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THE EFFECTS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOLESCENTS

by

Andre Rubin Fields

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Doctoral Committee:

Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D., Chair
Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D.
Douglas V. Davidson, Ph.D.

THE EFFECTS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ADOLESCENTS

Andre Rubin Fields, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2014

In the most recent decade, there has been a spiraling national trend of academic underachievement on the part of African American male adolescents. The empirical purpose of this study was to investigate what role, if any, systemic racism may be playing in the growing epidemic of academic underachievement in African American male adolescents. The results of the analyses utilized in this study found that there were significant correlations between perceptions of racism, coping behavior utilization, and psychological dysfunction. Specifically, canonical correlation analysis found that elevated levels of Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress leads to increased use of Emotion-Based Coping behaviors and decreased implementation of Avoidant-Focused and Task-Related Coping behaviors. Furthermore, canonical correlation analysis also found that Emotion-Based Coping and Cultural Mistrust were both associated with higher levels of Psychological Dysfunction (Anxiety and Depression). Finally, hierarchical regression analysis found that participant levels of Cultural Mistrust are related to Academic Achievement. In contrast, Psychological Dysfunction was not found to be significantly related to Academic Achievement. The findings of this research ultimately suggest that African American male perceptions of systemic racism indeed correlate with academic achievement. The results of this study

provide empirical evidence which warrants an intentional effort on the part of educators, therapists, and social scientists to purposefully construct contextualized models and culturally appropriate strategies that will psychologically empower African American male adolescents and reverse this population's trend of academic underachievement. Implications for educators, therapists, and social scientists are presented in this paper.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated with loving memories to Dr. Lonnie Earl Duncan. Your faith in my ability and your enduring support made all the difference to me and my family. Thanks for allowing God to use you and thanks for your willingness to give me a chance!

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An eternally appreciative thanks goes out to my mother, Donna M. Butler, my wife, Piper B. Fields, my oldest son, Tre'Shown L. Fields, and my dissertation chair, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson. You guys are my heroes!

Andre Rubin Fields

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

White America needs to understand it is poisoned to its soul by racism and the understanding needs to be carefully documented and consequently more difficult to reject.

Martin Luther King, Jr., addressing the
American Psychological Association,
Washington, D.C. September 1967
(Tannenbaum, 1968)

One of America's most profound tragedies has been its transgenerational, racially motivated, maltreatment of the African American race (Berlin, 2010). This steadfast and systematic discriminatory maltreatment has spanned well over 400 years (Boyd & Franklin, 2000; Jones, 1997; Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993). In comparison to every other social group (racial or ethnic), African Americans have had their existence complicated to the greatest degree by America's racially oppressive mechanisms (Gold, 2004). During the past four centuries of America's short history, it has been painstakingly documented that African Americans of all generations have been systematically denied the most fundamental and inalienable of all human rights—*the right and opportunity to engage in an enriching educational experience* (Asante, 1990; Boykin, 1986; Kunjufu, 1984; Lester, 1968; Ogbu, 1986).

Even in today's 21st century, one of the greatest travesties confronting America is its continued reproduction of educationally underachieved and scholastically detached African American male adolescents (Garibaldi, 1997; National Center for Education

Statistics, 2008; Ogbu, 1994; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). America's laissez-faire attitude and unhurried pace toward equal opportunity for all its adolescent citizens has cost generations of African American male adolescents a fair chance at achieving academic success. Specifically, African American male adolescents of the last 400 years, due to various forms of systemic racism, have not had as equal an opportunity as European American male adolescents to access, engage in, and/or experience a quality education. Ultimately, this has led to a legacy of generations of African American male adolescents underachieving in their academic pursuits.

It is arguably the moral obligation and responsibility of this nation to create an environment that is removed of the discriminatory procedures and practices that have both historically and presently operated as obstacles on the African American male adolescents' path toward educational success. This responsibility begins with researching and gaining a greater understanding as to exactly how systemic racism influences the educational trajectory of African American male adolescents.

Purpose of Study

Previous research has meticulously documented the persistent pattern of negative educational outcomes amongst African American male adolescents (Haycock, 2001; Ogbu, 1999, 2003). Related research, although mostly dated, has consistently demonstrated a relationship between experiences of systemic racism and psychological dysfunction (Harrell, 1995; Utsey, 1999). Additional related research has shown psychological dysfunction to be directly related to academic underachievement in African American male adolescents (Gougis, 1986). What has not been determined through previous research, however, are the precise variables that mediate the relationship

between experiences of systemic racism and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. For this reason, the overarching purposes of this study are to (a) determine if experiences of systemic racism affect the academic achievement of African American male adolescents, and (b) identify the possible linking or mediating factors that connect experiences of systemic racism to decreased levels of academic achievement in African American male adolescents. This study will therefore attempt to identify, examine, and discuss the potential effects systemic racism has on the academic achievement of African American males through the mediating factors of (a) maladaptive coping behaviors, and (b) psychological dysfunction (depression and anxiety). Specifically, this study seeks to uncover whether the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors, by African American male adolescents as a response to perceived systemic racism, results in increased levels of psychological dysfunction. Lastly, this study will attempt to determine if the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors and the consequential development of psychological dysfunction mediate the relationship between experiences of systemic racism and academic underachievement in African American male adolescents.

Significance of Study

This study is important in that it will help compensate for the absence of recent and relevant literature dedicated to investigating and explaining the direct effects of systemic racism on the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. By increasing the breadth of psychology's understanding of the African American adolescent male's experiences with systemic racism, therapists will be made more competent at identifying and bringing to a resolution unresolved issues related to prolonged

submersion in a nation permeated with racist structures and practices. This examination can make more pertinent the phenomenon of systemic racism in organizations that provide educational and/or therapeutic services and resources to African American male adolescents. Finally, such a study can be valuable in that clear and definitive information related to the potential relationship between systemic racism and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents can be gathered and utilized to curtail the post-millennial trend of increasing negative life outcomes in African American males.

A Theoretical Framework for Examining the Interaction Between Experiences of Systemic Racism, Race-Related Stress, Maladaptive Coping Behaviors, and Psychological Dysfunction

For the purposes of this study, the researcher has outlined a theoretical framework for examining the interaction between perceived systemic racism, race-related stress, the utilization of maladaptive coping behaviors, and psychological dysfunction.

The African American Male Adolescent's Perception of Self

Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals who are part of stigmatized groups often internalize mainstream society's projected covert and overt messages and images of inferiority (Cartwright, 1950; Erikson, 1956; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Taylor & Grundy, 1996). It has been further theorized that individuals belonging to a group that is devalued, underprivileged, and discriminated against are at an increased likelihood of experiencing poorer self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, self-hatred, and negative attitudes toward the self and the social group in which they belong (Cartwright, 1950). According to such theories and past research on the internalization of racism, adolescent aged African American males are at an increased likelihood of developing a negative attitude and perception about their individual selves.

The African American Male Adolescent's Perception of a Racist American System

Many African Americans report that racism is a primary form of stress in their day-to-day lives (Jaynes & Williams, 1989). In educational, political, legal, occupational, and social settings, African Americans have reported harboring distrust toward European Americans (Landrine & Klonoff, 1994). In addition, previous investigations have uncovered that African American adolescents perceive themselves to be victims of socially invasive stimuli via racially charged messages, images, policies, etc. (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Ogbu, 1993; Ruggiero, Taylor, & Lydon, 1997). These messages circulate and erode at the psychological structuring of these young minds. Negative messages about the self, combined with fearful interpretations of American culture, can effectively strip away the dignity, self-efficacy, and self-respect of these youth. To perceive the self as living in a culture in which one's unique potentials and viewpoints are not genuinely and sincerely valued, respected, and celebrated can leave one feeling irrelevant, invaluable, and socially unnecessary (Harrell, 1995). Such individuals developing in such a climate may begin to align their thinking, feelings, and behavior to the racist messages, stereotypes, fears, and/or expectations that hinder their pursuit toward becoming an educated and relevant member of society (Felice, 1981). Eventually, such adolescents are at an increased risk of attaining decreased levels of academic achievement and experiencing negative life outcomes.

The African American Male Adolescent's Pessimistic Attitude Toward the Future

Previous research has discovered that African American college students are significantly less likely to hold the worldview that hard work pays off and that anyone

can get ahead in life regardless of race (Levin, Federico, Sidanius, & Rabinowitz, 2002; Major, Gramzow, et al., 2002). Such fatalistic assumptions by African Americans are no doubt the result of years of exposure to systematic discrimination. In previous research, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) uncovered that African American high school students perceive academic achievement as being a benefit only to European Americans. Ford (1992) discovered that in comparison to African American female students, African American males are even more likely to perceive school as a waste of time.

In summary, it could be theorized that an African American male adolescent is likely to internalize the messages and images of inferiority and as a result develop a negative self-image. Furthermore, this same individual, due to a history of experiencing racism, will perceive that the world is racist, discriminatory, and unfair. As a result of these previously mentioned assumptions, this young African American male adolescent will automatically generate negative views about his individual ability to positively influence his future and in particular the futility of engaging in academic pursuits.

Combining these three potential mind-sets—(a) negative perceptions of self, (b) perceptions of a racist America, and (c) pessimistic outlook of the future, one could understand how these cognitive schemas can function collectively to produce psychologically taxing situations in which an individual would be desperate to escape. It could thus be theorized that an adolescent aged African American male who belongs to a historically stigmatized group will likely anticipate unavoidable and uncontrollable racist encounters in future life situations. This justifiable negative outlook on the future could then be theorized to cause an African American male adolescent to prefer a coping style congruent with his assumption that racism is unavoidable and inevitable. Finally, and

consequently, as it has been documented, the African American adolescent male is more likely to develop symptoms of psychological dysfunction.

Definition of Major Terms

Racism – Previous research has defined racism as “a system of cultural, institutional, and personal values, beliefs, and actions in which individuals or groups are put at a disadvantage based on ethnic or racial characteristics” (Tinsley-Jones, 2001, p. 573). Other publications have defined racism as “a society’s collective beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to degenerate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation” (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999, p. 805).

Systemic Racism – (1) “Racialized exploitations and subordination of Americans of color by White Americans that encompasses the racial stereotyping, prejudices, and emotions of Whites, as well as the discriminatory practices and racialized institutions generated for the long term domination of African Americans and other people of color” (Feagin & Barnett, 2005, p. 1100); (2) The act of restricting and marginalizing people of color using societal policies, and procedures that socially stigmatize minority groups as liabilities to society (Essed, 1991).

Experienced Racism – Individuals’ perceptions that due to their racial grouping and characteristics, they have been or are likely to be viewed negatively, mistreated, discriminated against, and oppressed by members of other racial classes.

Race-Related Stress – The mental and emotional distress and tension caused by frequent encounters and exposures to varying forms (e.g., individual, cultural, institutional) of racist stimuli (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996).

Coping Mechanisms – The “conscious, volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events and circumstances” (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001, p. 89).

Psychological Dysfunction – A breakdown in the psychological functioning (cognitive, emotional, or behavioral) of an individual (Santogrossi, Durand, & Barlow, 2004).

Depression – A sad dysphoric mood state (Merrell, 2003). An affective state characteristic of depressive mood changes, psychomotor agitation or impairment of functioning, diminished cognitive performance, and a decrease in motivation (Cantwell, 1990).

Anxiety – A cognitive emotional state characterized by discomfort, fear, and dread (Merrell, 2003). Individuals with elevated levels of anxiety display emotional symptoms of worry, tension, panic, apprehension, and sometimes irritability (Merrell, 2003).

Academic Achievement – The “achievement by individuals of objectives related to various types of knowledge and skills. These objectives are socially established based on the age, prior learning and capacity of individuals with regard to education, socialization and qualification” (Research Center on Academic Success, 2005).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to examine and explain the role systemic racism may play in the African American male adolescent’s pursuit toward academic achievement. Secondly, this study will examine if the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors leads to the production of psychological dysfunction. Furthermore, this study will

examine whether or not maladaptive coping behaviors and/or psychological dysfunction mediate the relationship between experiences of systemic racism and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. Finally, this study will attempt to answer the question of whether or not the devices of systemic racism serve as a means of hindering or complicating the African American male adolescent's ability to create and sustain an adequate and workable level of academic achievement. This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Determining whether or not experiences of systemic racism (perceptions of racism and race-related stress) are related to the implementation of coping behaviors in African American male adolescents.
2. Determining whether or not experiences of racism (perceptions of racism and race-related stress) and the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors (avoidant) are related to psychological dysfunction (depression and anxiety) in African American male adolescents
3. Determining if experiences of systemic racism (perceptions of racism and race-related stress) and psychological dysfunction (depression and anxiety) are related to the academic achievement of African American male adolescents.

The hypotheses or predictions of this research study are as follows:

Hypothesis I: Experiences of systemic racism will be related to the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors in African American male adolescents.

Hypothesis II: Experiences of systemic racism and the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors will be related to psychological dysfunction in African American male adolescents.

Hypothesis III: Experiences of systemic racism and psychological dysfunction will be related to academic achievement in African American male adolescents.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Trends of Declining Achievement in African American Male Adolescents

Black men in the United States face a far more dire situation than is portrayed by common employment and education statistics, a flurry of new scholarly studies (Columbia, Princeton, and Harvard) warn, and it has worsened in recent years even as an economic boom and a welfare overhaul have brought gains to black women and other groups.... the huge pool of poorly educated black men are becoming ever more disconnected from the mainstream society, and to a far greater degree than comparable White or Hispanic men.

(Eckholm, 2006)

According to statistics in the most recent decade (Eldermen, Holzer, & Offner, 2006), 72% of African American male dropouts in their 20's are unemployed. Likewise, 51% of African American males in their 20's who have completed high school are presently unemployed. In regard to criminality, 21% of African American males in their 20's who have not attended college are incarcerated (Eldermen et al., 2006). Finally, more than half of African American male adolescents drop out of high school (Eldermen et al., 2006). African Americans have been recently found to have high school graduation rates less than 60%. African American students have also been found to perform significantly poorer on standardized testing instruments (Freedle, 2003; Helms, 2002). Likewise, African American students have been found to obtain overall grade point averages (GPA) that are lower than their European American counterparts (Graham, 1989).

There are striking disparities between the rates of academic failings, unemployment, and poverty amongst African American males and other comparable male groups spread across the American landscape (Eldermen et al., 2006). The previously mentioned statistics vividly account the current plight of the African American male experience. According to researchers (Orfield, 2006), the economical, educational, and incarceration challenges of the African American male have intensified. This current trend of America producing socially unproductive African American male citizens has caused many to consider the current dilemma of this portion of the population to be “*a national emergency*” (Eckholm, 2006).

Summary of Previous Research on Academic Achievement

There has been extensive research over the years investigating the process of identity development during the adolescent years (Feldman & Elliott, 1990; Merikangas & Angst, 1995; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Petersen, 1988; Salts, Lindholm, & Goddard, 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Furthermore, there has been substantial research identifying and investigating the proximal and distal environmental factors that influence the developmental course of the typical African American male adolescents such as poverty (Durant, Cadenhead, Pendergrast, Slavens, & Linder, 1994) and familial structure (Herman, Ostrander & Tucker, 2007). Although there has been previous research investigating the relationship between racism and academic performance (Gougis, 1986), there has not, however, been much recent research related to how the academic achievement of African American male adolescents is affected by their personal perceptions of systemic racism in American society. There has been even less research specifically devoted to identifying the mediating variables responsible for the

empirically proven connection between perceived racism and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents.

Researchers have identified African American youth as being the most likely of all social groups situated in America to be victimized by the insidious practices of systemic racism (Suarez-Balcazar, Orellan-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003). Despite this finding, an extensive review of available literature conducted by several researchers discovered that less than 4% of all published articles are devoted to investigating the experiences of African American children or adolescents (Allen & Mitchell, 1998; Cauce, Ryan, & Grove, 1998; Ford, 1992; Harris & Ford, 1991). This collective failure by researchers of human behavior has left numerous gaps in literature related to understanding and explaining the social and psychological experiences of African American youth. Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) assert that there is a severe dearth of recent research related to understanding the connection between systemic racism and the psychological functioning of African American male adolescents. Other researchers have concurred with this finding (Burke, 1984; White & Parham, 1990).

Prior research has effectively demonstrated that systemic racism has deleterious effects on the psychological functioning of stereotyped and oppressed minorities (Allport, 1954; Cartwright, 1950; Clark et al., 1999; Lee, 2003). Specifically, African American males have been shown to be adversely affected both physically and psychologically by the phenomenon of racism, demonstrating, for example, increased stress levels, decreased self-esteem, and decreased levels of achievement orientation (Armstead, Lawler, Gorden, Cross, & Gibbons, 1989; Broman, 1997; Krieger & Sidney, 1996).

The destructive effects of racism on the psychological development and functioning of African American male adolescents has been documented in past research (Simons et al., 2002). Research has consistently concluded that the phenomenon of racism has tragically impacted the perceptual, emotional, behavioral, and mental functioning of African American male adolescents (Caldwell et al., 2004; Gibbons, Gerrard, & Cleveland, 2004; Nyborg & Curry, 2003; Simons et al., 2002). In 2001, the Surgeon General's Report declared racism to be an environmental stressor that has a direct negative impact on the mental and physical health of African Americans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Furthermore, according to this report, racism puts African Americans at an increased risk for depression and anxiety (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Researchers, however, have made minimal recent attempts to investigate and determine if and how perceptions of systemic racism may be associated with the recent trend of dwindling academic achievement in African American male adolescents.

Defining Racism

According to Tinsley-Jones (2001), racism can be defined as “a system of cultural, institutional, and personal values, beliefs, and actions in which individuals or groups are put at a disadvantage based on ethnic or racial characteristics” (p. 573). Wellman (1977) defined racism as the separating mechanisms of society that assigns advantages and privileges to members of society based upon racial characteristics. Other researchers have defined racism as “a society's collective beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation” (Clark et al., 1999, p. 805). This phenomenon

of racism is both “intentionally and unintentionally supported by the entire culture” (Jones, 1972, p. 117).

According to Gold (2004), no other racial group in American history has been victimized more mentally, economically, or physically by the assaults of systemic racism than African Americans. Recent research shows that African American youth are victims of racist emotions, behaviors, and practices more than any other social group, including African American adults (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). Furthermore, recent research has found that African American males, regardless of their social class, experience routine instances of racial discrimination (Comer, 1995). Such findings serve as clear indicators that African American male adolescents remain a vulnerable and targeted population in contemporary American society.

Defining and Examining the Systemic Racism Variable

Systemic racism has been defined as “racialized exploitations and subordination of Americans of color by White Americans that encompasses the racial stereotyping, prejudices, and emotions of Whites, as well as the discriminatory practices and racialized institutions generated for the long term domination of African Americans and other people of color” (Feagin & Barnett, 2005). Essed (1991) outlined the practices of systemic racism in this manner:

Everyday racism is a process of problemization, marginalization, and containment ... racism puts mechanisms in place that declares Black people (or any out-group) to be a problem, marginalizes them through ethnocentrism and barriers to participation and contains them through forms of suppression such as intimidation, pacification, or majority rule.

Systemic racism, according to Diaz, Ayala, and Bein (2004), results in “racial and economic practices that limit opportunities for employment, housing, education, and health care.”

The following is a brief outline and summary of historical and statistical information that identifies the presence of systemic racism in the educational, occupational, and judicial systems of American society.

Systemic Racism in America’s Education System

Throughout the history of America, African Americans have been an embattled population susceptible to physical and mental mistreatment in this racially oppressive society (Klarmann, 2004). Racially charged educational oppression has historically and presently disrupted the academic progress of African American youth. In present day society, the majority of an African American youth’s experiences with racism will occur in the school setting (Neville, Heppner, Ji, & Thye, 2004). Tatum (2000) asserted that African American students are confronted on a daily basis with both overt and covert forms of racism by students and faculty. In fact, researchers suggest that systemic racism pervades every aspect and level of the educational process (Graham & Robinson, 2004). Kunjufu (1984) and Ogbu (1986) asserted that throughout American history, fewer monetary and curricular resources have been allocated for educating of African American students. These authors also posit that the schools that African American youth typically attend are often characterized by overcrowding and inadequate maintenance. Furthermore, the educational settings provided to African American students, according to Ogbu (1993), are oftentimes “characterized by inadequately trained and overworked teachers, by different and inferior curriculum, inadequate funding, facilities, and

services” (p. 89). The students subjugated to these discriminatory educational settings are consciously aware of and expectant of such racial practices in the school system (Ruggiero et al., 1997).

Irvine (1991) performed a study that uncovered the propensity for European American students to receive preferential treatment from teachers in contrast to African American students. Past research also suggests that European American teachers have the propensity to present inaccurate or biased information to African American students and ultimately unfairly evaluate them (Jones, 1999).

Examiners have observed that African American students are more likely to be suspended from school than their European American peers (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003). The Department of Education and Employment (2001) reported that African American males are permanently expelled from school at an alarmingly higher rate than European American males. In agreement with this finding, Steele (1992) stated, “A recent national survey shows that through high school, black students are still more than twice as likely as white children to receive corporal punishment, be suspended from school, or be labeled mentally retarded” (p. 72).

Researchers assert that as a child goes through the adolescent stage, he or she becomes more aware of the economic and political mechanisms situated in society that may serve as barriers on their individual career path (Grant & Sleeter, 1988; Ogbu, 1986). More specifically, researchers assert that African American students are perceptually aware of and expectant of racially discriminatory practices within their school setting (Ruggiero et al., 1997). Tucker, Herman, Pedersen, Vogel, and Reinke

(2000) conducted research which found that, in general, African American students harbor distrust for educational systems and institutions.

Felice (1981) and Ogbu (1993) found that an African American student's motivation to succeed is directly related to the African American student's perceptions of his or her academic success leading to future positive life outcomes. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) specifically found that African American students perceive academic achievement as benefiting only European Americans. This, according to Ogbu (1993), could be the result of the child becoming aware of the centuries of strategic discriminatory practices that have limited and/or denied deserving individuals from the African American racial group access to varying jobs and positions in society. In short, they are not seeing (historically or presently) hard work and success in academia pay off, and thus they have become disillusioned from the educational process. Ford (1992) found that in comparison to African American female students, African American males are even more likely to perceive school as a waste of time. This finding may be indicative of Ford's further finding that in comparison to African American female students, African American male students put less energy and effort into academic pursuits and also attain lower GPAs than African American female students. In conclusion, Seaton (2003) found that racially discriminatory practices in school settings function as detriments to the psychological functioning of African American students. Tatum (2002) found that racist school environments directly affect the achievement outcomes of African American students. Even though such information has been gathered from previous studies, there is still yet to be a study conducted which identifies the mediating variables that connect systemic racism to academic underachievement in African American male adolescents.

Systemic Racism in America's Justice System

History vividly outlines the unyielding maltreatment of African Americans by the judicial system of America. Throughout the span of the past 400 years, kidnapping, lynching, police brutality, and unfair prison sentences have characterized the African American experience with the legal system of America (Duckitt, 1992; Klarmann, 2004; Newton & Newton, 1991; Thompson, Neville, Weathers, Poston, & Atkinson, 1990). Even in modern history, African Americans have been seemingly marginalized and targeted for maltreatment by the justice system of America (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). McCord and Freeman (1990) found that, in general, African Americans are at an increased risk of having negative encounters with law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, when engaging in similar forms of misconduct, studies have found that African American male students are more drastically punished than European American male students (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Fine, 1991; Nieto, 1991). In further comparisons with European American male adolescents, African American male adolescents have been found to be more likely to receive disciplinary action and/or incarceration instead of culturally relevant therapeutic interventions when navigating through the justice system (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997).

This finding is most likely indicative of a report issued by the U.S. Surgeon General declaring that African Americans are more likely to experience incarceration than European Americans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). It could be further indicative of recent Census Bureau data that discovered 12% of African American males were incarcerated in contrast to 2% of European American males (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Investigators have discovered that although African American

males make up only 6% of the United States population, they represent 49% of the United States prison system. Investigators have also found that African American male youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Fuentes, 2003; Sautner, 2001).

According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau (2000) data, the percentage of African American males incarcerated (12%) was only slightly less than the percentage of African American males who had obtained a college degree (13%). Also, researchers (Hagan & Peterson, 1995; Mauer, 1999; Tatum, 1996) have determined that in contrast to European Americans males, African American males are more likely to receive longer incarceration sentences, more likely to be tried as adults despite juvenile status, and more likely to receive capital punishment sentences for crimes committed against European Americans than crimes committed against African Americans. The glaring statistical accounts of the unequal treatment of African Americans by the judicial system of America are undeniable. The African American youth's added tasks of psychologically navigating the threats and obstacles placed on their path by the legal system is, arguably, an operative distraction to academic achievement.

Systemic Racism in America's Labor Force

From the days of slavery, to the era of 40 acres and a mule, to today's practices of racially profiling employment applications, African Americans have been notoriously exploited by America's labor and economic system (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). In contemporary American society, African Americans have been found to be at an increased risk of experiencing employment discrimination in comparison to other racial groups (McCord & Freeman, 1990). Ogbu (1986) asserted that "a number of investigators have reported that, with any level of education, Blacks have more difficulty getting jobs

than do their white peers” (p. 42). This is most likely indicative of U.S. Census Bureau (1999) data that reports African Americans are two times more likely to be unemployed in comparison with European Americans. In further revealing statistics, 72% of African American high school dropouts are unemployed in comparison to 34% of European American high school dropouts (Eldermen et al., 2006). The U.S. Surgeon General also found that African Americans experience more instances of prolonged periods of unemployment than European Americans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

Finally, in regard to evidence of systemic racism in America’s labor force, Staveteig and Wigton (2000) recently found that qualified African American men still earn less pay than European American men who have similar qualifications and credentials. Likewise, the U.S. Census Bureau (1982) reported that the average income for a European American with a high school degree was \$17,583. In contrast, the same report explained that the average salary for an African American with a post-secondary college degree was \$16,532. Conrad and Lowery (1995) reported that African American male college graduates had an average salary of \$31,000 per year, while European American male college graduates attained average salaries of \$40,000 per year. Such statistical findings serve as compelling evidence that the practices of systemic racism still pervade numerous levels of America’s economic and labor structuring.

Summary of Systemic Racism Variable

As demonstrated through this summary of literature, various forms of systemic racism in America have served the purpose of providing advantageous privileges to its European American citizens and disadvantageous circumstances to its African American

citizens (Tatum, 2000). Furthermore, it has been proven and documented that racially discriminatory practices in American society have had a negative impact on the physical health and psychological well-being of African Americans (Clark et al., 1999). The presence and effects of systemic racism on the African American experience is both appalling and unacceptable. It is the moral obligation of investigators of human behavior to research the interaction between the phenomena of systemic racism and academic underachievement in African American male adolescents. For the purposes of this study, systemic racism will be viewed as a potential environmental stressor that disturbs the normal functioning of the psychological mechanisms (via mediating variables) responsible for the development and maintenance of optimal levels of academic achievement in African American male adolescents.

Defining and Examining the Experienced Racism Variable

Individuals who belong to historically stigmatized racial groups are at increased risks of experiencing negative events related to racism (Major, Quinton, et al., 2002). Literature continues to indicate that the frequency and regularity of these negative events take place on a daily basis (Major, Quinton, et al., 2002). Researchers assert that as children go through the adolescent stage, they become more aware of the economic and political mechanisms situated in society that will serve as potential barriers on their educational and career paths (Grant & Sleeter, 1988; Ogbu, 1986). As previously mentioned, the students subjugated to these inequitable educational circumstances are consciously aware of and perceptually expectant of such racial prejudices in their school setting (Ruggiero et al., 1997). Research has verified that African American youth perceive themselves to be living in a racist society (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Potts, 1997).

Such research has uncovered that 98% of African Americans report experiencing some form of racist interactions (Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999). Such an awareness of and anticipation of unfair treatment by a young developing mind has been shown to result in elevated levels of mental and emotional stress (Harrell, 1995).

Defining and Examining Race-Related Stress

Researchers have found that in comparison with other ethnic minority groups, African Americans report higher levels of psychological stress as a result of exposure to racism (Harrell, 1995; Utsey, 1999). This could be the result of related research that asserts that due to distinctly differing physical characteristics, African Americans are more susceptible to experiencing racially motivated forms of discrimination in American society than other minority groups (Brown et al., 2000). There has been a plethora of research proving that perceptions of racism are directly connected to the experiencing of race-related stress (Harrell, 2000; Jones, 1997). Due to its documented taxing psychological effects, perceptions of systemic racism, in this study, will be viewed as a direct cause of race-related stress in African American male adolescents.

Why Are Experiences of Racism So Stressful?

The experiencing of stress arises as a result of exposure to, or anticipated exposure to, threatening stimuli. According to Hobfoll (2001), stress is produced within the psychological functioning of an individual when (a) an individual's resources are threatened with loss, (b) an individual experiences loss of resources, and/or (c) an individual fails to gain sufficient resources following significant resource investment. Applying this theory of stress, race-related stress could be conceptualized as the psychological consequence of constantly perceiving that due to one's personal racial

characteristics, their personal resources or access to resources will be minimized, withheld, or taken away.

Race-related stress is the direct result of chronic and continuous exposure to racist events and interactions (Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Jones, 1997; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Harrell (2000) defined race-related stress as “the race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (p. 45). Essed (1990) articulated the stress of racism in this manner: “to live with the threat of racism means planning, almost every day of one’s life, how to avoid or defend oneself against discrimination” (p. 260). Such planning, anticipation, and attempts at avoidance and/or defense are common physical and psychological tasks for African American youth (Coll et al., 1996). This type of seemingly uncontrollable, unavoidable, and, to a young adolescent mind, eternally inescapable situation without question produces conscious and unconscious stress within the minds African American male adolescents. The harboring of such stressful emotional reactions could be causative of the recent escalating epidemic of academic underachievement in African American male adolescents.

Psychological Consequences of Race-Related Stress

A young African American mind immersed in an atmosphere circulating with racially threatening stimuli is essentially unguarded and eventually susceptible to experiencing mental and emotional stress-related symptoms. Past researchers have empirically proven an inextricable link between race-related stress and psychological distress, for example, poorer mental health functioning among African Americans

(Brown et al., 2000; Harrell, 2000; Jackson, Williams, & Torres, 1997; Thompson & Neville, 1999; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003); depression (Burke, 1984; Clark et al., 1999); lowered self-esteem (Fischer & Shaw, 1999); feelings of trauma, loss, and helplessness (Thompson & Neville, 1999); lowered levels of general happiness and life satisfaction (Danoff-Burg, Perlow, & Swenson, 2004; Jackson et al., 1997); and increased hostility (Utsey, 1997). The consistently established correlation between race-related stress and psychological dysfunction warrants a study that examines if these two variables serve as links in the chain connecting perceived racism to academic underachievement in African American male adolescents.

Physiological Consequences of Race-Related Stress

The effects of race-related stress have been demonstrated to go beyond the boundaries of psychological functioning, and invade the physiological functioning of African Americans. Numerous studies have effectively proven race-related stress to be an elucidator and/or exasperator of numerous physiological consequences (e.g., Bovbjerg et al., 2003; Brondolo et al., 2003; Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Outlaw, 1993; Nazroo, 2003; C. E. Thompson & Neville, 1999; V. L. Thompson, 2002; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; Williams et al., 2003). The previously mentioned ability of race-related stress to exacerbate health-related issues could be indicative of a report issued by the Centers for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics (2006), which reported that African Americans experience increased mortality rates, decreased life expectancy, and increased potentials for heart disease, diabetes, breast cancer, and prostate cancer. Furthermore, race-related stress has also been found to be empirically linked to the onset of hypertension, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease (Fray, 1993; Krieger &

Sidney, 1996). Finally, African American males who experience increased exposures to racism have an increased risk of exhibiting stress-related physical diseases (McCord & Freeman, 1990). With empirical procedures illustrating the ability of race-related stress to infect and weaken the physical health of African Americans, it is imperative that immediate research be conducted to determine if race-related stress also has any influence on the eventual academic achievement of African American male adolescents.

Behavioral Consequences of Race-Related Stress

The experiencing of elevated stress has been documented to have a direct relationship on adolescent behavior. Nyborg and Curry (2003) asserted that African American adolescents who report being exposed to frequent instances of racism often have life issues related to externalizing behaviors. Past research (Sanders-Phillips, 1999; Williams et al., 2003) has demonstrated a connection between perceived racial discrimination and substance abuse, destructive emotional responses, and stress responses. These destructive behavioral and cognitive responses have been found to result in debilitating physical and mental health outcomes (Sanders-Phillips, 1999; Williams et al., 2003). Past research has demonstrated a relationship between race-related stress and antisocial behavior (Simpson & Yinger, 1985). Previous research has also demonstrated a relationship between race-related stress and poor academic performance (Gougis, 1986).

Living with Race-Related Stress

As previously delineated, African American youth perceive themselves to be potential victims of an overpowering racist American system. These encapsulating perceptions result in the production of detrimental amounts of race-related stress which

affects both the psychological and physiological functioning of African American youths. The challenges of existing in such a reality are without question tremendously overwhelming, and wanting of escape.

But how does a young mind escape such an engulfing situation which is, again, seemingly unchangeable, uncontrollable, and in the adolescent perception, eternally inescapable? How does a young mind, already pressured by the encountering of the already complicated and mysterious stage of adolescence, manage the psychological pain connected to fatalistic perceptions and anticipations of being treated unfairly because of their physical appearance? To investigate this question, social scientists were called upon by the Basic Behavioral Science Task Force of the National Advisory Mental Health Council to place a deliberate focus on identifying and understanding the methods and behaviors utilized by individuals whose lives are daily confronted and disrupted by the insidious forces of racism (Fischer & Shaw, 1999). Scholars have determined that race-related stress responses are directly related to an individual's utilization of self-protecting coping behaviors (Clark et al., 1999). These behaviors or "coping mechanisms" serve as an individual's means for suppressing feelings of stress related to being immersed in a social structure overrun with injustice and deficient of equality.

Defining and Examining the Coping Mechanism Variable

Coping mechanisms have been carefully defined as "conscious, volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events and circumstances" (Compas et al., 2001, p. 89). It is globally understood that African Americans perceive mainstream society as having a negative evaluation and reaction toward their racial group. Perceptions of racism have further been experientially

linked to increased levels of stress (Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000). Numerous studies have investigated the type of coping behaviors utilized by individuals to psychologically manage hostile reactions from other members of society (Goffman, 1963; Wahl, 1999).

Avoidant-Focused Coping

Past research has been initiated to identify the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive coping behaviors. As the result of such research, active coping behaviors have been discovered to be related to positive youth outcomes in adolescent populations (Compas et al., 2001). Avoidant-Focused Coping behaviors, in contrast, have been discovered to be related to negative youth outcomes (Ayers, Sandler, West, & Roosa, 1996). Previous research on coping behaviors has found that low income African American males utilize Avoidant-Focused Coping behaviors as a way of dealing with stress (Chandra & Batada, 2006; Clark, Novak, & Dupree, 2002; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, Henry, Chung, & Hunt, 2002). Researchers have identified Avoidant-Focused Coping as a type of coping that can manifest itself through withdrawal, escape, and denial (Cosway, Endler, Sadler, & Deary, 2000; Endler & Parker, 1990b). Avoidant-Focused Coping is the practice of mentally and physically avoiding or ignoring the reality of a given stressor in one's life. This type of coping includes the individual not making any personal attempts to eliminate or alter the experienced stressor (Herman-Stahl, Stemmler, & Petersen, 1995).

Unlike problem-focused coping, where the primary goal is to modify the stressful encounter or individual goals (Compass, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988), the primary objective of Avoidant-Focused Coping (a type of disengagement coping) is the regulation or management of negative emotions caused by life stressors (Roth & Cohen, 1986).

Avoidant-Focused Coping behaviors have been found to be positively correlated with depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, and maladjustment (Ayers, 1991; Herman-Stahl et al., 1995). Past research has discovered that individuals who anticipate devaluation and discrimination oftentimes utilize dysfunctional coping behaviors such as withdrawal or secrecy as a means of regulating or managing the stress accompanied with these perceptions (Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan, & Nuttbrock, 1997). Researchers theorize that the use of such maladaptive coping behaviors may exacerbate the effects of life stressors (Armistead et al., 1990; Ayers, 1991; Ebata & Moss, 1991). Finally, individuals who implement maladaptive coping behaviors as a means of managing their internal and external realities often report decreased levels of life satisfaction (Rosenfeld, 1997).

Emotion-Based Coping

According to social scientists, individuals utilize Emotion-Based Coping for the purposes of alleviating the undesired emotional discomfort that results from various types of stressors (Gaylord, Noni, Gipson, Mance, & Grant, 2008). Emotion-Based Coping often expresses itself through the venting of emotions, blaming of self, accepting of responsibility for the stressor, and seeking support from others (Gaylord et al., 2008). Individuals who utilize Emotion-Based Coping have been found to be self-preoccupied and tense as well as more likely to blame themselves for being over emotional and are often angry (Endler & Parker, 1988, 1990b). This maladaptive form of emotional coping has also been hypothesized by researchers to facilitate negative self-talk and ultimately depression (Gaylord et al., 2008).

Furthermore, in past research, it has been found that individuals who utilize Emotion-Based Coping behaviors report higher levels of negative affectivity (Compas

et al., 1988; Cosway et al., 2000; Endler & Parker, 1990b; McWilliams, Cox, & Enns, 2003).

The Process of Implementing a Coping Mechanism/Behavior

When encountering stressful situations, a two-tier process of appraisal takes place. The first level, called “primary appraisal,” is when the individual examines the stressful situation to determine the impact the stressful encounter will have on the individual. The second level of appraisal, called “secondary appraisal,” is when the individual examines the stressful situation to determine and explore potential options and resources available for dealing with the perceptually harmful situation (Chang, 1998). Folkman and Lazarus (1984) found that when individuals encounter stressful situations in which the individual perceives his or her circumstance to be controllable and/or changeable, the individual will utilize optimally effective problem-focused coping behaviors. In contrast, individuals confronted with situations that appear to be unchangeable or uncontrollable oftentimes utilize less effective Avoidant-Focused Coping behaviors.

The type of coping behavior utilized to manage life stressors has been found to be directly related to psychological maladjustment in adolescent populations (Compass, Orosan, & Grant, 1993; Kraaij et al., 2003). Avoidant-Focused Coping has been identified as a coping behavior typically utilized by African American males (Chandra & Batada, 2006; Grant et al., 2000). This is concurrent with the previously presented empirical finding that posits that individuals who are encountered with stressful circumstances that appear uncontrollable or unchangeable (e.g., systemic racism) oftentimes utilize Avoidant-Focused Coping as a means of managing the stresses of their environmental circumstance (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). As previously noted,

researchers have demonstrated that the utilization of a maladaptive coping style mediates the development of psychological maladjustment in adolescent populations (Compas et al., 2001; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995; Wolchik & Sandler, 1997). Past research has discovered that individuals who anticipate devaluation and discrimination utilize dysfunctional coping behaviors such as withdrawal or secrecy (Link et al., 1997). Research has demonstrated that maladaptive coping behaviors in response to intense exposure to racism increases the likelihood of African Americans experiencing negative psychological and educational outcomes (Clark, 2003; Scott, 2003).

Defining and Examining Psychological Dysfunction

The research conducted on the African American race has primarily focused on the young adult population and has failed to adequately examine the relationship between perceived racism and psychological dysfunction in African American male adolescents (Broman, 1997; Klonoff et al., 1999). Psychological dysfunction can be defined as a “breakdown in cognitive, emotional, or behavioral functioning” (Santogrossi et al., 2004). Previous research has identified persistent exposure to racism as a factor responsible for the production of stress-related psychological and physiological dysfunctions (Clark et al., 1999; Jackson et al., 1996; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Taylor & Turner, 2002; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). Broman (2000) discovered that individuals who experience racism are more likely to exhibit decreased degrees of academic mastery and increased degrees of psychological distress. Researchers have found that as a result of perceiving the world as being racist and discriminatory, African American men feel less confident, display negative affect,

and feel that the world is not concerned about their experiences as human beings (Ogbu, 1991; Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997).

Due to various other environmental factors that have been proven to be psychologically taxing, African American youth, as a result of the added stresses of systemized racism, are more susceptible to developing mental and emotional issues (Tatum, 2000).

As previously mentioned, psychological dysfunction can be defined as a “breakdown in cognitive, emotional, or behavioral functioning” (Santogrossi et al., 2004). For the purposes of this paper, two specific types of psychological symptoms will be measured and investigated: (a) depression, and (b) anxiety. Both of these psychological symptoms have been documented as being directly related with impairment in school and social functioning (Langley et al., 2004; Stark et al., 2006).

Defining and Examining the Depression Variable

Depression has been defined by Merrell (2003) as the experiencing of a sad dysphoric mood. The effects of this depressive mood state can encompass a decrease in psychomotor functioning, cognitive performance, and overall motivation (Cantwell, 1990). Simons et al. (2002) found that discrimination has a significant impact on the affect levels of African American males. Simons et al. (2002) and Contrada et al. (1999) discovered a measurable link between perceived racism and depressive symptoms. Researchers have found that individuals who hold pessimistic expectations about future life experiences often suffer severe psychological consequences (Scheier & Carver, 1985). In past research, negative life outlook has been directly linked to depressed emotions, deflated self-esteem, and decreased emotional well-being. Furthermore,

negative life outlook has been theorized by past researchers to cause psychological vulnerability through its direct impact on the cognitive appraisal mechanisms within the mind. Depression has been suggested by Beck (1967) to be the result of a triad of negative and pessimistic thinking. Beck asserted that individuals who are depressed are this way because they hold negative and pessimistic views about themselves (unworthiness and inadequacy), the world (unfair and full of obstacles), and the future (difficulties will never end). Moilanen (1995) demonstrated that adolescent depression is often associated with negative future outlooks. In comparison to every other social group including African American females, African American male adolescents have been found to have the highest levels of depressive symptoms (Kistner, David, & White, 2003; Kistner, David-Ferdon, Lopez, & Dunkel, 2007). Researchers have identified a relationship between negative affect and academic performance in early childhood (Masters, Barden, & Ford, 1979; Potts, Morse, Felleman, & Masters, 1986). In relation to the previously mentioned statement, African American high school drop-outs report feelings of powerlessness (Calabrese & Poe, 1990).

Defining an Examining the Anxiety Variable

Anxiety can be defined as a cognitive emotional state characterized by discomfort, fear, and dread (Merrell, 2003). Individuals with elevated levels of anxiety display emotional symptoms of worry, tension, panic, apprehension, and sometimes irritability (Merrell, 2003). Kaufmann (1989) speculated that “the child’s temperamental characteristics, in combination with early socialization experiences and the nature of the current . . . environment, probably account for the development of anxiety-related problems” (p. 334). Persons experiencing anxiety often entertain thoughts related to

catastrophe and impending doom (Beck et. al., 1987). Such persons have also demonstrated difficulty concentrating. Researchers also suggest the internal anxious reactions have a persistent, maladaptive, and debilitating effect on the individual (Barrios & Hartman, 1997; Morris & Kratachwill, 1983). Finally, past research has demonstrated a distinct relationship between anxiety and academic achievement (McIlroy & Bunting, 2002; Rindermann & Neubauer, 2001; Wilson, Warton, & Louw, 1998).

In conclusion to the demonstrated connection between perceived racism and psychological dysfunction, researchers conducted an extensive review of available literature and uncovered that 20 out of 25 reviewed studies reported an empirical connection between perceived discrimination and psychological distress (Williams et al., 2003).

Defining and Examining the Academic Achievement Variable

Academic achievement can be defined as “the achievement by individuals of objectives related to various types of knowledge and skills. These objectives are socially established based on the age, prior learning and capacity of individuals with regard to education, socialization and qualification” (Research Center on Academic Success, 2005). Educational researchers define the achievement gap as an observable and measurable discrepancy between the academic performance of African American students and the academic performance of European American students (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This gap can be observed or measured using a variety of variables, including grade point average (GPA) (Research Center on Academic Success, 2005). Academic motivation is defined as the “cognitive, emotional, and behavioral indicators of student investment in and attachment to education” (Tucker,

Zayco, & Herman, 2002, p. 477). Tucker et al. (2002) found that academic motivation is strongly related to academic achievement. In fact, these researchers concluded that all other variables affecting academic achievement can make their effect only indirectly through the medium of academic motivation. According to Entwistle (1968) and Blank (1997), individuals with high academic motivation achieve higher levels of academic achievement and exhibit lower rates of dropout. Numerous researchers have asserted that perceived racism is directly related to decreased levels of achievement motivation. Harter and Connell (1984) discovered that individuals who perceive themselves as having decreased personal control over their educational endeavors manifest deflated levels of academic motivation. Thus, it could be theorized that the African American male adolescent's path toward academic achievement is derailed through the sabotaging of the adolescent's motivation to succeed by the hands of systemic racism.

Sanders (1997) asserted that perceptions of educational and occupational discrimination have caused African American students to disengage from the educational system. This response of disengagement has further been found to be correlated with poor academic performance in African American students (Steele, 1997). Other researchers assert that this disidentifying and detaching from the educational process is due to African American students' perceptions that the educational system is not out for their best interest, neither is it dedicated to promoting the academic advancement of people who look like them (Felice, 1981; Kunjfu, 1984; Ogbu, 1986).

In direct comparisons with European American high school students, African American high schools students attain lower grade point averages and lower high school graduation rates (Moore, 1987; Steele, 1992). Upon leaving high school and entering

college, African American males have been found to attain lower test scores on college entrance exams (Bok & Bowen, 1998). There is an increasing disparity between the rates of college enrollment for African Americans in comparison to European Americans (Sable, 1998). A myriad of environmental factors have been implicated as being directly related to the apparent educational divide between European American and African American students. Roscigno (2000) asserted that environmental forces such as limited opportunities, racial segregation, and variations in school resources are the fundamental causes of the previously mentioned educational discrepancies. Other factors such as poor role models, socioeconomic status, and varying family characteristics have also been cited as potential factors directly impacting the academic achievement of minority children.

In regard to educational aspirations, it has been discovered by researchers that African American students exhibit higher aspirational education goals than their European American counterparts, yet ironically perform at lower levels than their European American counterparts (Graham, 1991, 1994). This has caused some researchers to hypothesize that African American underachievement must be the result of external environmental influences and forces (Jacoby & Glauberman, 1995). This discrepancy between a student's expected level of academic achievement and a student's actual attained academic achievement is the phenomenon of underachievement (Ford, 1992).

Summary of Review of Literature

In conclusion, the currently spiraling academic plight of the African American male adolescent has generated considerable interest in the environmental forces

connected to this alarming trend. Germain and Gitterman (1987) theorized human development (of which achievement orientation is a part of) as being the product of continuous transactions between individuals and various social elements within the environment by which they are surrounded. Due to histories of systematic oppression and poverty, African American male adolescents have been routinely and profusely situated in circumstances and environments where intense barrages of discrimination and unfair treatment are the norm. The oppressive societal forces of discrimination and marginalization have strategically worked to limit or bar the African American male adolescent's access to the educational, economical, and psychological enhancing resources and services available to other members of the American society.

To date, there is still uncertainty as to what specific mediating variables potentially serve as links which allow systemic racism to fuel or reproduce the national epidemic of underachieving African American male adolescents. Past research has empirically demonstrated the deleterious effects perceptions of racism have on the African American male adolescent's psychological development and academic achievement. Past research has further identified persistent patterns of racism as an environmental force directly related to underachievement in African American students (Barbarin & Soler, 1993; Calabrese & Poe, 1990; Graham, 1994; Irvine, 1990). Past research has not, however, determined the precise variables that mediate the relationship between perceptions of racism and academic achievement. Consequently, the primary purpose of this study is to identify the mediating influence that race-related stress, maladaptive coping behaviors, and psychological dysfunction may have in the connection

between perceived racism and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 85 African American males. Participant ages ranged from 14–19. The mean age of the participant pool was 16.98 years old ($SD = 1.53$). Two participants did not indicate their age on the demographic questionnaire. Of the 85 participants, there were 7 freshmen (8.2%), 9 sophomores (10.6%), 17 juniors (20%), and 51 seniors (60%). One participant did not indicate his grade level on the demographic questionnaire. Of the 85 participants, 7 were 14 years of age (8.2%), 9 were 15 years of age (10.6%), 14 were 16 years of age (16.5%), 16 were 17 years of age (18.8%), 23 were 18 years of age (27.1%), and 14 were 19 years of age (16.5%). The mean grade point average (4.0 = A) for the 85 participants was 2.24 ($SD = .80$). The grade point average by age was age 14 = 2.80, age 15 = 2.10, age 16 = 2.20, age 17 = 2.01, age 18 = 2.35, and age 19 = 2.12. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentages of participants by age as well as the mean grade point average by age.

Participants were either currently enrolled in or very recently graduated from a publicly funded urban high school located in a mid-sized city in southwest Michigan. The researcher in this study used several settings to identify and gather data from research participants. These settings included the Boys and Girls Club of America, Kingdom Life Ministries, Streams of Hope Community Center, and Grand Rapids Community College.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentages by Age and Mean Grade Point Average by Age

Participant Variables	Category	% /Full Sample (N)	Grade Point Average
Age	14	8.2 (7)	2.80
	15	10.6 (9)	2.10
	16	16.5 (14)	2.20
	17	18.8 (16)	2.01
	18	27.1 (23)	2.35
	19	16.5 (14)	2.12

To obtain participants for this study, the researcher solicited the appropriate officials responsible for approving the conducting of this study at each site. Upon being granted organizational permission from each site, the researcher began the process of recruiting participants for this study.

There were three primary pre-screening criteria:

1. Participant must have been between the ages of 14–19.
2. Participant must have been an African American male.
3. Participant must have been currently enrolled or very recently graduated from a publicly funded urban high school.

Procedure

Students who were identified as meeting the above criteria were invited to participate in this study. Identified youth who were interested in participating in this study were given consent forms. The potential participants who were between the ages of 14 and 17 were instructed to give the forms to their parent(s) or guardian(s) to review and sign. Potential participants were informed that if they did not return the forms with their

parent's or guardian's signature, they would not be able to participate in the study. The potential participants who were either 18 or 19 years of age were instructed to review, sign, and return their consent form. All participants were required to provide the researcher with their most recent progress report or high school transcript. All participants were instructed to bring their school-issued identification card as well as their progress reports and consent forms to the testing site for verification purposes.

The testing process was proctored by a trained graduate student. Upon entering the testing site, participants were verified via school-issued identification cards. All questionnaire packets were administered by the trained graduate student. Each envelope contained one questionnaire packet. The administrator of the questionnaire informed the participants that the questionnaire was for the purpose of understanding the life of the typical adolescent living in America. Participants were instructed to provide honest responses to all of the test items. Participants were further instructed to return their questionnaire packet to the survey proctor upon completion. Individuals recruited for this study participated strictly on a volunteer basis. The testing process took place during various times of the day. Each testing period allowed for up to 15 participants to participate. All testing sites were located in a mid-sized city in southwest Michigan. During each testing period, all participants were given questionnaire packets to complete. Each packet consisted of five separate scales: The Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI), the Index of Race Related Stress (IRRS), the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II), and the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS). There were a total of 149 items in each packet. The total testing time for each participant was approximately 30–45 minutes. The academic

achievement variable was measured using grade point average (GPA). GPA information was obtained by reviewing each participant's high school progress report or transcript. Upon completion, the participants returned their questionnaire packet and were given a monetary participation award of \$10 or \$25. Due to the fact that the researcher in this study encountered much difficulty finding students who were willing to complete the survey, the participation award was increased from \$10 to \$25 in an effort to increase motivation to participate.

Measures

The Cultural Mistrust Inventory

The Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI) (Terrell & Terrell, 1981) is a 48-item measure, with a 7-point response format. The CMI was developed to evaluate the degree to which African Americans mistrust European Americans. Responses are rated using a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7). All item responses are totaled and the resulting sum is used as an index for rating the participants' mistrust levels. Elevated scores represent an increased propensity to mistrust European Americans, whereas lower scores suggest a decreased propensity to mistrust European Americans. Example items for this measure include, "White teachers teach participants so that they favor Whites," "White policemen will slant a story to make Blacks appear guilty," and "There is no need for a Black person to work hard to get ahead financially because Whites will take what you earn anyway."

The CMI has been reported to have a test-retest reliability of .86 as well as adequate internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha = .89 (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Terrell, Terrell, and Taylor (1981) reported correlations of .34 and .47 total scores

obtained for the individual items. According to Terrell and Terrell, the CMI demonstrates convergent validity as well as discriminant validity.

The CMI examines mistrust in four specific social domains: (1) educational and training settings, (2) political and legal situations, (3) work and business environments, and (4) interpersonal and social contexts. In regard to intercorrelations between the four subscales, researchers report that intercorrelations vary from .11 to .23 (Sabnani & Ponterotto, 1992). Of the four subscales measured by this instrument, only the Interpersonal (I) and Education and Training (ET) subscales reveal a significant correlation ($r = .23, p < .05$). Terrell and Terrell (1981) explained that this decreased correlation between the subscales indicates that the CMI achieves adequate discriminant validity. In reference to the concurrent validity of the CMI, researchers discovered a positive relationship between mistrust scores on the CMI and level of racial discrimination scores on the Racial Discrimination Inventory (RDI) (Terrell & Terrell, 1981).

The original CMI was administered to 172 African American males who were enrolled as first- and second-year college students. Although the CMI was initially normed on African American male college students, it has been shown to be an accurate instrument for measuring cultural mistrust in African American middle school students (Terrell, Terrell, & Miller, 1993), African American high school students (Terrell et al., 1993), and, specifically, African American male high school students (Biafora, Taylor, Warheit, Zimmerman, & Vega, 1993). The participants in the study scored a Cronbach's alpha of .89 on the Cultural Mistrust Inventory.

The Index of Race Related Stress–Brief Version

The Index of Race Related Stress–Brief Version (IRRS-B) (Utsey, 1999) was utilized in this investigation to measure levels of race-related stress in African American male adolescents (Utsey, 1999). The IRRS-B is a 22-item instrument that was originally normed and validated on individuals 17 and over. Sample items of the IRRS-B include, “You have observed that White kids who commit crimes are portrayed as ‘boys being boys,’ while Black kids who commit similar crimes are wild animals,” “White people or other non-Blacks have treated you as if you were unintelligent and needed things explained to you slowly or numerous times,” and “You seldom hear or read about anything positive about Black people on the radio, T.V., newspapers or in history books.” Participant responses to the IRRS-B require that the test taker uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “This never happened to me” (0) to “This event happened and I was very upset” (4). Elevated scores indicate increased levels of stress responses on the part of the participant when experiencing varying forms of racism.

The IRRS is divided into three subscales or categories of race-related stress: (1) Individual, (2) Institutional, and (3) Cultural. Utsey (1999) and Seaton (2003) both found that each subscale of the IRRS-B demonstrated Cronbach alpha coefficients of at least .79. In regard to concurrent validity, two subscales of the IRRS-B, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress demonstrated significant correlations with the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Karmarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Several subscales of the IRRS-B have also effectively demonstrated concurrent validity with the individual and group subscales of the Racism and Life Experience Scales–Revised (Harrell, 1995).

Although the IRRS-B was originally normed and validated on individuals 17 and over (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996), the IRRS-B has recently been shown to demonstrate validity on adolescent populations (Seaton, 2003). Furthermore, the original IRRS-B has been demonstrated to have high reliability in utilization with African American adolescents (Seaton, 2006). The Cronbach's alphas for the IRRS-B subscales are reported as being .78 for Cultural Race-Related Stress, .69 for Individual Race-Related Stress, and .78 for Institutional Race-Related Stress (Utsey, 1999). The participants in the study scored a Cronbach's alpha of .88 on the Cultural Race-Related Stress subscale, a Cronbach's alpha of .51 on the Institutional Race-Related Stress, and a .84 on the Individual Race-Related Stress subscale.

The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations

The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS-21) (Endler & Parker, 1999) is a 21-item instrument that was used to assess and measure coping styles in participants (Endler & Parker, 1999). This multi-dimensional assessment of coping was systematically developed to provide a measurement of the forms of coping utilized by individuals when presented with difficult, stressful, or upsetting situations. The CISS-21 was specifically designed to effectively assess stress in adolescents aged 13–18. Example items in the Shortened Version Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations include, “Take some time off and get away from the situation,” “Focus on the problem and see how I can solve it,” and “Blame myself for having gotten into this situation.” The CISS-21 contains 21 self-report items that require the test taker to rate each item using a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, participants are asked to “indicate how much you engage in these

types of activities when you encounter a difficult, stressful, or upsetting situation.”

Responses can range from (1) “not at all” to (5) “very much.”

The CISS is divided into three specific coping behaviors subscales: (1) Task-oriented coping, (2) Emotion-oriented coping, and (3) Avoidance-oriented coping. Each coping behavior subscale contains 16 items. The item content for the CISS-21 was both theoretically and empirically derived. Researchers posit that the CISS-21 demonstrates significantly high reliability with adolescent populations (Endler & Parker, 1999). As it relates to early adolescent males, coefficient alpha reliabilities for the CISS subscales are Task ($\alpha = .92$), Emotion ($\alpha = .82$), and Avoidance ($\alpha = .85$). Coefficient alphas for late adolescent males are Task ($\alpha = .91$), Emotion ($\alpha = .90$), and Avoidance ($\alpha = .83$) (Endler & Parker, 1990a). The participants in the study scored a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 on the Task coping subscale, a .79 on the Emotion coping subscale and a .80 on the Avoidant-Related Coping subscale.

The Revised Children Manifest Anxiety Scale

The Revised Children Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS) (Reynolds & Richmond, 2008) was administered to measure anxiety levels of the participants in this study (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978). Specifically, the RCMAS was developed to measure anxiety in children and adolescents aged 6–19. The RCMAS consists of 37 items. This self-report measure of anxiety requires that the test taker give *yes* or *no* responses to the anxiety-related questions. Example items for this measure include, “I worry a lot of the time,” “I feel others do not like the way I do things,” and “A lot of people are against me.”

The RCMAS is divided into four subscales. These subscales or categories of manifest anxiety are: (1) Physiological Anxiety, (2) Worry/Over-sensitivity, (3) Social Concerns/Concentration, and (4) the Lie Scale. Reynolds (1980) posits that the RCMAS demonstrates high correlation with other measures of anxiety including the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC), $r = .85$, and the Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist (WPBIC) (Reynolds, 1982). The RCMAS has demonstrated a positive correlation of $r = .76$ with the Manifest Anxiety Scale (Lee, Piersel, Frielander, & Collamer, 1988). The RCMAS has generated internal consistency measures of .82 in its assessing of 15-year-old African American males. Cronbach's alpha for the RCMAS-2 total scale is .92 with test-retest reliability of .76. Cronbach's alpha for the RCMAS-2 total scale is .91 for males and $\alpha = .91$ for African Americans (Reynolds & Richmond, 2008). According to Reynolds and Richmond (2008), interscale correlations for the RCMAS Total Score and its subscales range from .82 to .90 ($M = .85$). The participants in the study scored a Cronbach's alpha of .86 on the entire revised Manifest Anxiety Scale for Children.

The Beck Depression Inventory II

The Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II) (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The BDI-II was utilized as a measure for assessing adolescent aged African American depression levels (Beck et al., 1996). The BDI-II was developed for use with individuals who are 13–80 years of age (Beck et al., 1996). This self-report measure of depression contains 21 items that require either a true or false response from the test taker. The questions serve the purpose of assessing an individual's experiences with depressive symptoms. The test takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. Example items for this

measure include, “I blame myself for everything bad that happens,” “I find I can’t concentrate on anything,” and “I feel my future is hopeless and will only get worse.”

The BDI-II is divided into two subscales: (1) Cognitive, and (2) Somatic. The BDI-II has consistently demonstrated high internal consistency with numerous populations (range = .89 to .94) including African American male adolescents (Dutton, Ancon, Jones, & Brantley, 2005; Kumar, Steer, Teitelman, & Villacis, 2002; Osman, Kopper, Barrios, Gutierrez, & Bagge, 2004). Test–retest reliability estimates range from .60 to .83 in non-psychiatric samples. The validity measures of the BDI-II have also yielded excellent results. As it relates to construct validity, the BDI-II has demonstrated adequate correlation with the BDI-IA (.93, $p < .001$). Finally, Beck et al. (1996) report that the BDI-II demonstrates strong convergent, discriminant and factorial validity. The participants in the study scored a Cronbach’s alpha of .89 on the entire Beck’s Depression Inventory.

Academic Achievement: Grade Point Average

The academic achievement variable was measured with grade point average on a 0 to 4.0 point scale (i.e., 4.0 equals A). Grade point average information was obtained by reviewing each participant’s high school progress report or high school transcript. The grade point average for the population in this study was 2.24.

Design

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between experiences of systemic racism, coping behaviors, psychological dysfunction, and academic achievement. The researcher in the study employed the following analyses in relation to the following hypotheses.

Research Question 1: Determining whether or not experiences of systemic racism (perceptions of racism and race related stress) are related to coping behavior implementation in African American male adolescents. This research question was examined analyzed using a canonical correlation analysis with experiences of racism as the predictor variable and coping behavior as the outcome variable. Canonical correlation analysis has been reported to be both an appropriate and effective instrument when analyzing the relationships between two sets of variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

Researchers posit that canonical correlation analysis is an appropriate analysis for research “where each participant is measured on two sets of variables and the researcher wants to know if and how the two sets relate to each other” (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996, p. 195). Furthermore, in canonical correlation analysis, the sets of variables being examined on both sides

are combined to produce, for each side, a predicted value that has the highest correlation with the predicted value on the other side. The combination of variables on both sides can be thought of as a dimension that relates the variables on one side to the variables on the other. (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996, p. 195)

Research Question 2: Determining whether or not experiences of racism (perceptions of racism and race related stress) implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors (avoidant) are related to psychological dysfunction (depression and anxiety) in African American male adolescents. This research question was analyzed using canonical correlation analysis with experiences of racism and coping behavior utilization as the predictor variables and psychological dysfunction as the outcome variable.

Research Question 3: Determining if experiences of systemic racism (perceptions of racism and race-related stress) and psychological dysfunction (depression and anxiety) are related to the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. This

research question was analyzed using stepwise regression analysis with experiences of racism and psychological dysfunction as independent variables and academic achievement as the dependent variable. According to researchers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996), regression analysis is stated as being an appropriate form of analysis when “there are several variables on one side of the equation and a single variable on the other side” (p. 95).

In regression analysis, “the several variables are combined into a predicted value to produce, across all participants, the highest correlation between the predicted value and the single variable. The combination of variables can be thought of as a dimension among the many variables that predicts the single variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996, p. 95).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Preliminary Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between systemic racism and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. This chapter will review and summarize the results of the statistical analysis utilized in this study.

This study utilized five separate measures to gather data from the participants in this study. These measures included the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI), the Index of Race Related Stress-Brief (IRRS-B), the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II), and the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale-2 (RCMAS-2). The academic achievement variable was measured using grade point average.

Before testing the research hypotheses, all collected data were screened for accuracy, missing data, outliers, and normality of distribution using SPSS 21. Frequency distributions were examined to assess for potential errors in the entry of collected data. After careful examination, there was no evidence of unusual means, extreme skewness or kurtosis, or enlarged standard deviations.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are imperative in that they provide a contextual framework for understanding and interpreting the multivariate statistics presented in this chapter.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics are critically important in that they provide an empirical lens in which the reader can more thoroughly understand the social and psychological experiences of African American male adolescents who participated in this study.

Systemic Racism Variable

The Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI) and the Index of Race Related Stress-Brief (IRRS-B) were used to measure the systemic racism variable.

The Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI) was used to measure participant levels of cultural mistrust. For the CMI, higher total scores indicate higher levels of cultural mistrust. The overall participant mean score for the CMI was 178.35 ($SD = 32.09$). The overall item level mean score was 3.71 representing a response of “Neither disagree nor agree” to the statements on the measure.

The Index of Race Related Stress–Brief (IRRS-B) has three subscales (Cultural Race-Related Stress, Institutional Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress) that were used to measure the systemic racism variable. For the IRRS-B, higher scores indicate more stress associated with experiences of racism. The Cultural Race-Related Stress subscale has a maximum total score of 40. The overall participant mean score for the Cultural Race-Related Stress subscale was 20.55 ($SD = 10.18$). The overall item level mean score was 1.97 representing a response of “This event happened and I was slightly upset” to the statements on the measure. The Institutional Race-Related Stress subscale has a maximum total score of 24. The overall participant mean for the Institutional Race-Related Stress subscale was 7.89 ($SD = 7.31$). The overall item level mean score was 3.11 representing a response of “This event happened and I was upset” to

the statements on the measure. The Individual Race-Related Stress subscale has a maximum total score of 24. The overall participant mean for the Individual Race-Related Stress subscale was 10.94 ($SD = 6.57$). The overall item level mean score was 2.20 representing a response of “This event happened and I was slightly upset” to the statements on the measure.

Coping Style Variable

The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) was used to measure coping style. Three subscales (Task, Emotion, and Avoidant) of the CISS were scored to determine participant dominant coping style. The overall participant mean for the Task subscale was 58.67 ($SD = 10.62$). The overall item level mean score was 3.68. The overall participant mean for the Emotion subscale was 48.42 ($SD = 10.24$). The overall item level mean score was 3.01. The overall participant mean for the Avoidance subscale was 50.66 ($SD = 10.08$). The overall item level mean score was 3.1.

Psychological Dysfunction Variable

The Revised Manifest Anxiety Scale-2 (RCMAS-2) and the Beck’s Depression Inventory II (BDI-II) were used to measure the psychological dysfunctional variable.

For the Revised Manifest Anxiety Scale 2 (RCMAS-2), higher total raw scores indicate higher levels of manifested anxiety. The overall participant mean score for the RCMAS-2 was 11.58 ($SD = 7.77$) which, overall, is equal to anxiety levels for this sample being “less problematic than for most students.”

The Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II) was used to measure depression. The maximum total raw score on the BDI-II is 63. For the BDI-II, higher total raw scores indicate higher levels of depression. The overall participant mean score for the BDI-II

was 9.89 ($SD = 8.22$) which, overall, is equal to “minimal levels” of depression being reported by the sample in this study.

Table 2 outlines the means and standard deviations for the variables measured in this study. Table 3 shows the Pearson’s r correlations for the variables measured in this study.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress, Institutional Race-Related Stress, Task Coping, Emotion Coping, Avoidant Coping, Anxiety and Depression

Variables	Mean (SD) Full Sample ($N = 85$)
Cultural Mistrust	178.35 (32.09)
Cultural Race-Related Stress	20.55 (10.18)
Individual Race-Related Stress	10.94 (6.57)
Institutional Race-Related Stress	7.89 (7.31)
Task-Related Coping	58.67 (10.62)
Emotion-Based Coping	48.42 (10.24)
Avoidant-Focused Coping	50.66 (10.08)
Manifest Anxiety	11.58 (7.77)
Depression	9.89 (8.22)
Grade Point Average	2.24 (.80)

Note. The mean scores of Cultural Mistrust are based upon a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) on the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI). The mean scores of Cultural Race-Related Stress are based upon a 5-point scale (0 = this never happened to me, 4 = this event happened to me and I was extremely upset) on the Inventory of Race Related Stress–Brief (IRRS-B). The mean scores of Individual Race-Related Stress are based upon a 5-point scale (0 = this never happened to me, 4 = this event happened to me and I was extremely upset)

on the Inventory of Race Related Stress–Brief (IRRS-B). The mean scores of Institutional Race-Related Stress are based upon a 5-point scale (0 = this never happened to me, 4 = this event happened to me and I was extremely upset) on the Inventory of Race Related Stress - Brief (IRRS-B). The mean scores for Task-Related Coping are based upon a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = very much) on the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations. The mean scores for Emotion-Based Coping are based upon a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = very much) on the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations. The mean scores for Avoidant-Focused Coping are based upon a 5-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = very much) on the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations. Values for Anxiety are based upon a sum of Yes responses on the Revised Manifest Anxiety Scale-2. Values for Depression are based upon a sum of scores that range between 0 and 63 0-13 = minimal, 14-19 = mild, 20-28 = moderate, 29-63 = severe. Values of GPA are the mean average of cumulative grade point averages that can range between 0.000 and 4.0.

Table 3

Pearson's r Correlations of Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress, Institutional Race-Related Stress, Task Coping, Emotion Coping, Avoidant Coping, Anxiety and Depression

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cultural Mistrust	1	.39**	.37**	.20	-.28**	.17	-.22*	.34**	.30**	-.12
Cultural Race-Related Stress		1	.76**	.56**	-.07	.13	-.26*	.29**	.09	.20
Individual Race-Related Stress			1	.72**	-.04	.17	-.16	.25*	.09	.21
Institutional <i>r</i>				1	.07	.09	-.12	.11	.06	.08
Task coping					1	.14	.59**	-.00	-.08	.11
Emotion coping						1	.14	.48**	.40**	.00
Avoidant coping							1	.01	.08	-.07
Anxiety								1	.61**	.07
Depression									1	-.13
GPA										1

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Review of Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that cultural mistrust, race-related stress, maladaptive coping behaviors, anxiety, and depression would all be significantly related to the academic achievement of African American males. Canonical correlation analyses and hierarchical regression analysis were conducted to investigate the multivariate relationships between the variable sets. Furthermore, due to statistical power issues related to a marginal sample size, the researcher chose to implement a $p < .10$ criteria for assessing statistical significance.

Hypothesis I stated that experiences of systemic racism (cultural mistrust and race-related stress) will be related to the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors in African American male adolescents.

For Hypothesis I, a canonical correlation analysis was conducted using four systemic racism variables (i.e., Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress, and Institutional Race-Related Stress) as predictors of the three coping style variables (i.e. Task, Emotion, and Avoidant) to evaluate the multivariate shared relationship between the two variable sets (i.e., systemic racism and coping style).

The analysis yielded three functions with squared canonical correlations (R_c^2) of .14, .09, and .01 for each successive function. Collectively, the full model across all functions was statistically significant using the Wilks's $\lambda = .77$ criterion, $F(12, 206) = 1.77, p = .06$. Because Wilks's λ represents the variance unexplained by the model, $1 - \lambda$ yields the full model effect size in the r^2 metric. Therefore, for the set of three canonical

functions, the r^2 type effect size was .23, which indicates that the full model explained a substantial portion, about 23%, of the variance shared between the variable sets.

The dimension reduction analysis gives the researcher the ability to test the hierarchical arrangement of the functions for statistical significance. As previously noted, the full model (Functions 1 to 3) was statistically significant. In contrast, Functions 2 to 3 and 3 to 3 were not found to explain a statistically significant amount of shared variance between the variable set, $F(6, 158) = 1.40, p = .21$, and $F(2, 80) = .430, p = .65$, respectively.

Based upon the computed R_c^2 effects of each function as well as the dimension reduction analysis, only the first function was considered noteworthy in the context of this study (14.4% of shared variance). The last two functions explained only 8.8% and 1.0%, respectively, of the remaining variance in the variable sets after the extraction of the prior functions, and yielded non-significant results in the dimension reduction analysis.

Table 4 outlines the standardized canonical function coefficients and structure coefficients for Function 1.

After a careful evaluation of Function 1, it can be stated that the primary predictor variables in this function which significantly contributed to the synthetic predictor variable were Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress. Specifically, Cultural Mistrust was the primary contributor to the synthetic predictor variable ($r_s = .94$). Cultural Race-Related Stress ($r_s = .62$) was the second strongest contributor to the synthetic predictor variable, followed by Individual Race-Related Stress ($r_s = .53$).

Table 4

Canonical Solution for Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress, Institutional Race-Related Stress, Task-Related Coping, Emotion-Based Coping, and Avoidant-Focused Coping

Variable	Function 1		
	Coef.	r_s	r_s^2 (%)
Cultural Mistrust	.806	<u>.944</u>	.89
Cultural Race-Related Stress	.321	<u>.620</u>	.38
Individual Race-Related Stress	.176	<u>.530</u>	.42
Institutional Race-Related Stress	-.262	.204	.28
Task-Related Coping	-.534	<u>-.718</u>	.52
Emotion-Based Coping	.628	<u>.489</u>	.24
Avoidant-Focused Coping	-.455	<u>-.682</u>	.47

Note. Structure coefficients (r_s) greater than .45 are underlined. Coef = standardized canonical function coefficient; r_s = structure coefficient; r_s^2 = squared structure coefficient.

As it relates to the outcome variable set analyzed in Function 1, all of the measured coping variables contributed to the synthetic outcome variables. Specifically, Task-Related Coping was the largest contributor to the synthetic outcome variables ($r_s = .72$), Avoidant-Related Coping was the second largest contributor to the synthetic outcome variable ($r_s = -.68$) and Emotion-Based Coping was the third largest contributor to the synthetic outcome variable ($r_s = .49$).

The pattern of statistical results further indicates that elevated levels of Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress are associated with increased implementation of Emotion-Based Coping and decreased use of Task-

Related Coping or Avoidant-Focused Coping. This conclusion can be derived from the observed pattern of correlations between both the predictors and their synthetic variable and correlations between dependents and their synthetic variables. The strength of the relationships between the predictors and the dependent variables is seen by examining the standardized canonical coefficients for both sets of measured variables. After examination of these results, Cultural Mistrust appears to have the strongest and most consistent influence on coping style (synthetic dependent variable). Although other systemic racism variables contribute to the synthetic predictor variable, the smaller canonical coefficients for these variables result from strong correlations between systemic racism and cultural mistrust.

In conclusion to Hypothesis I, the canonical correlation analysis determined that the predictor variables Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress predict a pattern of coping that has been empirically defined as maladaptive (Emotion-Based Coping). In this study, maladaptive coping patterns were reflected in the results indicating that when the measured systemic racism variables are high, task-related coping is low and Emotion-Based Coping is high. In contrast, Avoidant-Related Coping is low when systemic racism variables are high. Thus, the first hypothesis was partially supported. As the results of the analysis were generally supportive of the posited theoretical relationship, Function 1 has been labeled “Emotionalized Cultural Mistrust.” This label has been given to capture the intersection between Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and the utilization of Emotion-Based Coping behavior.

Hypothesis II stated that experiences of systemic racism and the utilization of maladaptive coping behaviors will be related to psychological dysfunction in African American male adolescents. For Hypothesis II, a canonical correlation analysis was conducted using four systemic racism variables (Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Institutional Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress) and three coping style variables (Task, Emotion, and Avoidant) as predictors of the two psychological dysfunction variables (Anxiety and Depression) to evaluate the multivariate shared relationship between the two variable sets (i.e., systemic racism and psychological dysfunction).

The analysis yielded two functions with squared canonical correlations (R_c^2) of .34 and .09 for each successive function. Collectively, the full model across all functions was statistically significant using the Wilks's $\lambda = .60$ criterion, $F(14, 152) = 3.15$, $p < .000$. Because Wilks's λ represents the variance unexplained by the model, $1 - \lambda$ yields the full model effect size in the r^2 metric. Therefore, for the set of two canonical functions, the r^2 type effect size was .40, which indicates that the full model explained a substantial portion, about 40%, of the variance shared between the variable sets.

The dimension reduction analysis gives the researcher the ability to test the hierarchical arrangement of the functions for statistical significance. As previously noted, the full model (Functions 1 to 2) was statistically significant. In contrast, Functions 2 to 2 was not found to explain a statistically significant amount of shared variance between the variable set $F(6, 77) = 1.26$, $p = .28$.

Based upon the computed R_c^2 effects of each function, only the first function was considered noteworthy in the context of this study (34% of shared variance). The second

function explained only 9% of the remaining variance in the variable sets after the extraction of the prior function and yielded non-significant results in the dimension reduction analysis.

Table 5 outlines the standardized canonical function coefficients and structure coefficients for Function 1.

Table 5

Canonical Solution for Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress, Institutional Race-Related Stress, Task-Related Coping, Emotion-Based Coping, Avoidant-Focused Coping, Anxiety and Depression

Variable	Function 1		
	Coef.	r_s	$r_s^2(\%)$
Cultural Mistrust	.403	<u>.613</u>	.38
Cultural Race-Related Stress	.284	<u>.434</u>	.19
Individual Race-Related Stress	-.024	.378	.14
Institutional Race-Related Stress	-.093	<u>.174</u>	.03
Task-Related Coping	-.110	<u>-.050</u>	.00
Emotion-Based Coping	.752	<u>.853</u>	.73
Avoidant-Focused Coping	.157	.052	.27
Depression	.317	<u>.790</u>	.62
Anxiety	.774	<u>.968</u>	.94

Note. Structure coefficients (r_s) greater than .45 are underlined. Coef = standardized canonical function coefficient; r_s = structure coefficient; r_s^2 = squared structure coefficient.

After a careful evaluation of Function 1, it can be stated that Emotion-Based Coping was the primary contributor to the synthetic predictor variable ($r_s = .85$), while Cultural Mistrust ($r_s = .61$) made the second strongest contribution to the synthetic predictor variable.

The pattern of statistical results further indicates that higher levels of Emotion-Based Coping ($r_s = .85$) and Cultural Mistrust ($r_s = .61$) are associated with higher levels of psychological dysfunction (Anxiety, $r_s = .97$ and Depression, $r_s = .79$). Anxiety and Depression had positive structure and function coefficients indicating that they were positively associated with Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Emotion-Based Coping.

The strength of the relationships between the predictors and the dependent variables is seen by examining the standardized canonical coefficients for both sets of measured variables. After examination of the statistical results, Emotion-Based Coping and Cultural Mistrust appear to have the strongest influence on psychological dysfunction (synthetic dependent variable). Overall, the pattern of statistical results indicate that if perceptions of Cultural Mistrust and Emotion-Based Coping are elevated then Depression and particularly Anxiety levels will also be elevated.

In conclusion to Hypothesis II, the canonical correlation analysis determined that the predictor variables (Emotion-Based Coping and Cultural Mistrust) have a statistically significant canonical correlation to the outcome variables (Anxiety and Depression). Thus, the second hypothesis was partially supported. As the results of the analysis provided empirical support to the posited theoretical relationship, Function 1 has been labeled “Emotionalized Coping of Cultural Mistrust and Psychological Dysfunction”.

Hypothesis III stated that experiences of Systemic Racism (Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress and Institutional Race-Related Stress) and Psychological Dysfunction (Depression and Anxiety) will be related to academic achievement in African American male adolescents. Hypothesis III of this study was tested using a hierarchical regression analysis that examined the effects of Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress and Institutional Race-Related Stress, Anxiety and Depression on the criterion variable (Grade Point Average). In this analysis, the first block of variables entered into the regression model included Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress and Institutional Race-Related Stress. The second block of variables entered into the regression model included Anxiety and Depression.

The overall regression equation was statistically significant in regards to Grade Point Average in African American male adolescents $F(6, 78) = 2.15, p=.06$. The hierarchical multiple regression analysis found that Step 1, experiences of Systemic Racism (Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress and Institutional Race-Related Stress) was a significant predictor of Academic Achievement (Grade Point Average) $F(4, 80) = 2.63, p=.04$. Step 1 yielded statistically significant results, indicating that the first block of variables (Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress and Institutional Race-Related Stress) accounted for 12% of the variance on Grade Point Average. In Step 2, the measures of psychological dysfunction (Anxiety and Depression) only accounted for an additional 2% of variance in Grade Point Average (F Change $(2, 78) = 1.17 p=.32$). Thus, Step 2 in this model was not statistically significant, indicating that Anxiety and

Depression do not have an effect on GPA once the variance associated with systemic racism (Cultural Mistrust and Race-Related Stress variables) is removed.

Within Step 1, Cultural Mistrust ($\beta = -.27$, $p = .02$) and Individual Race-Related Stress ($\beta = .33$, $p = .10$) each uniquely contributed to the variance in Grade Point Average. Results for regression analysis for GPA are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Effects of Variables on Grade Point Average

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2	<i>Adjusted R²</i>
Step 1					
Cultural Mistrust	-.01	.00	-.27**		
Cultural Race-Related Stress	.01	.01	.16		
Individual Race-Related Stress	.04	.02	.33*		
Institutional Race-Related Stress	-.02	.02	-.20	.12	.07

Note. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine and explain the role that systemic racism may play in the academic achievement levels of African American male adolescents. This study examined the role cultural mistrust, race-related stress, the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors, anxiety and depression may have on academic achievement.

Previous research has empirically demonstrated that cultural mistrust and consistent exposure to systemic racism negatively impact the academic trajectory of African American students (Barbarin & Soler, 1993; Calabrese & Poe, 1990; Graham, 1994; Irvine, 1990). The findings of this study expands the knowledge base on the relationships between race-related stress, maladaptive coping behaviors, psychological dysfunction, and the academic achievement of African American male adolescents.

In this final chapter, a comprehensive review of the findings of this study will be presented, followed by a discussion on the limitations of this study. This chapter will also discuss the resulting implications this study may have on psychological theory, research and practice. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a summary of recommendations for future research followed by conclusive remarks.

Review of Study Hypotheses and Results

Hypothesis I – Relationship Between Systemic Racism and Coping Behavior Utilization

It was hypothesized that experiences of systemic racism would be related to the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors in African American male adolescents. The results of the canonical correlation analysis utilized to investigate this hypothesis found that there was a significant correlation between Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, Individual Race-Related Stress, and Coping Behaviors.

Data analysis found that, overall, elevated levels of Cultural Mistrust, Cultural Race-Related Stress, and Individual Race-Related Stress led to increased implementation of Emotion-Based Coping behaviors and decreased implementation of Avoidant-Focused and Task-Related Coping behaviors. This ultimately suggests that African American male adolescents who have higher levels of mistrust for Whites or White-related organizations are most likely to implement an Emotion-Based Coping behavior and less likely to utilize Avoidant-Focused or Task-Related Coping behavior to regulate the emotions and stress that accompany the anticipation of experiencing an environmental stressor (e.g., devaluation and discrimination). As Emotion-Based Coping behaviors are considered to be maladaptive forms of coping, this finding is in agreement with previous research that has demonstrated a relationship between high levels of cultural mistrust and the utilization of maladaptive coping behaviors (Link et al., 1997).

The specific mediator(s) connecting high levels of cultural mistrust to the utilization of maladaptive Emotion-Based Coping behaviors is unclear. As previously mentioned, past research has found that when individuals are challenged by situations that appear to be unavoidable and unchangeable, they are more likely to utilize

maladaptive Avoidant-Focused Coping behaviors (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Using this previous research as a lens, it may be theorized that, overall, the participants in this study cognitively perceive systemic racism as being an unavoidable and unchangeable threat to their lives. This perceived inability to avoid or escape the harsh reality of racism in American culture may result in the implementation of a maladaptive, non-problem solving, emotion-based style of coping. Thus, it appears that African American males between the ages of 14 and 19 have acquired an internal sense that racism is deeply entrenched in American culture. This internal sense may ultimately erode away at the psychological empowerment necessary to be able to implement a problem-solving style of coping (i.e., task-related coping).

Hypothesis II – Relationships Between Systemic Racism, Coping Behavior Utilization, and Psychological Dysfunction

It was hypothesized that experiences of systemic racism and the implementation of maladaptive coping behaviors would be related to psychological dysfunction in African American male adolescents. Canonical correlation analysis indicated that there was indeed a significant correlation between these variables.

Data analysis found that overall Emotion-Based Coping and Cultural Mistrust were most associated with higher levels of Psychological Dysfunction (Anxiety and Depression). Of the predictor variables measured, Emotion-Based Coping was found to have to make the strongest contribution to the criterion variable set. These results indicate that higher levels of Emotion-Based Coping and Cultural Mistrust will be related with high levels of Depression and even higher levels of Anxiety. This finding is in agreement with previous findings that indicate African American males are more likely to utilize maladaptive coping behaviors. This finding, however, is in contradiction to previous

research that has uncovered the propensity for African American males to specifically utilize maladaptive Avoidant-Focused Coping behaviors (Chandra & Batada, 2006; Grant et al., 2000).

This above finding ultimately suggests that although African American male adolescents with higher levels of mistrust for Whites or White-related organizations are more likely to implement maladaptive Emotion-Based Coping styles in contrast to maladaptive avoidant behaviors, they are still predisposed to experience higher levels of depression and/or anxiety.

The specific variable(s) responsible for mediating the connection between high levels of cultural mistrust, the utilization of maladaptive emotion-based coping behaviors, and the ultimate experiencing of psychological dysfunction is uncertain. Previous research has uncovered that African American youth are the most likely of all social groups situated in America to be victimized by the insidious practices of racism (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2003). It can thus be theorized that over the course of their psychological development, the African American males in this study who perceive and experience higher levels of race-related stress and utilize Emotion-Based Coping behaviors eventually experience higher levels of psychological dysfunction in comparison to African American males in this study who utilize Task-Related Coping behaviors to deal with the challenges of life.

Emotion-Based Coping behaviors, according to previous research, is utilized as a result of perceptions of being powerless to control or avoid environmental stressors. As it relates to this study, it could be assumed that the participants in this study who battle higher levels of race-related stress and utilize Emotion-Based Coping behaviors also

perceive that they have a “holistic lack” of available resources (i.e., racial capital, financial security, psychological sophistication, fraternal support, age-related social restrictions) as it relates to avoiding or controlling their race-related social challenges. This internalized perception can be hypothesized to produce an internal sense of helplessness, which may in turn lead to the implementation of a non-problem solving form of Emotion-Based Coping. The results of these findings and the resulting mediation theory are in agreement with previous research that has found the utilization of Emotion-Based Coping to mediate psychological dysfunction (Compas et al., 1988; Cosway et al., 2000; Endler & Parker, 1988; McWilliams et al., 2003).

Hypothesis III – Relationships Between Systemic Racism, Psychological Dysfunction, and Academic Achievement

It was hypothesized that experiences of systemic racism and psychological dysfunction would be related to academic achievement in African American male adolescents. This hypothesis was partially supported.

A hierarchical regression analysis found that, overall, participant levels of cultural mistrust and experiences of Individual Race-Related Stress are related to academic achievement. Although psychological dysfunction did not yield a statistically significant relationship with academic achievement when entered into the equation after the systemic racism variables, both depression and anxiety yield small bivariate correlations with grade point average. The limited predictive value of psychological dysfunction on grade point average in this study may be related to the fact that participants overall reported minimal levels of both anxiety and depression. The findings of this research ultimately suggest that African American male perceptions of systemic racism indeed correlate with academic achievement. The findings of this study, as it relates to this hypothesis, support

the notion that individuals with high levels of Cultural Mistrust will more than likely experience negative educational outcomes. In contrast, individuals with high levels of Individual Race-Related Stress will more than likely experience positive educational outcomes.

The specific variable(s) responsible for mediating the relationship between cultural mistrust and academic achievement is uncertain. It may be theorized that the African American males in this study may not have been effectively instructed, socialized, or empowered to permit perceptions and experiences of racism, in and of themselves, to negatively impact their motivation and engagement with the process of being educated. It could also be that simply as a consequence of “national stigma and inferiorizing” the African American males in this study who report higher levels of Cultural Mistrust are simply functioning by the psychological principle of “self-fulfilled prophecy.” This study interestingly found that individuals who report high levels of Individual Race-Related Stress are also more likely to experience positive educational outcomes. This may be due to the fact that African American male adolescents feel more empowered to respond directly to Individual Race-Related Stress than they do to the systemic racism experiences represented by the Cultural Mistrust Inventory. This empowerment may be produced by the ability of Individual Race-Related Stress to incite increased focus and effort on the part of the student due to a personal desire to overcome the direct barriers represented by Individual Race-Related Stress.

Limitations of Study

A major limitation of this study includes the analysis of a small sample size ($N = 85$). If data were collected from a larger pool of participants, the complex multi-

variable analysis required for this research design may have resulted in more significant and generalizable findings. Another generalizability-related limitation lies in the fact that all data were collected from African American males ages 14–19 and thus the results cannot be generalized to African American female adolescents or African Americans who are younger than age 14 or older than age 19.

Another limitation of this study relates to the potential consequences that may have arisen as a result of the extreme difficulty the researcher encountered gathering data from the population being studied. Over the course of 3 years, data were collected from various sites, seasons, times of day, settings, and organizations. This could potentially compromise the generalizability of the data as participants completed surveys under the influence of different social conditions and potentially under differing psychological states. Another limitation of this study relates to the fact that all participants participated on a volunteer basis, which could be the result of the participants in this study having similar perceptual and emotional characteristics which may uniquely differ from the perceptual and emotional characteristics of the students who chose not to participate in this study.

Lastly, as it relates to limitations, conducting this study on an adolescent population brings a particular lens to the interpretation of the overall findings of this study. The age range of the participants in this study was 14 through 19, representing a large developmental span. In general, as it relates to researching adolescents, factors relating to brain development and an age-related lack of social experiences may have resulted in some of the participants demonstrating a limited capacity to fully understand the concept of systemic racism. Such developmental factors may have resulted in some

participants not being fully capable of reporting their true feelings and perceptions on some of the instrument items. This possibility would be presumably greatest amongst the younger participants. Also, the younger participants may have had greater difficulty conceptualizing their perceptions of and experiences with systemic racism as they may have lacked the reading ability, language skills, worldview, and cognitive maturity necessary to fully interpret the items on the measures.

The aforementioned potential for age-related response restrictions may, however, be minimal as both the CMI and the IRRS-B have been found to be adequate measures for African American adolescents. Furthermore, this potential for age-related response restrictions may be minimal as both scales only asked participants to provide responses based on past experiences, personal beliefs, and personal attitudes about individual aspects of systemic racism (e.g., “White teachers teach participants so that they favor Whites,” “White policemen will slant a story to make Blacks appear guilty,” and “There is no need for a Black person to work hard to get ahead financially because Whites will take what you earn anyway”). With this in mind, the participants in this study would not have to be able to fully define, describe, or understand the concept of systemic racism in order to provide adequate responses to the individual instrument items.

Implications

Finding ways to psychologically empower African American males to a level that may collectively improve their levels of academic achievement has been a problematic task. This task can be made less problematic if both therapists and educators become more conscious and aware of the impact of systemic racism on the academic achievement of African American males. As it relates to educators, this consciousness can be

demonstrated by educators making a deliberate effort to integrate psychoeducational information, exercises, and activities into the educational curriculums that govern the teaching practices utilized in their learning environments. Curriculums and lesson plans should be contextualized around the experiences of African American males and serve the purpose of building resilience, adaptive coping, confidence, and hope into the minds of this highly stigmatized category of American citizens.

Educators should also provide African American male adolescents with discussion platforms to share their viewpoints, frustrations, confusions, etc., as they relate to living and learning in a racist culture. Educators can use such platforms to teach African American males effective behaviors for perceiving, evaluating, interpreting, responding, and ultimately coping with both individual and systemic racism. Such platforms can provide African American males with a safe and supportive setting to practice newly acquired reasoning skills and coping behaviors.

Educators should also be deliberate in examining their learning environments in an effort to identify potential elements of systemic racism that may be complicating the ability of American male adolescents to psychologically thrive and ultimately accomplish their task of learning and excelling in the area of academia. Educators should be careful to provide African American male adolescents with cognitive and emotional support by providing positive affirmation as it relates to their ability to overcome systemic racism and live a happy and successful life. Educators should also provide teachers with professional development opportunities that specifically work to instill in teachers the knowledge base and skill set necessary to utilize a strength-based approach that identifies

and capitalizes on the psychological strengths and assets of African American male adolescents.

Implications for therapists include an intentional effort to design therapeutic approaches that are purposefully designed to help African American male adolescents become more aware of systemic racism. Therapists should also, as a result of this research, be professionally aware of their duty and responsibility to teach African American males effective behaviors for productively processing perceptions of and experiences with systemic racism. Such therapeutic models can instill in African American male adolescents the psychological skill set necessary to productively cope with and process their experiences with racism (i.e., not internalizing stigmatizing and inferiorizing messages).

Prescriptive race-based interventions and therapeutic models should be strategically contextualized around the race-based social experience of African American males as well as the consequential race-based trend of academic underachievement in African American male adolescents. Such culturally appropriate therapeutic models, if developed and utilized, will help to minimize the damaging impacts of systemic racism and maladaptive coping on the psychological development and functioning of African American male adolescents.

Directions for Future Research

This final chapter summarized and explained the findings of this study. Hypothesis I, Hypothesis II, and Hypothesis III were all partially supported by the results of this study. The results of this research provide evidence that African American male adolescents are negatively impacted by systemic racism, maladaptive coping behaviors,

and psychological dysfunction. Future research should include the replication of this study on a larger sample of African American male adolescents. By replicating this study on a larger pool of participants, the results will be more generalizable. Conducting this research on a larger pool of participants may also result in a more thorough examination of potential age-related developmental differences as they pertain to discerning and understanding systemic racism.

As a result of these findings, social scientists should conduct future studies that explore other psychological risks that may be resulting from systemic racism and ultimately sabotaging the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. If systemic racism is found to produce other psychological risks, which in turn increase the likelihood of academic failure in African American male adolescents, then prescriptive interventions and curricular models can be strategically contextualized around African American male adolescents' experiences with systemic racism. These interventions and curriculums should be purposefully designed to minimize the ability of systemic racism to produce "psychological risks" that potentially complicate the educational outcomes of African American male adolescents.

Future research on the topic of academic achievement in African American males should make a deliberate effort to collect qualitative data on the psychological impact of perceived and experienced racism, on the psychological development and functioning of African American male adolescents. Qualitative data would also expand our understanding of why African American male adolescents demonstrate a propensity to utilize maladaptive coping behaviors. Such qualitative studies that further examine the story behind the data would provide much needed insight on this population's specific

race-based social experiences and their eventual psychological consequences. Future research should also make a strategic effort to research the psychological strengths African American males can utilize to buffer the effects of systemic racism. Future research should be conducted to build an empirically proven, culturally appropriate conceptualization of the African American male adolescent experience. This conceptualization should then be strategically followed by research which examines best practices for facilitating the process of consciously utilizing adaptive coping behaviors in African American male adolescents. Research should also be undertaken to empirically identify effective therapeutic behaviors and psychoeducational methods for fostering resilience and adaptive coping toward systemic racism. In addition, research should endeavor to discriminate and evaluate age-related developmental differences in the understanding and experiencing of systemic racism. Such a strategic effort to identify and understand these developmental differences can provide a framework for the development of age-appropriate interventions that foster resilience and productive coping behaviors which, in turn, may improve the life outcomes of African American males.

Future research should be strategically implemented with the purpose of creating educational curriculums, lesson plans, and extracurricular activities that are designed to maximize the psychological strengths and assets of African American male adolescents. Research should also be undertaken to identify potential psychosocial and environmental buffers that minimize the damaging impacts of systemic racism and maladaptive coping on the psychological development and functioning of African American male adolescents.

Closing Remarks

The final two chapters of this research study reviewed and explained the findings of this study. The three hypotheses postulated for this study were all partially supported. This research has contributed to the collective knowledge base that relates to the psychological development and functioning of African American male adolescents. This added knowledge can potentially assist educators, therapists, and social scientists in the efforts to improve the educational outcomes of African American male adolescents.

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Appendix A

**Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval**

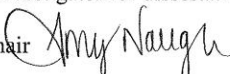
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: March 20, 2014

To: Mary Z. Anderson, Principal Investigator
Andre Fields, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-03-11

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "The Effects of Systemic Racism on the Academic Achievement of African American Male Adolescents" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

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

Approval Termination: March 19, 2015

Appendix B

**Adult Consent Form
(Parent or Guardian)**

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s):

3/10/2014

During the upcoming months, your child will have an opportunity to participate in a study entitled "Social Factors that Influence African American Male Adolescent Development". The purpose of this study is to investigate the developmental experiences of African American male adolescents. The study will take place at Grand Rapids Community College located at 143 Bostwick, NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49507.

As a participant in this study your child will be asked to answer 149 short answer questions. Your child's responses will be confidential. Your child will be required to bring with them their *1. school issued ID 2. signed permission slip 3. signed agreement to participate slip and 4. updated high school transcript. Note: You and your child also have the option of allowing the student investigator to review the high school transcript on file at the institution (GRCC).* Once your child's school ID, permission slip, agreement slip and high school transcript have been verified, your child will be marked for attendance.

An envelope containing 5 surveys will be passed out by the student investigator. The 5 surveys in this packet are designed to gather information about your child's personal perceptions of their developmental experiences. There will be a total of 149 items in each questionnaire packet. The total time for your child to complete this survey will be approximately 45 minutes. Your child will further be instructed to provide honest responses to all of the test items (any and all questions in which your child does not understand or has trouble reading, will be explained by the administrator of the test).

Your child will also be asked to provide general information about themselves such as age, grade, and the name of the high school in which they attend. If your child does not want to answer any of the survey questions – *they do not have to.* You and/or child are 100% free at anytime and for any reason to end your child's participation in this study. After completing all of the surveys included in the packet, your child will then be instructed to return their packet to the student investigator. Once your child has returned the packet, your child will be given a \$25 participation award and have their name entered into a raffle that will take place once the required total number of surveys have been completed. The winner of the raffle will have their choice of either a 32 Gig I-Pod Touch or 2 tickets to a Chicago Bulls game.

As with all research there may be unforeseen risks to participants. One potential risk for participants in this study is that participants may become upset over the content of some of the survey questions. In such a case, the student investigator will be available to discuss these thoughts and feelings after all of the other test-takers have completed their surveys.

There are several potential benefits to participating in this study. These benefits include your child having the chance to express their personal perceptions about how they are experiencing life. This chance to express personal perceptions has been found by researchers to be beneficial for individuals who have or who are experiencing life challenges. Another potential benefit from participating in this study is that other African American males who are currently going through adolescent stage of life, may benefit from the knowledge gained from this research.

Your child's responses will be completely confidential and anonymous in nature. Your child's name will not appear on any of the information collected and stored by the researchers. All of the information collected from your child will be used only for the purposes of this specific study (fulfillment of dissertation and Doctorate of philosophy requirements) and for future academic presentations as well as potential future professional publications and grant proposals. Finally, all data collected during this study will be securely transported and privately stored for a minimum of 3 years in the Western Michigan University archives department (as required by federal regulations).

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D. at 269-387-5113 (mary.anderson@wmich.edu) or Andre R. Fields at 616-734-9779 (andre.r.fields@wmich.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional review Board as indicated by the stamped date signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

If after reading this form you decide to allow your child to participate please sign and return this consent form. If at any time you have any questions, comments, or concerns feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

By signing below you indicate that you are the parent or guardian of _____ (child's name) and that you have read and/or have had explained to you the purposes and requirements of this study and that you give full consent for your child to participate in this study and also give the student investigator to review your child's academic transcript.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

Date

Appendix C
Student Consent Form
(18–19 Years Old)

Dear Student:

3/10/2014

During the upcoming months, you will have an opportunity to participate in a study entitled "Social Factors that Influence African American Male Adolescent Development". The purpose of this study is to investigate the developmental experiences of African American male adolescents. The study will take place at Grand Rapids Community College located at 143 Bostwick, NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49507.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to answer 149 short answer questions. Your responses will be confidential. You will be required to bring your *1. school issued ID 2. signed permission slip 3. signed agreement to participate slip and 4. updated high school transcript. Note: You will also have the option of allowing the student investigator to review the high school transcript on file at the institution (GRCC).* Once your school ID, permission slip, agreement slip and progress report have been verified, you will be marked for attendance.

An envelope containing 5 surveys will be passed out by the student investigator. The 5 surveys in this packet are designed to gather information about your personal perceptions of your developmental experiences. There will be a total of 149 items in each questionnaire packet. The total time it will take for you to complete this survey will be approximately 45 minutes. You will further be instructed to provide honest responses to all of the test items (any and all questions in which you do not understand or have trouble reading, will be explained by the administrator of the test).

You will also be asked to provide general information about yourself such as your age, grade, and the name of the high school in which you attend. If you do not want to answer any of the survey questions – *you do not have to.* You and/or your parent or guardian are 100% free at any time and for any reason to end your participation in this study. After completing all of the surveys included in the packet, you will then be instructed to return the packet to the student investigator. Once you have returned the packet, you will be thanked for participating, given a \$25 participation award and have your name entered into a raffle that will take place once the required total number of surveys have been completed. The winner of the raffle will have their choice of either a 32 Gig I-Pod Touch or 2 tickets to a Chicago Bulls game.

As with all research there may be unforeseen risks to participants. One potential risk with participating in this study is that you may become upset over the content of some of the survey questions. In such a case, the student investigator will be available to discuss these thoughts and feelings with you after all of the other test-takers have completed their surveys.

There are several potential benefits to participating in this study. These benefits include you having the chance to express your personal perceptions about how you are experiencing life. This chance to express your personal perceptions has been found by researchers to be beneficial for individuals who have or who are experiencing life challenges. Another potential benefit from participating in this study is that other African American males who are currently going through adolescent stage of life, may benefit from the knowledge gained from this research.

Your responses will be completely confidential and anonymous in nature. Your name will not appear on any of the information collected and stored by the researchers. All of the information collected from you will be used only for the purposes of this specific study (fulfillment of dissertation and Doctorate of philosophy requirements) and for future academic presentations, potential future professional publications and grant proposals. Finally, all data collected during this study will be securely transported and privately stored for a minimum of 3 years in the Western Michigan University archives department (as required by federal regulations).

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D. at 269-387-5113 (mary.anderson@wmich.edu) or Andre R. Fields at 616-734-9779 (andre.r.fields@wmich.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional review Board as indicated by the stamped date signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

If after reading this form you decide to participate please sign and return this consent form. If at any time you have any questions, comments, or concerns feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

By signing below you indicate that you _____ (your name here) have read and/or have had explained to you the purposes and requirements of this study and that you give full consent to participation in this study and also give permission for the student investigator to review your transcript.

Signature of Student

Printed Name of Student

Date

Appendix D
Student Assent Form
(17 Years and Younger)

Dear Student:

3/10/2014

During the upcoming months, you will have an opportunity to participate in a study entitled "Social Factors that Influence African American Male Adolescent Development". The purpose of this study is to investigate the developmental experiences of African American male adolescents. The study will take place at Grand Rapids Community College located at 143 Bostwick, NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49507.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to answer 149 short answer questions. Your responses will be confidential. You will be required to bring your *1. school issued ID 2. signed permission slip 3. signed agreement to participate slip and 4. updated high school transcript. Note: You will also have the option of allowing the student investigator to review the high school transcript on file at the institution (GRCC).* Once your school ID, permission slip, agreement slip and progress report have been verified, you will be marked for attendance.

An envelope containing 5 surveys will be passed out by the student investigator. An envelope containing 5 surveys will be passed out by the student investigator. The 5 surveys in this packet are designed to gather information about your personal perceptions of your developmental experiences. There will be a total of 149 items in each questionnaire packet. The total time it will take for you to complete this survey will be approximately 45 minutes. You will further be instructed to provide honest responses to all of the test items (any and all questions in which you do not understand or have trouble reading, will be explained by the administrator of the test).

You will also be asked to provide general information about yourself such as your age, grade, and the name of the high school in which you attend. If you do not want to answer any of the survey questions – *you do not have to.* You and/or your parent or guardian are 100% free at anytime and for any reason to end your participation in this study. Once you have returned the packet, you will be thanked for participating, given a \$25 participation award and have your name entered into a raffle that will take place once the required total number of surveys have been completed. The winner of the raffle will have their choice of either a 32 Gig I-Pod Touch or 2 tickets to a Chicago Bulls game.

The winner of the raffle will have their choice of either a 32 Gig I-Pod Touch or 2 tickets to a Chicago Bulls game.

As with all research there may be unforeseen risks to participants. One potential risk with participating in this study is that you may become upset over the content of some of the survey questions. In such a case, the student investigator will be available to discuss these thoughts and feelings with you after all of the other test-takers have completed their surveys.

There are several potential benefits to participating in this study. These benefits include you having the chance to express your personal perceptions about how you are experiencing life. This chance to express your personal perceptions has been found by researchers to be beneficial for individuals who have or who are experiencing life challenges. Another potential benefit from

participating in this study is that other African American males who are currently going through adolescent stage of life, may benefit from the knowledge gained from this research.

Your responses will be completely confidential and anonymous in nature. Your name will not appear on any of the information collected and stored by the researchers. All of the information collected from you will be used only for the purposes of this specific study (fulfillment of dissertation and Doctorate of philosophy requirements) and for future academic presentations, potential future professional publications and grant proposals. Finally, all data collected during this study will be securely transported and privately stored for a minimum of 3 years in the Western Michigan University archives department (as required by federal regulations).

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D. at 269-387-5113 (mary.anderson@wmich.edu) or Andre R. Fields at 616-734-9779 (andre.r.fields@wmich.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional review Board as indicated by the stamped date signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

If after reading this form you decide to participate please sign and return this assent form. If at any time you have any questions, comments, or concerns feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

By signing below you indicate that you _____ (your name here) have read and/or have had explained to you the purposes and requirements of this study and that you give full assent of your participation in this study.

Signature of Child

Printed Name of Child

Date