RACIAL IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COPING

STRATEGIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE

UNIVERSITY

by

ERIC MARCELL BRIDGES

(Under the Direction of Mary M. Frasier)

ABSTRACT

The research of William Cross (1971) in the area of Black racial identity has demonstrated that the emergence of a Black identity is complex, multifaceted and dependent upon the context and historical space in which African Americans find themselves. A Black racial identity can influence the coping strategies that African Americans may use when confronted with stress that is exacerbated by living in a society where racism exists.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact that racial identity has on the development of psychologically healthy coping strategies among African American males. William Cross's model of Psychological Nigrescence provided the theoretical framework for this study of Black racial identity and psychological coping strategies used by the participants of this study. Data were collected using focus group interviews with six African American male students. A phenomenological approach was used to examine the relationship of these African American males' racial identity and their psychological coping strategies derived from their everyday knowledge, perceptions and experiences.

The results of this study indicate that these students relied upon emotion based coping strategies through their support networks among African American women, African American faculty, other African American men, and the African American community to cope with racial stress. Results also indicate that these African American male students employed problem based coping strategies to deal with racial stress through strategic planning and goal setting. Recommendations for future research are discussed that may help future African American male students.

INDEX WORDS: Racial Identity, Coping Strategies, African American males, Resilience, Achievement, Psychological Health, Racism

RACIAL IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COPING

STRATEGIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

by

ERIC MARCELL BRIDGES

B.A., Georgia State University, 1993

M.S., Georgia State University, 1997

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2004

RACIAL IDENTITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COPING

STRATGEIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT A

PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

by

ERIC MARCELL BRIDGES

<table>
<tr><td>Major Professor:</td><td>Mary M. Frasier</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Committee:</td><td>Deryl Bailey
Tarek Grantham
Thomas P. Hebèrt</td></tr>
</table>

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2004

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandmothers; Dorothy Hampton, Annie Ruth Bridges,

Beulah Atkins and

A great and wise mentor, Reginald Lee Howard.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation has been a long task. It has humbled me and taught me the true sense of the word community. For if it had not been for the many people that have supported me through this endeavor, I would have not completed my studies at The University of Georgia.

First, to the Creator and all my ancestors whose shoulders I stand on, those known and unknown, I say thank you for your spiritual guidance and wisdom. I am merely an extension of those Africans who decided to survive and triumph in a hostile place.

I have to thank my advisor, my intellectual mother, and mentor Dr. Mary M. Frasier for her loving support and guidance. She has challenged me to reach a potential I never knew possible and been a model of courage, feminine strength and wisdom. For this she will always be dear to my heart.

Many thanks to my dissertation committee, Drs. Tarek Grantham and Thomas Hebèrt of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Georgia and Dr. Deryl Bailey of the Counseling Psychology Department at the University of Georgia. Your guidance and support have been valuable to me.

To my good friend Reginald Walter Howard, no words can express my gratitude for your listening to my ideas when others thought I was crazy. Your words inspired me tremendously.

The brothers who participated in my research study have been a source of emotional support for me. I hated when the interviews ended because I had become close to these men who keep their heads up when others try to break them down. May you continue to grow and find peace in this world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

As an African American male and an educational psychologist I have a perspective that gives me a sort of "insider's view" on the issues related to African American males and their psychological health. Throughout my graduate career and prior to it I have been in various roles as an educator. For this study I will rely heavily on my role as a psychologist to make sense of the experiences of the African American men I will be learning from in this study.

As an African American man in a patriarchal, white dominated society, I am very aware both of my African American manhood and my racial identity. As an African American male graduate student at a predominantly white university I am cognizant of the many prejudices and misconceptions that Whites have about me as a Black man. Thus, as an African American I have been affected by the political, economic, and social oppressions of my people. While my White colleagues talk about how America is a just country that treats all of her citizens well, I feel otherwise. African Americans have been subjected to enslavement, segregation (both de facto and de jure), economic and social disenfranchisement, and continuing violence (mental and physical). During my tenure in graduate school I have heard various remarks made about me because of my race. One professor told a colleague that "Eric forgets his place sometimes," and honestly while my race was not mentioned I cannot help but think about the connotation of this statement. In addition, one of my former undergraduate students told me of a conversation that she had with her sorority sister who was also a former student in the same class. The sorority sister made the comment that, "Even though I like Mr. Bridges he sometimes forgets his place as a nigger."

Some of my former students have made derogatory remarks about African Americans ranging from "all Black men want to do is deal drugs, make babies, and not work" to "Blacks are in some ways inferior to whites." The only thing that prevents me from verbally attacking the people who make these remarks is to remember my history and culture as an African American man.

In recent years I have also become aware that I have certain coping mechanisms that have allowed me to remain focused on completing my degree. I was socialized by my mother to never forget my African American roots. An example of how this socialization occurred is exemplified by this question my mother asked me when I was a child: "what do you call a Black man with a Ph.D.?" I told her I did not know and she responded, "A nigger." She explained that regardless of the amount of education a Black man receives, Whites may continue to see him as an inferior person. To this day, I know that this statement grounds me in the reality of living and working in White America.

I have heard the many unfortunate stories of the experiences of African American students attending predominantly White universities and the problems that they face. While my situation and outlook has allowed me to deal with racism in ways that have not deterred me in reaching my goal of achieving a Ph.D., some of my fellow African American male students have used coping mechanisms that were sometimes negative, stopping them short of their goal of receiving their graduate degrees. Even though African American women face racism and sexism in their respective programs they seem to get more emotional support from each other. This may be because there are more of them enrolled in universities across America than Black men. In many instances, I have been the only African American male in my graduate classes. Even now, there are only two African American males in my doctoral program (including myself) and one

in the masters' program. A special bond has developed among us which has been especially

helpful when we have had to deal with issues that involve racism. The African American man in

the masters' program jokes with me about the fact that we are not going to let this process of

receiving a graduate degree drive us crazy and that we would leave the program before it did.

The value that we place on our psychological health is more important than any degree.

However, it is short-sighted for us to think in this individualistic manner because ultimately, the

more African American males who receive graduate degrees, the more enriched the African

American community becomes as well as America.   It is for reasons such as this that I am

interested in the racial identity of Black males and in their psychological health. As this has been

a major source of motivation for me, I have often reflected on how this motivation came to be.

As suggested by numerous researchers, in order to understand any phenomenon being

 researched, one must examine his/her life experiences (DuBois 1940/2000). As one of my

professors is fond of saying, "uncover any dissertation and you will find an autobiography." I

know that this is true in my case. Since I am an African American male graduate student at a

predominantly white university I will be able to empathize with the participants in my study.

Reflecting upon my life experiences as an African American man allows me to create an

understanding of my identity from the perspective of an educational psychologist, a researcher,

and a human being. This reflection allowed me to present a clear understanding of my

sentiments regarding research, my approach to conducting research, the topics I am interested in

researching and the population I want to be the focus of my research.

The first lesson I learned from my mother about being an African American male was

that I was born with two strikes against me. The first strike was my Blackness, especially since I

am dark skinned. Traditionally, lighter skinned Blacks have been viewed as smarter, better

looking, and more civilized that their darker brethren (Otis-Graham, 2000). The second strike

against me was my maleness. My mother told me that the greatest threat in White males' minds

was a Black man. Therefore it has always been incumbent upon White males to make sure Black

males were marginalized in all facets of American society. Since I am a dark skinned African

American male this hits home more closely because dark skinned African American males are

seen as the diametrically opposite of all that is good in America. We are seen as criminals,

rapists, violent, uncaring, nihilistic, and cold-bloodied killers, and many times, without regard for

human life.

The media perpetrates this image many times through shows like *Cops* and the nightly

news. Television is most pervasive in propagating the negative racial stereotype of the African

American male as a criminal. Research by Peffley, Shields and Williams (1996) indicate that

studies of media content consistently find that Black criminal suspects are portrayed more

frequently and more menacingly than White suspects in television news stories of violent crimes.

Using a video experiment in which they manipulated only the visual image of the race of the

suspect in a television news story of violent crime, the researchers found, consistent with their

expectations, that even a brief visual image of an African American male suspect in a televised

crime story was capable of activating racial stereotypes which, in turn, heavily biased whites'

evaluations of the suspect along racial lines. White participants in the experiment who endorsed

negative stereotypes of African Americans viewed the Black suspect in the crime story as guilty,

more deserving of punishment, more likely to commit future violence, and with more fear and

loathing than a similarly portrayed White suspect (Ramseur, 1991).

Movies such as *Candyman* drive home the fact that if you are Black, male, and

intelligent, you are evil incarnate and need to be destroyed. A real life example of this was the

story of young Edmund Perry, an extremely gifted African American male whose story, *Best Intentions*, chronicles his life of growing up in Harlem, receiving a scholarship to one of the most prestigious preparatory schools in America-- Phillips Exeter-- and facing the challenges of existing in two dissimilar worlds. A few weeks before he was to leave for Stanford University, he was shot and killed by a young White undercover police officer for attempted robbery. The author of the book, Sam Anson, paints a picture of this Black teenager as cunning, manipulative and too urbane for his age. Edmund Perry became America's worst nightmare, an intelligent Black male who was not afraid to face society's racism. What Mr. Anson dealt with too lightly was young Edmund Perry's way of dealing with his burden of going between the worlds of Harlem, which is primarily Black and poor, and Phillips Exeter, which is rich and White. I cannot but wonder if Edmund had anyone to talk to about the challenges he faced and, if so, did they understand what he was going through?

Even as a grown man I empathize with Edmund Perry because, in some ways, I have experienced many of the things he experienced. As a Black man I have learned to play the game, while at the same time, realizing that the game does have a price. Do I achieve in the White world and forget my Black roots? For many in academia there is the belief that if you want to be successful in this game you have to leave the "minority stuff" alone. Blacks who research Black issues are told that they are too close to the topic and therefore are unqualified to do research in the area. I, myself, refuse to accept this line of reasoning because I feel that I have an obligation to African American males to help us (African American males) succeed. The history of African American males in this country and my socialization in my home, my community and in my education compels me to seek answers that will allow me to contribute to the development of interventions that may effectively impact the socialization of today's African American males.

African Americans in general, and African American men in particular, have rich voices that can add to scientific knowledge. However, these voices have been traditionally ignored. It is my contention that the context and shared experiences of African American males provide dimensionality to this research. Because we, as human beings, actively create and interpret our realities, context becomes essential in that it helps influence our interpretations of experiences. I classify myself as a social constructivist. To me context and interpretation are paramount. As a social constructivist, I believe social processes help shape our construction of the meanings of our individual life experiences (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1994). These experiences are often functions of history, culture, and the environment (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). Because of this, the history of African American males and our socialization have shaped my views tremendously.

CHAPTER I

RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

Researchers have grappled for years to find out what characteristics-- be they social,

cultural, psychological, or a combination of the three-- enable African Americans to achieve in a

society which has traditionally been hostile to them. More importantly, how do African

Americans manage to retain a level of sanity while their humanity is being attacked? What, if

any, role has the development of a positive racial identity played in their development of

effective coping strategies?

The positive view of African American people who have achieved, despite the many

obstacles placed in their way, is typically contradicted by psychiatrists, psychologists, and other

commentaries who maintain that because of the enslavement experience, African Americans

suffer from a kind of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that negatively influences their ability to be

resilient in their ability to cope (Utsey & Ponterotto, 2000). This inability to be resilient in the

face of adversity has been used by researchers and commentators to characterize why many

African American males have not fared well in American society.

African American males have faced and continue to face many socio-cultural, academic,

and economic dilemmas that generate negative experiences and identity conflicts that are specific

to them. The conditions of unemployment, stress, substance abuse, and violence often inundate

their lives (Kirven, 1999). Social and cultural adversities have been enumerated to include

various denigrations of the manhood, e.g., beatings, castration, and lynching, of African

American males. Unfortunately, the outcomes of these denigrations have been the creation of

stressors that have often prevented African American males from expressing their full potential as men. These stressors, in turn, have often led to psychological pressures that negatively affect the African American male's relationships with African American women, children and the African American community.

An alternative picture of African American males is offered by Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka (1981). The picture they paint depicts a description of African Americans, males included, who have somehow managed to be psychologically healthy through their effective use of coping strategies when dealing with life's adversities. Even though the African American males they describe face tremendous stressors from a hostile society, many still managed to live successful (materially and socially) and fulfilling lives.

A debate over which of the descriptive pictures of African American males is more true may not nearly be as important as discovering which aspects of either picture might be included in programs designed to assist today's young African American males in developing the coping strategies they need to help them succeed and to be resilient in the face of diversity. Gibbs (1989) and Mincy (1994) observed that whereas negative physical and psychological challenges to the self-concept of African American male youth have been well documented over the years, the most current social implications point to serious losses in the areas of education, unemployment, delinquency, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and suicide. Ford (1996) has asserted that Black males need and seek greater self-awareness, self-understanding, and appreciation. She further asserted that Black males seek stronger relationships with their peers and with the African American community, and more positive social relations and greater opportunities to express their emotions and feelings in positive and productive ways. Others have concluded that intervention programs geared to developing a strong or positive ethnic

8

identity in young African American males could have positive influences that could effectively help them to alleviate many of the problems they face (Gibbs, 1989; Mincy, 1994; Williams, 1995/96).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the impact that racial identity has on the development of psychologically healthy coping strategies among African American male university students. The goal of the study was to derive implications that may be used to help young African American male university students learn how to more successfully navigate their educational experiences.

The contention was that if educators and counselors could better understand more the impact of the social restraints that impede the progress of African American males in their quest to be successful in mainstream American society, they could then help them develop more realistic expectations regarding to take advantage of opportunities to succeed in mainstream society (Thorn & Sarata, 1998).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does the racial identification of African American males influence how they deal with stress?

2. In what ways does racial identification help to explain how some African American males are resilient in the face of adversities?

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms that are used in this study.

Coping. In this study coping is the process where an individual attempts to manage, through cognitive and behavioral efforts, external or internal demands that are assessed as exceeding an individual's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Racial identity. In this study racial identity is defined according to Cross's (1971) conception of Nigrescence to mean a "sense of Blackness".

Psychological health. In this study psychological health as used in this study is based Welsing's (1991) definition where she states that psychological health are those patterns of perception, logic, thought, speech, action and emotional response, whereby consciously or unconsciously determined, which reflect personal and extended self respect and extended self affirmation.

Racism. As used in this study the word racism is defined as those activities and behaviors, practiced by persons who classify themselves as White and are engaged by them to suppress, oppress, and maintain power in nine areas of people activities. These area include: education, entertainment economics, labor, law, politics, religion, sex, and war (Welsing, 1991).

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Black Racial Identity

Black Racial identity has been discussed in the social science literature using various

terms. Black identity, "sense of people-hood," "sense of Blackness," are all terms that have been

used by researchers (Ramseur, 1991). There is no consensus on concept definition, measurement

technique, or links to personality theories as they relate to Black racial identity. Much of the

work in this area has assumed that Black racial identity is strongly linked to personal self-esteem,

but that this link is more of a theoretical postulate that empirically based (Ramseur, 1991).

Ruth and Eugene Horowitz were probably the earliest researchers to study Black racial

identity as a scientific construct. They were keenly interested in theory and research on social

attitudes and personality, two themes they frequently explored in their studies involving the

racial attitudes and personality dynamics of Black and White children (Cross, 1971). Under the

guidance of Gardner Murphy, Eugene Horowitz in 1936 completed his dissertation on the racial

attitudes of White children living in the South, North, and within a communist commune in New

York City. Part of Eugene Horowitz's methodology required subjects to rank order photographs

of the faces of Black and White children. Afterwards, in a test called the *Show Me Test*, the

children selected preferred companions from the same set of photographs. Some of the questions

on this test included:

1. Show me all those that you want to sit next to on a car.

2. Show me all those that you want to be in your class at school.

3. Show me all those that you would play ball with.

4. Show me all those that you want to come to your party.

The Show Me Test was based on an earlier study that E. Horowitz had adapted from the work of Garnder Murphy (Murphy & Murphy, 1931). The purpose of Horowitz's dissertation was to show that racial attitudes and racial conflict were not instinctually based. Horowitz's study included a modest sample led to a surprising find. Horowitz found that the Black children showed a slight but statistically significant preference for the White pictures on the Show Me Test.

Eventually, Eugene joined his wife Ruth in expanding the study to include the use of puppets, dolls, and pictures to elicit children's social attitudes. Ruth Horowitz thought that race consciousness transcended surface issues and touched on intrinsic dimensions of personality. As a follow up to her husband's work, Ruth Horowitz conducted what is now recognized as the first modern empirical study of racial identity in Black children (Horowitz, 1939). She discovered that several Black preschool children misidentified themselves as White, leading to the assumption that these children were socialized to identify with Whiteness, rather than Blackness (Horowitz, 1939). R. Horowitz's findings quickly gained the interest of other psychologists, among them, the husband and white team of Drs. Mamie and Kenneth Clark. The Clarks replicated and expanded Dr. Horowitz's earlier study but were critical of the conclusion she reached indicating that Black children were socialized to identify with Whiteness (Cross, 1971). It was the work of the Clarks that sparked the interest in the study of Black racial identity (Cross, 1971).

Cross's Theory of Nigrescence

The most widely known model of Black racial identity is Cross's model of Nigrescence (1971). Nigrescence, a French word that means the process of becoming Black, is also probably the first theory to explain the processes that African Americans progress through in the development of a Black identity. The Nigrescence model describes the profile of African Americans, in relation to the majority White culture and the various phrases of their ethnic identity development. Cross states in his book, *Shades of Black* (1991) that his stage theory is a resocialization experience that seeks to transform a preexisting identity (a non-Afrocentric identity) into one that is Afrocentric. Cross developed the Nigrescence theory as means to explain the Black racial identity of adults. Parham (1989) has extended the Nigrescence theory to include a concept of recycling, periodic episodes of Nigrescence across the life span. Cross (1991) maintains that while Nigrescence is not a process for describing the socialization of children, it is a model that explains how assimilated Black adults, as well as deculturalized and miseducated Black adults are transformed by a series of circumstances and events into persons who are Afrocentrically aligned.

Cross states that there are five stages of Black racial identity development: Pre-encounter, in which an individual reject their own culture and accepts the norms of the majority culture; Encounter, in which events occur that open individuals' eyes to their own culture and the way it has been oppressed; Immersion-Emersion, where individuals immerse themselves in African American culture and reject the dominant white culture; and Internalization, in which individuals attain a multicultural outlook, accepting their African heritage while also being accepting of the traditions, beliefs, and values of other cultures. The fifth stage, Internalization-Commitment, is characterized by positive self-esteem, ideological flexibility and openness to

13

one's Blackness just as in stage four. The difference in stage five is that individuals find activities and commitments to express their identity (Cross, 1971).

Cross views a person in the Internalization Commitment stage as the "ideal," the psychologically healthy Black person. This person has a calm, secure demeanor which is characterized by ideological flexibility, psychological openness and self confidence about Black racial identity. While Blacks are the primary reference group, the person holds no prejudices about other races, sex, ages or social classes (Ramseur, 1991). Cross sees the Nigrescence process as an African American model of self-actualization under oppressive social conditions (Ramseur, 1991). In Cross's model African Americans who reach stage five would be self-actualizers.

The revised model of Nigrescence includes substantial changes, particularly in the pre-encounter and internalization stages. The pre-encounter stage now includes three distinct identity clusters (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). The *pre-encounter assimilation* identity has a low salience for race but a strong orientation toward being an American. The *pre-encounter miseducation* identity internalizes negative stereotypes about being Black (i.e., being lazy or criminal). The *pre-encounter self-hatred* identity holds extremely negative views about Black people and ultimately is anti- Black and self-hating (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

The encounter stage still involves an encounter with discrimination or racism that causes a shift in a person's perception of the world. However, because of its transitional nature it is difficult to measure.

The immersion-emersion stage is now theorized as consisting of two identities. The *immersion-emersion intense Black involvement* identity which celebrates everything Black as good, and the *immersion-emersion anti-white* identity which views everything White as evil

14

(Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Individuals in the immersion-emersion stage immerse themselves in

Blackness. Instead of conceptualizing this stage as a single identity with two components (i.e.,

pro-Black and anti-white), Cross conceptualized it as two separate identities under the umbrella

of immersion into Blackness (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

The internalization stage is also now theorized to consist of two identities. The first,

Black nationalism, adheres to an Afrocentric perspective where Africa is seen as the political,

social and cultural center for people of African descent worldwide (Asante, 1992), with a pro-

Black, nonreactionary mindset towards those persons who are not Black. The second

internalization identity, *multiculturalist inclusive*, embraces a Black identity while

acknowledging the cultures of those persons who are not Black. This revised version alludes to

the fact that while acknowledging one's Blackness is important, it is also important to recognize

the biculturalism that African Americans must ascribe to in order to succeed in America.

Cross's (1991) critical review of empirical studies on racial identity led to major

theoretical changes in the internalization stage. Many people equated internalization with a

universal or humanistic view about relationships among diverse cultural groups. Internalized

African Americans could differ in their acceptance of members from diverse cultural groups. The

second change in the revised internalization stages was the uncoupling of Black self-acceptance

and mental health. Cross (1995) argued that while changes from pro-White to pro-Black attitudes

might result in changes in a person's worldview, value system, ideology, or reference group

orientation, but the changes did not necessarily result in changes in one's general psychological

functioning or personality. In other words, acceptance of Blackness does not guarantee a positive

change in a Black person's level of psychological functioning. The acceptance of Blackness does

not insulate African Americans from depression nor does it change fundamental personality characteristics (Cross, 1991, 1995).

African American Men and Racial Identity

W.E.B. DuBois, the great American scholar, stated in the 20th century that the African American had two souls, warring and competing for dominance in one dark body. Some people may state that the merging of these two souls has been unsuccessful even up to present day 21st century. The history of America and its' relationship with African American males has been acrimonious, to say the least. African American men, in the past and presently still suffer from the chronic stress of living in a racist and oppressive society. This condition has historical roots dating back to their enslavement and deportation from Africa (Elligan & Utsey, 1999). Today, African American males are marginalized out of the political, economic, and social arena. This has shaped African American males racial identity in significant ways. As African American boys develop, they become aware of the inequalities that exist within American society. African American males see that Whites are treated well whereas they suffer from limited opportunities (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999). The media, newspapers, and classroom textbooks project images of Eurocentric power and dominance (White & Parkham, 1990). In the academic environment, African American males are placed in remedial and special education classes at a greater rate than Whites. They achieve lower grades and have a greater number of expulsions and suspensions than Whites or Black females (Irvine, 1990). Given the absence of positive feedback from the academic environment and the media, and the frequent encounters with violence, police harassment, and incarceration, African American males have tended to develop a sense of pessimism toward the future (Harris, 1995).

Phinney, Lockner, and Murphy (1990) suggest that African American males need to resolve two primary issues or conflicts that stem from their status as members of a marginalized group in American society. First, African American males must resolve prejudicial attitudes from society. Second, African American males have to adopt two differing sets of values, one from the dominant culture and one from their own culture. According to Phinney et al. (1990) African American males may actively explore resolution to these issues that result in an achieved ethnic identity or they may ignore them, resulting in identity diffusion. African American males must realize that prejudicial stereotypes will only affect their identity development if they accept and believe the stereotypes (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999). In fact, African American males have the power to reject these stereotypes and redefine themselves and their group in more positive terms (Tajfel, 1978).

The second issue appears to be more difficult to resolve. This issue is concerned with African American males' feelings of exclusion from society. This exclusion is a core issue in that while African American males are indeed Americans, they are not truly accepted as first class citizens. This presents a conflict. In trying to resolve or define their identity they become individuals with two warring souls, African and American. This conflict is a core issue in the identity struggle of African American males and may promote feelings of anger and indignation (White, 1984). African American males must struggle with adopting two divergent value systems, one African American and the other European American (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999). Total rejection of either reality can restrict their choices, personal growth, social interactions, and economic opportunities (White & Parkham, 1990). If African American males exclusively identify solely with Eurocentric values of individualism, competitiveness, emotional suppression, power, and dominance, they may achieve at the cost of being isolated from the African American

community and alienated psychologically from who they are as persons of African descent. If African American males exclusively identifies with the African American values of communalism, emotionality, shared power, and interdependence, they may not develop many of the necessary skills needed to survive in the workforce and to dismantle the White supremacy power structure (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999).

In order for African American males to resolve the ethnic identity issue, there are a number of possible outcomes that have been suggested: alienation, assimilation, withdrawal, and integration. These four outcomes are each affected by social factors such as discrimination, poverty, and education level (Phinney et al., 1990; Tajfel, 1978). Alienated individuals are those who accept the negative image that society presents and alienate themselves from the African American community and culture. According to Corbin & Pruitt (1999) these individuals accept the fact that they are inferior to whites. Assimilated individuals attempt to become part of the majority culture and do not remain connected with the African American community. They attempt to think and behave in ways that minimize, devalue, or deny their African American heritage. Withdrawn individuals become immersed in their own culture while withdrawing from contact with the dominant culture. In order to counterbalance the negative images they receive from the dominant society they may over-identify with African American culture to minimize any loss of self-esteem resulting from comparisons with the dominant group (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999).

Although some African American males may view these three outcomes as healthy defense mechanisms, they leave them unprepared to cope with the reality of racism when they are not within the boundaries of the African American community. Integrated individuals find a way of accepting their African American racial identity while interacting with the dominant

culture. They feel secure in their African American identity while maintaining contact with European Americans (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999). While interaction with the mainstream White community may not be an easy task for some African American males, it is more beneficial to African American males if they are to be both a viable part of American society and remain connected to the African American community.

Psychological Health

Defining psychological health is not an easy task. No theory or model of adult psychological health has achieved consensus among researchers or accumulated a convincing body of empirical evidence to give an exact definition of psychological health (Ramseur, 1991). In addition, while existing models of psychological health claim to be universal, meaning that they are applicable and explanatory for all humans; in fact they usually have every little to say about the unique social and cultural circumstances of African American males and the impact of these circumstances on the psychological health of the African American male.

"Universal" (or western) models of psychological health are varied. The standard model in medicine was that psychological health is freedom from symptoms of illness (Ramseur, 1991). Another accepted definition was that psychological health was being like the average or "modal" member of society, or being "adjusted" to one's social and cultural surroundings. These definitions are rarely used today.

Maslow (1968) criticized models such as these because they did not include the human potentiality of creativity, growth, and self-actualization in psychological functioning. Writing from a humanistic perspective, Maslow described a healthy person as "self-actualized," someone who is moving towards fulfilling their unique human potential. According to Maslow, we all have an inherent motivation towards growth or self-actualization, and humans would grow if

19

society allowed our more primitive needs to be satisfied (e.g., hunger, safety). He investigated the personality characteristics of people he thought were self-actualized by reviewing biographies of prominent figures and his friends. The characteristics he discovered include the accurate perception of reality, the ability to be intimate with others, the capacity to have mystical experiences, and the capacity to be creative.

Marie Jahoda (1958) proposes that there are six themes of positive mental health. According to Jahoda, positive mental health refers to positive and realistic attitudes towards the self, growth and self-actualization, integration or a balance of psychological forces and stress resistance, autonomy, accurate perception of reality, and environmental mastery-the ability to love, work and play. Unfortunately, Jahoda did not specify how, or if, the six criteria are interrelated. Also, Jahoda's model is not grounded in developmental or social/cultural psychological theory (Ramseur, 1991).

Erik Erikson's model (1968) is probably the most sophisticated example of a developmental/lifespan approach to psychological health. Erikson analyzed the human life cycle in terms of eight different stages of ego development. Each stage is a crisis or turning point that involves a basis psychological issue that can have a healthy or pathological outcome which then has implications for the next stage of life. Erikson emphasized the role of social and cultural factors on development. The eight stages are: 1. The basic trust versus mistrust stage occurs from birth to 1 year old. During this stage the infant either gains a sense of trust, confidence and a belief that the world is good or a sense of mistrust where the infant senses that the world is a harsh place; 2. The autonomy versus shame and doubt stage occurs from 1 year to 3 years old. During this stage children want to choose and decide for themselves. Autonomy is fostered when parents permit reasonable free choice and do not force or shame the child which can lead

to the child developing a sense of doubt in themselves; 3. The initiative versus guilt stage occurs from 3 to 6 years old age. Children, through make-believe play, experiment with the kind of person they can become. This initiative develops when parents support their child's new sense of purpose. The danger is that parents will demand too much self-control which can lead to over-control and a sense of guilt for the child. 4. The industry versus inferiority stage occurs from age 6 to 11 years old age. In this stage children develop the capacity to work and cooperate with others. A sense of inferiority occurs when negative experiences at home, school, or with other peers lead to feelings of incompetence. 5. The identity versus identity confusion stage occurs during adolescence. The teenager tries to answer the question, Who am I?, and what is my place in society? The negative outcome is confusion about future adult roles. 6. The next stage, intimacy versus isolation, occurs in young adulthood. In this stage young people work on establishing intimate ties to others. Some individuals, because of earlier disappointments, cannot form close relationships and thus remain isolated from others. 7. The next stage, generativity versus stagnation, occurs during the middle age years and entails a sense of accomplishment, the passing on of wisdom to the next generation through child rearing, and caring for other people or productive work. The person who fails in these ways feels an absence of meaningful accomplishment. 8. The last stage, integrity versus despair, occurs during the older years. In this final stage Erikson maintains that individuals reflect on the kind of person they have been. Integrity results from feeling that life was worth living as it happened. Older individuals who are dissatisfied with their lives fear death. Erikson states that the outcome of each of these stages is a dynamic balance with health representing the process of continued growth and development. This balance is contingent on the coping strategies that an individual uses when faced with stress.

The model which Jahoda proposed along with Erickson's development model and the stress models all seem to be useful in understanding psychological health among African-American males. Jahoda's model specifies that psychological health has a number of definable dimensions that may be related but can also be independent of one another. Implicit in this model is the idea that the dimensions are measurable and can be empirically investigated. Unfortunately, the model is not grounded in theory, does not have a developmental or social/cultural perspective, and does not consider gender differences (Ramseur, 1991). Erikson's model is a developmental one which addresses issues across lifespan. His theory points to the importance of the interplay between society and culture on the individual, and forges links to theory. He points out that psychological health is a matter of a "dynamic balance" or a favorable ratio of positive to negative psychological aspects. Unfortunately, little empirical research has been concluded in relation to Erikson's model.

Erikson's stress/adaptation model has a number of strengths. It inherently takes the social/cultural environment in which persons finds themselves into consideration. It looks at different points in the life cycle, is easily empirically researchable, and is linked to social/psychological theory. The shortcoming of this model is the fact that it has been focused at the group level of analysis, rather than the individual. Therefore, applying findings to assess or describe a psychological healthy person is often difficult (Ramseur, 1991).

According to Azibo (1996) western psychology, lacking an a priori model of psychological health, infers that sanity is the absence of insanity. Azibo (1996) goes further by defining mental health Africentrically as the state at which mental processes are self-preserving. Wade Nobles (1986) gives a holistic definition of mental health as the behavioral representation of ordered thought that is consistent with one's spirit. Welsing (1991) defines African American

mental health as patterns of perception, logic, thought, speech, action and emotional response, whether consciously or unconsciously determined. To her, African American mental health reflects personal and extended self respect and extended self-affirmation. Thus, African-centered psychologists tend to define mental health not only for the individual, but the relationships that the individual has with the extended community.

African American males must live and adapt to a unique social and cultural environment. This environment and the necessity that African American males adapt to it has implications for any model that claims to define and understand the psychological health of African American males (Ramseur, 1991). Certain issues seem important in characterizing the aspects of the environment that are relevant to the psychological health of African American males: racism, the need to adapt to white institutions and culture, adapting to Black community (e.g. family, Black institutions, and culture) and coping with social and political powerlessness (Ramseur, 1991).

Most African American males must adapt to the Black community and its culture as well as the White American culture and institutions. While most African American males live, have families, social friends and attend churches in the African American community, they still must adjust to White-run institutions, workplaces, and military settings. This adaptation many times requires them to juggle different values, behavioral styles and aspirations. This situation has led many social scientists to state that many African American males have to be bicultural to function in both cultures (Ramseur, 1991).

Coping Strategies

There is a sizable amount of literature that examines the stress/adaptation model proposed by Erikson and the links between stress, coping skills and the level of subjective well-being or distress experienced by an individual (Ramseur, 1991). There has been a recent growth of

23

research dealing with coping strategies. This research has provided a large amount of evidence that helps to explain the strategies by which people cope with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Stress has been associated with many diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, and substance abuse. African American men are more susceptible than other populations to these disorders. Stress has also been associated with homicide and suicide, which occur at high rates in African American communities (Plummer & Slane, 1996). While stress has been defined in many ways all of the definitions involve an environmental demand to which the person must react and where stress is perceived of as at least potentially exceeding the person's ability or resources to meet the challenge (Ramseur, 1991).

According to Ramseur (1991), coping refers to efforts to master environmental demands when a previous response is unavailable or ineffective. This is similar to the definition that is proposed by Utsey and Ponterotto (2000). Stress and coping responses are linked by the cognitive appraisal of the stressor and the internal/external resources of the person (Ramseur, 1991). Cognitive appraisal refers to the significance and meaning attached to a stressor. Internal resources refer to individual factors; i.e., personality traits, racial identification, social class, and cultural beliefs. External resources refer to family or social ties, work relationships, and church affiliations (Ramseur, 1991). The model then is one where stressor(s), an appraisal of the stressor(s) and the person's internal/external resources in turn produces a coping response that leads to an adaptive or distressful outcome (Ramseur, 1991).

Researchers generally agree that there are two major types of coping strategies: One is problem-focused and the other is emotion-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping strategies function to change a troubled person-environment relationship by directly acting on the environment or oneself. In contrast, emotion-focused coping operates to change

24

either commitment patterns (e.g., one avoids thinking about a threat) or the meaning or interpretation of what is happening which may mitigate the stress, although the actual reality of the relationship is not changed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Examples of problem-focused coping are planning strategies or suppression of competing activities whereas receiving emotional social support and religious activities are examples of emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Along with emotion and problem focused coping strategies, the use of certain coping styles and strategies appears to depend on personal characteristics and the ways they appraise the nature of an event and situational factors are appraised (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, particular types of coping strategies are more or less effective, according to the type of stress encountered (Dempsey, 2002). Plummer and Slane (1996) pointed out that some coping strategies that may be viewed as maladaptive (e.g., avoidance or distancing) or adaptive under some circumstances and some coping strategies that are viewed as adaptive may be maladaptive under other circumstances.

Racism, Coping and African Americans Males

There is limited research that deals with the successful coping styles used by African American males. More problematically, the destructive effects of racism as a stressor, on the psychological health of African American men have largely been ignored within the research literature (Elligan & Utsey, 1999). A few researchers have noted a relationship between chronic exposure to racism and poorer psychological and somatic health among African American men (Utsey & Payne, 2000).

In this dissertation study, the definition proposed by Welsing was used to define racism. Welsing (1991) states that racism/ White Supremacy are those activities and behaviors, practiced by persons who classify themselves as White and are engaged by them to suppress,

25

oppress and maintain power in nine areas of people activities: education, entertainment, economics, labor, law, politics, religion, sex, and war.

Racism has been implicated in the onset of several stress-related diseases, including hypertension, coronary heart disease, cancer, and cirrhosis of the liver. Psychologically, chronic exposure to racism has been associated with increased levels of depression, lowered life satisfaction and self-esteem, feelings of trauma, loss, and helplessness (Utsey & Payne, 2000). Given the insidious nature of racism and its deleterious effects on the psychological health of African American men, more research is needed that examines the impact of racism as a stressor in the lives of African American men.

Racial discrimination is, indeed, insidious and permeates many aspects of African American life. According to Jones (1997), the experience of racism is multidimensional and can be classified using a tripartite typology. The first type of racism posited by Jones is individual racism. In this type of racism, African Americans are likely to experience racial discrimination on a personal level. One example of individual racism is when a security guard targets an African American and follows that individual while they shop at a store. The second type of racism suggested by Jones is institutional racism. This type of racism is experienced by African Americans as a result of social and institutional policies that exclude African Americans from full participation in the benefits offered to other members of society. Examples of institutional racism are the criminal laws that relate to the possession of illegal drugs. Federal drug laws require stiffer penalties for possession of crack cocaine, a drug more accessible to African Americans than for powdered cocaine, the drug of choice for White Americans. The last type of racism suggested by Jones is cultural racism which occurs when the cultural practices of the "dominant" group are generally regarded by society and its institutions as being superior to the

culture of a "subordinate" group. Cultural racism can be observed in the manner in which the

contributions of African Americans have been largely ignored in the annals of American history.

Given that racism in all its forms is a powerful stressor in the lives of many African Americans,

particularly African American males, research aimed at delineating those coping behaviors that

effectively ameliorate its potential harmful psychological and somatic consequences is

warranted.

In previous studies on racial discrimination as a source of stress, researchers have

conceptualized the coping behaviors of African Americans from the theoretical framework

posited by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to their theory, stress is a particular

relationship between individuals and their environment that is appraised by them as taxing or as

exceeding their resources and endangering their well-being. Their theory also states

that as stressors occur, depending on one's view of the impending threat and the resources at

their disposal to handle the threat, individuals can become overwhelmed. At this point,

individuals risk becoming vulnerable to the onset of physical and psychological disorders.

Larazus & Folkman (1984) thus define coping as the process whereby individuals attempt to

manage, through cognitive and behavioral efforts, external or internal demands that are assessed

as exceeding their resources. These cognitive and behavioral efforts can be described as negative

or positive (Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, & Serafini, 1996) Negative coping (e.g., distraction,

withdrawal, self-criticism, aggression, blaming others, wishful thinking, and resignation) consists

of asocial or antisocial avoidant behaviors that are focused on the stressor itself. Positive coping

strategies (e.g. , problem-solving efforts, seeking information, and social support) include pro-

social approach behaviors which are focused on self-care or on changing the problem situation

(Dempsey, 2002). In general, it has been shown that positive, problem-focused strategies have

been related to better outcomes, whereas negative, avoidant strategies have been associated with greater difficulties (Altshuler & Ruble, 1989).

Plummer and Slane (1996) conducted an empirical study using the Lazarus and Folkman theoretical framework of coping to examine the coping behavior of African Americans. They found that: (a) African Americans engaged in less active coping efforts in racially stressful situations, (b) racially stressful situations generally demanded confrontational coping strategies, and (c) racially stressful situations tended to restrict the coping options available to African Americans. Overall, in comparing the coping behaviors of African Americans with those of Whites, Plummer and Slane (1996) found that African Americans used significantly more emotion-focused and problem focused coping strategies than did Whites. This led them to conclude that African Americans are exposed to unique stressors that require them to call on their entire repertoire of coping strategies.

A qualitative study was conducted by Feagin (1991) in which African Americans were interviewed regarding their experiences with racism. The study's findings suggested that the response to racism that African Americans used was influenced by the context in which it occurred. For example, racial hostility encountered in the street was most likely to be met with withdrawal, resigned acceptance, or verbal retort. In situations in which African Americans experienced racism in public accommodations, the response was generally a verbal counterattack or resigned acceptance. Feagin found that in many of these situations, acquiescence or withdrawal was the more preferred response because confrontation was viewed as being too costly in time and energy. Moreover, due to the often subtle nature of racism, many African Americans activated their response to racist events with a careful evaluation of the situation (Feagin, 1991). Feagin also noted the advantages of middle-class African Americans in terms of

their access to resources (both psychological and material), which enhances their coping efficacy. Despite these middle-class advantages however, the individual cost of the chronic strain associated with racism is great and has a cumulative effect over the life span of most African Americans regardless of socioeconomic status.

Prior research has examined the negative effects of racism on the life satisfaction and self esteem of African Americans. A study conducted by Jackson et al., (1995) found that African Americans who recently experienced racism reported lowered levels of general happiness and life satisfaction. Simpson and Yinger (1985) found that African Americans who reported frequent encounters with perceived racism (i.e., at least once weekly) manifested indicators of low self-esteem.

In summation, because there is little research examining the coping strategies used by African American males in managing the stress associated with racism, this study will be an exploratory endeavor. The purpose of this study will be to examine the impact that racial identity has on the development of psychological healthy coping strategies among young African American males.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As stated earlier in this paper the purpose of this study is to examine Black racial identity development and psychological coping strategies of African American males at a predominantly white university. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How does the racial identification of African American males influence how they deal with stress?

2. How does racial identification help to explain how some African American males are resilient in the face of adversities and others lack the ability to persevere when faced with difficult challenges?

Context for the Study

Historically, the university has been viewed by African Americans as an unwelcoming place. African Americans were allowed to matriculate at the university in 1961. A year later, an African American woman enrolled as a graduate student. Their matriculation was followed closely by the African American community and the media. Accounts of their tenure at the university described it as stressful, to say the least. They were constantly harassed and taunted by many of the White students. However, all three managed to graduate. Since then, the number of African Americans attending the university has increased even though it has been comparatively low.

The university administration states that it has a commitment to recruiting more African Americans, particularly more African American males. This is particularly relevant because

African Americans make up 30% of the state's total population. In the state where this research took place, college age African American males comprise 16% of the state's total population. College age African American males make up 7.2% of the students enrolled in all of the state's public colleges and universities. In 1997, 23.5% of African American males who graduated from the state's public high schools went on to college in the state. By 2001, that percentage fell to 20.8%. Of the African American males who enroll in college, a lower rate of them graduate when compared to White students and African American women. For the state, the college graduation rate for Black males is 21%, compared with 35% for Black females, 42% for White males, and 47% for White females. Fall 2002 enrollment data showed that Black women comprised 68 % of the university system's African American enrollment with 35,873 Black women compared to 17,068 Black males (Roach, 2003). Efforts to recruit African American students by the university have been seen by African American students and the state's African American population as something to be desired.

In my personal discussions with friends and family members who considered attending the university, the idea that the university was an unwelcoming place for African Americans was always the reason they decided not to attend. Few Whites at the university understand that since the university is a predominantly White public space, it is dominated by White-determined norms (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). While such settings at this university generally seem normal and unexceptional to Whites, to African Americans students it is seen as unwelcoming or unsupportive (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). Research indicates that many African American students have found historically White schools and college settings to be so racially negative or hostile that they do not consider returning for reunions or homecomings (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). Racist experiences, scholars argue, directly affect the achievement and psychosocial

development of African American students who attend predominantly White universities (Allen, 1992; Feagin, Vera and Imani, 1996; Lomotey, 1990). This has ramifications for White colleges and universities that are attempting to recruit African American students. Black alumni can positively or negatively persuade their children to attend or not attend these colleges and universities based on their personal experiences.

Participants and Selection

Participants in this study were six African American males. As illustrated in Table 1, four of the participants were graduate students majoring in various areas of education and in pharmacy. Two were recent college graduates who played collegiate football while enrolled at the university. One was a member of a Black fraternity of which I a member. Four of the participants were from the southeastern region of the United States, specifically the states of Georgia (two participants), North Carolina (one participant) and South Carolina (0ne participant). One participant was from Illinois and the last participant was from the District of Columbia. Three of the participants have urban backgrounds, one was raised in a suburban area, and two were from rural areas. Their ages ranged from 22 to 34 years old. Such a range resulted in the participants who had relatively similar experiences. Given the small number of African American males attending this university and my contact with many of them through my work as a graduate teaching assistant and, my role as a tutor for athletes, I knew all of the participants who were finally selected. Thus, my selection was based on my professional relationships that I had developed with the six males who participated in the study. Two of the participants were students in my educational psychology classes and two were fellow colleagues and students in the educational psychology program

The study took place at a large public flagship university in Northeastern Georgia with an enrollment of approximately 32,000 students. African Americans comprise 5.56% of this total population, placing their numbers at 1,774. This figure includes undergraduate, graduate and professional African American students at this university.

Table 1

Demographic Data on African American Male Participants

Name	Age	Where raised	Education	marital status & # of children	#of yrs at univ.
Pierre	31	Chicago	Ph.D. cand.	Married, one child	four
Dallas	34	Wash. D.C.	Ph.D. cand.	Single	four
Highjohn	28	North GA.	Master's	Married, two children	three
Xavier	28	S. Carolina	Ph.D. student	Single	four
Sampson	25	South GA.	College grad.	Single	five
Stokely	22	N. Carolina	College grad.	Single	four

Determining Participants' Racial Identity

Each participant was administered the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). This instrument was developed by William Cross and his associates to measure of Black racial identity attitudes. It is based on the revised Nigrescence model proposed by Cross (1991,1995) and the empirical studies of racial identity conducted by other researchers (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). It should be noted that establishing participants' racial identity was not a goal for the administration of the CRIS. Rather, the participant's racial identity was used to establish a frame of reference and a categorizing tool to discuss the findings in this study.

The CRIS measures six identities (Worrell et al. 2001): three Pre-Encounter identities (Assimilation, Miseducation, and Self-Hatred); one Immersion-Emersion identity (Anti-White), and two Internalization identities (Afrocentricity and Multiculturalist Inclusive). Each of these identity scales further characterizes responders into subscales. All of the participants in this study scored in the Internalization stage of the CRIS. However Dallas, Highjohn, Xavier, Stokely, and Sampson were further characterized as having multicultural inclusive identities; Pierre had an afrocentric identity (see Table 2).

Those who score high in the internalization stage accept their African American identity while not negating the ethnic identity of others who are not Black. Persons described by both the afrocentric or multicultural inclusive subscale identities of the Internalization stage accept others regardless of their ethnicity, are accepting of their own Blackness, and are able to comfortably traverse between the White dominant society and the African American community. However, the difference between these two subscale identities is that a person characterized as having an afrocentric identity promotes a nationalistic perspective for African American empowerment. A person characterized as having a multicultural inclusive identity promotes a multicultural agenda of human and individual empowerment. For example Pierre, who scored very high on the afrocentric subscale, felt that it is important that African Americans to include an African centered worldview as a means to Black empowerment. The other participants who scored high exclusively on the multicultural inclusive subscale do not see this inclusion as necessary.

Functions of an Internalized Racial Identity

Cross maintains having an internalized Black racial identity performs three unique functions in everyday Black life. The first is to defend the person from the negative

Table 2

The Racial Identity of African American Male Participants

Name/Pseudonym	Racial Identity (CRIS)	Internalized Identity	Self-Identification
Pierre	Internalized	Afrocentric	African American
Dallas	Internalized	Multi-Inclusive	African American
Highjohn	Internalized	Multi-Inclusive	Black
Xavier	Internalized	Multi-Inclusive	African American
Sampson	Internalized	Multi-Inclusive	African
Stokely	Internalized	Multi-Inclusive	African

psychological stress that results from having to live in a society that at times can be very racist. Second, an internalized Black racial identity provides a sense of purpose, meaning, and affiliation. Finally, this identity provides the psychological mechanisms that facilitate social intercourse with people, cultures, and human situations outside the boundaries of Blackness (Cross, 1991). According to Cross (1991) a person may acquire these functions over the course of being socialized from childhood through early adulthood by parents or caretakers who have strong Black identities. When a person enters the internalization stage, the defense function of their Black identity becomes more sophisticated and flexible. Unlike the iron shield which is characteristic of the immersion-emersion stage, the internalization stage becomes a translucent filter that is often "invisible and undetectable", allowing non-threatening information and experiences to be processed without distortion. Individual with an internalized Black racial identity are aware that racism continues to be a part of American society and that anyone, regardless of their status in American society, can be a target of racism. These individuals have healthy ego defenses that they use, more often than not, when confronted with racism. They have the predisposition to locate the fault in the circumstances, not in the self. Finally, these individuals have a religious/spiritual orientation that seems to help them deter the development of a sense of bitterness or the need to demonize all Whites (Cross, 1991).

Research Design

The research of the racial identity of African American males and their coping strategies was an attempt to understand these males' experiences from their perspective. To emphasize this rationale, Creswell (1998) states that the purpose of qualitative research is:

36

To determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived (pp. 53-54).

As the researcher in this study, I was the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p.11). Through the use of focus groups I was able to interact directly with the participants to react, respond, adapt, clarify, summarize and explore (as needed) to make sense of participants' reactions to stimulus questions.

Focus Groups

I used Focus Group interviews to address the research questions raised in this study. A focus group design was chosen as the method to use to explore responses to the questions posed for this study for several reasons succinctly outlined by Merton and Kendall (1946). They identified four uses of the focus group interview. First, a focus group interview holds promise for explaining the relationship between a stimulus and an effect. For example, it can give researchers insight on teacher expectations on student achievement. Second, the focus group interview can provide information to assist in interpreting unexpected effects. An example of this is demonstrated in Steele's (1989) research on stereotype threat among White male students when they knew their test scores were being compared with Asian males test scores. The White males scored in the study scored lower on the test used in the study in comparison to the Asian males because they thought they were not as smart as Asian males. Third, focus group interviews provide verification in interpreting data that might otherwise only be conjecture. For example, in a survey of factors that inhibit teacher planning for individual student needs, budgetary factors were cited as a primary barrier. It was assumed that budgetary restrictions frequently resulted in increased class size. Focus group interviews could be used to verify this

37

interpretation. Fourth, focus group interviews can provide alternative interpretations of findings that may not be obtainable using traditional quantitative methods. Oftentimes information from quantitative measures do not explain the thought processes or feelings of individuals on questionnaires or the questions used on instruments may be vague, not covering all possibilities to which people could respond. Therefore I chose this strategy because it was deemed to be the most effective way to unravel a fairly complex problem so that it can be pursued through further research for explanations and for refinement.

There are several assumptions that underlie the use of focus group interviews. One is that people are valuable sources of information, particularly about themselves. Another is that people are capable of reporting about themselves and are articulate enough to put opinions about their feelings and perceptions into words. The next assumption is that the best procedure for obtaining people's feelings and opinions is through a structured group conversation in which the moderator solicits information. The last assumption underscores the notion that there are the effects of group dynamics that enhance the likelihood that people will speak frankly about a subject. This cannot occur through individual or small group interviews. Finally the information obtained from a focus group interview is genuine information about what each person feels rather than a group mind in which people conform to what others believe (Lederman, 1990).

Procedure

The data sources for this study were focus group interviews. The data gathered from the focus group interviews consisted of direct quotations from the participants about their experiences of being an African American male at a predominantly White university and any racial stress that they have experienced. Three focus group interviews were used to facilitate data collection. Each interview lasted one hour. In the first interview participants were introduced to

the study and asked to discuss issues that were important to them. The question asked to illicit responses from the participants was: Tell me what issues are important to you in regards to being an African American male student here at this university. The second focus group interview involved a discussion of the participants' experiences at a predominantly White university and how being an African American male shaped those experiences. The third interview followed up on issues that evolved from the second interview and also served as a wrap-up.

Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews. Open-ended questions were used in the focus group interviews to examine several domains associated with my participants. The questions posed were designed to address the following issues related to racial identity and psychological coping strategies at a predominantly White university: (a) Black masculinity (e.g., "What does it mean to be a Black man in America?"), (b) Dealing with stress (e.g., "Is there anything that you do on a regular basis to deal with stress?"), (c) Relationships with Black women (e.g., "What are relations like between Black men and Black women?"), (d)Relationships with Whites (e.g., What are relationships with Whites like?") , (e) Relationships among Black males (e.g., "What are relationships like between Black males on campus?"), (f) Relationships among faculty (e.g. "What are relationships like with faculty?") and (g) Experiences as a Black male at a predominantly White university (e.g., "Describe what it is like for you at the university?") (See Appendix A for a complete delineation of the questions posed.

Before the interviews were conducted, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used by them throughout the study. Video tapes were used as a back-up to the voice tapes so that I could examine the non-verbal body cues of my participants. This was important because I felt I could gain more insight into the things the participants said about their coping strategies during their conversations. Each participant also agreed that I could voice-tape and

video-tape the interviews. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim. I went over the interviews with the participants so they could review the transcripts and make additions or corrections.

Field notes were also taken during the interviews. Bogden and Biklen (1992) stated that field notes are written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks during data collection and analysis. My field notes were descriptive and included dates and basic information as to where the interviews took place, who was present, what the physical setting was like, and what social interactions took place.

Assessment Measures

The Cross Racial Identity Scale. In light of the development of his theory of Psychological Nigrescence explaining the various stages of Black racial identity, Cross developed the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) with Worrell and Vandiver (2000) to access the racial identity of African Americans. The CRIS consists of 40 items that gauge attitudes correlated to the four stages of Black identity development described in the revised Cross model of Psychological Nigrescence. Internal consistency ranges for Pre-Encounter Assimilation, Miseducation, and Self Hatred are .85, .79, .89 respectively; .90 for Immersion-Emersion; .83 for Internalization Afrocentricity and .82 for Multiculturalist Inclusive. The range of scores on the subscales are from 5 to 35. Reliability estimates for the CRIS, based on Cronbach's (1951) alpha, range from .78 to .90. Exploratory factor analysis for the CRIS was investigated using a sample of 279 students (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, et al. 2000). Subscale intercorrelations based on this sample ranged from |.04| to |.42| (Mdn= |.16|). Confirmatory factor analysis intercorrelations ranged from |.06| to |.46| (Mdn=|.16|).

Convergent validity was tested by examining the relationship between subscales of the

Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI). (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, &

Chavous, 1998) and the CRIS using bivariate and canonical correlations. Like the CRIS, the

MIBI is a measure of Black racial identity. Several MIBI subscales measure content related to

that measured by the CRIS. The subscales on the MIBI are: Assimilation, Centrality, Humanist,

Nationalist, Oppressed Minority, Private Regard, and Public Regard (Sellers et al., 1998). For the

bivariate correlations, only correlations of at least |.30| were interpreted. Pre-Encounter

Assimilation on the CRIS was related positively to Assimilation and Humanist on the MIBI and

negatively to Centrality and Nationalist (Worrell et al., 2000). Pre-Encounter Miseducation on

the CRIS was not related to any MIBI subscale and Pre-Encounter Self- Hatred (CRIS) had a

negative relationship with Private Regard (MIBI). Immersion-Emersion Anti-White and

Internalization Afrocentricity (CRIS) had positive correlations with the Nationalist subscale

(MIBI), and Immersion-Emersion Anti-White had a negative correlation with the Humanist scale

of the MIBI. Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive (CRIS) had positive correlations with the

Humanist and Oppressed Minority Subscales of the MIBI (Worrell et al., 2000).

In regards to discriminant validity and social desirability Paulhus (1991) captured two

constructs of social desirability-- self-deception and other-deception-- using the Balanced

Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR).The relationship was examined using the previously

mentioned sample of 279 students. Bivariate correlations indicated that none of the CRIS

subscales had correlations above |.23| with either of the BIDR subscales, indicating that CRIS

scores are not strongly influenced by social desirability concerns (Worrell et al., 2000).

Lastly, CRIS scores were also correlated with subscale scores on the Big Five Inventory

(BFI) (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), to examine the relationship between reference group

orientation as measured by the CRIS and personal identity as measured by the BFI. Bivariate

analysis revealed no correlations above |.20| between the CRIS and the BFI subscales (Worrell et

al., 2000).

Presenting the Results

Reflexivity is a critical thinking process where researchers look at how their personal

feelings and emotions could influence a study in process, then incorporate that understanding

into the study (Lamb & Huttlinger, 1982: Ceglowski, 2000). Reflexivity was used to help

maintain the rigor of qualitative research in this study.

Qualitative investigators do not acknowledge how, among other things, their own

background, gender, social class, ethnicity, values, and beliefs affect the emergent construction

of reality. Reflection on the influence of self not only creates personal awareness of how the

research is shaped by one's own biography, but also provides a context within which audiences

can more fully understand the researcher's interpretation of text data. Reflexivity affects every

step of the research process, is dynamic and constantly changing, and, reflexivity occurs

repeatedly during all phases of a research study and adds rigor to qualitative analysis (Sellars et

al., 1998).

Rigor in qualitative research is a topic that is beginning to appear in more literature. The

question for me is how can I be sure my research is valid and reliable when there's no one truth,

where truth is constructed from individual and shared experiences, as is my case of using focus

group inquiries? Pope, Ziebland, and Mays, in an excellent paper entitled *Assessing Quality in*

Qualitative Research (2000), suggested several ways to improve validity. The first one is

triangulation. Though triangulation was originally a quantitative tool adapted to qualitative

methods (Seale, 1999), it is appropriate nonetheless, and simply involves comparing data

collected from several different sources.   After the transcripts were completed my participants had the opportunity to read them and verify that what was written was actually stated by them.

The Insider's Stance & Research Bias

By conducting research with other African American males who share my ethnicity and more than likely share my social class and values, I am deliberately adopting an insider's stance, rather than a marginal position. Through the reflection of my life experiences as an African American man at a predominantly White university, I will be able to empathize with the participants of this study.

Duhl (1999) states that it is not the giving out secrets of ones' private life but sharing common experiences that permits identification with the other. Because I share similar experiences with my participants, I assumed a reflexive posture even as I encouraged them to do so. The beauty of focus groups is that all participants, including the facilitator of the focus group, add to the discussion.

An important aspect about focus group interviews is the allowance of note takers in the research process. In my research I used two African American women as note takers. Normally, note takers are silent partners in the research process. I made an exception to this rule when the topic of African American male and female relations was brought up during the conversation. My decision to have African American women as note takers was based exclusively on the discussion of African American male and female relations during the focus group interviews and their contribution to this discussion from their experiences as African American women.

Data Analysis

      After completing the focus group interviews, data were analyzed to discern for emergent themes. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) data analysis in qualitative research is a matter of organizing everything researchers hear, see, and read, so they can begin to make sense of what was learned.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The Participants

Pierre

Background

Pierre is a 31 year old married father of one daughter, who self identified as African American on the Cross Racial Identity Index. Pierre is originally from Chicago and attended a historically Black college for his undergraduate degree. He is enrolled as a third year graduate student in counseling psychology. Pierre can be described as an easy-going man, but assertive. He is a lover of the outdoors, hiking whenever he gets the chance. He is also fairly competent as an athlete who uses the university gym on a regular basis. Pierre describes both his physical and mental health as being very good.

Both his mother and father have graduate degrees and he considers his upbringing as middle class. He grew up in a mostly White suburb of Chicago with one older brother who is s world class paraplegic athlete in track and field. When he came to the South for college he says he found it to be a different world from the one he knew. The city and schools were predominantly African American, and both were known to be centers for African American culture and history. While working at the university, Pierre married his college girlfriend, who came to the university to complete her master's degree in school psychology. Pierre's wife works as a school psychologist in an adjacent county.

Ethnic Identity

Pierre's CRIS score indicates he has the attributes of Internalized ethnic identity, scoring 26 out of 35 on the Multicultural Inclusive subcomponent and 25 out of 35 on the Afrocentricity subcomponent. Of the six participants, Pierre had the highest score on the Afrocentricity subcomponent. However, he had some of the attributes of the self-hatred subcomponent of the Pre-encounter subscale, scoring 17 out of 35. Pierre had very few of the attributes of the Assimilation subcomponent of the Pre-encounter subscale with a score of 8 out of 35.

Even though Pierre scored high as a multiculturalist, he tended to view society from an Afrocentric perspective. He thought that Blacks who had accepted an Afrocentric perspective could truly solve the race problem in America. Pierre also felt that Black people would never be free until they embraced an Afrocentric perspective. When he votes in elections, Pierre states that the first thing that he thinks about is a candidate's record on racial and cultural issues. In his opinion, affirmative action will be needed for a long time to address years of discrimination against African Americans. Although Pierre holds Afrocentric views, he believes that it is important to be accepting of everyone irregardless of their ethnicity, race, religion or sexuality. Issues of race permeate his life. According to his CRIS, he said he typically thinks about racial and cultural issues many times during a normal week.

Dallas

Background

Dallas is a self-defined African American. He is a single 34 year old man originally from Washington D.C. He is a Ph.D. candidate in the area of pharmaceutical science who worked in private industry before returning to graduate school. Like Pierre, he can also be described has easy-going and assertive, not hesitating to share his views on various issues. Dallas describes the

community in which he was raised as very urban and predominantly Black. He states that religion is somewhat important in his life, indicating on the CRIS that he attends church often. In fact, Dallas states that his father is a minister. He describes his upbringing as middle-class; both of his parents hold graduate and professional degrees. He describes both his physical health and mental health as very good and indicates that he works out on a consistent basis, playing basketball and lifting weights.

Ethnic Identity

Dallas's ethnic identity is classified as Internalized Multiculturalist Inclusive, scoring 23 out of 35 in this area. He also had a strong score on the Afrocentricity subcomponent of the Internalization subscale with a score of 20 out of 35. He states that when he walks into a room he always takes note of the racial make-up of the people around him. When he reads a newspaper or a magazine, he always looks for articles and stories that deal with race and ethnic issues. Dallas embraces his Black identity, but also respects and celebrates the cultural identities of other groups such as Native Americans, Whites, Latinos, Jews, Asian Americans and gays. Like Pierre, Dallas also states that when he votes in elections, the first thing he thinks about is a candidate's record on racial and cultural issues and that during a typical week, he thinks about racial and cultural many times.

Highjohn

Highjohn identifies himself as Black. He is 28 years old, has a wife and one son. He has another son from a previous relationship. Highjohn recently completed his master's degree in education and is preparing to enroll in a Ph.D. program at the university. His wife completed her master's program approximately one year ago and is presently working on her Ph.D. in adult education. He describes both his present physical and mental health as being fair.

Highjohn states that he comes from a working class background. His father is a high school graduate and his mother has a college degree. He is originally from northwest Georgia and describes the community in which he was raised as rural and predominantly White. Highjohn is musically artistic, and especially enjoys hip-hop music and culture. He wants to continue in academia and research hip-hop music and culture as an educational medium to reach youth.

Ethnic Identity

Of all the participants, Highjohn was the only one to self identify as Black and not African American. He scored extremely high on the Multiculturalist Inclusive component of the Internalization subscale (35 out of 35). In fact, Highjohn could almost be described as being exclusively Multiculturalist Inclusive due to the fact that none of his other scores were nearly as strong. Being a multiculturalist is very important to him; he feels this allows him to connect with many different ethnic and racial groups. Highjohn embraces his Black identity, but he also respects and celebrates the cultural identities of other groups. Like Pierre and Dallas, Highjohn states that during a typical week, he thinks about racial and cultural issues many times.

Xavier

Background

Xavier, a 28 year old gay male, self identified as an African American. He was born and raised in South Carolina and attended a small college in the state. Xavier is presently a fourth year doctoral student in education. While completing his Ph.D. Xavier is working as a teaching assistant in his department. Xavier describes the area where he grew up as suburban and mixed racially. Xavier's parents hold associate degrees, and like Dallas' father, his father is a minister. He describes his family's socioeconomic level as being middle-class. Xavier has one sister who

recently completed a master's degree in education and works as a guidance counselor in a high school in South Carolina. He describes his mental and physical health as being fair.

Ethnic Identity

Xavier has an Internalized ethnic identity, scoring a 29 out of 35 in the Multicultural Inclusive component of the Internalization subscale. Xavier, like Highjohn, is almost exclusively Multicultural Inclusive. He strongly believes that as a multiculturalist, he is connected to many groups, which is probably most significant to him since he is openly gay. Currently Xavier is writing his comprehensive examinations. He plans to research African American gay males.

Like Pierre, Xavier states that when he walks into a room he always takes note of the racial make-up of the people around him. Another commonality that Xavier shares with the other participants is the fact that during a typical week, he thinks about racial and cultural issues many times. While he embraces his own Black gay identity, he also respects the cultural identities of other groups.

Sampson

Background

Sampson, a 25 year old recent college graduate, identifies himself as an African on the demographic section of the CRIS. He is a former football player at the university, opting not to play his last year to dedicate his time to his academic studies. He is originally from South Georgia and describes the community where he was raised as rural and mostly white. He states that his family's socioeconomic status is middle class. His father has a high school diploma and his mother has an associate's degree. Sampson describes his physical and mental health as very good.

Ethnic Identity

Sampson scored highest on the Multicultural Inclusive area of the Internalization subscale (35 out of 35). He also scored high in two other areas of Afrocentricity (Internalization), with a score of 23 out of 35. Sampson also scored high on the Assimilation area of the Pre-Encounter subscale (22 out of 35).

Sampson feels that it is important to be connected to many different ethnic groups other than Blacks exclusively. While he embraces his Black identity, he respects the cultural identities of other groups. He also states that when he walks into a room he always take note of the racial make-up of the people around him. In regards to his afrocentricity, Sampson said that he sees and thinks about things from an afrocentric perspective.

His high score on the Assimilation area of the Pre-Encounter subscale is reflected in his scoring high on statements on the CRIS such as; "I think of myself primarily as an American, and seldom as a member of a racial group" and " I have developed an identity that stresses my experiences as an American more than my experiences as a member of a racial group. He also states that too many Blacks glamorize the drug trade and fail to see opportunities that do not involve crime.

Stokely

Background

Stokely, a 22 year old from Charlotte, North Carolina, is a recent college graduate with a degree in political science who plans to continue his education by pursuing a master's degree. Of the six participants, he is the youngest. He identifies himself as an African, even though he and his parents were born in the United States. He is a defensive end on the university's

50

championship football team and was a previous student in a class I taught. Like Pierre and Dallas, he describes his mental and physical health as both being very good.

His parents are divorced, but he remains close to both his parents who live in Charlotte. He is the only son of three, being the middle child. He feels that it is his duty to be the man of the house since he lives with his mother when he is in Charlotte. When he is not in school playing football he often returns to Charlotte to be with his family and to help out with his father's construction business.

Stokely describes his family's socioeconomic status as being working class. Educationally, his mother completed her associate's degree and his father received his high school diploma. As a child he was placed in gifted classes. Once he reached high school he decided he no longer wanted to be in gifted classes because he did not think it was cool. He decided to devote more time to his athletic ability and down play his smartness. Even in college, Stokely continues to just get by academically because it has become commonplace to him.

Ethnic Identity

Stokely, like the majority of the participants, also scored high in the Internalization subscale of Multiculturalist Inclusive (25 out of 35). He feels that as a multiculturalist he is connected to many different ethnic groups. Stokely also states that when he walks into a room he always takes note of the racial make-up of the people in the area. He believes that it is important to have both a Black identity and a multicultural perspective which is inclusive of all people.

Unlike the group, Stokely scored high in the Pre-Encounter subscale of Miseducation (21 out of 35). One of the strongest Pre-Encounter statements he made was that too many Blacks

glamorize the drug trade and fail to see opportunities that do not involve crime. On the CRIS he

agreed that many African Americans are too lazy to see opportunities that are right in front of

them.

The Interviews

The three focus group interviews were held off campus in a private home. The interviews

were held during the second and third weeks of July 2003. The first interview was a discussion

of the issues that the participants deemed important to them and that they thought warranted in-

depth conversation. The issues they felt should be included in the interviews were: What does it

mean to be a Black man?; Interactions with the larger African American community and What

advice (e.g. academic, social, Black male and female relations) they would give to other African

American males considering attending the university. After this discussion, these issues were

incorporated that into the interview protocol I had developed for the interviews. The second and

third focus group meetings were focused on discussing these issues and responding to the

interview questions (See Appendix C). As stated previously the interviews were audio and

videotaped. Two African American women served as note-takers and observers.

The university as a welcoming place for African American males

The university where this study was undertaken has grappled with the issue of boosting

 retention among African American males. According to Dr. Michael Lomax (1994), president of

Dillard University, college administrators need to pay closer attention to the social and economic

circumstances that shape African American males' lives. Given the context in which African

American males find themselves, in and out of the university settings, college administrators

need to understand how and why African American males behave and react to societal

conditions, particularly to racism and marginalization as they do. Few non-Black college

personnel understand how African American males move between cultures, how they adjust to a society whose dominant culture is often alien and disrespectful of their home culture, and how African American males are affected by the stereotypes that others have of Black males. African American males face these issues in the microcosm of the university. Although, as a group, African American males may be at risk for numerous social and educational ills, within that context of risk many have survived and progressed successfully (Polite & Davis, 1999). This study is the story of a few who are succeeding.

Dialog

The first issue discussed was concerned with the university as a welcoming place for African American males. Xavier stated:

"I've never felt that sense of community even in our department, not necessarily because people were spitting on me or anything, but the first day I get here I get on the elevator three people get off. I mean it's just people asking me well can you clean up something depending on how I'm dressed, little things like that."

He follows with a comment about the low numbers of African American males attending the university:

"But the university itself didn't really make an effort and then this past year for the 1.9% campaign, I honestly didn't realize that the numbers were that low. And so it really made an impression on me in terms of well no wonder you're not welcoming. They really don't want you here anyway."

In terms of the university being a welcoming place for African American males several participants thought that the university only saw African American males as athletic

commodities. To them, this plays into the stereotype of African American males as athletically

gifted but intellectually lazy. Stokely, the undergraduate football player stated:

"It's kind of hard, I don't think really they welcome the students per say or like you said

people already have a preconceived notion that you're Black on this campus. You're

automatically an athlete and with that comes the stereotypes of not being smart or lazy

amongst other things and at the same time they want you to play, but they don't want to

look pass you being an athlete either. They don't want to get to know you as a student

and they're not really doing anything to know the person either. So it's kind of hard or

whatever, it's a constant battle or whatever. You want to show, you kind of try

harder to show that you can be , that you can strive in this environment or whatever, but

there's really no programs."

This stereotype of the African American male being just an athlete while disregarding

their intellectual needs was also shared by Sampson, another undergraduate student and former

football player:

" I'm done with football and my fifth year I decide not to try play professional

football or anything. So from my fourth year to the fifth year it was a big difference. It

went from phone calls making sure that you go to class, study hall or have you

seen your tutor, have you been registered for class, why were you late to class? Until now

I have registered myself for class. I have to know when I need a certain class or

what I need to graduate to if I don't get out of bed they don't call and say why you didn't

get out of bed anymore and basically they don't care if you graduate. That's good

because it's helping their percentages to say we're graduating African American males,

but when you get to your fifth year it's basically about what you have inside of you to say

alright they got all of the stuff that they are going to get out of me, I need to do what I can

to get something out of them. And that's the only reason why I'm getting my degree

because it's something inside of me not so much of what they're doing."

<u>Stressful Experiences at the University</u>

The second topic discussed was how participants handled stressful situations related

to race. Franklin (2000) uses the concept of the invisibility syndrome to describe the reaction of

African American men to the constant onslaught of psychic assaults resulting from their daily

encounters with various forms of racism and discrimination. According to Franklin, there are

seven elements that characterize the intrapsychic apparatus of invisibility experienced by African

American men during everyday interracial interactions. These include: a) lack of recognition or

acknowledgement, b) lack of satisfaction or gratification, c) feelings of self-doubt (i.e., do I

belong here?), d) experiences are not validated, e) absent of mutual respect, f) dignity is

often compromised, and g) basic identity is challenge. Not only does racism serve as a constant

reminder of African American males' despised social status, it can potentially result in feelings

of anger, depression, anxiety, lowered levels of life satisfaction and emotional distress (Utsey &

Payne, 2001). For African American men, racism in one form or another is an everyday

experience that has a cumulative impact on their psychological well being. Although African

American men experience both overt and covert racism, the most insidious form of racism is the

subtle, often difficult to identify racism embedded in the cultural fabric of American society

(Jones, 1997).

Chester Pierce (1988) characterized the psychic assaults of the subtle racism that African

Americans experience daily as microaggressions. According to Pierce, microaggressions are

forms of offense mechanisms that intrude upon the space, time, energy, and mobility of African

American men. Such microaggressions can be verbal, nonverbal, or kinetic. The resulting sense

of degradation, eroded self-confidence, and negative self-image that potentially occurs as a result

of the psychic violence leveled by these race-related microaggressions has a cumulative

psychological impact across the developmental life span of African American men. Furthermore,

Pierce hypothesized that African Americans are often confused around the dynamics associated

with interracial encounters with White Americans. The source of confusion for African

Americans, according to Pierce, is related to the following: a) whether the individual is being

accepted or just tolerated, b) the supportive nature of individual Whites versus the malevolence

of the collective White society, and c) determining when to confront racism and when to

accommodate it. The cognitive energy associated with negotiating the complexities of

racism in everyday life is potentially detrimental to the psychological health of African

American men (Utsey & Payne, 2001). The participants' experiences reflected these ideas

proposed by these researchers.

The participants were asked to describe a stressful experience during their enrollment in

the university. In conjunction with their describing a stressful experience, the participants also

shared how the stressful situation developed and what did they do to deal with it. Dallas shared a

stressful experience which occurred to him in the downtown area where the university is located.

> "Being downtown, yeah start right there, I forgot what the name of the bar
>
> was. It was either (name of bar) or (name of bar) whatever, and I'm sitting there with
>
> a White friend of mine in my department and an older White guy comes up to me
>
> and says, huffing to me, I need to be blasting, need to tell you something. We need
>
> to talk Black man to White man. I need to tell you what's going on. He proceeds to
>
> tell me about, you know, the confederate nation and how his forefathers and

ancestors were just great men of great valiance and why would any Black man have

a problem with all of this. He was pretty drunk or whatever, he couldn't get around

to finally shutting up so I could answer his questions and before I had a chance to

answer his question and stuff starting off with, those were the same people who had

all of my people enslaved and a hundred years of Jim Crow and so forth. He got

taken up out of there by security and I didn't really get a chance to find him and that

stayed with me for about a month and a half. I'm looking around for this dude (and

asking) where he is and stuff so I can talk to him."

When asked how he felt when he could not talk to the man harassing him and what he

would have done if he did have the chance to confront the man, Dallas says:

"I don't even know man, I would have tried to have been directly addressing the

issue and not going off because he needs somebody to talk to him in a sensible

matter rather than just start flicking off and coming back with the accusations

because that wouldn't go into his head at all."

Dallas thought that even though the White man was acting irrationally it is important that

he remain in control of his emotions. Another racial experience also occurred off campus at a

local bank to Stokely, the recent college graduate:

"I got one scenario. You know (name) Bank is located downtown probably sixty

feet from the A_____S. I'm going in there I just got my check, it's like a thousand

dollars or whatever and I'm going to the bank. I realize I don't have my license. I'm

out of state but it's cool because I have my university ID. So I get up to the counter

and I was like I need to get some money out to pay my rent but I want to deposit the

rest and the lady told me my account balance was too low to even deposit my check.

I'm like hold up now, you know what I'm saying?"

Stokely continues,

"I just noticed the person before me, she made the issue that I didn't have a license I

had my school ID and that was a problem, that wasn't the policy. But I noticed that

the person before me, it was a White guy, he was probably younger than me and he

didn't have his license he had his university ID too. So I called her out on it and she

was like that it didn't happen. I didn't make it a racial issue, I was like I needed my

money . I was like ma'am can I see your boss and it was a Black guy. I actually

knew him and he came out there and he corrected the whole issue. She was trying to

say that I didn't want to take this check because it might bounce. I told her (the

town) would burn to hell before this check bounces, but she went on and cashed it.

The gentleman pulled me aside and said they had had some complaints about this

lady before saying a lot of Black people coming in and complaining and made me

upset. I mean I'm coming in here trying to do business with the people and whatever

but I can't get any service."

When asked if he continues to bank with this financial institute Stokely says;

"I do, I do because it's convenient and it's a convenience issue, that's the only

reason."

This description by Stokely demonstrates Feagin's (2003) notion that the response of an

African American to racism is influenced by the context in which it occurs. For example, racial

hostility encountered in the street is most likely met with withdrawal, resigned acceptance, or

verbal retort. In situations in which African Americans experience discrimination in public

places, as in this instance, the response is generally verbal counterattack or resigned acceptance. In many situations where African Americans experience discrimination, acquiescence or withdrawal is the preferred response because confrontation is seen as being too costly in time and energy. Moreover, due to the often subtle nature of racism, many African Americans begin their response to racist events with a careful evaluation of the situation (Feagin, 2003). Stokely demonstrates this in his assessment of this particular situation.

I asked Stokely if he thought this was a racial incident:

"I think how I dealt with the situation in the bank was I think the correct way. I didn't want to deal with her about, you know what I'm saying, no race card or nothing like that. I wanted to talk to the manager because I felt like that was the thing to do. But what she failed to realize was that I knew the manager. I think it was a race issue and a class issues 'cause I mean a Black guy coming in here first of all, is it stolen, the check? I don't work ,you know what I'm saying, or I sell dope, they don't pay drug dealers with a check!"

African American males are demonized by American society. The image that White America has of Black males has not changed much since the days of chattel slavery, where the Black male was portrayed as a brutish creature with beast-like strength and a hypersexual disposition. African American males are White America's Frankenstein, consisting of everything that is despicable and to be feared in society. In creating this societal menace to be despised and feared at all cost, White America fostered an environment hostile to the existence of the African American male (Utsey & Payne, 2000). Along this line, Stokely reflects on the way African American males are portrayed by the school and local newspapers as criminals and rapists: "You get one crime committed by a Black person, wherever. It's blasted all over the paper, front page,

like I swear man, since my freshman year it's been the same Black guy raping people for like the last five years or whatever. They still haven't caught him if he

hasn't died from AIDS. The (local newspaper) , all the local papers you might get a blur of it in the back about we are looking for a White suspect, 5"10 and whatever, call this number if you see him opposed to them putting the guy on TV. You got the posters all around downtown, you got the little leaflets in the (school newspaper) and that's making it harder on me to go to school here because White girls on campus ain't really looking at this guy's face. They just see it's a Black guy."

As stated earlier, the media often portrays African American males as criminals. This has repercussions on the perceptions of Whites who may view any African American male as a potential criminal threat. At the same time, this places African American males in a precarious situation because they are singled out by Whites, especially police, who may think they have committed crimes that they did not. This is stressful for African American males because they must always guard against being seen as threatening by Whites, which in itself creates stress in the lives of these men.

Highjohn and Dallas discussed perceptions that Whites have of African American males as criminals and drug dealers and how Whites respond to Black males because of their perceptions:

"When I first got here I was having a hard time trying to find a job, trying to negotiate the bus system. So I was doing a lot of walking, but I noticed while I'm walking though the parking lots especially I'm hearing like alarms go off, people setting their alarms—boop-boop. I'm not seeing anybody so I probably didn't think about it at the time but I get home and I'm pondering about hey, they talking about me. They think I'm about to steal

their car and it's insulting on two levels. One, that if you see me I automatically remind you to set your car alarm. Number two, if I wanted your car what makes you think I would come to you and take your keys and dare you to call the police if I wanted it that bad? So that issue is kind of disturbing, but I don't let it bother me. But like that issue and the other issues that go along with what I was talking about it used to bother me a lot. But now that I understand that this is my illusion you know."

Dallas: "Three weeks ago while hanging out downtown, two White guys come up to me, this is like the fifth or sixth time this has happened, and they think that because I'm Black that I got drugs and they will say things like, 'man you got some weed?' But this time these two White guys wanted to know if I had some cocaine, some Blow, and I was like nah man. They don't know me from a can of paint but they just assumed that they could come over and ask me that question. So I turned around and said to them that one of the things about being Black is everybody coming up to you thinking you are a drug dealer."

In dealing with peoples' perceptions of him as an African American man, Highjohn thinks it is important that he knows who he is and not let what others think affect the way he thinks about himself.

"Regardless of what you call yourself, what you want to be, what you plan to be, your aspirations to people, all you can be is what they want you to be 'cause they don't know you. They just know a couple of things about you, but they don't really know you. So in that sense this is my illusion because they don't know you, then this is what I'm putting out. This is the smoky mirrors."

Students have perceptions of African Americans in general that cause them to make assumptions that can affect their performance in the classroom. The sharing of information is

especially important in graduate school where students are expected to work and collaborate on assignments. Xavier talks about an experience he had in his department;

"In my department we have projects and we have classes called the studio for (class) and the head of our project, I was in the lower class. We had to get images for them and stuff and of course when I went to send my images I had a question because they did not tell us what format. So I sent out an email to the person about the project, never got an answer. After spring break I sent more emails. I send an email to the person over the whole project and she sends an email to the whole listserv saying you know we just assumed that you weren't going to do it. So if you decide that you want to then that's fine."

Xavier follows:

"She said we got the emails, we just assumed that you weren't going to do it. I told her that she never asked, so what gave you that clue. I told her that I was extremely offended by fact you assumed that because I was Black and I'm the only Black person in this department that I wouldn't do my work. Ok, you don't know me, you've never worked with me but you made that assumption based on what?

This experience is again reflective of Franklin's (2000) invisibility syndrome where African Americans' personal experiences are not validated, ignored or pegged as oversensitivity on the part of the Black person. This comes into play with Xavier and his colleagues:

" Everyone wanted to make it seem like well you're just sensitive. Well I've learned to be sensitive, you've made me sensitive. It's not this just happened overnight. Every time I go into a classroom I have to put up with you know, being the only one, and they talk about diversity. Well why you looking at me? You got fifty Asian

people here, fifty White people and me and I'm the only one who knows about

diversity."

When asked if he would trade these experiences for the luxury that Whites have not to

constantly think about race, Xavier states:

"Oh no, I think it would make me a weaker person because for example when I dealt

with the other situation they were acting like they were going to cry. I was fine, I

mean I just put you in your place and keep on moving. But you know my

grandmother used to tell me you have to be three times as good as they do just to get

where they are and I think because a lot of them have had it so easy the minute you

say something it's just tears you know they want to weep up and cry or say they will

tell the department head."

Coping strategies at the university

A number of researchers have examined the relationship between the strategies used

by African Americans to cope with the stressors of everyday racism which they experience and

their psychological and somatic health (Utsey & Payne, 2001). The consensus among these

researchers is that the repertoire of coping behaviors employed by African Americans in

response to their encounters with racism directly impacts their physical and psychological health

and the relationships they have with others. Coping strategies that buffer African American

males from the stressful effects of chronic exposure to racism are essential to healthy

psychological functioning (Utsey & Payne, 2000). Effective coping strategies were found to

incorporate cognitive flexibility in response to racist encounters. Inversely, maladaptive coping

strategies generally result in poorer psychological and physical health outcomes for African

American males (Utsey & Payne, 2000). Extremely maladaptive coping strategies may include

excessive drinking, sexual promiscuity, anger, domestic violence, substance abuse, and suicide. Racism's impact on the psychological functioning of African American males is complex and begs the question as to why some individuals experience the full force of racism's harmful effects and why others are relatively untouched by their personal encounters with this societal problem.

The participants in this study used various techniques in coping with the stress of being an African American male on a predominantly White, southern campus. One of the most common coping strategies was distancing from Whites, whether it be physical or psychological. In their seminal work, *Black Rage,* Grier and Cobbs (1968) maintain that it is necessary for a Black man in America to develop a profound distrust of his White counterparts and of the nation itself. Since this is the case, African American males must be on guard when in contact with Whites to protect themselves from physical and psychological harm. One way African American males may protect themselves is through distancing. Physical distancing from Whites for participants in this study was hard because Whites make up over 80% of the student population. Therefore they could not help but interact with Whites on some level. Psychological distancing was the device used most often by the participants because while one could be in the presence of Whites one could mentally separate from the situation of being among Whites. Pierre expresses this sentiment throughout the interview:

> "Yeah, I think I've changed from being here but I think that when I started moving into
> distancing myself and kind of keeping up a little bit of wall between me and some of the
> White folks, anticipating that there was going to be a problem at some point with them
> down the line because you just feel like at some point they are going to say something
> stupid or do something that's going to be a misunderstanding or something. I think in a

way it's coping and in a way it's keeping me free of what I think is inevitable like I just

feel like at some point White folks are going to do something that either they deliberately

do or more like just out of ignorance. I don't want to put myself in a situation where I

have to deal with it again because I don't feel like I should always have to be

clarifying some statement that they've made or addressing them about something or

anything that will take me out of the direction that I think I should be going---like dealing

with school work and taking care of my family. I don't want to have to deal with

somebody else's ignorance about something."

A key issue in coping with the stress of being an African American male at the university

centers around the fact that having a strong sense of identity and knowing the history of what

African Americans went through to come to the university, helps make one's tenure easier. Gurin

and Epps (1975) conducted a series of studies at several historically Black colleges from 1964 to

1970 to study Black students level of Black consciousness, Black identity, and achievement.

A number of students talked about the pride they felt in being part of a ethnic group that has the

ability to overcome obstacles and of having a history of survival in the face of overwhelming

hardships. In this study the students talked about strength of character, specific historical events,

landmarks of progress and accomplishment, and figures who have stood for determination,

courage, and revolution. Dallas expresses this same sentiment when he stated:

"I feel like, the first Black graduate to graduate from my department came to speak to us

and what he went through and stuff and man, there's no way I could not do everything in

my power to get through all the rest of the obstacles here and overcome them. The

responsibility of the people who came here before me makes it easier for me to deal."

Interestingly, as a younger African American male student, Stokely looked at this issue of one knowing about oneself as an African American male from another viewpoint. While he felt it was important to know about the trials and tribulations of others like himself, he stated that it is sometimes difficult to know what other Black males who have attended the university have done to matriculate successfully:

"I don't know if I should answer this question but I feel like if it was a book that had some direction on how to be a Black man and what a Black man is, it would say a little bit but then it would be incomplete. I'm saying incomplete to the fact you know, if I was to give you an answer right now really I wouldn't know. Do I feel like I'm a man? Yes. But I don't have all those life experiences to compare to the person that I am even though I feel that I am? A big part I think to being a man or a Black man on this campus or everywhere for that matter, is awareness. 'Cause if you go before me and you fail and I look at you and I know how you failed you know what I'm saying but if I'm not aware, I don't take that to build upon and I go after you and fail too. Then I haven't served my purpose. What does it mean to be a Black man? I think the jury is still out on that one because so many Black men aren't here to tell their stories because they are dead or they're somewhere confined, chained up, locked up and nobody wants to hear their stories, so I mean like I said---awareness."

The statistics of African American males incarcerated or their mortality rates do not need repeating. The problem is that society sends a message to African American males that it is better for them to not be allowed to develop to their full potential academically, or become aware of themselves as intellectual beings. Stokely's keen insight into this complex response is a reminder that education is more than an individualistic endeavor, it affects an entire community.

66

We can posit that if African American males go to college they can inspire younger African American males to achieve academically. If, however, African American males are attending and graduating college at low numbers compared to other groups, who will groom the next generation of Black men to attend college?

For some of the participants, reading literature that dealt with aspects of Black history and culture or enjoying different genres of Black music helped them cope. Highjohn discusses reading and attending musical events in a nearby large city help him cope:

"I like to read empowering literature, something that will uplift me or something intellectual. I just know that even though it is a little rough up here at least I have a grip on the truth, some grasp of what's really happening that keeps me grounded, keeps me focused. Also just getting away to (name of city), hitting certain clubs where you can always see Black people enjoying the music."

I asked Highjohn if he had any authors he really enjoyed:

"Right now I'm into Author Flowers, with his Mojo Blues. It is just interesting how he talks about ways of dealing with this system. It brings a contemporary slant to what we as Black men deal with."

Sampson added that one book that an uncle suggested he read gave him perspective:

"One book that changed my life was the *Autobiography of Malcolm X.* I am glad my uncle made me read it when I was younger because I see in Malcolm a model of strength."

While most of the things the participants did to deal with the stress of being a Black male on campus were positive, a few discussed some of the negative behaviors they engaged in. Two participants who did share some not so positive coping strategies were Dallas and Xavier.

Xavier: "During my master's program I guess I wasn't fully prepared to deal with White people like the ones who attend this university. So I found myself being promiscuous. I found myself doing things I normally wouldn't do and the I figured this is why I'm doing what I'm doing because of the stress. Promiscuity isn't the word I should use, I was just having far more sex than I normally would have, given all things considered. So I figured out that instead of doing this I started kickboxing. I had to find something else to do to spend all that frustration.

While Xavier used sex as a coping mechanism, Dallas used alcohol to deal with stress; "I have to admit that sometimes I may have in the past drank a little to much to deal with the stress."

Even though these two students engaged in behaviors that were not so positive they, (Stokely, Highjohn and Pierre) pointed out that spirituality was important to them and the collegiality of their fellow students and family helped them manage stress better.

Xavier: 'I attend a lot of church because of kind of it gives me that tie at least mentally to my dad who is a pastor and to my family. My spirituality is important to me, it's like a rejuvenation, and everyone is in one accord. There are situations that I can't deal with or focus on and I know that in the back of my mind these situations are incubating. I can be in church and hear the sermon and then bam. Now you call it whatever you want to call it but for me that's a spiritual experience."

Dallas: "Yeah, spirituality is important, you have to have faith in something bigger than yourself." I also got lucky in having a pretty good percentage of African Americans in my department and I knew coming down here that I would probably be the only one. But it's been eight or nine of us and we are really tight and in addition to everything else,

people saying I wouldn't be able to make it daily, I can just roll into somebody else's lap and be like, 'man you know what such and such said, or some wild stuff just happened to me?' The whole opportunity to vent since we don't have any Black professors in our entire department for mentorship."

Stokely: "I have to agree with Dallas and Xavier, going to church and my family are important. I have three friends (names) I call my rocks, if I have some problems or whatever I try to bounce my ideas on what's going out there and they can help me deal with being here. Friends, family, and number one you always got to pray for it to make it."

It is important to state, in light of the upcoming conversation on the relationships among African American men, that Stokely feels his friends are his support, his rocks are fellow African American men.

Highjohn: " I have a wife, slash friend, slash partner, whatever you want to call her because she's in school here too. She knows what I am dealing with and sometimes she might say something that's not very positive but it's the truth and it's still kind of supportive, but in the same instance, I'm trying to work past negativity and that becomes an issue sometimes. Other than that, she is wonderful, she's been there for me and I couldn't have done it without her."

Pierre: "I would echo some of what Highjohn said. Having a wife and having a family, it's like built in support. I come home to support everyday and I know that it's support but sometimes it doesn't look like support. Like my dissertation this summer. It's like I got my back on this paper and she just let me do it kind of in my own time but we had some conflicting priorities this summer. I could tell she wanted me out in terms of me

going to get a job and a work schedule. That's not compatible with me getting other

things accomplished, like the dissertation. But otherwise, I think she is very supportive;

her family (in-laws) are supportive. Her family has supported me and so did my family—

my brothers, sisters and parents. Knowing that they're out there, it's almost a spiritual

support of everybody knowing that they want to see me succeed."

<u>African American faculty as mentors</u>

Dallas mentions that he wishes there were more African American faculty on campus to

serve as mentors. Several of the participants talked about their relationships with their mentors

and how important these were in their matriculation. For all students, regardless of their race or

ethnicity, mentors are an invaluable resource for information on professional development,

advisement, and emotional support. While a mentor does not necessarily have to be of the same

racial or ethnic background, just knowing that someone of your heritage is present on campus

that you could talk to if needed gives African American students a sense of psychological

comfort. Dallas commented on the low numbers of African American faculty on campus and

what that means as far as emotional venting that he sometimes needs to do to cope. Several of

the other participants discussed their experiences with African American faculty either, as

supportive or problematic. For some of the participants, such as Dallas, there is not an

opportunity to interact with Black faculty because there are not any in his department:

Dallas: " I haven't had one Black mentor ahead of me, anywhere since I have been here. I

don't know what that would be like, I mean it would be so great!"

Mentorships are extremely important to graduate students for professional development.

Even though undergraduate students have less contact with faculty than graduate students, their

desire to see African Americans represented among the university faculty is just as strong as that

of African American graduate students.

> Sampson: " I think the lack of Black faculty especially to undergraduates, is affecting a
>
> lot of students. Since I've been here, I've had two or three African American female
>
> faculty members. The semester that I had them, of course, was their last semester here at
>
> the university (their leaving) was due to the things going on in their departments as far as
>
> promotion and tenure and a lot of other stuff they couldn't expose me to. I guess we're all
>
> suffering and you can get an education you know what I'm saying, the delivery is
>
> important, you might have a teacher of a different ethnic background that you can relate
>
> to, you feel more comfortable, you might open up, you can contribute more in class. But
>
> if you come from Detroit, Philly, you know you may be used to being around somebody
>
> Black and you come to this university and you've been around Blacks all your life, you
>
> may tend to not want to open up as much because you feel as though you can't trust this
>
> person because he or she is White. You may have heard some stories before you came to
>
> (name of the university). I think a lot of people are suffering because of this."

For those students lucky enough to have an African American faculty in their

departments the relationships cultivated have been invaluable. This has been the case for

Highjohn:

> "I was lucky to have a Black mentor in my experiences. Some people have to go looking
>
> for mentors, I was lucky enough to have somebody look for me (recruit me). With the
>
> help of (name of professor) it would have been impossible. (Name of another professor)
>
> has also reached out to me and shared some knowledge. I didn't know what to think,
>
> they're pretty busy, to pull a professor and talk about these things that are bothering you

and you want to talk to them and they to you. I guess they thought I had something interesting to say. It meant a lot and I was surprised not that here was a person reaching out, but I was just surprised because I think Black faculty have twice as much going on, just to take time out their day to interact with me, it meant a lot to me."

While there are positive examples of mentorship relationships between African American students and faculty, there can be tensions, as in any human relations.

Xavier: " I think that in our department I was lucky enough to have (name of professor). But then another Black professor that was in the department I wish had not been there because not just my personal experience but other's experiences have been negative with this professor. It can work both ways, you can have that Black faculty member there and it's a really good thing or it can be that they are not doing their job and it makes everyone's life more difficult because then you have all the White faculty and all the White students looking at you saying, 'see if we let one (an African American), in see what happens.' And even though it shouldn't be that way, when there's so few of you, you become stereotyped (by Whites). I was like, who am I going to look up to when (name of professor) leaves and this other faculty member is not doing their job, how do we contend with this as students?"

I asked if this meant that African American students should take African American professors on an individual basis, Xavier follows:

 "Well yeah, and even though we as Black students probably do expect on some level for those Black professors to mentor us and take us under their wings, with that comes a lot of responsibility on both parts. Don't take me under your wing if you're not doing what you need to be doing."

72

Graduate students sometimes are just as knowledgeable about a particular discipline as their professors are. Highjohn felt that a professor whose class he was enrolled in was threatened by his extensive knowledge of subject area:

"Just to add, sometimes I guess I tried to reason that some Black professors don't reach out or don't mentor or have negative experiences with Black students is I think, just from my case. The guy told me, 'you know that you are brilliant'. But at the same time you dogging my work but not helping me get better. This leads me to think that you are upset because I'm hanging with you (intellectually). The subject that we are talking about I'm just as knowledgeable as he is. I'm not really understanding what's happening or is it an ego thing."

While there may be challenges among individual students and professors, the overall tenor of the conversation among the focus group participants was that African American faculty are sources of support, both intellectually and psychologically. This is summed up by Pierre:

"I think one thing for me is I've got two Black faculty (members) in my department and I think just having them around it's almost like it's a safety issue. I feel like I'm sort of protected or something by having them around. I don't know if it's noticed on their part, but I will always be there for them if they needed me, because every time I needed them for something, they were always there for me. I've always considered some kind of understanding (between Black faculty and students), some of that a contract within our race."

This contract among African Americans was summed up by Sampson:

"I feel we're all totally responsible to each other and for each other. That's where I am coming from, but to somebody else that may have different experiences, or may be in a

different place, another level of identity may not see it the way I do. I see it as a kind of responsibility that we (African Americans) have to each other, whether we're faculty or not."

African American women as support

During the course of the interviews the most highly charged discussion was that of the relationships between African American men and women on campus. The university is a microcosm of American society and much has been written and debated on African American male and female relations. African American women are attending college in greater numbers nationwide in comparison to African American men. This has implications for the entire African American community. The usual picture painted of this relationship is one of antagonism. African American men may resent African American women for their success and African American women may view African American men as not rising to the challenges that they face. The participants alluded to this superficial problem, but did not feel that African American women were unsupportive of African American men on this campus. Most of the participants thought that African American women wanted to see more African American men on campus because this would enrich the education (academically and socially) of African American women. Dallas expresses this sentiment in the following statement:

"First thing right off the bat is that I feel like I am a commodity or something like that. When you really think about it, it is really sad. In every type of meeting that I have been to, every type of student organization I have been to where it's been majority African Americans, it's been five to one, six to one, eight to one, more Black women than Black men. Damn, where are all my brothers, where are they? Are they all left behind and stuff?

That's why I say I can't help but think how much bigger this is than just (name of school) and societal problems. Sometimes I feel sorry for the sisters."

Interviewer: "How come?"

Dallas: "I mean it's just so many of them just in terms of social functions and they get tired of seeing just all the sisters come out. I know that they would like to see a lot more balance (between African American men and women)."

More African American men on campus creates balance as Dallas stated, and both African American men and women benefit. The overall tenor of the discussion of Black males and females on campus was one of mutual support and respect, with the participants genuinely empathizing with the plight of African American women on campus. An example of this is reflected in Sampson's statement:

"African American men start feeling like well, that they act like they don't need us any more and we're not this and that. But you have to look at it like this—that's a sister who is still trying to grow, she's trying to better her life and a lot of African American men are in the prison system and not doing what they are supposed to do and you can't be mad at sisters. I wish that it was a perfect world and we can do this, but it's not. So when you look at it. It's even deeper than this education. It has to do with economics in our neighborhoods and how that's affected (African Americans), because African American men are not getting pulled up with the sisters and we're not going to grow as a whole race, but what's going to happen is things are going to be lopsided."

African Americans in general are communal individualists in regards to viewing the world from the perspective that while they may be successful as individuals, the importance is on the contributions they make to the African American community and the society at large (Zaff,

75

1999). Sampson realizes that the success of African American women is a half victory for the African American community, that ultimately it will take the success of African American women and men together to effect change in America for all African Americans.

While the participants sympathized with African American women on campus, one of the participants talked about a negative experience with an individual Black woman on campus. Even though the experience for him was not positive, the participant did not feel that the treatment he received was not indicative of the way all African American women viewed African American men on campus. Stokely states:

> "I hope I don't offend any women because I have two sisters. I sometimes feel like they [Black women] don't really want to get a chance to know us. I had a situation where I was in a class and there was a Black female. She was on various Black organizations around campus. I think I was the only Black male in the class but it was like five or six other Black females in the class. A situation came up about a grade that I received, and my grade was higher than her grade and she found out about it. She came to me and said in class that the only reason my grade was higher than hers was because I had a White girl taking notes for me. I sit in the front of the class and this girl sits like two rows back and she came to me wrong. And there were a whole bunch of White people around us. She said it in front of everybody and that hurt me that she said that. I was about to come back at her and say something but I didn't want to disrespect her like that in front of all those White people. I was going to let it slide, but that hurt me. Even though they are becoming more successful than us, I think sometimes some of them bash us. They have a lack of respect for us. True, we have something to do with that, but don't talk about us, don't bash us, pray for us."

Stokely perceived that this African American women may have internalized the stereotype that African Americans are not as intelligent as Whites, or, as in this case, if an African American scores high on a test that the African American had the help of a White person, as in this case. This is especially poignant because Stokely is a college football player and the perception is that football players are not intelligent. Add race to the equation and one can imagine the stigma that African American male athletes have to combat. During elementary and high school, Stokely was placed in gifted education classes but decided to opt out of the class because he did not think it was cool. Nonetheless, Stokely did fairly well in high school and college and is now planning to pursue a graduate degree while he is completing his final year of eligibility on the football team. During personal conversations I have had with Stokely he has stated that he has always battled peoples' perceptions that he is less intellectually capable because he is Black and an athlete. What compounds this issue is the fact that this time the person espousing this view was a fellow African American who, he felt, should support him.

A number of participants alluded to the fact that the relationships among African American males and females on campus were part of the larger issue of relationships between the two sexes. In the participants' minds, they could not discuss what transpires on campus without also discussing what happens in the larger African American community. The central issue brought out in this discussion was that African Americans, males and females, should remember that they are not each other's enemy; they should support each other. Pierre shares his thoughts on how society plays a role in the view that African American males are not able to fulfill their role as provider as a reason why there may exist some antagonism between Black men and women:

"I think part of the thing too is like I guess the bigger thing that we all deal with is that America is a paternalistic society anyway and the way it's set up, the majority culture for White folks is that White men can go out there and make the money, get their education and stuff like that. White women can do the same thing but society is designed for them (White men) to be kind of the forerunners and to be the breadwinners. Historically, it's been impossible for Black men to do the same kind of thing; we've got so many other obstacles in front of us that prevent or a least hinder us from achieving. It's made it a bit more easier for Black women to manage that and so we really got kind of a reciprocal relationship to what's going on in the White community. We got to create, develop, a new reality for what's going on with Black folks and stop thinking that we as Black men have to be out there doing what they do. I think that we have to create a new reality for what's going on with Black folks so that we can succeed in a different way."

As stated in the methodology chapter I decided to have African American female note takers. During the discussion of relationships among Black men and Black women they shared their thoughts on this critical subject. One note taker felt that it was important that African Americans look at their history to discover what African American men and women did to survive and maintain their relationships. She states:

"How about getting in touch with an old reality? Black women have always, if you go back in history, always had the opportunity, if you will, to make more money than their men. Yet they always had an easier time getting a job and nobody was getting jobs at work up here, but you know the Black man had a very difficult time getting the job and then had a difficult time keeping the job. Somehow, our forefathers and mothers managed to make that work and the relationships were more egalitarian. It could be that some

78

Black women always wanted that "Leave it to Beaver" kind of life, but they couldn't have it except on Sundays. The men can rise and be the one, you know, in the church and be the leader. But on Monday they have had to go back to being the boy; a lot of times the Black woman would have to intercede for them. I think that we all need to look back at our history a little bit and see, because it is troublesome for both Black men and women. I think you can loose touch with this reality of being Black in this society. All of a sudden you get a position and get a chip on your shoulder. When push comes to shove you going to the bank and the man who is not going to cash the check because you are Black! He does not care whether you have more money than your wife or your wife's got more money than you; it does not matter. Yet somehow we need to realize that we all are Black, at some point in time we are all going to be looked at as Black I don't care what kind of degree you have. Things are still going on, that's why we are losing. We think we know what's going on now but we don't and some serious stuff is going on."

An important aspect of successful relations among Black men and women on campus is the idea that African Americans not develop an elitist attitude because they have been fortunate enough to attend college. This was expressed by the African American female note taker as well as Stokely. The difference between the note taker's analysis and Stokely's was that Stokely feels that African American women, in general, loose a sense of who they are in their quest for success:

"It's just a difference. I feel like once they [African American women] get that success, they forget who they are or how they got there, but on the flip side that's the argument that they are trying to use against us [African American men]. When we get successful, I'm talking about Black men, I'm not talking about athletes, no, I'm talking about Black

79

men. When we get successful we forget where we come from, and move away from other Black people. They [Black women] kind of lose touch and lose focus and they forget who they are."

This sentiment was also shared by Xavier:

"I had a point that you brought up of something about Black women and common sense and I have a lot of African American female friends on campus and even my own sister, I love her some days, but others I am like, what are you thinking? I mean I walk across campus and you know for example, prime example, I was teaching a class last year and one of my Black female students, I'm sitting at the front of the class dressed in a tie—everything and this fool is like 'so have you met the professor?' I am the professor, I'm like all the stuff up here---handing out papers and stuff and she still did not realize that I could be her professor. I think sometimes Black women get into this whole education thing and education is wonderful, I'm not saying that you shouldn't have education but you can have some street sense. I think a lot of times for some reason it just goes out the window. I don't know if it's because we're at a predominantly White university and all of a sudden we think we've arrived. You can't do that—think that you have arrived because you are here."

African Americans can internalize negative stereotypes just as can Whites. In this case, as in the prior one with Stokely, an African American female has made an assumption that African American males can not be intellectually capable or in position of authority in an intellectual setting, such as in a the college classroom. This heightens animosity. The African American women feel that African American men are not shouldering their share of the burden for advancing the welfare of the African American community. The African American men do not

feel that African American women are supporting them. The main issue is not whether Black women are succeeding and speaking negatively of African American men or African American men are feeling resentful toward African American women. It is the systemic racism and discrimination in America that is a major cause for this animosity between the two genders and that causes African Americans to lose focus and not support one another (Welsing, 1991).

<u>Relations among African American men at the university</u>

As stated earlier African American males at the university make up 1.9% of the total student population, undergraduate and graduate. In examining the support mechanisms that African Americans relied upon to successfully navigate their university experience, I wanted to know if African American male students felt they were supportive of each other. According to the views of the two undergraduate participants, Stokely and Sampson, the relationships that African American men share with one another are, in some ways, more tedious than the relationship shared between African American men and women. The fact that there are so few African American males on campus led one of the participants to state that African American men did not get along because there is competition among them for the African American women on this campus. Stokely stated:

> "The relationship between Black males and how they get along on this campus amongst themselves? I think it's not so good but I think it's due to the women on the campus. The reason you are not speaking to somebody is that you have an issue with somebody. It all goes back to a woman."

As an undergraduate African American male on campus Stokely had a different viewpoint than a graduate student had on this topic. Highjohn, a graduate student, and Stokely engaged in the following dialog:

"Because we're not in the same scene I really don't have that perspective anymore but I can see where you are coming from with that (Stokely). I think because we all have different reasons that we relate to each other differently and in a different context. For instance, you wouldn't just come up to me and tell me about the party that you went to on Friday and how many girls were there, how drunk you got, just giving me details of the party if you saw me on campus?"

Stokely: "Are you talking to me?"

Highjohn: "Yes—Because you don't have that relationship (with me)"

Stokely: "I don't know you"

Highjohn: "Exactly, you don't know me like that but you see me on campus. You might comment on how's it going, how you doing in school or what about that conversation we had over Dr. (name)'s house? We need more of that. That's the kind of relationship we have so I think that because we have differences, each of us can serve each other on certain purposes. So we have our own purposes for speaking to each other and not speaking to each other. So I don't think that's it."

Stokely: "So you are saying basically open up with each other more and I'm saying that it's wrong for me to try and speak to you when I'm trying to promote an event like a party and I want you to tell your friends about it? That's wrong, I need to come and holla at you on Tuesday instead of Friday? Basically, I feel what you are saying."

In this dialog between Highjohn and Stokely we are exposed to the intra-dynamics of communicating among African American males at the university. Even though one is an undergraduate and the other a graduate student, both think that it is important that African

American males speak to each other, not only about trivial issues such as parties but also engage in discussions that address the welfare of African Americans that attend the university.

Since there are so few African American males attending the university, some may generalize that this population should be more cohesive than it really is. Some of the participants discussed the need for more unity among African Americans in general and African American males specifically. Sampson and Highjohn expressed these thoughts:

Sampson: "It is sad because there are so few of us. I mean we should be so much tighter, so much closer so we can together form one large fist and we can throw a punch that can really knock holes and dents in some areas in this school. But when we're all separated and scattered amongst each other, we are fighting against each other which is going to cause more tension and more drama. We're not going anywhere, we're moving slower. If we come together and just make one plan, it might not be the best plan but at least all of us can agree on it and even if you don't like it, let's go with it. Now, we don't have that."

Highjohn: "That's why I think we have all these insecurities. We just manifest them in different ways so that's one of the reasons I think you can't have a whole group of Black men go on and make that fist because we're going to have egos. You (Black men) have insecurities---you (Black men) don't speak to me when I see you---this is the reality."

I followed through with Highjohn about what these insecurities were and if they were different than men, regardless of race, have in general:

Highjohn: "Most definitely. Number one because particularly on this campus we're not supposed to be here statistically, systematically, however you want to say it. We are going to get those funny looks from White people and just to know that we're here despite this adversity number one, that's going to make us better. I don't really see it

happening, try two and three times to show that you can out do a White person! The fact

that you exist in this environment alone, you know, ought to let them know that hey this

isn't some joke. That's just our environment historically, like he (Stokely) said he had a

hard time getting his check cashed. Now, when I go to (name of bank) or (name of

another bank) or wherever I bank I'm going to have that thought in my head all the time

so I'm going to be on guard."

In regards to African American males supporting one another on campus I asked the

participants how African American males' insecurities affect their communicating with one

another:

Highjohn: "I think that's just a level of maturity because some people can be really petty

and say 'well I'm not going to speak to this dude because he doesn't speak to me.' But it

would really be looking at yourself and really surveying the situation then you would see

that we are all here to do the same thing, get the degree number one, number two, try to

learn something, and (three), try to get a job when you come out. I don't really

understand why there are insecurities or why there would be tension but it just is and

that's something I have come to understand."

Even though the situation among African American males was not ideal, all the

participants thought that it was important for African American males to communicate and

support one another, especially since the African American male population was so small. It was

especially important that those African American males who had succeeded at the university

share strategies, experiences, and mindsets they used with future African American male

students. Most participants felt that it was extremely important that a young African American

male have a realistic outlook about what attending a predominantly White university would

entail. They also felt it was critical to have a focus on accomplishing academic goals. Sampson stated:

"You have got to really ask yourself what do you want? I mean you got to come to the university and know that for one, I'm not coming here for partying. It's not going to be a party atmosphere if you are an African American male---thinking you can go downtown and be able to go to a lot of different places. This isn't the place to come for a Black male unless you are in a clique, going to the business school, education school, it's all about why are you coming here. If you are just coming here to say "I'm going to have a Black college experience', don't come. I'm dead honest with you, if you're coming here for academics in a particular field and you're not really worried about the social aspect of the campus and all of that, well you can come. To be honest with you don't sell yourself short by saying that you are going to come here and experience it all as if you went to a predominantly Black school and being with your people like that. It's just not going to happen."

Sampson used the term 'cliques' in his discussion. Throughout the interview Sampson mentioned how prevalent cliques are among African Americans. There appeared to be a negative connotation when he talked about these cliques. As a follow through for clarification on his thoughts of cliques, I asked him if cliques could be a support mechanism for some individuals:

Sampson: "Yes, because they are the people you relate to. You can look at any study, people hang around likeness. I mean, if your friends are doing the same thing you are doing, that's why you all are friends, because you basically do the same thing. Therefore, there's always someone there that you can lean on because he relates to you. You may

have some things that you relate to a certain extent and there are certain areas in his life

that you can't relate to, but still you can relate on the more important things."

The older participants in the focus group really felt that future African American male

students should have a strong sense of purpose before coming to the university. Dallas and Pierre

both commented on this.

Dallas: "You have got to be about business. The university is a good institution if you are

here for learning whatever it is you have to learn. Many of the departments and the

resources here are outstanding. You are going to be isolated here and is that's okay and

you realize it, you can understand it, and you can focus in on what you have to do. The

school itself is top notch. I don't have any problems."

Pierre: I really just kind of say the same thing because I am thinking about the resources

and things like that. This university has stuff coming off the walls in regards to excellent

educational opportunities. But I think you also, as a Black person, to come here you have

to bring that extra piece like you have to carry everywhere else. It's either knowing who

you are as a Black person or at some point you're going to have to learn a little bit more

about yourself being in this environment. I think that college in general is a time about

learning a little bit more about yourself, whether you go to a Black school or not. But

then, there's going to be more so because of who we are, experiences that you're going to

have on this campus. This is going to force you to think about society in general and how

you as a Black man fit into this society and how you as a Black man fit into (name of

university).I think it's going to cause you to gravitate towards other Black people and

learn a little bit more about what's going on not just on campus but just as being a twenty

year old or a nineteen year old Black male in American. I just think there's an extra component."

Being alone or isolated as an African American male was something that Highjohn thought a future African American male student attending the university should be comfortable with.

"I was kind of to myself, even though I could be socially active and prosper in that (social) area. But here, I've just become a hermit. I feel like I'm on a hill looking on top of a town sometimes, which is good in a respect because that keeps folks out of your business, but it kind of sets you out because you will be an outcast. Be prepared to be an outcast or be prepared to be in the midst of things to change something somewhere."

Stokely offers this advice to future African American male students:

"There's not that much going on here at the university, but it's enough to keep you busy. I will echo the words that some of the other people said as far as conformity. If you're a Black male and you only date Black females that could potentially be a problem. If you date White females or you date outside of your race, then it's cool. We have 18,000 of them (White women) here. Then I bring up the issue of proximity. It's a lot going on at this (name of the university), you make a trade off if you stay a hour and a half way (in the nearby city). Stay in (city), somewhere like that because the support system is better. I would go back and ask why the brother why do they want to come here because if there are any other schools in your state where you are from that you could have the same thing (support), I would just stay there."

Relationships among Whites at the university

As stated earlier, Whites make up 88% of the student population. African American males interact with Whites on a daily basis, either as peers or as students. In conjunction with distancing themselves psychologically from Whites, most participants were mistrustful of Whites in general. Throughout the study their views on relationships among Whites was interspersed into their m comments. However, one statement made by Sampson addressed the general mistrust that African American males have of Whites:

> Sampson: "I think I have changed since I have been here in a good way. Just being around a lot of Caucasians you get a real picture of how they think and how they operate and how cut throat they are. They really don't care as much as they put on in front of your face. But behind closed doors when it is just them, it's a different story. In your class when you were talking about how White men see society, I didn't need anyone to tell me that they (White men) are not giving up power for anybody, especially not to a Black man. So for a Black man you have to find a way to get power to help brothers and sisters.

Relationships between African American men and the African American community

The participants discussed their relationships among African American women, African American faculty, African American men and Whites at the university. An infrequently mentioned source for support was the African American community. The university is located in an area where African Americans make up 40% of the general population. Therefore, there are ostensibly many opportunities for African American male students to interact with the larger African American community through venues such as churches, civic organizations, and social functions. Only two of the participants commented on their experiences with the larger African

American community. Oftentimes, African Americans who attend college and graduate school are placed on a pedestal by other African Americans because of the status accorded such an achievement. This may be a barrier for some African Americans males to develop genuine relationships with the African American community.

> Dallas: "I have boys like my barber, who I could hang with, but he places brothers and sisters who go to college on a pedestal. I sometimes think that he thinks that I think I am better than him because of this. I don't think I am better than anyone, just lucky that I had the opportunity to get a Ph.D. I wish I could relate to him more on a brother to brother level."

For others, such as Highjohn, there is the feeling that the larger African American community views him and his wife as unusual because of their appearance.

> " I get looks of despise when I am with my wife because we both have locks. It's like they want to say (to my wife), ' now you know that girl needs a TCB in her head, you just need some Dark and Lovely.' I think that because we haven't assimilated as much, we don't have the assimilated look; we haven't cut our hair, I don't shave for particular reasons or whatever. I think they [the African American community] might find that disrespectful, seeing that you are in master's house, you supposed to do what master say, and look like master and do his purpose. I guess I got issues with Black folks. I've had some issues with Black people on campus and (name of town) in general. Sometimes when you hear me speak you can tell I'm from the country. Where I come from everybody speaks (to one another). So I speak to people here whether I know them or not and just to speak to some Black people sometimes they look at you and it's like, 'man

what are you doing (speaking to me)?' So it kind of hurts when we don't speak to each other."

How has being at the university changed you?

The last topic discussed among the focus group was concerned with how being at the university changed them, positively or negatively. Most agreed that being at a predominantly White university definitely changed them.

Dallas: "I guess my naivety to how White America really is, I came from an all Black environment except for the White people on TV or the movies like that Legally Blonde stuff they talk about."

Highjohn: "You take every experience and it's added on to who you are and keep going on. It's not better or worse for me, it's just more experience

Pierre issues a follow through for Dallas about keeping his guard up against Whites when he interacts with them:

Pierre: "I wanted to ask Dallas, you said you go downtown with some of your White friends, and I wondered if you generally keep a wall up with some of them too? Just because you just feel like at some point they are going to say something stupid or do something that's going to be a misunderstanding of something?"

Dallas: "Something a little stupid but that gives me a chance to interact with them and tell them what I think. There has definitely been some positive exchanges of information when some of them [Whites] have been forthcoming. Maybe they [Whites] have a better experience while here by hanging out with me!"

As one of the youngest participants in the focus group, Sampson stated that he has learned a lot as a student:

Sampson: "I learned a whole lot being here and the reason I came here has served it's

purpose. I grew as a person. I met a lot of people, I got a chance to travel and it's truly

changed me especially coming from a rural area where millions of Black guys, if they'd

seen half of my life, they probably wouldn't know what to do with themselves because

they have only been out of the state you know, five miles to Florida, to them that's

something big. So, (yes) it's changed me."

<u>Summary</u>

The purpose of this research was to discover if racial identity had an influence on the

psychological coping strategies of African American males at a predominantly White university.

Through focus group interviews, various relationships that African Americans males on campus

shared with one another-- African American females, Whites, African American faculty, and the

surrounding African American community-- were discussed to find out if these venues were a

source of psychological support for African American males. In the next chapter I will discuss

what these findings mean relative to racial identity, coping strategies and resilience.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to examine the impact that racial identity has on young African American males' development of psychologically healthy coping strategies as they attempt to navigate their educational environment at a predominantly White university. Coping was defined as a process wherein an individual attempts to manage, through cognitive and behavioral efforts, external or internal demands that exceed an individual's resources (Larazus & Folkman, 1984). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does the racial identification of African American males influence how they deal with stress caused by racism?

2. In what ways does racial identification help explain how some African American males are resilient in the face of adversities and others lack the ability to persevere when faced with difficult challenges?

African American male participants' relationships with other African American males, African American females, Whites, African American faculty, and the surrounding African American community were examined. Figure 1 depicts these relationships as they were examined in this study. The goal was to investigate how these relationships affected the ability of participants in this study to cope with stressful situations while they were enrolled at a predominantly White university.
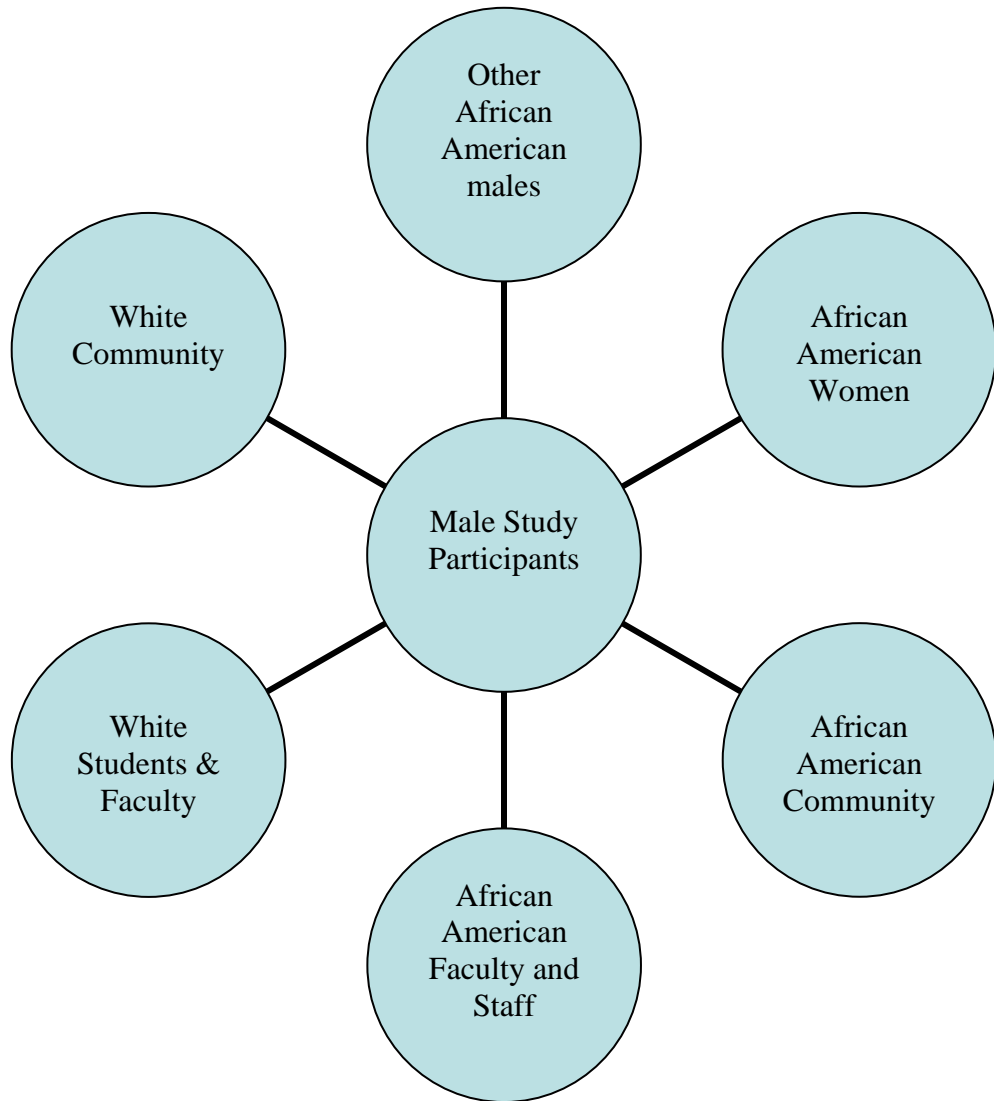
Figure 1- Significant Groups with which African American Males Interact at a Predominantly

White University

Coping with Racism

Racism in the lives of African Americans creates tremendous stresses. The chronic nature

of racial discrimination is a major quality of life issue for African Americans living in

contemporary society (Feagin, 2003; Hacker, 1992). While the focus of this study was not life satisfaction, the ability to enjoy life versus the stress of dealing with racism is not without implications. When African American males have to deal with the insidiousness of racism as a regular occurrence in their life, life satisfaction is influenced because of it. However, because individuals at the internalization stage such as the participants in this study, accept the fact that racism permeates many aspects of their lives, they are equipped with healthy coping strategies that allow them to better enjoy their individual lives. They can do this with no conflict while they also contribute to the overall welfare of the African American community.

It is impossible to have a defense against racism if its existence is denied or minimized, as it is in the pre-encounter stage. If Black people see themselves as special African Americans, beyond the reach of racism or if they deny racism's existence, then they are less likely to be in a position to anticipate when they are the target of racism. Persons with an internalized Black identity and a well-developed defense mode, however, understand that racism is a given in American society. They are therefore more likely to recognize when they are a target of racism.

Throughout the focus group discussions the participants described several behavioral and attitudinal responses they used to deal with racism in their roles as students at a predominantly White university. Withdrawal and assertion were primarily used by the participants along with the added attitudinal behavior of psychological distancing. Psychological distancing was especially used by Pierre, who used the term to describe the way he relates to Whites.

Several of the focus group members in this study experienced what Jones (1997) classifies as individual racism in that they experienced racial discrimination on a personal level, as in the case with Stokely when he faced the problem of cashing a check at a local bank. According to Feagin (2003), African Americans who face racism in a public place usually resort

to verbal attacks or accept the situation without publicly questioning it and later voicing concerns through the appropriate channels. While the behavior of several focus group participants who did experience individual racism contradict Feagin's description of responses to racism the behavior of some of them were consistent with his findings. Stokely and Xavier confirmed that they confronted individuals who treated them unfairly. Stokely, who even after asking to see the manager of the bank, decided to continue banking with the institution. However, Dallas who experienced a racist incident in a downtown bar, accepted the fact that the White man who accosted him was just a drunkard. He felt that the emotional cost of addressing the issue with the man was not worth the effort. The reactions that Dallas and Stokely had to their racist encounters could be their shock that the situation even occurred. As Feagin (2003) maintains, the confrontational response is often so costly in terms of time and emotional energy that acquiescence or withdrawal are more viable options.

Other Factors Affecting the Development of Coping Strategies

The research on coping strategies used by African Americans indicates that gender differences exist regarding the types of coping strategies used by African Americans in their encounters with racism. The findings indicate that African American women seek social support as coping strategies significantly more than African American men (Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds & Cancelli, 2000). Several of the participants in this study stated that the relationships they had with their African American friends, mentors, families, and the Black church allowed them to cope with the stresses of racism while at the university. They felt that these relationships contributed to their psychological well being and made their enrollment at the university easier. This is consistent with the work of Lalonde et al. (1995) who found that, for a sample of African Canadians, the preferred coping strategy in confronting institutional racism was to seek social

support. This finding may be substantiated by the nature of this study itself because relationships were the focal point of this study. This finding, however is important nonetheless, because the participants viewed these with-in group relationships as critical to their well being.

The defense strategies used by participants in this study allowed them to deal with the internalized racism in their predominantly White setting. Their racial identity allowed them to minimize the hurt, pain and stigmatization that comes from being treated with disrespect, rudeness, and insensitivity (Cross, 1991). Most of the participants of this study experienced these feelings as a result of situations they found themselves in while at the university. Instead of being overly hurt or caught off guard, the defense strategies the participants used enabled them to maintain control, strategize, and avoid overreacting (Cross, 1991).

Spirituality As a Coping Strategy

According to Stevenson (2002) spirituality provides the means whereby an individual can make sense of an irrational and unjust world. Strategically, for African American males, it provides the systemic "checkmate" necessary to counter the negative spin doctoring they face in a racist society. For the participants of this study, spirituality provided a way for them to avoid worrying about uncontrollable situations and to focus instead on what was possible to manage-- one's self-alienation and self appreciation. Since racism poses particular problems for African American males they need, as the participants in this study stated, a strategy, a checkmate, which would allow them to look above the fray of racial politics and see the world for what it is.

Several of the participants discussed religion and a belief in a supreme being as a strategy that allowed them to cope with the hassles of being an African American male enrolled in a predominantly White university. Cross (1991) states that a religious orientation helps people avoid becoming bitter and filled with hatred especially towards Whites. Spirituality is the factor

96

that participants felt kept their focus on racism as a form of human evil, rather than as Cross (1991) noted, on the demonization of White people. Cross further observed that such a focus is often accompanied by a sense of hopelessness when dealing with Whites (Cross, 1991).

Community Involvement as a Coping Strategy

Human behavior is more complex than any psychological theory could describe. While the Nigrescence theory helps explain Black racial identity as a model, it is not the intention of this model to peg Black individuals into neat compartments. The Nigrescence theory acknowledges the diversity that exists among African Americans, ideologically and philosophically. For instance, several of the multicultural inclusive participants felt that it was important that the African American community pursue a unified agenda towards empowerment and that it was important to place the welfare of the African American community above that of the individual. This collectivist mindset is consistent with Cross's internalization stage even though it is more of a nationalistic, than a multicultural outlook. All of the participants agreed that the welfare of the African American community was important and all felt, in their individual way, that this was important to promote by either connecting with the African American community or by sharing their experiences with future African American male students. Cross (1991) states that Pre-encounter persons do not necessarily differ in their value structures from persons in advanced stages of racial identity development. People in the Pre-encounter stage often have affiliations with secular, political, and religious organizations, and have been known to demonstrate tremendous commitment and even militant dedication to certain issues, beliefs, and causes that go beyond merely thinking about one's self. In other words, African Americans in the Pre-encounter stage may be no less communalistic or individualistic than African Americans at other stages (Cross, 1991). However the active promotion of the

African American community that some of the participants expressed is a major factor that more aptly describes individuals at the internalization stage (Cross, 1991). Sampson, Pierre, Dallas, Xavier, and Highjohn all considered that giving back to the African American community is an important component of who they are as individuals. Each of them mentioned that it is important to pass on their experiences by providing guidance that would enrich the lives of future African American men who would attend the university.

Support Mechanisms for Participants

  <u>African American women.</u> During the course of the interviews the most provocative discussion centered around the relationship between African American men and women on campus. Most of the graduate students felt that African American women were supportive of African American men on campus. Dallas stated that in his interactions with African American women at the university he observed that they wish there were more African American men on campus. Sampson, in his conversation, stressed the point that African American men could not fault African American women for succeeding and outnumbering African American men at the university. Both Dallas and Sampson felt that this topic was larger than what went on at the university, that this issue is societal and that the university simply reflected what is happening in society. Even the negative experience that Stokely shared ended with a sort of plea for help, as he noted that African American women, instead of putting African American men down, should pray for them.

  Some of the participants discussed how their wives and partners supported them in the pursuit of their degrees. Highjohn and Pierre, two graduate students, expressed their appreciation for their African American wives' support and for their holding their families together while they completed their graduate educations.

Stokely and Xavier were vocal in their opinions that African American women were either not as supportive of African American men as they thought they should be or concentrated too much on their academic and professional careers to the exclusion of learning the skills that would allow them to navigate the streets (or as Xavier stated, having common sense) and development of these social skills, they felt, would allow them to relate better to African American males.

African American men. The conversation centering on the relationships that African American men had with one another stressed that African American men need to be more supportive of one another. Stokely, the undergraduate student, talked about how African American males competed with each other to see who could have the most girlfriends and how this prevented African American men from speaking to one another. As a follow through to Stokely's remark, Highjohn remarked that African American men have to dialog with each other on other things that have more importance to the well being of African Americans in general, and African American men in particular.

African American community. Here again the participants felt that relations could be improved between African American men and the African American community. Dallas's experience with his barber is an example of how, at times, the African American community may have the idea that African American college students are condescending towards them and insinuate that the students think they are better than the community. Dallas and Sampson talked about how the African American community could be a source of support for African American students, forging a relationship where both worked towards the mutual benefit of the other.

African American faculty. When participants had access to African American faculty, most expressed that their relationships with them were influential support mechanisms. Two of

the participants, Highjohn and Xavier, talked about negative experiences they had with African American faculty. However, these experiences did not negate the positive mentoring relationships they had with other African American faculty members who were more helpful. These faculty members actively recruited the participants to the university, and guided them academically, professionally, and emotionally.

Whites on campus. The participants' comments on Whites at the university paint a picture of distrust and suspicion. The participants agreed that to a degree they had to keep, as Pierre termed, a psychological distance from Whites because of this general distrust that they had for them. All of the participants realized that since they attend a predominantly White university, they had to attend class and possible study with White students or have White faculty serve as their professors and/or advisors. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the participants to be aware that while these relationships were a necessity, they would always have to be on guard to protect themselves psychological and emotionally.

Psychological Resilience

In regards to psychological resilience African Americans at the pre-encounter stage may have coping strategies which allow them to deal with racial stress just as African Americans at the internalization stage. The connotation of coping strategies that these African Americans may use is not focused on whether the strategies are effective or non-effective. The issue, simply is that they must use coping strategies that would allow them to cope, at least temporarily. African Americans at the pre-encounter stage in fact may deal with stressors by denying that racism exists or that it affects them, leading them to view that the stress is caused by something other than racism (Helms, 1990). For example, a pre-encounter African American is passed over for a job promotion while his White colleagues are advanced may deal with this experience by

100

cognitively assessing his skills and training as things that need improving which contributed to his being passed over. His colleagues may see this as an instance of discrimination.

While it can not be stated that the participants in this study are happier, more psychologically stable, or more psychologically resilient than other African American men at other stages in Cross's Nigrescence Model, it can be said that their internalized racial identities provided a shield that deflected some of the negative effects of racism and provided them with the necessary coping strategies needed to succeed at a predominantly white university.

An individual at the pre-encounter stage may feel that being Black and having knowledge about the Black experience have little to do with their perceived sense of happiness and well-being and that Blackness contributes little to their life. African Americans at the pre-encounter stage may place higher value on things other than their Blackness, like their religion, lifestyle, social status or profession. These people experience a meaningful existence; it is just that little emphasis is given to their Blackness (Cross, 1991). As long as their pre-encounter attitudes bring them a sense of fulfillment, a meaningful existence, order and harmony, there is no need for resocialization into a new Black identity (Cross, 1991).

African Americans in the immersion-emersion stage may use similar techniques of dealing with racism as people at the internalization stage (avoidance, psychological distancing, and assertion). However, their usage of these techniques is not as complex as those in the internalization stage because their identity is predicated on an intense dislike for Whites. Because of this, they have little or no contact with the dominant culture, which may hinder their development of more sophisticated modes of relating with Whites and mainstream society. In other words, these African Americans will not place themselves in contexts where they are in the minority such as enrolling in predominantly White university.. They may attend predominantly

Black colleges and universities, live in all Black neighbors, and deal with Black businesses as much as possible. It is important to mention here that some African American psychologists and psychiatrists who subscribe to this radical school of thought believe that this is a healthy response by African Americans in the immersion-emersion stage (Karenga, 2002), These researchers make no appeal to Whites to change their opinions of Blacks and direct their exclusive attention to the development African American people. These scientists feel that African Americans in the immersion-emersion stage are justified in their stance towards Whites, regardless if that stance is anti- White (Akbar, 1994; Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1986; Cress Welsing, 1991; Wilson, 1981; Wright, 1981).

Conclusions

Though the number of participants in this study was small as dictated by the use of a focus group design, several important issues were raised which are worthy of note. One of these issues related to the importance of self awareness. Participants frequently comment on the importance of their knowledge of who they were as fundamental to their functioning. They described how important this self knowledge was to their being successful at this predominantly White institution that they attended. They also noted that self-awareness was critical to their relations with other African Americans, males and females, with the African American community, and to their successful understanding of functioning in and negotiating an American society that views them through racist tinted glasses.

The self-awareness described by the participants may be related to this internalized racial identity, which allowed them to cope with being African American males in a predominantly White setting. The participants realized that racism is a given in all facets of life in America. However, the knowledge of who they are as people of African descent helped them to deal with

102

being in this context. As Phinney states (1990), it is also critical that African American males define themselves and reject the stereotypes that American society has put forth. Highjohn was especially good at expressing this idea when he stated that people will only see what they want to see in African American males, but African American males have the power to reject these views this by creating new realities for themselves. The second problem that African American males have to overcome is the rejection by mainstream White America (Phinney, 1990). The African American males in this study experienced the dual task of accepting their own cultural values and those of society while maintaining a strong sense of who they were as African American men. By having an internalized racial identity they did not have to transcend their Blackness; their knowledge of who they were helped them to not only cope but succeed.

The African American males in this study pointed to the importance of another issue described by Larazus and Folkman (1982) as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies used when dealing with the stress caused by racism. Examples of problem-focused coping strategies were demonstrated by Dallas during his confrontation with a White man in a downtown bar, Stokely during his encounter at the bank with being denied service and Pierre in his use of his ability to psychologically distance himself from Whites when appropriate. Using these strategies instead of becoming emotionally involved places their behavior in the problem-focused category. The situation in which individuals find themselves determine which focus strategy is better to use. All of the participants, at one time or another, used emotion-focused coping strategies. Examples of emotion focused coping strategies included seeking the support of friends or family or using spirituality. It is important to state that neither coping strategy is positive or negative.

Another issue raised by the participants was their need to seek greater opportunities to express their emotions and feelings in productive ways. That is, statements they made attested to the importance of addressing and seeking satisfaction in the affective part of their lives.

Participants emphasized the importance of relationships they had or desired with significant others in their lives. Strong relationships with other African American males, women, university faculty and staff, their families, and the African American community were attested to as being foundational to their coping at a majority White institution.

Recommendations

In light of the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Conducting this study with a larger sample of students would clarify and provide greater support for findings. This larger sample should include an undergraduate sample that is more equal to the graduate student sample so that the effects of maturation could be more clearly discovered and discussed.

2. Though tentative, given the size of the sample used in this study, a number of ideas were generated that could benefit from further investigations of media forms that could be used to stimulate dialogues with young African American males. For example, handbooks, an organized format for guided discussion groups, a web-suite focused on possible solutions to problems faced by African American males are a few possibilities.

3. Further investigations should be conducted regarding the connections between African American males and the significant relationships (e.g., the African American community including churches, social, and cultural organizations) pointed out by the participants in this study.

4. Much more study needs to be conducted regarding the relationship between African American males and African American females, especially in academic settings. Many of the participants in this study commented on the male-female relationship and its importance to academic and self development.

5. A critical issue pointed out by participants in this study was related to the importance of self awareness. This is an area in which much more study is needed and with a larger sample. It appeared, from observations made by participants in this study, that knowing one's self was a critical key to academic success as well as to relations with others.

6. Conducting this study with participants who are classified as being at the other stages in the Cross model (1991) would be definitely useful. In this study I could only speculate what the differences in responses might be for participants at other stages. Being able to analyze responses by participants at various stages would help to provided greater clarity to the coping strategies used by African American males and provide the information needed to better formulate intervention programs based on their needs at these different levels. Further, such an investigation would provide a clearer definition of what those psychological coping strategies are that could be used by African American males to successfully negotiate academic and relationship settings.

Limitations

There were two limitations of this study which should be noted. The first concerns the small sample size which limits the ability of findings from this study being generalized to all African American males attending predominantly White universities. The use of a focus group

105

by design limited the number of participants in this study. While the findings were important, conducting this study with a larger sample would aid future studies.

Experiences described and comments made by students in this study emphasized more the views of graduate students than undergraduate students. Because of this, findings may not be as applicable to undergraduate students.

Final Thought

Conducting this study has reminded me of the diversity and complexity of my fellow African American brothers. I hope that readers will come to have a greater understanding and appreciation of African American males and their spirits. The participants of this study provided inspiration for me because of their dedication to excellence and their courageous spirits. To them and to future African American males who attend this and other predominantly White universities I leave them with these words by Marcus Garvey's: *Up you mighty race; you will accomplish what you will.*

REFERENCES

Allen, W.R. (1992). The color of success: African American college student outcomes at

predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities.

Harvard Educational Review, 62 (1), 26-44.

Akbar, N. (1994). *Light from ancient Africa.* Tallahassee: Mind Productions.

Anson, R.S. (1998). *Best intentions: The education and killing of Edmund Perry.*

New York: Random House.

Asante, M. K. (1992). *Kemet, afrocentricity, and knowledge.* Trenton: African World

Press.

Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited.*

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Azibo, D.A. (1996). *African psychology in historical perspective and related*

commentary. Trenton, N.J.: African World Press.

Berman, S.L., Kurtines, W.M., Silverman, W.K., Serafini, L.T. (1996).The impact

of exposure to crime and violence on urban youth. *American journal of*

orthopsychiatry, Vol. 66(3), pp. 329-336.

Blackwell, J.E. (1987). Mentoring and networking among Blacks. In A. Pruitt

(Ed.), *In pursuit of equality in higher education.* New York: General Hall.

Clark, K.B.& Clark, M.P. (1939). The development of consciousness of self and the

emergence of racial identification in Negro pre-school children. *Journal of Social*

Psychology, vol. 10, pp. 591-599.

Corbin, K. & Pruitt R. (1997). Who am I? The development of the African American

      Male Identity. In Vernon Polite (Ed.) *African American males in school and*

      society: Practices and policies for effective education .New York : Teacher

      College Press.

Cronbach, L.J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika,*

      Vol. 16, 297-334.

Cross, W. (1971). Negro-to-Black conversion experience. *Black World*, vol. 20, pp. 13-

      27.

Cross, W. (1971). *Shades of Black*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Cross, W.E., Jr. (1995). The psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross model.

      In J.G. Ponterotto, J.M. Casas, L.A. Suzuki, & C.M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of*

      multicultural counseling (pp. 93-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cross, W.E., Vandiver, B. (2001). Nigrescence theory: Current status and challenges for

      the future. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Developing*, Vol. 29(3), July,

      pp. 201-213.

Elligan, D., Utsey, S. (1999). Utility of an African-centered support group for African

      American men confronting societal racism and oppression. *Cultural Diversity &*

      Ethnic Minority Psychology, Vol. 5(2), May 1999, pp.159-165.

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

Feagin, J. & O'Brien, E. (2003). *White men on race; Power, privilege, and the shaping*

of cultural consciousness. Boston: Beacon Press.

Feagin, J.R., Vera, H., & Imani, N.O. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students*

      at a White university. New York: Routledge.

Ford, D.Y. (1996). Perceptions and attitudes of Black students toward schools,

      Achievement and other educational variables. *Child Development,* Vol. 67 (3),

      June. pp. 1141-1152.

Franklin, A.J. (2000). Invisibility syndrome: A clinical model of the effects of racism

      on African American males. *Journal of orthopsychiatry,* Vol. 70(1), 33-41.

Gibbs, H. (1989). *Minorities in American society.* New York: Van Nostrand Company.

Grier, W.H. & Cobbs, P. M. (1968).*Black rage.* New York: Basic Books, Inc..

Griffin, O.T. (1992). The impacts of academic and social integration for Black

      students in higher education. In M. Lang & C. Fords (Eds.), *Strategies for*

      retaining minority students in higher education. Springfield : Charles C. Thomas.

Gurin, P. & Epps, E. (1975). *Black consciousness, identity, and achievement; A study*

      Of students in historically Black colleges. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Hacker, A. (1992). *Two nations: Black and White, separate, hostile, unequal.*

      New York: Scribner's.

Helms, J. (1990). *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research and practice.*

      College Park: University of Maryland.

Helms, K.E. (1989). Considering some methodological issues in racial identity

      Counseling research. *Counseling Psychologist.* Vol. 17 (2), April, pp. 227-252.

Horowitz, R. (1939). Racial aspects of self-identification in nursery school children.

      Journal of Psychology, vol. 7, pp. 91-99.

Irvine, J.J. (1990). Cross cultural competency and multicultural teacher education.

      Review of Educational Research, Vol, 70(1), Spring.pp.3-24.

Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health; A report to the staff director Jack R. Ewalt*. New York: Basic Books.

Jones, J.M. (1997). *Prejudice and racism.* New York:McGraw-Hill

Kambon, K.K. (1998). *African-Black psychology in the American context: An African-centered approach.* Tallahassee: Nubian Nation Publications.

Karenga, M. (2002). *Introduction to Black Studies.* Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press.

Kirven, S. (1999). *African Americans: Faces of success*. New York: Harper.

Lalonde, R.N., Majumder, S., & Parris, R.D. (1995). Preferred responses to situation of housing and employment discrimination. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology,* 25, 1105-1119.

Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* New York: Springer.

Lomotey, K. (1990). *The retention of African American students: The effects of institutional arrangements in higher education* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 333).

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

Meristakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Merriam. S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Merton, R., Kendall, M.A. (1946). *Mass persuasion: The social psychology of a war bond drive*. New York: Harper.

Mincy, T. (1994). Black youth development: The underreported story. *Focus,* Vol. 22 (2).

Murphy, G. & Murphy, L.B. (1931). *Experimental social psychology.* New York: Harper.

Nobles, W.W. (1986). *African psychology: Towards its reclamation, reascension and revitalization.* Oakland: Black Family Institute.

Otis-Graham, L. (2000). *Our kind of people: Inside America's Black upper class.* New York: Harper Perennial.

Pascarella, E. T. , & Terenzini, P.T. (1980). Predicting freshman persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *Journal of higher education,* 51, 60-75.

Phinney, J.S., Lochner, B.T., Murphy, R. (1990). Ethnic identity development and psychological adjustment in adolescence. In Larry E. Davis (Ed.), *Ethnic issues in adolescent mental health.* pp. 53-72.

Pierce, C. (1986). Suppressed anger and blood pressure: The effects of race, sex, social class, obesity and age. *Psychosomatic medicine,* Vol. 48(1), pp. 430-436.

Plummer, D.L., Slane, S. (1996). Patterns of coping in racially stressful situations. *The journal of Black psychology,* Vol. 22(3), pp. 302-315.

Pope, M.Q. (2000). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Polite, V.C., Davis, J.E. (1999). *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education.* New York: Teacher College Press.

Ramseur, H. (1991). Psychological healthy Black adults. In Reginald Jones (Ed.) *Black Psychology* (3rd edition). pp. 353-378.

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

Stillion, H. & Noviello, F. (2001). *African American males in America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Stevenson, H.C. (2002). Wrestling with destiny: The cultural socialization of anger and healing in African American Males. *Journal of psychology and Christianity,* 21, 3: 357-364.

Tajfel, H. (1978). *The social psychology of minorities.* New York: Minority Rights Group.

Thorn, G.R., Sarata, B. (1998). Psychotherapy with African American men: What we know and what we need to know. *Journal of multicultural counseling and development,* Vol. 26 (4), pp. 240-253.

Tillman, L. (1995). *African American faculty mentoring in predominantly White Institutions.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Tinto, V.(1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Utsey, O., Ponterotto, J.G., Reynolds, A.L., Cancelli, A.A. (2000). Racial discrimination, coping, life satisfaction, and self-esteem among African Americans. *Journal of Counseling and Development,* Vol. 78(1), pp.72-82.

Ustey, S. & Payne, Y. (2000). Race –related stress, quality of life indicators, and life satisfaction among elderly African Americans. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology,* Vol. 8 (3), August. pp. 224-233.

Utsey, S. & Ponterotto, J. (2000). Elderly African Americans and coping strategies. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, Vol. 8 (4), October. pp. 135-144.

Vandiver, B.J., Cross, W.E. Jr., Worrell, F.C., & Fhagen-Smith, P.E. (2002) Validating the Cross Racial Identity Scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 49,* 71-85.

Vann Lynch, R. (1999). *Mentoring and 'others': The mentoring experiences of African American students in predominantly White institutions of higher education.* Unpublished dissertation proposal, The Ohio State University.

Veroff, D. Douvan, S. & Kulka, S. (1981) *The inner American*. New York: Harper.

Welsing, F.C. (1991). *The Isis papers: The keys to the colors.* Chicago: Third World Press.

White, J. (1984). *The psychology of Blacks.* New York: Prentice-Hall.

White, J. & Parham, T.A. (1990). *The psychology of Blacks.* New York: Prentice-Hall.

Williams. R. (1995/96). Biblio-mentors: Autobiography as a tool for counseling African American males. *Journal of African American Men*, Vol. 1 (3), pp. 73-83.

Wilson, A. N. (1981). The psychological development of the Black child. *Black Books Bulletin,* 7, 2:8-14.

Wilson, K.B. (1994). Developing a freshmen mentoring program: A small college experience. In M.A. Wunsch (Ed.), *Mentoring revisited: Making an impact on individuals and institutions* (Vol. 57, pp. 47-52). San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Worrell, F.C., Cross, W.E., & Vandiver, B.J. (2001). Nigrescence theory: Current status and challenges for the future. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development,* 29, 201-213.

Wright, B.E. (1981). Black suicide: Lynching by any other name is still lynching. *Black Books Bulletin,* 7, 2:15-17.

Zaff, J.F. (1999). *Ethnic identity and definitions of success among African American men: An ecological examination.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

CONSENT LETTER

May 20, 2003

Dear Fellow Student:

I am writing this letter to invite your participation in a study concerned with the academic and social coping strategies used by African American male students while they are attending predominantly White universities. The purpose will be to derive implications that universities may use to provide a research-based foundation for developing academic and counseling interventions to help African American male students more effectively navigate their educational experiences while in school. A major goal of this study, then, will be to use the information you provide to make recommendations regarding how universities may better structure and implement efforts to provide appropriate programs and other support services for current and perspective African American male students. Another goal is to assist you, an African American male student, in understanding yourself better and how to use this understanding to help you achieve maximum benefits from your studies.

Information for this study will be gathered from a self-report instrument on racial identity that you will complete and three focus group interviews in which you will participate. The self-report instrument will take approximately 15-20 minutes for you to complete; its administration will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. The focus groups, which will be audio- and videotaped, will also be arranged to occur at a time convenient to your schedule and that of the other participants. The three focus groups will last approximately one hour; refreshments will be served.

The confidentiality of your participation will be protected by the use of a pseudonym that you will develop and use when you are participating in the focus groups and by a code that I will develop to designate your self-report instrument. The pseudonym and code will only be known by my major professor and me; all information gathered from you will be destroyed by me on or before December 31, 2003.

Please let me know by of your decision to participate by returning one copy of the enclosed **Consent Form** to me by June 30, 2003. I will then contact you and the other participants to schedule a convenient time for your completion of the self-report instrument and for the three focus group interviews. Please feel free to contact me at any time by telephone (706) 546-9490 or by e-mail ebridges@uga.edu, if you have any issues or concerns about the study and your participation in it.

It is my sincere hope that you will agree to participate in this study and that you will find it to be beneficial for you personally as well as for future African American male students.

Sincerely,

Eric M. Bridges, Researcher
Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Psychology

Enclosure.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Consent form

I agree to participate in this research study entitled, "Racial identity development and coping strategies of African American males at a predominantly White university", which is being conducted by Eric M. Bridges, a doctoral student in Educational Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. Mary M. Frasier, Director of the Research and Instructional Center, The University of Georgia, G-4F Aderhold Hall, (706) 542-5106. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time. I understand that my results will be removed from the research records or destroyed upon my request.

The following points have been explained to me:

1) The reason for the research is to gain a better understanding of the "academic", "social and psychological" coping behaviors of African American male students who are enrolled in academic programs at The University of Georgia.

2) My participation in this study may help The University of Georgia in the development of programs and services designed to more effectively recruit and retain current and prospective African American male students.

3) My participation in this study may help me to learn more about myself that could be helpful in my gaining the most from my experience at The University of Georgia.

4) I understand that if I decide not to participate in this study my nonparticipation will not affect my degree completion nor will it affect any of the services that I currently receive at The University of Georgia.

5) I understand that I will be asked to complete a racial identity instrument and to participate in three focus groups concerned with issues related to the academic and social coping behaviors of African American male graduate students enrolled in programs at a predominantly White university.

6) I understand that a code number will be used to identify my completed racial identity scale, which will take 15- 20 minutes to complete. A pseudonym, chosen by me, will be used during the audio and videotaped focus groups, which will last for 60 minutes. Only Eric Bridges and his major professor will have access to my pseudonym and code number. All information pertaining to my participation will be destroyed on or before December 31, 2003.

7) I understand that Eric Bridges will be available to me at any time during this study to answer any questions or concerns that I might have and that I can contact him by telephone at (706) 546-9490 or by e-mail at ebridges@uga.edu. I further understand that Eric Bridges will be available at the end of the study to me for debriefing for if I desire.

8) I understand that results of this study will not be released in any individually identifiable form to other students, faculty, or staff without prior consent, unless required by law.

Please sign two copies of the consent form. I will keep one copy for myself and return the other to Eric Bridges.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date   Signature of Researcher   Date
                                                Telephone Number-546-9490
                                                Email-ebridges@uga.edu

    Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What have your experiences been like at the University?
2. Describe what it is like for you at the University?
3. Is the University a welcoming place for African American males?
4. Describe a stressful experience that has happened to you since you have been at the University. How did it emerge? What did you do to deal with the stress?
5. Is there anything that you do on a regular basis to deal with stress?
6. Are there any not so positive things that you may engage in to deal with stress?
7. What are your relationships like with White students?
8. What are your relationships like with Black students?
9. What are your relationships like with other students of color?
10. What are your relationships like with faculty?
11. What advice would you all give to other African American males who are considering enrolling at this University?