lives (i.e., meaning making and coping). As a result, this study sought to acquire insight into how religion and spirituality could potentially cultivate opportunities for additional coping and appraisal strategies for low-income, African American, adolescent males who are exposed to community violence.

Research questions. The current study attended to four primary research questions.

- 1) What does it mean to be an adolescent African American male?"
- 2) What contributes to the experience in which an adolescent, African American male feels safe versus unsafe?
- 3) How do adolescent, African American males cope when they feel unsafe?
- 4) Can religion or spirituality be a viable coping mechanism to help protect adolescent, African American males from events deleterious events, such as community violence?

Chapter III

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study was designed to describe the meaning of the participants' lived experiences of community violence, or the threat of violence as garnered from a sample of participants. The desire to study the experiences of African American, male adolescents in depth and detail led to the selection of qualitative method of research (Mertens, 1998). A phenomenological approach was used to portray the meaning of the lived experience of community violence or the threat of community violence. This method was chosen in order to gain a richer comprehension of the meaning of experiences, with the goal of gaining insight into the lives of individuals who have learned how to endure in this particular environment (van Manen, 1997).

Phenomenological approach

The term phenomenology stems from the Ancient Greek word *phainomenon*, which means the appearance of things or the concept of lived experiences for several individuals (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). "Phenomena includes anything that appears or presents itself, such as emotions, thoughts, and physical objects" (Whiting, 2006, p. 222). Phenomenologists seek to describe the commonalities among participants as they experience a particular phenomenon; reducing individual experiences with a phenomenon to universal description of essence (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Specifically, the researcher collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, and from that data, establishes an amalgamated description of their experiences.

According to a Midwestern, regional survey in 2009, the general population was identified as becoming “less Christian.” Furthermore, according to the report, 76% of the state’s population identified as Christian—a drop from a previous endorsement of 91% of the population who identified as Christian in 1990. This particular state-wide trend reflected similar trends also found nationwide. Between 1990 and 2008, the number of Americans who identified as Christian decreased from 86.2% to 76% (Badger Herald, 2009).

Population and Sampling Procedures

The study participants were purposefully chosen by sampling adolescent, African American males who had experienced the phenomenon of violence or the threat of exposure to violence in their community. The search for in-depth, information-rich data was valuable in researching the often-unheard thoughts and feelings of young, African American men and the unique challenges they face in their particular sociocultural environment. When assessing sample size in qualitative research, adequacy was determined by the “quality, completeness and amount of information contributed by informants rather than by the number of cases” (Morse, 1986, p. 110).

The sample was comprised of seven individuals who each self-identified as being African American. Additionally, each individual reported being between the ages of 14-16 and residents of a mid-sized, Midwestern city (See Table 1.). Participants were recruited through flyers posted around town, electronic postings, E-mail and by word-of-mouth through peers in the community. As the study focused

solely on the experiences of adolescents, a letter explaining the study's purpose and the participant's role in study was delivered to the parents of the individuals who agreed to participate. The letter explained the scope and purpose of the study, as well as plans for the results once the study was completed. The letter also contained a consent form that was to be signed by the parent and the participant, giving permission to participate in a study and acknowledging consent for the use of the results once the study was completed (Appendix II and Appendix III). It was noted that each participant would be given a \$15 iTunes gift card for his participation.

Method of Data Collection

Gorgi (1985) proposed that the researcher collect data by gathering descriptions of the phenomenon from the participants. The researcher conducted a face-to-face, semi-structured, open-ended interview to collect the descriptive data. The first goal of the interviewer was to establish rapport with the participant. After thanking the individual for his participation, the interviewer explained the study's purpose and the ways in which the participation of the individual was important. Confidentiality was assured and the participant was informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at anytime.

Each interview was conducted at a private office space reserved in the community. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and forty-five minutes, allowing for the participants to have adequate time to describe, in detail, their shared experience. The researcher presented questions in a way that would guide participants to the appraisal of their experiences, as way to limit solely depicting

details of a particular occurrence (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1997).

The open-ended interview with clarifying questions facilitated the gathering of experiential material (Carpenter, 1995; van Manen, 1997). The interviewer focused on the primary research question: "How have you made sense (appraisal) and continue to function (coping) after experiencing an event in which you felt unsafe in your community? Additionally, the prompt, "Describe what it means to be an African American male in your community" was used as the broad starting point to encourage the participants to describe, in detail, their lived experiences based on salient, sociocultural identification. Subsequently, the semi-structured interview focused on themes of the aforementioned experiences by eliciting more concrete descriptive information. The following secondary questions were also established prior to the interview as a way to further elicit details and explore experiences disclosed from the adolescents:

- a) "What does it mean to be an African American male in your community?"
- b) "Describe a specific day or week, in your community, when you have felt safe."
- c) "Describe a specific day or week, in your community, when you have felt unsafe."
- d) "How have you made sense of the event after having experienced the event?"
- e) "Have you changed anything in your daily living after experiencing this event?"
- f) "Has faith ever played a role in how you've made sense or coped after

experiencing this event?"

The researcher encouraged the participants to relate more specific information with regard to particular situations, persons and events as a way to probe, redirect and facilitate the participants' awareness of the experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1997). At the end of the interview, the researcher debriefed the participants and attempted to put closure on the experience for them. This was accomplished by asking the following questions:

- a) "Is there anything else that you would like to share with me or to young brothers like you who might be facing similar experiences?"
- b) "Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?"
- c) "How do you feel about sharing this experience with me?"

The interviews resulted in conversation that was textually-rich in its description of the participants' experiences with community violence.

Interviews were audio taped and translated for use in data analysis. To assist in the transcription process, the researcher recruited two, African American graduate assistants to help transcribe the participants' audio-recorded interviews. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts and compared them to the audio recordings in order to maintain accuracy of the transcriptions.

Using Colloizzi's (1978) descriptive method of data analysis, the researcher read the transcription of the taped interviews and made notes about any statements thought to be significant. Significant statements from the narrative passages were

extracted and particular statements that were considered critically prominent were underlined. This method of data presentation allowed the reader to follow the decision trail of the researcher in determining if others can arrive at equivalent or comparable conclusions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Through this reductive process, the researcher was able to discover essential themes of the lived experience of the participants. These significant statements were underscored at the end of each section and identified as *Emerging Themes*. These statements reflect the textual descriptions derived from the phenomenological reduction process. Afterward, the formulated statements of meaning were then grouped into meaningful clusters of shared themes. Finally, exhaustive descriptions were written as the researcher attempted to identify the fundamental structure of the experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness of Data

The number of interviews conducted for this study ($n = 7$) is consistent with Morse's (1994) recommendation of minimally collecting six interviews for phenomenological studies. Similarly, Neilson and Landauer (1993) created a mathematical model based on results of six different projects and showed that six participants can reveal more than 80% of information desired. Thus, it was sufficient for this researcher to obtain significant results for this study through the collected narratives from the seven participants.

The researcher also ensured trustworthiness of the collected data through substantial engagement of the subjects to ensure the repetition of themes, in

addition to persistent observation of the participant. Additionally, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing, as well as continuous monitoring to encourage the researcher to pursue the study with an open mind and seek diverse meanings. More specifically, the researcher made sure to explicitly restate or summarize information throughout the interviews, therefore, allowing participants to either agree or disagree so that the summaries accurately reflected their feelings and experiences (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identified member checks as the most important step in establishing credibility. Thus, instead of relying on data triangulation as a method of interpreting consistency across sources, the researcher used member checks with participants as a way to establish data validity. In addition, member checks were in accordance with Collaizi (1978) who also recommended returning to the participants to confirm reported findings. Immediately following the interviews, the researcher met with each participant to personally review notes, concepts and themes that emerged through the collected narratives. This in-person consultation was used as a way to insure scholarly rigor (Sandelowski, 1993).

After reviewing with the researcher, participants in this study endorsed that the findings reflected their experiences, thus no additions or changes were recommended. Subsequently, the researcher also ran a negative case analysis—a review of the elements of data that could possibly deviate from or contradict other emerging data—in order to assess the adequacy of diverse statements into appropriate categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Additionally, theory triangulation, (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999), was utilized in determining the consistency of data. In the process of interpretation of the data obtained from participants, the researcher examined theories gathered from varying sources for the literature review and then compared them with the core themes that resulted from the data. In accordance to Mertens (1998) and Patton (1990), these differing sources presented multiple perspectives and authenticated themes gathered from the research of this study.

Likewise, the researcher assessed transferability through analysis of the collected data in comparison with a thorough review of the literature as a way to validate the extent to which the results of this study could be applied to other situations. Successively, multiple participants' responses were described with comprehensive and careful description. "Thick or rich" illustrations, which included time, place, context and participant culture were also captured by the researcher as a way to determine similarity between the presented data and the receiving context (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 1998).

Dependability was identified and maintained by the researcher being cognizant to and tracking contextual changes as it emerged from the data. Furthermore, the researcher maintained an audit of the steps in the research process. The researcher also conducted an inquiry audit (e.g., review of the raw data, data reconstruction and process notes) as a way to assure dependability. This audit confirmed that the data, analysis, and inferences were supported by the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Inherent in this research is a recognition that not

all positions or perspectives could be characterized. Thus, the study was characteristic in the context of the research method and did not claim to stand for universal truth (Cresswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Positionality and Reflexivity of the Design

It was an assumption of the study that most adolescent African American males have experienced some form of violence in their communities. Howard (1996) highlighted this assumption in her theoretical model by postulating that community violence is so “pervasive” that inevitably the majority of African American adolescents living in urban communities have been or will be exposed to some type of violence. Individuals considered for participation in this study fell into the categories of not only experiencing community violence, but also those whose appraisal of community violence was affected by their perception of the threat of violence in their respected community. Further, it was an assumption that the participants’ shared recollections of their experience was reflective of their true experiences.

The researcher’s own biases and prejudgments concerning violence in the community also had to be considered. As a result, the researcher had to bracket personal biases concerning violence in African American communities that might prohibit participants from being forthcoming in the descriptions of their experiences. As an individual who had been born and raised in a Midwestern, racially-divided and violent community, the researcher had accumulated personal opinions and concerns about this topic. Thus, the researcher bracketed these

presuppositions:

- a) In predominantly low-SES and African American communities, violence is a concern that significantly threatens the safety of African American adolescents.
- b) The researcher felt a responsibility to engage adolescents in situations of reported community violence in order to protect individuals and their families.

As a result of personal experience and being trained in the counseling field, the researcher had numerous preconceived notions about the origins, effects and preventions of community violence prior to this study, which led to bracketing:

- a) Community violence is the result of multiple factors including personality traits and behaviors, familial background, socioeconomic culture of the community and access to financial resources.
- b) The presence of community violence has a way of negatively influencing the lives of African American adolescents and subsequently limiting their ability to process and cope in an adaptive way.

Having experience assisting clients in resolving topics of concern, the researcher also had to bracket the fact that it was not his role to serve as a counselor in this setting. The challenge rested in discovering the common links within the essences of the adolescents' experience with violence, while also eliminating the researcher's bias (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Chapter IV

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The experiences of adolescent, African American males who had encountered community violence are presented in this chapter to explore the study's primary research question. The following narratives were disclosed from young, African American males when asked about their experiences with community violence and serve as illustrative and meaningful statements provided by study's participants.

Overview of the Participants

The sample consisted of seven, adolescent, African American males between the ages of 14 and 16. There were 4 participants who were 16, 2 who were 15, and one who was 14. All participants were recruited from a mid-sized, Midwestern city. Through informed consent, each participant was given pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity	Religious/Spiritual
Michael	15	African American	No
James	15	African American	No
Joe	16	Black	No
Hakeem	16	Black	No
Tyrell	16	African American	No
Steven	16	African American	Yes (Christian)

Drew	14	Bi-Racial; Primarily Black	No
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Drew, the youngest participant in the study, was a 14 year-old, self-identified “Black/bi-racial” male who lived at home with his mother and father. He was the only participant who identified as “bi-racial;” however, he also communicated that he identified primarily as “Black” and indicated that he had a close relationship with both of his parents.

Similar to Drew, fellow participants Michael, Hakeem and Steven also endorsed being raised in two-parent homes.

Michael was a 15 year-old, self-identified “African American” male who lived at home with his mother, father and older sister. He indicated that he had meaningful relationships with both of his parents—whom he loved and respected.

Hakeem was a 16 year-old, self-identified “Black” male who lived at home with his mother and father. He indicated that he had loving relationships with both parents and identified them as significant supports.

Steven was a 16 year-old, self-identified “African American” male who lived at home with his mother and father. He identified his household as loving and Christian-focused and endorsed participation in weekly spiritual practice.

In addition to these shared narratives of being raised in loving, two-parent homes, one of the participants described an experience uniquely different from the rest of the participants.

Tyrell—a 16 year-old, self-identified “African American” male, participant—described his unique experience of be raised as an individual who was adopted. Tyrell disclosed living at home with both of his parents and his younger sister. Furthermore, he identified close support through his family and also acknowledged exposure to contrast experiences compared to his African American peers as a result of his upbringing.

The remaining participants, James and Joseph, described personal

experiences of growing up in homes with a single-caregiver.

James was a 15 year-old, self-identified “African American” male who lived at home with his mother. He identified the relationship between he and his mother as “very close.”

Joseph was a 16 year-old, self-identified “Black” male who lived at home with his mother and older brother. He identified his mother and brother as his most significant supports in his life.

Emerging Themes. The themes identified by the researcher are as follows:

The experience of being ‘African American’, unsafe vs. safe spaces within the community, disclosed coping strategies, and the possible role of ‘faith’ as part of their daily experience. In the following text, each of these topics were examined and further described using supportive data to specify the thematic concept intended.

Participants’ Appraisal of being African American in their Communities

Boykin and Toms (1985) demonstrated that African Americans negotiate three different spheres of experience during their formation of racial identity simultaneously: (1) the mainstream sphere, (2) the Black cultural experience sphere, and (3) the minority sphere. Due to these deep historical roots of discrimination within the United States, African American youth continue to be perceived and treated differently from White youth (Nunn, 2002). As a result of pervasive discrimination experienced by African American youth, Nunn (2002) described the notion of the ‘other’ self as a way to cope. The essence of ‘otherness’ that surrounds African American youth is so insidious that boundaries of childhood, adulthood, crime and delinquency are defined by the experience (Nunn, 2002).

Participants voiced many opinions related to feelings of ‘otherness’ as part of

their experience as an African American, male adolescent in their communities. Moreover, narratives provided by participants also administered insight into several other areas, which were part of their daily existence. Significant statements—and emergent meanings from the transcribed events—have been extracted and underlined in the ensuing excerpts:

- a) Unsafe moments experienced in their communities
- b) Observed coping strategies in their communities
- c) Observed spaces of respite in their communities
- d) Interpretation of 'faith' in their communities

Participants described a broad range of emotional responses including anger, fear, sadness, discouragement and displacement when reflecting on their experiences as African American males in their community. Below, Michael's narrative helps illuminate the experienced challenges he has faced during adolescence in his community.

Michael: It's...okay...I say it's hard, 'cause like we can't really do, like, a lot of things. So say if we were to go, like to the [West Towne or East Towne] mall and there's a group of people with us—there's like a group of African American males, like including myself and a group of my friends—mall security will split us up into groups of three. So, we can't even, like, really walk around or chill with each other. One group would have to be on one side and one group would have to be in front, or they'll just separate us. I don't know if they think we're gonna try to attempt something, but in my eyes, in my mind... they don't really think we're gonna do good deeds if we're in the mall and in a large group.

Similarly, James, Joseph, Tyrell and Hakeem described comparable experiences of being frequently perceived by others to engage in destructive

activities that would result in harm or damage of property.

James: I sometimes get followed around a lot and it makes me feel uncomfortable. Like pretty much every time I go into a store, like the mall or something, I get followed around constantly and they're constantly asking me if I need help with something when I'm just browsing. [People] probably think I'm going to steal something or take something. I don't think that they think that I would rob [the store], but I just think that they're curious to see if I'm going to take anything. Like, they probably don't think I have any money or something. I'm not sure.

Joseph: It's pretty hard because like being Black, everybody looks at you different because they think that just because you're Black, they think that you're going to steal, shoot, or beat up people and stuff like that. It's pretty hard being Black in [this community]. It's like other people see me different, 'cause yeah, I'm a Black male and, like, I'm getting older. There's stuff I can and cannot do now. And then, like, my mom doesn't want me in the streets now 'cause I'm getting older and everything. Like, police—they arrest you for anything now. So, yeah, my mom wants me to stay from around the streets now.

Tyrell: Um, I personally haven't been, like, followed in a store. You know how there's always that story of, "I was followed in a grocery store..." but the way that other people look at you based on things that they hear, they reflect that on you. I feel very strongly that people who don't know me automatically assume that I'm like violent or something like that or I'm doing something that I shouldn't be doing. So yeah, being conscientious of everything you do and I think that fear is also in it— a little bit—too. Being scared. I think you also need to be strong, but not in a way that society can see you...that's more...I guess more of a movie aspect of an African American male—to be violent—I guess. The way you dress factors into it. The way you talk. Um, who your friends are...and like, for me, I experience some African American males think that they have to be mean or play basketball or have to be athletic. I think it's really based on stereotypes.

Hakeem: I think being in [this community] there's more negative sides that come out and more negative stereotypes are pointed towards me. It's more of, "Oh, there goes a Black dude. He's probably in a gang. His dad probably isn't around or in jail or something. He's uneducated and doesn't care about school or his future. He's probably selling drugs and stuff." In [this community], I feel like more negative sides pop out and I'm more recognized for that. I mean there's a lot of things that are hurtful, but it's not surprising to hear from a lot of other people. You know, being followed around in stores.

You know being called n****r in the middle of the street and not being accepted in certain groups or whatnot. I don't know. It's a lot of exclusion and hatred towards me.

Likewise, Drew and Steven, noted that in addition to being perceived as a threat, they often experience moments of inferiority and invalidation within their community.

Drew: Um, I think people think that I'll act a different way because when people see me, they think I'm Black...if I'm Black, I'm loud and obnoxious and insubordinate in every way. But I'm really not that way. And because of that, I feel like people will treat me differently if they don't know me.

Steven: Well, figuring out that [this community] has the biggest achievement gap between African American males and Whites...and African Americans who are in college have a 50% chance that they might not graduate...it's kinda sad, if you look at it, because they're not going to look at us to be smart. But, we actually are smart and can do good in school. I would say that they probably think of us as being better athletes than in academics. Like, "Oh, he's just good at sports and not good at school work. "I really think that they're not really trying to get to know the person.

Emerging Themes. The themes identified by the researcher are as follows:

Taken together, these narratives describe that the collective experience of being an adolescent, African American male—as contextually described by the participants in this community— is often comprised of challenges and frequently being misperceived as violent, unruly and uneducated. In addition, these misperceptions often lurk, historically, within the communities of these adolescents. Thus, negative, preconceived notions are formed—often indirectly— about the existence of the adolescents within these spaces.

Participants' Recollections of Feeling Unsafe in Their Communities

How African American adolescents appraise and cope with exposures to

traumatic events has implications for social adaptation and resilience (Howard, 1996). The psychological meaning a situation has for a person—reflected in the personal narratives associated with events—is an essential determining factor in coping behavior (Howard, 1996). Furthermore, exposure to community trauma significantly contributes to the morbidity and mortality of adolescents (Cheng et al., 2003). The following narratives reflect not only the diverse occurrences among adolescent, African American males in their communities, but also echo many of the shared experiences that many in this population often face. Below, Joseph shares a powerful account of how he has personally been impacted by gun violence and how this event has continued to influence his daily functioning.

Joseph: My brother got shot five times, like, um, last week. So now my mom doesn't want me to go outside and everything. She wants me to be safe and all that and wants me in the house at a certain time and stuff right now. It had a big impact on me at first because, like, I didn't think that he was going to make it, but he's good, though. I was feeling unsafe when my brother was in the hospital and when the people had shot him... Yeah, 'cause that whole week I was feeling unsafe. I didn't feel safe when my brother got shot because he got shot because of me because he was trying to protect me...

In addition to Joseph's experience, Drew and Steven also endorsed moments in which they were directly exposed to gun violence in their community. Alarming, each reported event occurred within weeks of each other.

Drew: Um, there was one day when I was riding around with my brother and some of my friends. We were waiting for somebody to come out of their house and there were people right in front of us and then they started shooting. 'Cause I live in sort of live in a rough area I guess. So they started shooting at each other and we had to pull off before the cops got there because the cops don't really like us.

Steven: Um, I think a time when I have felt unsafe was when...it happened the

other week at the mall when they were shooting. They had the whole mall on a 'lockdown' and we were in the mall and everybody was wondering what was happening because people were shooting and I think that was when I felt the most unsafe...You never hear of shootings or anything, so I was stunned to hear the gunshots. And then they had like the people announce, "This is a lockdown." They closed all the doors to the stores and chained them up and we were just sitting in there. It was a bad experience because we were in there for a super long time, but it was scary, too...the shooter could have shot more people.

As described in the literature, adolescent, African American males also have a high probability of indirect exposure to community violence. Moreover, due to a reported lack of communal understanding and support, these individuals often forced to make sense of these experiences independently. The following narratives provided by Michael and James further highlight these events in an instrumental way.

Michael: [Discussing a recent event of a 17 year-old, unarmed, African American male, shot and killed by a Caucasian officer within the community]. I feel unsafe maybe 45% of the time. Depending on who I am with, I could be with people and feel unsafe because 1) I could be accused of doing something that I wasn't a part of, or 2) I could be robbed or something. Or 3) I could be killed for something that I didn't do. And it's like...life's too short. Most people be like, "I don't care anymore, at all." And to be seen based on color of skin and to think, "Oh that's how that group of people is..." or, "Their background is different from mine..." By seeing that or by me noticing what I came up on and you haven't witnessed...for you to judge me...it's like you have sat down to talk to me about it. You're just like, "Oh he's just another Black boy, supposedly, trying to make it out."

James: There's a park up the street. And [sometimes] when I came from there, I would come home and see on the news or something that a shooting had just went down up there over a little basketball game or something or gambling games that they play up there. Also, there was this girl that had got kidnapped and she passed away. She was kidnapped and killed and like it was a very sad tragedy that happened. [People] probably cared for a about a month...fighting for justice, and then, up until now, nobody even brings it up

anymore...That's why it's bad about [this community]...you only show sympathy for a short period of time...it really hurt me seeing that she was an African American female. We were the same race and when an African American goes down, people that are in power...no sympathy is shown. They just give reasons why this person shouldn't have been here, or that person shouldn't have been there, or this person should have done this...when they're gone. Like how can you say that? And it's strange that that's not coming out of an African American's mouth.

When querying about spaces in which individuals felt unsafe in their communities, the several of the participants also identified "school" as a recognized space in the community where they have often felt misunderstood or unprotected. Hakeem and Tyrell highlight these experiences below.

Hakeem: When I come to school, I can see all of the stereotypes being flung at me by my classmates and even by some of my teachers as well. You know, staff members. And it's not just from White people either. It's every race. I probably fit a stereotype... It's not hard to notice. I'm afraid of proving them right and those negative stereotypes. To be a n****r, so to speak. You know, reckless, undisciplined and all of those negative stereotypes...it's pretty hurtful.

Tyrell: Um, school altogether...I didn't want to ask for help because then I was afraid that other people would overhear [the teacher] having to explain [English or Chemistry] to me and be like, "Oh look, he doesn't get it...Do you just not know it?"...I tried to do like every other excuse you know. "You don't see any of the other Black guys studying for the tests and they're perfectly fine with not...it doesn't seem to shake them and they don't come in to talk to the teacher." Being an African American male who did worry about it, it was really embarrassing at the time.

Emerging Themes. The themes identified by the researcher are as follows:

The probability of being exposed to community violence is high as an adolescent, African American male. Alarmingly, five out of the seven participants described an occurrence of gun-related violence—whether directly or indirectly. Additionally, one of the locations that some of the participants identified as 'unsafe' within in the

community was “at school.” Due to commonly held beliefs of inferiority about adolescent, African American males within the community, intuitions—such as school— have also been inappropriately influenced by these maladaptive beliefs. As a result, adolescent, African American males, at times, have felt isolated and invalidated.

Participants’ Coping Strategies

Coping has been defined as behavioral or cognitive responses that protect people from being psychologically harmed by problematic social experiences (Howard, 1996). A goal of coping is to restore or achieve a sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and stability in one's life situation (Howard, 1996). Another way, coping refers to processes directed toward attaining or regaining competence in the face of adaptational challenges (Howard, 1996). Coping pertains to the assessment and engagement of one's resources and options, both internal and external (Howard, 1996). Furthermore, there is a notion that some degree of adversity, most typically in one's personal life and/or proximal environment, exists which is countered by protective factors accessed by the individual, family, or household (Howard, 1996).

The following disclosures from Drew, Tyrell and Hakeem illustrate how characteristics (e.g., dress, speech, and location) observed in physical environments influence the experiences of the adolescent, African American males.

Drew: I try to stay away from [violence in his neighborhood]...like when I do go out, I try to stay away from my house as much as possible until at least I have to go home. When I come back home...my mind is always on edge. I like to have [my friends] around so I can feel a little bit calmer. Also, check your surroundings. Check the news before you leave because if there are shots, it's

probably around my house or something. Um, again, stay on edge. If you're not on edge, then you wouldn't be as reactionary as you would as if you were paying attention. So, keep your head low and always pay attention.

Tyrell: I feel like people look at me differently when I'm dressed very, like, fancy, you know. Like more respect than just going in like a hoodie and some shorts, you know. And for me, it also makes me feel powerful, I guess. Like, the better you look, the better you feel...I feel. So the better I feel about what I'm wearing, the less cautious I feel about what I'm wearing...the less cautious I feel around other people. And then, last year...I had a choice between taking the early bus and the late bus [to go to school]...It was more of where do I feel more comfortable and I don't like to be surrounded by lots of people because like if I hear something, then I automatically assume that it's because of me and I get very anxious. I ended up taking the later bus because I feel more comfortable...I've learned to be self-reliant and to understand that you can only take care of you.

Hakeem: I know sometimes I have a tendency to show up late or skip class. It's not consistent, but you know those days that I'm feeling really down and, you know, having that factor of racism in the classroom, you know, it's something that I don't want to experience that day, so I won't show up to class. During the week, I would say this happens four or five times a day...I kind of just want to isolate myself from everybody. You know, and just be alone. I know if I'm alone, there's no one who is going to look down upon me. I won't have to worry about whether or not I could be accepted.

Michael's experience lends additional insight into avoidance as a coping strategy by emphasizing trust as a critical component of perceived safety in the adolescent's experience.

Michael: I don't know how to say it, but ever since 2013 or 2014...that's when we [he and his friends] all learned that you can't really trust anyone... I say that even though we've all known each other for so long and how we know each other's strengths and weaknesses, we know each other and we also can't trust each other...I just watch my back. That's what I really do. I watch my back and I barely go places. Like if I go someplace, then I'll let my mom know. Then if I do go somewhere, I go with a group with me. Even though I know we trust each other [more than anyone outside of the group] and I know that I really can't say too much, because [outsiders] will get to thinking that we're saying too much or using other words. I stay with my close friends, but I stay with a selected few of them...at the end of the day, you can only

really trust yourself.

Similar to physical avoidance of environmental spaces, adolescent, African American males have also relied upon psychological and emotional avoidance to as way to cope during moments in which they have felt unsafe. This sentiment is depicted through the narratives expressed by Steven, James and Joseph.

Steven: I just try not to think about [the witnessed shooting]. Um, sharing the story today... 'cause like, you don't want that to ever happen to anybody or like, um, just by it happening in the moment, and it's unexpected. I like going to play a sport or hanging out with friends help to not think about it. Also, just being more careful being around what to go to and who to be around, making sure you're always with somebody wherever you go... I've talked to some friends and my mom about [the witnessed shooting], but other than that, really [haven't spoken to] nobody.

Joseph: Yeah, because my brother who got shot...he can fight real good and then, like, since he can fight...and I've beat up a lot of people and everything, so then like...yeah...people know, "[I] can fight." I keep an eye out more. I'm aware of my surroundings more, now. It's like I only stick with my friends. I don't go [to many places]...I'm not cool with nobody else no more. It's like I'm only cool with the people who, like, are my bros and my friends. It's like I'm not really cool with nobody now. [Regarding his brother getting shot] Now it's like, it's over with now, so I'm just trying to forget about it. It's over with now. I do want to be at home with my mother a little bit more because, like, I don't want nothing to happen to my family...Yeah, but I don't really talk about it.

A common variable that seemed to be implicitly shared by each of the participants was the notion of perceived powerlessness also present in their experiences. Hence, it is plausible that avoidance was possibly utilized as the result of physiological, psychological and emotionally fatigue due to unceasing exposure to institutional inequality and racism. This theme was expressed more candidly through James' disclosure.

James: So...it's no way to handle it, but to forget about it. I mean, that's sad to say, but there's nothing that you can really do. You can't just be by yourself and protest. You can't just be one person...I mean, I try not to blame it on the White friends that I have because it's not their fault. I mean, you just got to deal with it because if a White colored man or woman talked to me disrespectfully and I just go off on them...say if I put my hands on them or something, then I would really, really, really be in some serious trouble. I know that for sure. I just ignore it... Some things in life you just don't react to...we came this far...I mean we can't really react to someone being racist to you because it's normal.

Emerging Themes. The themes identified by the researcher are as follows:

Due to perceived powerlessness within their communities, adolescent, African American males spend a significant amount of time avoiding, isolating, and maintaining intimate support systems as a way to cope. However, avoidance—particularly when used to avoid the classroom—has sometimes resulted in negative consequences, such as suspension, parental and teacher frustration and perpetuation of inferiority beliefs. Additionally, the concept of trust was discussed by the adolescents. Trust was described as a significant variable in cultivating and sustaining any relationship among this population. Conversely, the adolescents stated that there are only a select few adults, peers and family members with whom they confide.

Participants' Appraisal of Feeling Safe in Their Communities

Along with risk factors, child and adolescent adjustment is impacted by protective factors. Positive individual, family and community resources offer opportunities to diminish both externalizing and internalizing symptoms. A sense of confidence, positive family interactions and a cohesive neighborhood environment

can enhance urban youths' adjustment (Blocker & Copeland, 1994; Dumont & Provost, 1999). One way that African American adolescents may become more hopeful regarding their future and belief in their own self-worth is with strong support from their families and communities (DeGruy et al., 2011).

The following disclosures shed light on some of the spaces in which the participants have felt most understood and supported in their communities. In particular, Joseph and Michael recognized places in which physical safety was established and maintained (i.e., at home and school) as preferred spaces within their community.

Joseph: Um, I feel safe, like...I feel safe everyday, but like, I mostly feel safe on the weekdays more than the weekends because on the weekends I'm outside and stuff. So yeah, on the weekdays, I'm either at school, work or home...It's like, at school, nothing is gonna happen because there's too many kids to do something. And then, like, at work, there's too many people that come in and out. I also feel safe talking to my mom, stepdad and my friends because they really know me and love me.

Michael: To be truthful, the only time I really feel safe is when I'm at home, or at a family member's house, or a close friend's house. And that's about it...'cause, like, one, I know where I'm at. I know I really could do anything I want in there. And then it's like... it's like a less likely chance that someone would try to come through the door, or through the window and try to do, like, something crazy or something. And it's like everybody that's in there—in that home—loves me. And we all got the same love for each other and take care of each other. That's why I feel safe in those places.

Correspondingly, Drew, Tyrell, Steven, James and Hakeem further elaborated on additional entities within the protective walls of home and school that help establish perceived safety—emotional support from peers, parents and staff.

Drew: Um, I feel pretty safe when I'm at school because I know that there will always be an adult everywhere throughout the school and security guards

that will patrol. So, I know that I'm safe [while at school]...certain people [make me feel safe]; not necessarily one person makes me feel safe. Like there's the security guards that will help you, but I don't think they'll make me feel safer in a tough situation because of the fact that they don't understand. So the fact that they're older...it makes them maybe not understand as much as if they were a peer or something. So, it helps a lot to have peers around that you can trust. You can't trust anyone really, but it's good to have peers around that you can trust and stuff...

Tyrell: [Regarding supportive outlets] I don't talk to a lot of people besides my parents...I feel like people who I went to middle school with would not understand me because they don't have...well, that I know of...they don't share the same challenges as I do so I don't expect them to understand...Just knowing that I could trust [my parents and close friends] and that they'll still be around, I guess, and I won't be automatically judged by them for not knowing what I'm doing.

Steven: When I'm usually with my friends and, like, when we're together, it's like, I don't feel like anyone can come between us because we all have each other's backs. Or like, chillin' with my dad, I know that he always has my back and I don't have to worry about dealing with nobody...There was a time in the eighth grade when this guy was yelling at me at football practice and my dad came out of no where and was like, "You don't yell at my son." That's when I realized that I could always depend on my dad whenever...Also, because I feel like I can talk to my mom about, like, anything and know that she'll have my back.

James: I feel safe playing...going to my after school sport—being around all of my friends and stuff—just having fun...not having to worry about anything...I also talk to my mom and my family...I feel like my mom understands a lot of, like, how I feel and I just feel comfortable talking to my mom about it because she gives good responses to [the recent community shooting]...She made a lot of things seem clear. I was just, like, flipping off saying, "Oh that's not fair!" Or before, I just said a bunch of stuff that wasn't really necessary and she made it...she made it more clear...She gives me good advice.

Hakeem: I'm in a college prep class [at school] filled with pretty much a bunch of...it mainly consists of people of minority or low-income [students] so it allows the people in there to relate to me. We've become a family because we have to stay with each other for all four years of high school so we've all related to each other. We've become a family and strong. I have those people supporting me. And I have other people...I know I have friends, you know—also minorities—who definitely support me.

Emerging Themes. The themes identified by the researcher are as follows: Adolescent, African American males feel the safest in spaces in which perceived support is fostered. More specifically, the homes of family members or friends were commonly identified 'safe spaces' within a community. Similarly, when occupied by supportive teachers and staff, "school" was also identified as a safe space.

The Role of 'Faith' in the Coping and Appraisal Process of Participants

One way that African Americans have traditionally established a sense of communalism has been through a deeply rooted sense of spirituality derived from the African legacy (Mbiti, 1990). Today, the Black church is one institution that offers role models to Black children, a vehicle for bolstering self-esteem by making available to Blacks positions of leadership and responsibility, and an extended family of community members available for emotional and financial support (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Richardson, 1991). Conceptually, the Black church is possibly "the most organized, visible, and nurturing institution" in the lives of African Americans (Hopkins, 1993, p. 1).

Despite historical data found in the literature, this study revealed that the majority of the participants denied incorporating religious or spiritual support to assist them through many of the crisis that they frequently experienced within their communities.

Drew: I'm not religious at all. I don't know why I'm not religious. Probably because of science...I don't know. Evolution makes sense to me. I don't know how it makes sense, but it just makes sense to me. I don't see any other way, personally. I know that other people see it differently than I do, but I don't see it that way or the way that they do.

Tyrell: I wouldn't say that I'm quite as religious as some of my African American peers are. And I feel like that's where it's a big difference too because I feel like if I did participate in going to church more often, you know, I would rely on faith more to get me through different things. But, I...right now, it's just about doing it and knowing that no one else can really help you with some of the things that you have to do, so it's about just getting through it. Just getting through the experience....

Joseph: I don't really go to church like that. I don't really pray or nothing like that, but it's like I've never been that type of person...to pray or nothing like that, but it's like I've never been that type of person...I was never that type of person to go to church and stuff.

Hakeem: I don't really rely on faith. I don't know if I necessarily define myself as a religious person...I look at it as I got to push through it. I got to make the change. I got to be better myself, you know. I got to improve upon all the stereotypes surrounding me and whatnot...I guess the way I was raised. I was around new people always telling me that "this" is the right religion. I felt like it was almost oppressing...I want something that I can choose for myself. You know, once I started finding things that I was passionate about, that may disagree with me being Muslim, I found that to be more powerful than any religion. I would say that hip-hop is the biggest thing for me.

In contrast to the disclosures provided by the other participants, Steven was the only participant in this study that endorsed religious and spiritual practice as being an integral part of his daily functioning.

Steven: [Faith] has played a big role in my life. Like, sometimes when you're down or going through tough times, there's just times where they don't believe that it won't happen, but I always tell them to believe during tough times. There's a saying in the Bible that God saves his toughest battles for the soldiers. So just trying to stay positive and never be negative and to keep faith because dreams do come true...I would say that I probably attend church, like, three times a month...Each Sunday morning we wake up and go listen to the preacher...It's helpful because there's some strong quotes that the preacher says that like...it's just like a smart quote that relates to so much in life and it makes you want to do so much more in life and be successful.

For the purpose of this study, the term 'faith' was intentionally defined broadly so that the experience of the participants could be best understood through

their reported framework. As a result, James and Michael conceptualized and articulated examples of faith in less religious or spiritual contexts, but rather in terms of individual and community support.

James: Having faith for me, yes it has made a difference because earlier in high school, I had a lot of putdowns. I didn't have a lot of faith. Especially in my grades 'cause I just thought, like, things wouldn't be just right for me. I didn't really think I was smart. I didn't really try at things, but my mom has helped me build my faith up. [With regard to spiritual faith] Um, the community...I could say that right now, we do have faith because the students are leaving school to go stand up for [the death of the 17 year-old African American male who was shot and killed by a Caucasian officer] that they want to see changed...So spiritually, yeah, I think our community does have faith. But, like I said earlier, I feel like faith in the community only carries for a short period of time. [With regard to personal faith] I don't really pray that much on things, so I don't think it would be fair for me to pray once for something good to happen instead of praying every single day. So praying is not really one of my resources.

Michael: [Faith] not really, like recently. But, like, years ago, I think I have... [Faith] to me, I feel, is when I say that people have a lot of faith in me. So by them just saying that they have faith in me...it may just seem like a couple of words to somebody else, but to me, it means a lot because it means that they believe in me. I can try to do and accomplish anything when people say that they believe in me because it makes me want to work harder and harder to go out and do what I can do just a little bit at a time.

Emerging Themes. The themes identified by the researcher are as follows:

Despite well-documented references of the Black church as a significant resource among African American communities, religiosity and spirituality appear to be underutilized resources in this particular African American community, presently. Adolescent, African American males appear to utilize intimate relationships and reliance upon 'self' more than spiritual practices or organized religion.

Thematic Clusters Derived from the Emerging Themes

An exhaustive description of the participants' experiences was developed through presentation of thematic clusters derived from the aforementioned formulated meanings. Consistent among all participants, *fear* was part of the lived-experience in their community. Despite reported moments in which they felt safe, each participant also indicated that safety was a contextualized variable that was dependent on time, location and the presence of others. Specifically, in relation to time, the participants' narratives also suggested that a plausible explanation for increased exposure to violent events was correlated to the time of season. A meta-analysis conducted by Anderson, Anderson, Dorr, DeNeve, and Flanagan (2000) alluded to the findings that population density is higher during warmer months as people are more likely to spend time outside "in the streets." As the study's participants spent more time in the streets, there too was an increased opportunity for maladaptive (e.g., violent) interactions in these communities. Similarly, participants noted that societal-beliefs held about each of them also influenced how they were perceived in the community. This is consistent with the notion that interaction of culture and social class plays a pivotal role in the determination of socialization patterns and developmental outcomes (Howard, 1996). As a result, these young, African American males were often viewed as "violent" and "destructive."

Consequently, participants endorsed possessing insight into their limited sociocultural resources at a young age. Furthermore, they were aware of factors that

would additionally prohibit access to resources within their community, such as increased quantity of adolescent, African American males in select community settings. To counterbalance the experienced racism and inequality expressed by the participants, the majority of the young, African American males described using parental support as an adaptive coping strategy. Moreover, community support from other peers and adults were also identified as helpful resources—specifically to cultivate self-efficacy among this population. Despite this endorsement of communal support, religiosity or spirituality was not an entity commonly utilized among the participants within their communities.

Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

There are numerous stressors that impact the lives of African American males—especially young, African American males who are living in communities with elevated levels of violence. Interventions provided in schools and in community centers may provide a sense of respite from community violence; however, occurrences of aggression, gang activity, decreased academic performance and concerns with conduct are salient within African American sub-culture, despite best efforts within the community. Given these aforementioned risk-factors, this study sought to identify possible constructs of support also present within African American communities.

The experiences of seven adolescent African American male participants who had been exposed to community violence were investigated in this phenomenological study. The primary research question, “What role does religiosity and/or spirituality play in the coping and appraisal process with regard to exposure to community violence?” was assessed through an interview process. Using the method of data analysis by Colaizzi (1978), the researcher analyzed the participants’ taped interviews to gain an overall understanding of their experiences, and made notes about any statements thought to be significant.

From these extracted significant statements, the researcher formulated statements of meaning derived from the data protocols. These statements of

meaning were then grouped into meaning clusters of shared themes. An exhaustive description of the participants' experiences was developed through presentation of theme clusters of formulated meanings. The fundamental structure of the lived experiences emerged from the exhaustive description of the experiences.

Both individual and composite descriptions were outlined throughout this chapter. Major individual textual descriptions included narrative statements associated with the lived experiences of being labeled as 'violent' and without community or religiosity. Composite descriptions consistently demonstrated a thematic emergence of phenomena including: strong sense of self-reliance, lack of access to privileged resources, lack of safety, institutional cruelty, and the existence of stereotypes/prejudices, and biases that perpetuate a mistrust of others in the young African American male's life.

These themes have been evidenced in previously reviewed literature and have demonstrated themselves to be relevant among the young men interviewed in this study. One theme explored in this study stands in stark contrast to previous literature associated with African American communities. Of the seven young men interviewed, neither individual religiosity nor affiliations with communities of organized religion were perceived to be attainable avenues of support. Thus, both individual and composite descriptions discussed in this chapter have illuminated the potential disconnect between the perception that spirituality or religiosity are viable, desired avenues of support available to these young African American men.

Contrast of Literature Review Outcomes

In this phenomenological study, there were similarities found between the extant literature and emerging themes from the study's African American, male adolescents. According to the literature, there was sufficient empirical evidence linking the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and practices of African American, male adolescents to effective coping strategies that resulted in positive adaptive outcomes in situations of risk and adversity (e.g. Brosky, 2000; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Hill, 1999; Taylor, Chatters & Levin, 2004; Utsey, Adams & Bolden, 2000). These culturally-oriented strategies were conceptually linked to variable assets in Masten's (2001) model of resilience. Additionally, assorted religious and spiritual coping strategies—such as prayer, interaction with spiritual mentors, church membership, spiritual mediation and song helped cultivate adaptive belief systems within African American, male adolescents (Anderson, 2006).

Stevenson (1997) found that adolescent, African American males who hear, and seemingly internalize messages about religion and/or spirituality, subsequently tend to experience superior levels of anger control and fewer acts of explicit hostility more than their peers. These results postulate that the integration of religiosity and/or spirituality play a role in the efforts of the adolescents to achieve emotional and behavioral self-regulation—particularly in times of interpersonal conflict (Stevenson, 1997, p. 524).

Consistent with the extant literature, overcoming adversity was a significant

factor in the lived experiences of the adolescent, African American males with this study. Erikson's (1968) stage theory encompassed a systematic approach to the development of the perception of adolescent, African American males in understanding religiosity and/or spirituality as a coping mechanism when challenged with adversity. Spiritual and religious development introduced maturation, transformation, or growth, as well as life phases and stages.

The literature also conveyed that it is during adolescence that religious and spiritual beliefs were expected to begin to take on similar meanings they have in adulthood, thus utilizing their coping skills. The concept of religiosity and/or spirituality development from adolescence to adulthood is essential in understanding that religiosity and/or spirituality based practice may be utilized as coping mechanisms. However, some theorists—particularly those with religiously Christian ties—fear that, recently, previously held beliefs and vows promoted through religious and spiritual traditions have insufficiently dissolved in the lives of adolescent, African American males (Lindner, 2004).

Moreover, King (2001) supported this researcher's postulation by assessing that religiosity and spirituality once served a more prominent role as viable coping mechanisms in the lives of the African American, adolescent males. However, over time, the influence of religion and spirituality has since dissipated due to possibly being "overshadowed by the trials and tribulations of society," thus challenging the coping skills utilized by adolescent, African American males. Conversely, this finding is in contrast to other research, which identified spirituality and coping as necessary

components in the development of adolescent, African American males (Benson, 2005; Richardson, 1991).

A potential reason for the current underutilization of the church as a community resource might be because the adolescents communicated that their daily focus seldom involved examining sources of support. Instead, they disclosed that the majority of their day was preoccupied by remaining cautiously attentive to possible threats. Subsequently, protective coping strategies and opportunities, which also might be present within the community, have been negatively-tinted—or even erased—as a result of their lives being framed through deficit-based lenses. Furthermore, multiple participants described their neighborhoods as becoming less recognizable due to an influx of individuals migrating from the Chicagoland area. As a result, over time, the physical environment and implicit culture of the neighborhoods have transformed once sacred establishments into spaces of violence. Moreover, the young, African American males concluded that it is more effective to foster microcosms of support through small groups of a few friends and family rather than seek assistance through the larger community.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study was restricted to the lived experiences of seven African American, adolescent males in moderately-sized, predominantly Caucasian, Midwestern city. Despite the city's national recognition for more liberally held beliefs, the city has also been associated with racial conflict and violence, especially recently. It is possible that many of the narratives were influenced by city-wide

events and protests that took place prior to the collected interviews.

The identification of the researcher as an African American male may have also influenced the way participants responded to the interview questions. For instance, several of the participants described altering their behaviors (i.e., responses) as a way to cope in certain environments—particularly during moments of expressed vulnerability. Processing experiences of community violence with an African American, male researcher might have inherently cultivated a ‘safer’ space for the participant due to assumed shared experiences as a result of perceived similar, phenotypical traits. This was evident through the level of depth in which participants disclosed not only the personal exposure to violence, but also the visceral feelings of anger, sadness and fear.

Another limitation of the study could be as a result of population sampled. Multiple settings such as churches, community recreational centers, libraries and malls were contacted to help promote participation in the study. However, this resulted in minimal responses during the first few weeks. Greater responses were facilitated through direct word-of-mouth recruitment from personal colleagues and mentors within the community. As a result, some of the participants recruited for this study might have been indirectly selected because of pre-existing relationships with identified community advocates. Despite expressed interest several individuals, some adolescents were unable to participate in the study because their guardians expressed difficulty finding time or the monetary means in which to transport the adolescents to the designated site to participate in the in-person

interviews.

Finally, it is also worth noting that many of the adolescents who were interviewed stated that at least a portion of their upbringing was spent living in neighborhoods, influenced by populations and gang-affiliated culture from the Chicagoland area. Conversely, African American men across the country reside in diverse neighborhoods and come from assorted backgrounds—not solely from the Midwest. Geographical limitations are important to consider, particularly as location within the United States can play a significant role in the upbringing of young, African American males. Thus, the demographics of males presented in this study are narrowed and cannot generalize the experience of all adolescent, African American males.

Implications for Recommended Future Research

Presently, there is minimal phenomenological research on the lived experiences of adolescent, African American males—particularly in urban communities. Conceptual research of adolescent, African American males must be expanded to integrate nuanced and salient influences of their development and emerging resiliency. This perspective would, thereby, shift the academic focus away from designations of deficiency, but rather move towards a richer comprehension of sociocultural needs of the aforementioned youth (Howard, 1996).

Correspondingly, there is a need for researchers to specifically research strength-based attributes in marginalized communities—especially among young, African American adolescents. Due to the scarcity of these concepts currently

present in the extant literature, there is an unfortunate and disparaging picture that continues to be depicted with regard to young, African American males.

As a way to address this deficit, this study attempted to examine one of the most identified entities of institutional support historically found in the Black community—the church. More specifically, this researcher wanted to investigate whether the personal practice of religion and/or spirituality played a role in the adaptive processing among those who are at the greatest risk of exposure to community violence. This study revealed that despite historical data found in the literature, most of the participants did not rely upon religious or spiritual support to assist them through many of the crisis that they frequently experienced within their communities.

Furthermore, the exploration of ‘faith’ might not have fully captured the lived experiences of the participants, or the strategies that they have incorporated in their distinct appraisal and coping processes. The term ‘faith’ was intentionally used in a broad sense to provide a more inclusive depiction of the possible role that religion and spirituality might occupy in the appraisal and coping process of adolescent, African American males. However, when addressing the role of the ‘Black church,’ the exploration of faith might have been too broad of a concept for what this study was trying to assess (i.e., the possible role that religiosity and spirituality plays in the coping and appraisal process of adolescent, African American males). Future research might benefit from a more focused study of the role that the ‘Black church’ might serve, with regard to an established resource within this particular

community.

Despite the lack of utilization of religion and/or spirituality expressed by the adolescents in this study, participants did identify moments of increased self-worth, increased social engagement and increased self-efficacy when trustworthy parents and adult mentors provided guidance and reflected appreciation for the youth. Thus, future researchers may find it beneficial to examine principles currently practiced in community mentoring programs and investigate any overlapping concepts that were once commonly found through religion and spirituality (e.g., leadership, group participation, and sense of belonging; Lerner, Anderson, Alberts & Dowling, 2005).

Implications for Recommended Clinical Practice

As previously identified, fear was a significant theme that emerged through the collective narratives of the participants in this study. Moreover, this reported fear also served a significant role in the conceptualization and identification processes of these young, African American males. Consistent with the findings reported in Nunn (2002), participants in this study divulged multiple experiences in which it was socially more acceptable to “undervalue the lives” of African Americans—particularly, the lives of adolescent, African American males. Whether through the reported prevalence of gun-related violence, or the disclosure of frequent maladaptive interactions with authority figures and officers, it was evident that these individuals perceived a high prevalence of harm to be inflicted upon their bodies as a result of historical and societal-conditioning— inherently, Black bodies are more disposable because they are “undervalued” (Nunn, 2002).

Due to the priming of negatively held beliefs about adolescent, African American males, these youth, essentially, remain unaware of talents and resources that are also accessible within their external and internal self (Howard, 1996). A clinical implication derived from the study's emerging themes is that the autonomy of the youth has habitually felt compromised or challenged by others—specifically, when the adolescent has elected to skip class as a way to promote self-efficacy.

Contrariwise, it is worth highlighting that another emerging theme from this study was that participants were also able to identify uniquely supportive individuals within their communities. Howard (1996) noted that this interpersonal celebration of the youth's self-worth has been found to be empowering. It was gleaned from the narratives in this study that when participants felt encouraged—specifically by trustworthy adults—the adolescents reported a greater sense of interpersonal connectivity and self-worth. Accordingly, adults who communicated and offered expressed interest, guidance, trust and compassion for the youth were described as 'safe' supports for the adolescents.

Socially constructed labels of inferiority challenge the adolescent's ego-syntonic beliefs and further perpetuate a distorted sense-of-self. As a result, a significant message for clinicians to take from this study is that safety is a critically essential component required for change to occur in these communities. Safety—as described by the participants—was not necessarily confined to a physical building or location, but more so expressed through the associated encouragement found in another.

Howard (1996) highlighted the need for greater insight into the need of

providing safe spaces for adolescents who are exposed to chronic violence.

Learning more about how adolescent, African American males cope within their physical settings is essential in understanding how they survive environments that have been described as “violent and destructive.” With respect to coping with exposure to traumatic and fearful events within the community, the adolescents communicated that it was sometimes necessary to position themselves in culturally salient spaces—physically, mentally and emotionally (i.e., truancy).

Additionally, as narrated by the participants of this study, it was sometimes necessary to isolate oneself in order to avoid harmful locations or experiences. Thus, it would behoove clinicians to further examine these coping strategies because the adolescents also acknowledged that this façade can inevitably become such an intricate part of survival that it makes it difficult to live an authentic experience—even around those with whom they identify as ‘trustworthy.’

It is incumbent for clinicians to continue to adopt and promote these identified variables of support as a way to provide a stronger presence of assistance within these identified communities. Through a working alliance, practitioners could facilitate trusting and secure relationships with adolescent, African American males, thereby allowing the youth to be the expert of their lived experiences, rather than being pathologized and subjugated by external entities.

Furthermore, allowing the adolescents to share their experiences in an authentic and compassionate way could help cultivate a sense validation that has rarely been found outside of church, school, or home (Blocker & Copeland, 1994; Dumont &

Provost, 1999). Concurrently, it is not sufficient for clinicians to solely consult with just the adolescents. To serve all populations within these communities, it is recommended that clinicians also confer with other identified members with whom the adolescents recognize as being safe (e.g., church leaders, parents, teachers, community activists, mentors, neighbors). Through these engagements of re-integration, clinicians would help foster the hope that is required to provide an alternative experience for these individuals (DeGruy et al., 2011).

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APPENDIX I
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Directions: Explain to the participant the purpose of the interview. Review confidentiality and how the audio recordings will be used. Clarify any questions the participant may have. Ask participant if he would like to review the results for validity check via email.

1. Demographics (ID of pseudonym)

2. Pre Event:

- a. What is it like for you to be a _____(participant self-descriptor)?
- b. What is like for you to be a _____(participant self-descriptor) in Madison?
 - i. What are some of the experiences that come with being a _____(participant self-descriptor) in Madison?
 - ii. What are some of the assumptions that come with being a _____(participant self-descriptor) in Madison?
 - iii. Describe a typical day or week for you being part of your community.
 - iv. What is it like for you?

3. Event:

- a. Tell me about the time during your day or week that you have felt safe.
 - i. What made you feel safe?
- b. Tell me about the time during your day or week that you have felt unsafe.
 - i. What made you feel unsafe?
 - a. How often do you experience not feeling safe?

- c. Please describe, as detailed as possible, one those situations in which you did not feel safe.
 - i. What was your experience of _____ (the event)?
 - a. In the moment of the experience, what were your thoughts, feelings, and believes about _____ (the event)?

(*Check-in: See how participant is feeling/presenting during the interview and inquire if he would like to proceed).

4. Post Event:

- a. Looking back on _____ (the event), how have you made sense of _____ (the event)?
- b. What has changed for you after having experienced _____ (the event)?
- c. Do you do anything different after having experienced _____(the event)?
 - i. What do you do different? (Changes in life and perceptions, coping)
- d. Do you think anything different after having experienced _____(the event)?
- e. Do you feel anything different after having experienced _____(the event)?
- f. How is your day influenced by the _____ (the event)?
- g. How have you dealt with it?
 - i. Tell me more - (clarifying questions)
 - ii. How coped with _____ (the event)?
 - iii. How did _____ (the event)? help you after the event (coping)?
- h. Who have you talked to about _____ (the event)?
 - i. How come you went to _____(person/place)?
 - ii. How did it help you after _____ (the event)? (coping)?
- i. Some people rely on their faith to make sense of different events. Has faith played a role in how you made sense of _____ (this event)?
 - i. If no, how come?

- ii. If yes, how so?
- j. Anything else about _____ (the event) or your responses that you want to share with me as part of our time together?

(*Check-in: See how participant is feeling/presenting at the conclusion of the interview).

APPENDIX II

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON Research Participant Information and Consent Letter

Title of the Study: Appraisal and Coping Processes of Low-Income, African American Adolescent Males

Principal Investigator: Alberta M. Gloria (email: amgloria@wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Aaron V. Smith (email: avsmith@wisc.edu; phone #: 608-770-2657)

ABOUT THE RESERACHER

My name is Aaron Smith and I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As an African American male, I understand that we all experience both good and bad days in each of our communities. Sometimes it is hard for others to understand your son, his friends, and your family may go through on a day-to-day basis. I am passionate to find out how to support best our different communities and explore how we can find our truths through sharing experiences.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are being asked for permission to allow your son to participate in a research study about understanding the experiences of African American adolescent males. You are being asked because you have a son who is an African American male and is between the ages of 13 and 17. The purpose of the project is to explore young African American males' experiences within their community. Interviews will be conducted in a quiet, private place within the community. Audio recordings will be made of your son's interview. Only members of the project team will have access to the recordings in order to transcribe the recording and then the recordings will be deleted.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD'S PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you provide your permission for your son to participate in this study, your child will be asked to complete a brief interview (approximately 45 – 60 minutes) that is conducted by the project leaders.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO MY CHILD?

There are no more than minimal risks associated with participating in the study. As your son shares his experiences as part of the interview, he might experience some discomfort. Any discomfort experienced will be no more than if he was sharing the story in any other setting or telling it to any other person. If you decide at any time that you do not want your son to participate in this voluntary study, you can contact the researcher and your son's interview will be destroyed. Similarly, if at any time, your son chooses to discontinue his participation, he can do so.

This project seeks to hear and honor your son's truths. Part of his truths may include the witnessing or participation in activities that may be considered illegal. If so, this information will remain confidential to the research team; however, it is also important to maintain your son's safety and the safety of others. If during his narrative he discloses that he is in imminent danger to himself or to others or if he discloses the imminent danger of another identifiable person, confidentiality WILL be broken. Any details of abuse or neglect of a minor are also reportable events per Executive Order 54. Breaking the confidentiality of the interview would be to maintain your son's safety and well-being of others within the community. If you would also like to receive a list of community resources, please provide a mailing address or email address.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO MY CHILD?

There are no direct benefits to your child from this study. Some participants, however, may find value in discussing their experience and potentially identifying positive coping responses to their experience.

WILL MY CHILD BE COMPENSATED FOR HIS PARTICIPATION?

At the end of interview (whether participants complete the interview or withdraw from the study), your son will be given a \$15.00 iTunes gift card.

HOW WILL MY CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

To protect your child's confidentiality, only your child's first name will be used as part of the interview. Your child will be allowed to pick a pseudonym that will be used as part of the final transcription to ensure greater confidentiality. All names and specific places will be removed or de-identified from the transcript. Also, in describing the study participants, only group characteristics will be published. We will however ask you and your child's permissions to use direct quotes from his interview. Selected quotes will only be used that are de-identified and cannot be linked back to you or your child.

It is anticipated that results from this study will be used as part of professional presentations and publications. If you and your child agree to be quoted, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form. To protect your child's privacy, your child can refuse to answer any questions. He will also be informed that he can determine how much to share based on his level of comfort.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator, Alberta M. Gloria, at amgloria@wisc.edu. You may also call the student researcher, Aaron V. Smith, by phone at 608-770- 2657, or by email at avsmith@wisc.edu. If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320. Your son's participation is completely voluntary. If you or your son decides not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on either of you.

Your signature indicates that you and have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about the study and your son's participation in this research, and give consent for your son to participate in the study. You and will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Parent's/Guardian's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Emergency Contact Number: _____

_____ I give my consent to use direct quotes from my son's interview as part of presentation and publication of this study. I understand that any quote used will be de-identified and in no way can be linked back to me or my son.

APPENDIX III

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON Research Participant Information and Assent Letter

My name is Aaron Smith and I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As an African American male, I understand that we all experience both good and bad days in each of our communities. Sometimes it is hard for others to understand what you, your friends, and your family may go through on a day-to-day basis. I am passionate to find out how to support best our different communities and explore how we can find our truths through sharing experiences. In order to hear your truth, I am asking your help to participate in my project that listens to the experiences of young African American males in Madison. I want to understand what it is like for you to live in our community. For my project, I want to find out more about some of the concerns that you may have faced in the past or even now and you handled them.

I am asking you to share your story in an interview that will take about 45-60 minutes. Interviews will take place at a local community center in a quiet private room, where you can tell as much or as little as you feel comfortable. To make sure I understand your story as clearly and accurately as possible I would like to audio record our interview. Only my team (other graduate students who are helping me to complete the project) will have access to the recordings in order to write down what was said during the interview. The recordings will be destroyed after they are written down.

Your parents or legal guardians have given their permission for you to be part of this project, but you have the right to choose whether or not you want to share your story with me. You may quit the study at any time by simply saying, "I don't want to participate." When telling your story, you may feel uncomfortable, but you can choose how much you want to share.

This project seeks to hear and honor your truths. Part of your truths may include the witnessing or participation in activities that may be considered illegal. If so, this information will remain confidential to the researcher and team; however, it is also

important to maintain your safety and the safety of others. If during your story you share that you are in serious danger to yourself or to others or if you share that another identifiable person is in serious danger, confidentiality WILL BE BROKEN in order to maintain your safety and well-being of others within the community.

To thank you for your willingness to help me with my project, you will receive a \$15 iTunes gift card. To protect your confidentiality, your name or any information that can identify who you are will not be shared with anyone who is not part of the project. You can pick a name that will be used as part of the project if you would like.

If you have any question about this project, please call me (608) 770-2657, or email me (avsmith@wisc.edu), or my professor, Dr. Alberta M. Gloria, at (agloria@wisc.edu). If you have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Sincerely, Aaron V. Smith, M.A.

Agreement

I agree to participate in this research project and I have received a copy of this form.

Student's Name (Please Print) Date

Student's Signature

APPENDIX IV

What's Your Son's Truth?

Sometimes it is hard for others to understand what your son, his friends, and your family may go through on a day-to-day basis. In order to hear their truth, I am asking 45 to 60 minute of your son's time to participate in my project that listens to their experiences as a young African American male living in Madison.

Your son is invited to participate in the study if he meets all of the following conditions:

- Your son self-identifies as an African American male
- Your son is between the ages of 13 and 17
- You give your permission to allow your son to participate in my study
- Your son lives in Madison

This study is *voluntary* and *confidential* and a \$15 iTunes card will be given to those who complete the interview.

If you would like more information or would like to allow your son(s) to participate, please contact the student researcher, Aaron V. Smith by e-mail at avsmith@wisc.edu or by phone at 608-770-2657.

Thank you,

Aaron Smith

APPENDIX V

Community Resources**1. Journey Mental Health Center**

Address: 625 W Washington Ave, Madison, WI 53703

Phone:(608) 280-2700

Hours: 8:00 am – 8:00 pm

2. Urban League of Greater Madison

Address: 2222 S Park St #200, Madison, WI 53713

Phone:(608) 729-1200

Hours: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

3. Counseling Psychology Training Clinic

Address: School of Education, UW-Madison, Room 312 Educational Sciences 1025 W. Johnson Street, Madison, WI 53706

Phone: (608) 265- 8779

Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays & Thursdays 3:00 pm – 7:00pm

4. Big Brothers Big Sisters

Address: 2059 Atwood Ave. #2, Madison, WI 53704

Phone: (608) 661- 4370

5. Mentoring Positives, Inc.

☒☒**Address:** 414 Rethke Ave, Madison, WI 53714

Phone:(608) 819-6200

6. Catholic Charities

☒☒**Address:** 1810 S. Park St. #200, Madison, WI 53713

Phone:(608) 256-2358

7. Lutheran Social Services

☒☒**Address:** 6314 Odana Road, Madison, WI 53719

Phone:(608) 277-0610

