A CASE STUDY: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH COPING WITH ADVERSITY IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT

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A CASE STUDY: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH COPING WITH ADVERSITY IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT

A Project

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Abstract

of

A CASE STUDY: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE YOUTH COPING WITH ADVERSITY IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT

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The issue addressed in this study concerns whether a positive youth development program, sensitive to Black youth, effectively negates structural and cultural pressures. The environment in this study is important because it is a predominantly Caucasian, university town, where the economic base is high and cultural exploration is low. A qualitative evaluative method is employed which includes interviewing of respondents. Parents account for scrutiny in their sons’ lives, also observed changes in behavior due to the program. The program provided a safe space for Black male youth to relieve stress and discover the benefits of cultural centrality. This study lends support to the importance of cultural centrality and the need for supportive services in predominantly Caucasian environments. This study concludes with the implications for social work practice.

Joyce Burris, PhD, MSW

Date: _______________________

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DEDICATION

First, I thank God who is the head of my life. I give Him all the glory because He continues to keep my family and me. He also gave me the strength to pursue my dreams. I dedicate this project first to my grandfather, Arnold Stephens, who passed away during my second year in the MSW program. He was a great man and great inspiration to my life. I also dedicate this project to my grandmother, Beatrice Lanier, who passed away in my last semester. Lastly, this project is dedicated to my children, Rene and Miles Lampley, who endured the frustrations that graduate level studies bring and who shared in my accomplishment of earning a master’s degree. Let my passion and diligence be a lesson for you.
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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

African American males are having an increasingly difficult time achieving in ways that society deems conventional. They are having difficulty academically, socially, as well with internalizing some of the negativity they encounter. This is problematic because instead of attempting to achieve, conventional or otherwise, most young African American men are adapting to a structure which does not wholly support them; adapting in dysfunctional and unhealthy ways which contribute to adverse and limited life outcomes.

This general problem exists for the majority of African American male youth in the United States, but when looking at the experiences of this population as they reside in predominantly white suburban areas, the problem has a more narrow focus. It has been the experience of this researcher that environments inhabited by predominantly Caucasian residents and business owners, do not provide the same cultural cover that integrated or predominantly Black areas do. Without this cover, child and adolescent development are very different, because race relations and socialization become increasingly important developmental tasks. Additionally, the programs and services that parents use to assist as they navigate adolescence are not present in the community; thus, causing them to travel to more urban areas.

Because little knowledge and expertise concerning the issues and needs of young Black males exists in these environments, parents are left to deal with their
youth who are being labeled as underachievers, as disruptive or as having behavioral issues. This connotes that members of society chose to deal with this population in a punitive way. People are socialized to deal with African American males in such a way because stereotypically they are seen as angry and dangerous. Not only do these negative social constructions add to the unhealthy development of African American males, but living in an environment that is not sensitive to their cultural needs adds as well.

The study will look at how cultural centrality can be recreated in a suburban area giving this population the space to explore an Afrocentric cultural ideology. It will also look at the results of implementing a culturally sensitive, strength based program from the perspective of the parent. This writer is specifically studying the effects of this program on the Black adolescent males, their families and the community; evaluating whether a particular human service program will alleviate or negate some of the dysfunctional trends among African American male adolescents.

This chapter will provide an in depth discussion of the issues that social workers face as they assist and advocate for this population replete with background, a formal statement of the problem, theoretical framework and overview of the study.

Background of the Problem

Both internal and external factors have historically affected the development of African Americans, specifically Black males. These factors begin affecting them in preadolescence as they grow up in various types of environments, all having the same
stereotypical precognitions. Unfortunately, these precognitions were developed at the same time that race relations in the United States emerged. Race became a modern social idea that created a divide between White Americans and everyone else. White Americans, with the exception of indentured servants and factory workers during the industrial revolution, afforded themselves greater freedom and more rights, which placed them in a power over position. Race became a means for protecting the capital and wealth of White Americans while marginalizing minority groups (Hirschman, 2004). Thus, development for those considered minorities became a very different task than development for the majority members of society.

Oliver (1989) assumes that much of the adversity that African American males have traditionally endured is because of structural pressures. Under this assumption, the problem does not lie within American economics, policy, society and culture. Institutions form the structural fabric of society and provide a means to maintain order and prevent lawlessness. However, this structural fabric has also perpetuated racial, ethnic and socioeconomic hierarchies. Oliver continues his discussion with adding that African Americans and others have collectively failed to protect the culture and people from this structure that has constructed racism, discrimination and oppression. They have failed to develop and maintain ideologies that protect solidarity, maintain and circulate traditional knowledge, behaviors and agreements. Consequently, what continues to happen are dysfunctional adaptations to the structure, and limited choices.
Statement of the Research Problem

The problem is that typically, African American students have a more difficult time adjusting to and residing in suburban environments, especially when predominantly White residents and business owners inhabit the environment. The expectation is that African Americans perform as other students or members of the community do, when in fact they will not because adolescent development is compounded with racial socialization. The lack of understanding this and lack of cultural centrality greatly affects their development. There is also a lack of knowledge on how to provide support for this population in such an environment. The knowledge gap is problematic, because not only does ignorance feed into society’s stereotypical perception of African American males, but it also leaves the boys feeling lost and neglected by their own communities. This study will specifically look at the adversity that African American male youth encounter and evaluates whether a culturally sensitive positive youth development program is an appropriate and sufficient response.

The problem is serious for both African Americans and non-Black communities. As more and more African American families are move to rural and suburban environments they must be ready to grapple with the negative social interactions that may occur. They must also attempt to increase the positive interactions. At the other end of the spectrum, there must be an effort in non-Black communities to be more inclusive and accepting of those who wish to enjoy rural and
suburban life. This process is not always seamless. Noguera (2003) adds that when there are groups of people who are being marginalized and discriminated against, society or structural entities should be questioning their roles in the treatment of these groups.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of the study is to evaluate the culturally positive youth development model and determine whether it will be successful in meeting the needs of African American male youth in a predominantly white suburban setting. This researcher will determine if the model assists in areas of academia, racial socialization, perception of self, familial and social relationships. One of the secondary purposes is to alleviate the stress and tension surrounding living in an environment that is not supportive nor is it sensitive to the needs of this population. The other secondary purpose is to make evident the necessity for cultural programs and services in environment such as the one included in this study.

**Research Question**

How effective can a positive youth development program, which is culturally sensitive, be with helping African American male youth cope with adversity in a predominantly white suburban environment?

**Theoretical Framework**

Epstein and Sharma (1998) along with other researchers continue to further the shift from deficit to strength-based research, intervention and evaluation (Epstein, La
Vigne, Ryan, Trout, 2003; Laursen, 2000). The UC Davis Center for Human Services supports these researchers with its publishing of reviews explicating the necessity and benefits of the shift. They agree that using a strength-based approach allows the practitioner to align with individuals and families in order enhance functioning, development of potential and facilitate empowerment.

Epstein and Sharma (1998) provide a comprehensive discussion of the strength based theory as it relates to children and adolescents. They describe assessing strengths as a determination or evaluation of the emotional and behavioral state. The more positive the state, the better apt the client is toward accomplishment, prosocial relationships and contributions to environment. Wachs (2000) adds that children who can associate themselves with positive concepts and internalize positive perceptions demonstrate internal locus of control. These authors also believe that, with an internal locus of control, children and adolescents can contribute to and influence their communities.

Starting from a strength-based position, when working with youth, is much more appealing to families and communities. Epstein and Sharma (1998) and Wachs (2000) agree that enhanced competencies and characteristics magnify the child’s ability to contribute to engaging parents and the community. When they have developed social skills and are able to demonstrate, they can be contributors, community members feel invited and drawn into the process of developing their youth’s potential. Community involvement can consequently be a means to build
assets. Collaborations include programs such as youth chartering, fundraisers and school based extra-curricular activities (Benson, 2003).

DeSilve, Helms, Jemigan, Nicolas, Sass and Skrzypek (2008) posit that the approach can frame the lives of African Americans in a way that focuses on how racial socialization contributes to positive life outcomes. The authors’ discussion emphasizes the importance of prosocial expectations. Families, educators and mentors should hold youth to expectations of academic achievement, which involves working and studying for the better grade and taking positions of leadership in academic environments. Specifically this means running and networking for student led governments, leadership and participation in Black Student Unions, participation on student councils. Academic expectations also include becoming involved in clubs and utilizing problem solving skills when facing detrimental situations that can potentially be pivotal in development.

Maintaining these expectations through adolescent development contributes to the achievement of personal, cultural and community goals. Adolescents are able to develop coping skills and positive behaviors, which can be used as building blocks and asset. These behaviors allow youth to engage in activities that are beneficial to self and community. When expectations included those specific to African culture, youth are able to foster a sense of solidarity and promote cultural assets. These are prosocial expectations, which lead African American youth to social capital instead of liabilities.

The study will examine the stated problem from a strengths based perspective.
There is no way to complete the study without acknowledging the adversity because it intrudes upon the development of African American youth; however many researchers believe that focusing on the strengths, talents and contributions of the client, despite any adversity, not only speaks to the resilience of the client but facilitates achievement, healthy development, boosts self-esteem and instills hope. While these tools have proven useful for understanding what is wrong with children, they provide little insight to the strengths children may have in overcoming some of their problem behaviors. Researchers working from a strength-based approach suggest that using assessments that focus on strengths allows practitioners to develop partnerships with families and children that may contribute to the child has enhanced performance and motivation.

Assumptions

There are three assumptions of this study. The first is that the facilitator of the group is knowledgeable about the concept of positive youth development programs and ways to infuse afrocentrism. In order for this evaluation to be valid, the program must be implemented in the most effective way. This means that the facilitator is knowledgeable methods of engaging adolescents, strengths based perspective and topics which address the needs of African American male youth; incorporating all of these into psychoeducational workshops. The second assumption is that parents are knowledgeable about their youth. They have knowledge of their son’s character, normal behaviors, social activities, and academic work ethic. The last assumption is
that the youth have open and good communication with their parents. When this is true, parents can communicate needs, goals and successes of their youth.

*Justification*

All ethical principles, as determined by the National Association of Social workers are important; however, one primarily helps to justify a research project such as this. This value is service (nasw.org). The profession is essentially founded on service; service that not only meet the needs of vulnerable populations but address the social problem at large as well. This project evaluates a service that seeks to develop the potential of a population and reduce vulnerability. In addition, the results will ultimately express whether social workers can effectively provide this service in a predominantly white suburban community where there are no like services.

This project will also provide vital information for social work research and literature. It includes detailed information about the cultural experiences of African American male youth in a predominantly Caucasian environment. Whether this project results with positive or negative conclusions, it can potentially help parents understand what type of service to seek. It can also potentially help non-profit agencies and educational facilities understand what their African American youth cope with on a day-to-day basis. Considering research is very limited, this information is beneficial.

*Limitations*

One of the limitations of the study is the sample size is small. Babbie and Rubin (2007) suggest that a sample size of one hundred is both feasible and concrete.
This large sample is suggested because it is more likely to be representative of the larger population in a given area; thus making the study more reliable and valid, and giving the researcher the ability to generalize the results. The results of this particular study, however, are not generalizable because the sample size consists of four parents.

The second limitation of the study concerns the participants themselves. The nature of social work is to address issues from a psychosocial perspective examining every aspect of life that may cause discomfort and stress to the client. In this study, only the parents of youth who participating in program were interviewed. In addition, the clients were under the age of eighteen and thus not considered capable to give consent to participate in the study according to the human subjects criteria of California State University. There were no school counselors, teachers or other mentors solicited. Hopefully, the best communication or flow of information existed between parents and youth. The parents’ reports of that information are what this researcher surveyed.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the general problem that Black youth face. Chapter two will provide an in depth discussion of the specific problem. It will review the literature that suggests that the lack of cultural ideology and ill response to structural pressures has prevented African Americans from progressing leaving the population to become vulnerable to dysfunction. Chapter three describes the methodology of the study and chapter four will provide qualitative organized data. Lastly, chapter five
summarizes the evidence, answers the research question, discusses implications of the study and makes recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Researchers who look ecologically at the lives of Black adolescents generally discuss how interactions within systems, both structural and cultural, culminate to form the life of the young Black male. When these interactions are examined closely it is evident that Black adolescents have an increasingly difficult time navigating this period of life, because of the lack of supportive structure, perceived lack of culture, or both. Rose (1994) and DeSilve, Helms, Jemigan, Nicolas, Sass and Skrzypek (2008) note that authority figures operating within the structure of society perceive all Black youth as threats to society. Consequently, these youth commonly experience neglect and suspicion in addition to other forms of racism, discrimination and oppression. Thus, Black youth are affected by these three forms of mistreatment at a crucial time in adolescent development.

What makes Black adolescent development unique is that it must occur in the context of American society, which is still racist (DeSilve et al., 2008; Franklin, 2004). Black teens are exploring their identity and developing the formal reasoning necessary to understand their experiences. Adolescent Black males are also attempting to recognize and incorporate race and ethnicity. These things affect the perception of themselves, their environment and outcomes for their lives. Therefore, development becomes a very different task for this population.
This chapter will review how structure and culture effect the development of African American males. It includes an in depth discussion on how the structure of American society contributes to the disengagement of African American males from many facets of life. This literature will also provide some disturbing statistics regarding what happens when young males internalize adversity, engage in unhealthy activity and therefore become at risk for adverse life outcomes. Lastly, because this study focuses on interventions for Black youth, the literature will review the benefits of using a positive youth development model, which is culturally sensitive, as a method of mitigation.

**Structural Ideology**

Discussing a structuralist’s viewpoint helps with understanding the structural barriers that African American males face as they navigate adolescence and adulthood. Structuralists are normally concerned with institutions, economy, employment, class and demographics; those things that function to organize and construct order for society (Wilson, 1987). Specifically this means laws such as Proposition 184, also known as California’s Third Strike law, which holds criminals committing at least three felonies to longer prison terms (lao.ca.gov). These factors create the structural walls of a given environment.

From this perspective, if people living within parameters begin to behave contrary to the norm or and there is public outcry, then only changes in the structure will treat the problem. The responsibility to treat public upheaval lies with the
structure because it is the cause of the change in behaviors and attitudes. Changes can only happen if there are opportunities made possible or a reduction in inequality within the structure. Furthermore, it becomes difficult to hold people responsible for their behavior because what happens in the greater environment is not under the control of the individual (Noguera, 2003).

American schools can represent larger society in some ways. There are indicators of inequality and discrimination within educational settings, which can include low teacher expectations, lack of Black educators and administrators, concentration on white American history and little diversity in cultural exploration, or expression of academic content (Cole-Taylor, 2003). However overt or covert these factors are, they play a major role in contributing to the widespread perception of African American youth being underachievers. Additionally, as a result, some youth of color may live down to the perception and low-achieving students’ perceptions of their abilities may be further damaged (Castillino, Darity & Tyson, 2005).

There has been much research conducted on African American youth and impoverished environments, and that research provides vital information on the effects of living in a detrimental environment. However, what happens when the environment is socioeconomically stable, but not culturally accepting or diverse? Noguera (2003) posits that many times these environments warrant even more attention because they have the ability to cause more damage than what may occur in ethnically diverse environments. African American adolescents exhibiting behavior and emotional
symptoms to problems with inequality at the core are ignored or stereotyped. Black parents living in predominantly White stable communities believe that the active racial socialization of their children is more critical (Tatum, 2000). They also feel more comfortable and able to adapt to the environment by concentrating particularly on racial socialization instead of change in the structure of the environment.

**Racial Socialization**

Racial socialization, as defined Davis, Herrero-Taylor, McNeil and Stevenson (2005), involves the messages that young African American males and females receive about their ethnicity. It is usually a process of parental teaching that occurs from childhood through young adulthood. Parents help their children to process and internalize coping strategies that assist them with encounters specific to the ethnic or racial group. Chavous, Cooke and Sellers (1998) describe racial socialization as profound and intensive because it involves repeated interpersonal experiences with Black and non-Black individuals. Only this process helps to develop an understanding of the ecological contributors that influence development. These experiences affect development in such a way that cultivates and perpetuates the African American culture.

Bowman and Howard (1985) found that Black teenage males reported receiving socialization messages from their parents related to racial barriers and inequality more so than Black teenage females. They also received more information about incarceration, profiling and negative stereotypes, whereas girls received
messages concerning academic achievement, cultural competence and racial pride. (Davis et.al, 2005)

According to Van Laar (2000), Black males and females make internal and external attributions about their experiences. When they attribute their experiences externally, they direct blame away from themselves and place it on structural barriers such as oppression and discrimination. They also withdraw from cultural norms and values, forming their own or adapting dysfunctional ones. Consequently, they withdraw from structure and culture, which they perceive as failing them. Specifically they withdraw from their communities and withdraw from conventional ways of achieving such as education resulting in an achievement gap (Harpalani, Noll, Spencer & Stozfus, 2001). The other attribution is internal. The results are heightened risk of internalizing racism leading to lowered academic achievement, which affects the confidence level of the individual. This process most often breeds emotional and behavioral impairment.

Cultural Ideology

Anderson (1990) discusses that culturalists are not so concerned with structural factors, as they are concerned that a person being shaped through cultural socialization – beliefs, morals and values. With this viewpoint, interactions through kinship, likeness and collectivity foster cultural norms and can bring about change. This can be positive individual adaptations to a cultural consciousness, or simply cultural mores those individuals and groups abide by. These mores and consciousness shape the
everyday lives of individuals and determine choices that they make. Thus, making changes in structural fabric such as hiring more African American teachers, expanding opportunities or raising expectations will not help the perception or internalization of Black youth as underachievers (Anderson 1990; Noguera, 2003). However, making personal choices to participate in communal learning or participate in an Afrocentric program will help perceptions and motivate change.

From a culturalist perspective, the superiority of whites perpetuated through media, religion and education intrudes upon the development of African American youth. Instead of allowing more healthy and positive portrayals of African Americans in the mainstream media, DeSilve et. al. (2008) observed, only what is most profitable to capitalists is portrayed. What is profitable are African Americans as athletes, fashion icons and rappers (Watkins, 1998). Wealth has become motivation for change and because it is acquired by way of sports, fashion and music, there is a pull toward and steering of Black youth into these areas. The media has particularly focused on the stereotypic aspects, which include Black youth as criminals, crack addicts and misogynists (Watkins, 1998). The culture that is being transformed by society, and the culture many Black youth and adults have adapted to, is dysfunctional. Traditional African American culture no longer exists and for this reason, many Black male and females face greater adversity.

There is discussion of the lack of the development of traditional cultural ideology. Researchers and authors state that there is a failure to create or maintain
cultural traditions and functional adaptations to structural pressures. However, if the ideology of Afrocentricity is incorporated into the development and social interactions of African American youth and adults, then they can begin to battle the unhealthy trends that plague the culture, and flourish on micro, mezzo and macro levels (Watkins, 1998).

Motivation for change in behaviors, attitudes and emotions can be owned by Afrocentristic beliefs. Afrocentrism, as Harvey (2005) describes, is centered in humanism and naturalism. He dates this cultural ideology to the African systems and patterns that promote intrapersonal, familial and environmental balance. Africans are traditionally harmonious and optimistic in approaching and achieving this balance. Thus, when Africans or African Americans are placed in environments saturated in individualistic and conflictual values, they do not thrive. Harvey notes that these traditional behavior patterns have evolved as African culture merged with Western. Humanism is still within the foundation of the culture; however, more emphasis is placed on the interconnectedness of the individual with family and community. He further states that as social workers, community organizers and educators seek to implement interventions; these dynamics must be understood in order for the intervention to be appropriate.

Lee (1989) believes that it is imperative that African American culture is embedded in the helping process. He states that a culturally sensitive perspective can potentially address every aspect of African American life. A cultural approach will
take aspects of African American life that are typically hyper-focused on or sometimes ignored and turn them into educational opportunities. He concludes that in order for these approached to be highly effective they should begin from a therapeutic place of communal guidance, group process, cohesiveness.

*Cultural Centrality*

The broader environment plays a critical role in the upbringing of Black youth. Davis, Herrero-Taylor, McNeil and Stevenson (2005) discuss the psychological effects of racism in predominantly Black areas. They state that predominantly Black environments become protected spaces. They are havens for racial and cultural socialization. Caldwell, Jackson, Seaton and Sellers (2005) add that in these areas parents realize opportunities to explore the risk of accepting and internalizing inferiority with their Black youth. With inferiority comes a malnourished potential and severely limited choice. The results of the study show that parents, living in these protected spaces, conveyed more messages about managing diversity, as well coping with Black male endangerment, antagonism and vulnerability. Black female youth received messages from parents about cultural pride and body image. These environments are vital to exploring all things concerning racial identity, perceived racism and community. Thus, these communities become centers for healthy cultural development and a means to mitigate racial discrimination and detrimental outcomes.

Gibbs (1984) would agree that young Black males are more likely to become entwined with the juvenile systems because of the urban areas they live in. More
particularly in urban areas, the racial biases held by the police force pose a risk for involvement with the juvenile system. It is further suggested that more attention is paid to this population because of the outwardly expression of culture through dress, music and language. Even beyond the neighborhoods, they exist in a society that oppresses them and denies them opportunities based on skin color. Gibbs (1984) states that as a result, opportunities for Black males to advance through education and employment are greatly reduced. In addition, there is a high probability of delinquency and once in the system, recidivism. Theoretically, racism and discrimination have become methods to diminish any sense of centrality, power and cohesiveness. (Caldwell et al., 2008; Davis et al., 2005; Oliver, 1989).

In addition to the diminished life outcomes that African American male youth generally face, they also face an absence of cultural centrality in predominantly white suburban and rural areas. Instead, socially constructed perceptions are prevalent. Black youth are underachievers, lazy and threatening. Davis et al. (2005) adds that it becomes critical for parents and persons providing social support to supply African American youth with this same security available in predominantly Black environments. In the absence of, or in a diminished state of cultural centrality, the effects are much more impacting. Caldwell et al. (2008) expect that racism and discrimination will intrude upon adolescent development in such a way that will feed pessimism. Youth residing in environments where there are no opportunities for cultural development will find it harder to seek and push toward outcomes that are
more positive. Studies have also found that anger, depression and psychological
distress are also responses to racially hostile environments (Davis et al., 2005;
Caldwell et al., 2008).

*Internalization*

The previous section explored the situations that place this population at risk.
Those situations included lack of centrality, lack of cultural ideology, racial
oppression and a process of inferiorization; and because of these conceptual ideas,
discusses the internalization of the negative perception of African American. He states
that Black males are playing a role in their own detriment. Consequently, society
continues to view them according to the stereotypes imposed on this population.
Internalization of society’s perception, however overt or covert, and typing to live
according the stereotype fuels the negative perception.

Curry and Nyborg (2003) found several internalizing and externalizing
psychological symptoms, including lower self-concept and hopelessness, associated
with perceived racism for teenagers. Some indicators or predictors for internalized
racism suggested by the authors are grade retention, chronic absenteeism, behavioral
problems, and decreased social activity.

Noguera (2003) begins his article with some historical and adverse statistics
that African American males face as they navigate adolescence. He states these
statistics verify the risk of diminished life opportunities and declining life expectancy.
Most recent information provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that 51% of all HIV and AIDS cases in 2007 were African Americans. They have the highest probability of dying during the first year of life, and if not dead during the first year, they have the highest probability of being incarcerated or convicted of a crime (Currie & Skolnick, 1994; Auerback, Krimgold & Lefkowitz, 2000). In 2006, there were an estimated 35,314 new diagnoses of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). This includes confidential reporting across thirty-three states. The number remained stable through 2003. However, in 2006 almost half of new HIV/AIDS cases across those same thirty-three states occurred among Black males and females.

In educational institutions, Black males are more likely to be severely punished for minor infractions (Everson, Sandler & Wilcox, 1985) and more likely to be excluded from challenging courses (Oakes, 1985). They are also more likely to be punished with severity, more likely to be labeled with behavior problems, more likely to be considered less intelligent and more likely to be excluded from educational opportunities, or placed in lower tracks (Everson, Sandler & Wilcox, 1985; Hilliard, 1991). In addition, minority children, particularly African-Americans, are less likely to receive the same education as their non-minority counterparts. They are more likely to be identified for placement in special education classrooms (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000), and be subject to lower teacher expectations for academic achievement (Roscigno, 1998).
Young African American males have a very high probability of becoming involved with the juvenile system. Harvey (2005) and Wilson (1994) agree that they make up a great deal of the population of youth who commit crimes and find themselves in detention centers. The highest rate of homicide lies within this population as well. The statistics reflect the intensity of the risk.

*Positive Youth Development Model*

Research suggests that adolescence is a critical time because during this period reasoning, perception and identity develop while intersecting with experiences specifically associated with race and ethnicity. Brody, Cleveland, Gerrard, Gibbons and Wills (2004) reported that the majority of African Americans, ninety-one percent precisely, experience discrimination prior to adolescence. This is prior to the time where they actually comprehend the totality of the experience. Most often pathology and risky behavior are also associated with this period. Edwards, Mumford, Serra-Roldan, (2007) state that identifying pathology is helpful when doing service planning and determining treatment for youth. However, identifying strengths and positive predictors delineates prosocial expectations and affords effective interventions. Positive youth development models pose a much healthier means of handling this population because those expectations can be presented to the youth.

Being able to perceive discrimination, racism, partiality is important especially in the lives of African Americans because the ability to formally understand and perceive it is a necessary skill. Caldwell et al. (2008) explore the relationship between
perceived discrimination and psychological well-being and found that not only are experiences with discrimination the norm for Black adolescents, but there are more incidents of perceived discrimination because adolescents are exploring what it means to be African American. This percentage increases somewhat as Black youth progress through adolescence. Studies have shown that youth on the tail end of adolescence recognize more incidents of discrimination (Caldwell et al., 2008). Carter and Hall (2006) found in their research that perceptions of discrimination are indicators of the exploration stage. They also determined that there is a significant relationship between perception and depressive symptoms.

When racial identity and positive youth development combine, benefits are inconceivable. When children and adolescents are taught about Black American culture, they receive coaching that ultimately prepares them for racial and racist experiences. More importantly in the process of learning communally, Black male youth develop skills to adjust outcomes in favor of goal achievement and personal prosocial development (Blackmon & Constantine, 1999; Stevenson, 1997). This leads to heightened formal reasoning and perceptions that, Oliver (1989) stated, are vital in adolescent development of Black youth. Blackmon and Constantine (1999) also found in their study that cultural pride socialization messages were positively associated with self-esteem in home, academic and social environments. Not only do these youth depend upon each other for support as they are educated communally, but they also draw upon each other’s unique skills to help equip them for experiences.
The positive youth development approach focuses on healthy functioning and development, resourcefulness and potentialities. While it acknowledges adversity and recognizes the resilience of adolescents in all that they may overcome, the primary focus is developing attitudes and behaviors that promote positive life outcomes, achievement and positive perceptions of youth in general. Utilizing this model will engage youth in productive activities to achieve the mission and goals of such a program and promote the culture as a whole. Instead of dealing with them in a more punitive and correctional manner, Lerner and Benson (2003) identify positive youth development programs as imperative avenues to maximize the strengths of individual young people. They further support such programs because they can be designed to anticipate the trials of adolescent development, even for youth of color, and proactively instill mechanisms to deal with pathology, risk, dissociation and dysfunction.

*Group Process*

In order to curb delinquency and recidivism, the needs unique to African American young males must be met. One of the more important necessities is peer groups. According to Harvey (2005), peer groups provide positive influence, reference for alternative behavior and general support in the face of pressures, oppression and racism. Being involved in a peer group also creates the cohesiveness and universality that is critical for survival. Additionally, positive role models are critical because it is very necessary for Black males to see themselves in successful
and key roles within society. President Barack Obama holds one of those key positions important for Black males to see. Lastly, these adolescents need comprehensive programs, which acknowledge culture and include services, psychotherapy, education and recreation. Workshops and discussion within groups can address this in totality.

Fitting in often becomes the primary concern for most adolescents. Groups assume a great influence over orienting adolescents to social environments – providing a level of comfort, associating them with norms, developing a discursive field and directing young people toward achieving in their environment (Davison, Phelan & Ya, 1998). They also profoundly shape identity and racial development in secondary school environments (Steinberg, 1996). As adolescents become clearer about the nature of their racial and gender identities, they begin to play a more active role in maintaining and policing these identities. Peer groups are likely to impose negative sanctions on those who violate what are perceived as established norms and those who attempt to exist outside the norm (Peshkin, 1991).

Harpalani et al. (2001) found that African American secondary school students evidenced high self-esteem and academic achievement goals in conjunction with higher levels of Afrocentricity. Franklin (1989) also discusses in his text that peer groups provide an opportunity to develop kinship and unity. The comradery, which occurs in the midst of discussing like experiences, fosters and encourages both kinship and unity. These are also very important needs of this population. Within the kinship and unity lie cohesiveness that is vital to the development and sustenance of the group.
Franklin (1989) further elaborates that the issue of respect is important to address in a group setting as well. Respect is a common value in the African American family and plays an important role in the development of African American youth. Mutran (1985) states in her research that a young person’s attitude about respect for older generations can be a determining factor of family support. If youth are disrespectful to older generations by using foul language, speaking with a sharp or unruly tone or addressing by first, then older generations will tend to have a negative perception of the youth and offer very little support. At the other end of the spectrum, if youth use such words as “ma’am” or “sir” and are willing socialize with older generations, then those adults readily have better attitudes toward supporting youth. These types of values are so engrained in the culture of family and allowing this population a safe space to explore what respect means only positively contributes to self, family and culture.

Harvey (2005) tells us plainly in his literature that young African American males need a peer group. Peer groups serve to bring this population together in order to discuss topics that are specific to them; topics they feel can only be understood by others that look like them and who are close in age. Tatum (2005) explains that the reason why peer groups are so important is that there is a process that occurs. She explains that adolescents must be able to explore specifically what it means to be African American and they must do it together. This means having individual experiences and bringing it back to the group’s discursive space. Furthermore, it
means having group experiences and being able to process them together for a deeper understanding. A group such as this can formally set young Black males up to discover their identities without the negative labels, discover that there is a legion like them, and discover that there are systems, whether formal or informal, in the community to assist them in success.

An Afrocentric cultural ideology presented in a group process would encourage Black youth to surpass the crises and adversity they face. By embracing and utilizing traditional African values of spirituality, communalism and collectivism, they contribute to their own sustenance, and the perpetuation of Afrocentrism. Perkins (1986) suggests that a cultural approach must be used to transform antisocial behavior and address the factors that place this population at risk. Warfield-Coppock and Harvey (1989) elaborate that specifically Afrocentric approaches are successful with reproducing positive outcomes, instilling value of self and community, as well as implanting and restoring the limitations on unacceptable behavior.

Conclusion

Using a cultural approach provides an avenue for socializing this population in a way that is most beneficial to them, and in a way that will ultimately allow them to contribute positively to their communities. Damon (2004) discusses how focusing on problems and deficits is part of a mental health model left over from the historic work of child development analysts and psychologists. It is also drawn from a criminal justice model that has stressed punishment over prevention. Positive youth
development not only contributes to the way society perceives youth on a macro level, but also on a micro level the way youth view themselves. It contributes to positive self-perception that spills over into interactions with family and community.

People in society sometimes ignore or deny the burden that race and racism places on child and adolescent development. Black youth face seemingly insurmountable barriers and few supportive services or cultural practices are in place to help foster resiliency (Franklin, 2004). Therefore approaching these youth from a strength-based approach, positive youth development becomes increasingly important because it provides cultural centrality. It provides a safe space for the exploration of cultural and racial identity. Black youth have the ability to become sound in their identity, have coping mechanism to protect them from the inequality that resides in the structure of American society, and equipped to become agents of change.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the design and methods used for this research project. First, the research question is clearly stated and the following sections present the research design with an explanation of why it is chosen, a description of the participants, statement regarding the research question, and data gathering procedures. Additionally an analysis plan is discussed and human subject protections are addressed. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Research Question

The major question that this study will answer is how effective can a positive youth development program, which is culturally sensitive, be with helping African American male youth cope with adversity in a predominantly white suburban environment? This is a predominantly Caucasian environment where the majority of African American students are scattered, disorganized, targeted, academically overlooked and suffering through adversity without the comfort of comradery. In this study, lack of centrality, racial socialization and cultural ideology are explored. The culturally sensitive positive youth development program is what is being evaluated.

The amount of adversity as well as the effects of the program is measured through the testimonies of parents. Parents are asked to account for the adversity their son faces from day-to-day. They are also asked to account for their son’s reaction to
the psychoeducation presented in the group, interactions with group members and
group cohesion, as well to discuss whether the program has contributed to cultural
competence. The aim of this study is for parents to discuss how such a program that
focuses on African American male youth, in such positive ways, helps them cope with
discrimination, helps them to build centrality, take ownership and make significant
contributions to their environment.

_Design_

This study employs a qualitative design. Using a qualitative design allows the
researcher to construct a social reality according to Kreuger and Neuman (2003). It
allows for the generation of ideas and concepts that emanate from the raw data. The
researcher can use the subject’s own words, feelings and descriptions to operationalize
the ideas, in turn constructing a reality that is relative to the subject. The subjectivity
of this design is valuable because, in a study that investigates the adversity which
African American boys encounter, it is important to not only humanize and
personalize adversity but equally important to do the same for positive development. It
is also more apt to allow cultural meaning to be boundless. Culture can be as pervasive
as necessary (Rubin & Babbie, 2007). Lastly, Kreuger and Neuman (2003) suggest
this style for studies with small sample sizes, such as this one.

There are several advantages and disadvantages in using a qualitative
approach. One of the biggest advantages is that exact words and phrases can be
recorded and used in the results of the study. Secondly, this researcher has the ability
to probe and rephrase for clarity, understanding and depth in answers. In addition, observations are important to record. This researcher has the ability to record appearance, body language, facial expressions and interviewing environment, all of which adds to the detail of the study. A qualitative design does allow for discussion of emerging themes, but even further, it allows the researcher to incorporate the participant’s actual words, conveying a uniqueness and authenticity that is vacant in a quantitative study. This method is, in many ways, more flexible than a quantitative study (Babbie & Rubin, 2007).

As this model is flexible, the greatest disadvantage is that the findings are not generalizable to other populations. This study recognizes the unique realities of participants; it is quite situational. Another potential problem with this method is that the researcher is very much involved in the study. The researcher of this particular study is involved in facilitating the psychoeducation that was presented to the youth. Therefore, there is a greater tendency for bias to be reflected throughout the study (Kreuger & Newman, 2003).

The design type that is employed is evaluative. This type of study typically evaluates programs, policies or interventions (Babbie & Rubin, 2007). Because very little research exists on this topic, the research will primarily be focused on meeting the needs of African American male youth who reside in an environment that is not completely conducive to their cultural, social and academic development. Common themes, values and issues were analyzed to determine the attitudes towards utilizing a
cultural program, such as the one implemented, in a predominantly Caucasian environment.

The data gathering technique used for this study is an in-depth interview. This technique is chosen not only because of its qualitative nature, but also because it is in the form of a case study. Babbie and Rubin (2007) discuss qualitative methods when using case studies. An in-depth interview is fitting when attempting to complete an evaluation because interviewing the client, family members or significant others, reveals whether changes in behavior are attributable to extrinsic circumstances or the intervention that was implemented in the program. Questions in the interview are designed to target and separate behaviors as they relate to the positive youth development program from behaviors as they relate to events such as a death in the family or a significant change in family structure. When the sample size is very small, in depth interviews are particularly useful because the researcher can spend more time in this process of investigating changes in behavior, academics and socializing. The disadvantage is that this process can also become time consuming (Kreuger & Neuman, 2003).

Subjects

The participants of this study will be the parents of African American male youth living in Davis, California. All parents have youth who participated in a positive youth development program that catered to the needs of Black males age thirteen to eighteen. This researcher chose to use a snowball sampling method in selecting these
parents because this researcher had already established friendly relationships with two of the parents prior to the study. Rapport and discussion of the study had already developed when the parents suggested others who could potentially participate.

**Instrumentation**

The instrument used in the data gathering process was a survey created by this researcher. The survey contained twenty-five questions (See Appendix A). The questions were all open-ended for withdrawing information from the participant concerning how their son perceives himself, what messages they give their sons regarding race and ethnicity and how comfortable their sons feel with expressing themselves, talking about their culture, being educated and socializing in a predominantly white environment. The questions are also designed to evaluate whether the program they participated in addressed their needs and contributed to any improvement in overall wellbeing.

The literature that this researcher focused on greatly contributed to the creation of the instrument. The literature revealed many commonalities and themes concerning African American males. It also clearly stated what positive youth development should be able to accomplish, therefore this researcher created questions that both addressed the needs of Black youth and goals of this type of program. The instrument also utilized open-ended questions that allowed the participants to respond and expand on what was significant to them and the development of their son.
Data Gathering Procedures

The procedures used for this research included: first soliciting six to nine participants using the snowball sampling method, then discussing confidentiality and signing consent forms, next scheduling and conducting interviews. Finally, interviews are recorded and transcribed.

The interviews are conducted in the homes of the participants, where parents felt most comfortable. Initially they are informed that they were not required to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable and that the interview could be discontinued if necessary. However, the risk of discomfort or harm in the use of the interview questions is minimal. This researcher also informed them that their recorded interview was used for an MSW research project. No inducements were offered.

During the remainder of the study, the recorder and transcribed interviews were stored in a locked cabinet with no identifying information. All digital recordings were erased once the study was complete.

Data Analysis

The data gathered was analyzed using basic concept formation that is common in qualitative studies (Kreuuger & Neuman, 2003). These authors discuss how the process of concept formation really begins as the interviews are being conducted. Researchers have the ability to apply current concepts, refine them, or form new ones as data is being collected, transcribed and discussed. These concepts have direct connections to the interactions and experiences of the participants.
Using conceptualization permits the researcher to organize the data into categories based on themes and features that emerge from the raw data. The researcher must be able to provide definitions of the concepts, operationalize them using the data collected and then discuss the relationships that exist among them. Researchers, according to Kreuger and Neuman, also must exercise critical analysis, meaning asking critical and logical questions such as the role that themes play, the purpose of certain situations, as well make comparisons to more general or other specific studies. The formation and discussion of concepts must culminate to answer the research question with brevity and clarity.

This form of data analysis has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that it is a simple form of analysis requiring no software, no entering of data, coding or tabulation. The researcher draws conclusions strictly from transcribed interviews. The researcher also has greater freedom in interpretation of data compared to quantitative analysis. The disadvantage also lies in the interpretation of data because there is room for error in the deductive and inductive process of analysis. This study employed inductive reasoning, consequently the researcher must be able to take the data and come to a conclusion; this process and interpretation is left solely to the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher submitted a Human Subjects Application to the California State University, Sacramento Department of Social Work Committee for the Protection of
Human Subjects. The study is approved, with an identification number of 09-10-092, and classified as a “minimal risk.” (See Appendix A). This classification specifically means that the human subjects were not exposed to any situations or questions causing great physical or emotional distress. The committee also approved a Consent Form (See Appendix B) which presents the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits and compensation. It also addressed confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the interview. All participants consented by signing or initialing the form.

Confidentiality was upheld in two different ways. First consent forms were contained in a separate location from recorded interviews; both securely locked cabinets. The completed consent forms were stored separately from the completed surveys in a locked cabinet in a secure location at the researcher’s home. The researcher is the only person with access to the completed surveys during the completion of the project. The data is destroyed after the project is filed with Graduate Studies at California State University, Sacramento.

Summary

This chapter addresses the methods used in this research study. The study population and recruitment methods are described. This chapter also examines the evaluative criteria, the qualitative questionnaire, the data gathering procedures, and the measures taken to protect the human subjects. The data analysis method is also explored. The next chapter will discuss the data analysis.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents and examines the results of the interviews conducted by this researcher. First, the demographics of the participants are discussed. The next sections will present the themes that emerged from the responses to the open-ended questions, particular stories that this researcher determined were vital in the results of the project. Finally, this chapter will discuss how a positive youth development program responded to and assisted parents in their efforts to create cultural centrality and meet the needs of their youth.

Demographics

Few youth participated in the positive youth development program and some of the parents who agreed to participate in the study dropped out. Ten parents initially responded to the request for participants in this study. All parents are African American females who consider themselves single and were between the ages of thirty and forty years old. All ten mothers have sons who are between the ages of thirteen and seventeen, and who participated in the youth program, which was culturally sensitive. Of the ten who responded to the request, only four remained in the study. Because the study focuses on only four of the parents’ experiences, the format of the project changed to a case study.

None of the participants were raised in Davis; all moved from more urban
areas such as Oakland, Stockton, Pinole and Sacramento, California. Three of the parents are employed and one is a full time student. All mothers consider themselves a part of the lower middle socioeconomic class.

Findings

The participants answered a set of nineteen questions related to the perceptions of their youth and the effects of living in a predominantly white environment. The questions also focused on whether the program their youth participated in helped to deal with some of those effects; specifically, any improvements that the parent observed in their son’s emotional or behavioral state because of completing the five-month program. The themes developed around the data that was most common and that provided pertinent evidence for the research question. The findings are arranged under three sections and all will discuss specific themes.

High level of stress. All parents identified being Black or African American in a predominantly white suburban or rural environment causes anxiety, worry and stress. Parents reported, upon moving to and settling in the environment, numerous stories were circulating about mistreatment by police, teachers ignoring African American students, and having extremely low expectations of Black students. They also heard of the racial slurs and remarks made by community members; even painted on sidewalks and inside bicycle tunnels. One parent told of her initial experience:

“I moved here because it has the best school, the environment was nice…I thought I would be able to let
my son walk around and ride his bike on the greenbelts like everyone else. It was like that for the first year, then all of a sudden he just started to get harassed by the police…They went to his school, pulled him out of class and questioned him about an incident he wasn’t even involved in…And had the nerve to call him a BMJ (black male juvenile).”

Three of the four parents reported on similar stories of negative interactions with the police department. These type situations caused parents to worry about letting their youth walk around and socialize downtown. Parents believed that business owners and police had preconceived notions regarding their youth and had worries about their youth being considered loiterers when socializing downtown. Parents believed that their worry and anxiety was warranted by the circulating stories and personal experiences.

Parents consider the community atmosphere to be racially charged and because of this, felt like they had to be in “protection mode” the majority of the time. One parent stated, “He’s old enough to understand the community he is in…There may not be a lot of people who are in his corner.” Parents wanted their youth to communicate their whereabouts clearly by sometimes writing down the names and phone numbers of the people their youth visited. One mother required an hourly check-in, so that she could make decisions on what places were and was not safe for her son to go. One of
the places that the parent viewed as unsafe was a Caucasian female friend’s home when parents were not home. This parent stressed safety in the evaluation of potential situations her son could place himself and that youth might inhabit without realizing. Another parent stated, “I tell my son all the time you’re Black, you’re six feet tall, and you’re a male…you’re going to be intimidating to the people living here.”

*High level of scrutiny.* Knowing whereabouts on an hourly basis is also an example of how parent scrutinized their sons’ daily activities. Parents reported a high level of scrutiny from teachers and other authoritative figures as well. One parent discussed telling her son numerous times, “Your Black! You can’t do the same things your white friends do in this city.” Because of the way they look, dress, and speak many of their activities are tracked by authorities, teachers and principals. For this reason, parents disallow sagging pants, caps worn backward and congregating in downtown Davis. The same parent stated, “I’d rather my son hang out with his white friends than be in a group of black boys.”

As one parent discussed her five different interactions with the police while her son was in the 8th grade, her level of irritation and frustration was evidenced by her leaning forward with folded arms, down-turned eyebrows and sharp tone.

“I was letting my son hang around with boys the police knew by name…I remember sitting at the police station telling an officer that my son doesn’t get into a lot of trouble. I started naming the boys he was hanging
around with and they knew exactly who they were… I
told the police you will not know my son by name or
sight! That’s just not gonna happen!”

Three of the four respondents reported an increasing level of interaction with the
police, which they believed to be associated with racism and profiling. One parent
concluded, “I want my son to fly under the radar because he has somewhere to go.”

Parents also admitted to contributing to their own stress by examining their
son’s apparel, conversations and circle of friends. One parent checks her son’s dress in
the mornings to avoid him characterization as a thug. In addition to disallowing
sagging pants, she stated, “My son will not wear all one color, beanies or all dark
clothing because he’ll be labeled.” Other parents talked avoided extra attention by
discouraging talk about their original hometowns. They believed that allowing their
sons to discuss “being from the hood” would cause their son’s to be viewed as
ignorant, thug-like, or inferior; however discussion of hometown neighborhoods was
acceptable in the home and around family.

Lastly, parents encouraged their sons to socialize in a more diverse group
verses a group of African Americans. Socializing downtown or in other public places
seemed to draw unwanted attention to the group. Being that most parents want their
sons to “fly under the radar,” parents deemed that the son’s respective circle of friends
needed to be very diverse. Parents felt more comfortable with their son’s socializing in
a group of diverse friends verses a group of Black friends.
Pressure to blend in. When discussing the exploration of culture and expression of cultural identity within the community and academic settings parent unanimously agreed that there is very little to no exploration of African American and African culture in the community. When asked about the exploration of culture many of the replies were that exploration has to begin in the home. Parents made statements such as “we have to do it on our own,” because there is no exploration of culture in the educational setting. Parents made these types of statements because youth reported only learning about those two subjects when discussing African Americans. One parent discussed educating her son about the inventions of African Americans, as well as doing book reports on novels and educational literature by Black authors. One mother insightfully reported:

“Our Black sons have to really think outside the box…try bringing in culture yourself. Don’t wait until the teacher talks about it. You talk about it. There is nothing wrong with choosing to do a presentation about Malcolm X or the Tuskegee Air Men. Take the opportunity to educate your class. There is more to Black people than slavery and Martin Luther King.”

This particular mother discussed feeling like there is no exploration of culture because the community is a “uniform environment.” All parents agreed that there is so much resistance against the norm of the environment and no real push back from a
collective Black community to change the norm. She stated, “They just want you to blend in.”

Parents felt an overwhelming pressure to help their sons perform well academically. Academic achievement specifically means maintaining a 3.0 grade point average or above, graduating from the high school, and entering college. One parent stated, “My son has been talking about USC since the fifth grade.” She also reported, “It is unacceptable to get a C or lower…getting a C is like an F to me.” There is an expectation of Black students to perform as their counterparts do. In most cases they do, however they are also performing in an institution that hardly acknowledges the contribution of African Americans in national arenas down to their own campus.

Individually parents expressed anxiety and exhaustion over pressing their youth to dress a certain way that doesn’t draw attention, get A’s and B’s and prohibiting hanging out in crowds or groups of Black students. However, what is most interesting is that they had very little communication with each other. They felt very compartmentalized and separated from other Black parents; however, they knew that other Black parents were having the same experiences.

Changes in behavior. Upon entering the program parents had hopes of their sons being able to socialize in a safe space, learn about some of the cultural beliefs of African Americans, and bring their frustrations to the group to process together. Because of being in a space central to healthy unrestrained discussion, communal learning and cultural development, what did ensue was a change in behavior. Parents
were able to observe these changes in socializing patterns, communication and comfort level in the community over the five-month period.

Parents discussed their sons primarily feeling safe to completely be themselves and socialize freely. When asked about what their sons liked most about the program the answer was unanimously socializing. Responses included, “He loved being with the other boys,” “he likes everybody in the group,” and “socializing was the only thing he remembered.” Boys were given the opportunity to talk and commune in a space where there was no pressure to dumb down culture or racial identity, no scrutinizing of speech or activity, and really a freedom to explore cultural values.

Most parents expressed improvement in communication. One parents stated, “I believe that the group has helped him with communication. He’s coming out. Marcus talked about Charles and how he left the group. Charles came to the group and then just stopped coming. He said that it was left up to the group members to find out why he stopped coming and talk about it in group.”

This parent’s son felt that he invested both time and energy into a group member, and when he stopped coming there was a void. He was able to communicate that to his parent.

Parents identified in their interaction with their youth, a willingness to talk about psycho education presented in the group and interactions in the group. “I’m
starting to see some changes in behavior...responsibility and choices.” A youth make this statement after a workshop on problem solving. Youth took a real life problem, which had occurred on the high school campus. Together they defined the problem and developed a list of options. For each option, the group produced a pros and cons list, and then chose the most suitable option. One particular youth consequently had a list of other choices that he could have made instead of fighting.

Boys also had discussions with parents about the positive attribute of being Black in the community they live in. They had hopes of being leaders and change agents. They developed situations where they could demonstrate to themselves, their families and communities how they could be leaders in their community. Because they were able to internalize positive aspects of being Black in this environment, there was also a willingness and eagerness to return to the group.

Centrality. All parents also discussed their sons being intelligent, athletic and musically artistic. However, self-esteem was moderately low and there was evidence of withdrawal from the environment. One parent reported, “Hasn’t fully developed identity…I still think he’s finding himself. He is shut down and seems withdrawn. But that is how he is…I can understand why people may think he has behavior problems.” When asked if being in the environment contributes to withdrawal from social conversation, activities, situations and exertion of self, the parent responded with, “I would say yes.”
This program actually places the youth outside the home and gives them the same safe space for exploration. Parents indicated a desire to feel like their sons could be themselves outside the home. They discussed instances of going back to hometowns and having very different interactions. Parent observed their sons in a more comfortable environment. On parents discussed taking her son to Atlanta, Georgia for a family member’s graduation. She reported that he son felt exponentially more comfortable and found that environment more appealing, welcoming and exciting. She stated, “It shocked him because down south, it was just all Black.” The feelings of belonging and comfort are what the program sought to offer the youth, and parents agreed that the program aroused those same feelings. Interactions in the group were similar to interactions their youth had in their hometowns.

Summary

This chapter looked at the demographics of the participants of this study. This chapter also explored some of the responses to the questions asked of the respondents, which included specific stories about their youth’s interactions in the environment and how the positive youth development program helped their youth. The next chapter will analyze the data gathered and present the conclusions, limitations and implications for social work.
Chapter 5

INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

This project gives a voice to the parents of four African American male youth who feel that their voices are unheard and their needs unmet by the community in which they take ownership. Not only does this project give volume to their voices, but also speaks to the injustices that Black youth living in predominantly Caucasian environments are experiencing. More importantly, this study provides proof that positive youth development, which specifically focuses on the development of African American male youth, is effective in such an environment. This study proves that a culturally sensitive helping process mitigates some of the pressures these four youth experience. This chapter will review the findings, provide recommendations for further research, and discuss implications for the social work profession.

Review of Findings

This study provides much needed qualitative information to explicate the reasons why services like cultural programs are needed. African American boys in this particular environment are feeling the effects of being marginalized and targeted. Conclusively, parents communicate that their youth tend to remember the negative interactions more than the positive. The negative interactions that cause high levels of stress for the youth, in turn causing stress for their parents. However, the positive youth development program provided an avenue for positive experiences and
interactions to influence development.

Parents in this study found themselves teaching their sons to adapt to a racially charged environment. They are examining what they wear, where they go and whom they are with. These four youth are receiving this same type of scrutiny from police and teachers. Huebner (1980) suggested that when an individual and environment are a good fit it absolutely creates opportunities for achievement and promotes personal growth. However, when the individual and environment do not coincide, the individual can suffer from stress. This study supports Huebner’s notions because it proves his theoretical statement. Parents did experience stress, worry and anxiety because of the pressures of the environment. In addition, there was some relief when their sons’ participated in the program that provided a space to bring their frustrations to. The program allowed the boys a place where they fit.

Fretz and Thompson (1991) conducted a similar study. They were concerned with the adjustment of Black students at predominantly white educational institutions. They found that African American students had positive attitudes toward communalism and cooperative learning; additionally there was a willingness to interact with other Black students. They also found that Black students were more apt to socially adjust verses academically adjust. They were particularly concerned with biculturality. They found that those African American students who were able to balance Afrocentric and Anglocentric learning were more apt to fit into the environment, and succeed in a predominantly Caucasian environment while remaining
true to their own cultural values.

What this program accomplished was creating a comfortable space outside the home. Parents agreed that a positive youth development program helped their youth to communicate better. Parents found that their youth communicated more positive and negative racial experiences that were already occurring in the community. Youth communicated to their parents the necessity to socialize in groups of African American males, as well communicated the importance of a traditional African values such as communalism and collectivity.

There is evidence of cultural centrality with the community of these four African American male youth; however, the centrality is bound and confined. It seems that individual homes have become the centers for both adolescent and cultural development. Individual homes are also where intense racial socialization occurs. There is no central space, accessible by African Americans living in the community, where they can bring concerns, explore racial identity, develop prosocial skills such as leadership and absorb Afrocentric values. Because there was no central space, parents found it critical to perform these duties separately, and found few opportunities to discuss practices with each other, until this project.

This study found that cultural and racial centrality is equally important for African American male youth in predominantly white suburban areas as it is for Black youth in urban areas. While parents prepare their youth in urban neighborhoods under the protection of the environment, youth in predominantly white environments, where
there are very few Black educators, mentors and cultural programs, are attempting to cope with facilitating healthy adolescent development without the shielded space. It is evident that this task is increasingly hard because police, teachers and even parents scrutinize the youth in social and academic life. This caused a great amount of stress for parents and caused them to be extremely protective over their Black youth; Black youth who were exhibiting symptoms of withdrawal from academic and social life.

This study supports Wright’s (1981) research, which provided that Black students in predominantly white environments will have an increasingly difficult time attempting to socially and academically perform congruently with schoolmates. They exhibit higher levels of stress and lower levels of self-esteem. In this particular study, parents felt that they could relieve stress by helping their youth to blend into the environment by making sure their youth did not dress, speak or socialize in ways that brought attention to them. However, in the home and during program sessions, youth were free to express themselves in whichever way they saw fit.

Implications

The results suggests that because Black male youth suffer from environmental and sometimes cultural pressures, they may need a range of services to help them exert themselves in the environment, live comfortably in the environment and make contributions to their environment. Parents recognize the struggle that their youth face as they attempt to achieve this level of comfort. Parents therefore make choices to separate their sons from the stereotypic. These choices include utilizing cultural
programs and services that educate them about the Afrocentricity and cultural mores that may keep them from suffering some of the stereotypic outcomes of the entire population. Noguera (2003) agrees that agency is critical in the face of adversity.

This study implicates the necessity for social workers to develop programs in suburban environments, not only because services are typically scarce, but also because parents want the programs in their communities to assist with the development of their youth. Parents clearly recognized the benefits of creating cultural centrality in their environment, however were unclear on how to collectively provide centrality for their youth. When social workers are culturally and environmentally competent, they have the ability to facilitate change and adjust outcomes for youth and their families.

Recommendations for Further Research

Barazani, Cosden, Gottheil, Gutierrez and Panteleakos (2004) state that there is not a sufficient number of programs utilizing strength based approaches in order to help youth, families and communities. The first reason this is true is that program developers are interpreting and implementing the approaches in a variety of ways. The strength-based approach is versatile in that sense. However, versatility poses a problem because researchers are finding that conditions and findings cannot be generalized. The authors suggest that there are many standardized interventions, therefore replication of approaches become difficult and determining effectiveness over a regional or general population is equally difficult. In order for the findings of
this study to be generalized, this researcher suggests conducting this study on a much larger scale. With the necessary resources, this type of study could potentially prove that Afrocentric strength based programs can contribute to the success of Black youth and instill the necessary skills for them to succeed in all facets of life. It is important for researchers to conduct further studies in support of these finding because not only are they contributing to providing evidence that the culturally competent programs and services work, but also they especially work for those youth living in suburban environments.

Summary

The results of this study enhance the knowledge and provide evidence in favor of the use of Afrocentric programs in predominantly white suburban environments. Unanimously parents believe that implementing a program such as the one in this study helps their youth to communicate, gives them a space to socialize freely under little scrutiny. Parents believe that the program was effective in helping them deal with the pressures of their environment. Most importantly, parents believe that the program reinforces racial socialization that was already occurring in the home and builds upon the cultural beliefs that parents instill in their youth in their individual homes. The evidence provided in this study helps to operationalize the concepts of cultural centrality and racial socialization for social workers in and around this environment; adding to their cultural competence as they work with clientele in this environment.
APPENDICES
TO: Denise Lanier
FROM: Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects
DATE: February 24, 2010

RE: YOUR RECENT HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION

We are writing on behalf of the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects from the Division of Social Work. Your proposed study, “A Case Study: African American Male Youth Coping with Adversity in a Predominantly White Suburban Environment.”

X approved as ___EXEMPT ___ NO RISK  X MINIMAL RISK.

Your human subjects approval number is: 09-10-092. Please use this number in all official correspondence and written materials relative to your study. Your approval expires one year from this date. Approval carries with it that you will inform the Committee promptly should an adverse reaction occur, and that you will make no modification in the protocol without prior approval of the Committee.

The committee wishes you the best in your research.

Professors: Teiahsha Bankhead, Chrys Barranti, Andy Bein, Joyce Burris, Maria Dinis, Susan Eggman, Serge Lee, Kisun Nam, Sue Taylor

Cc: Dr. Joyce Burris
APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Dear Participant:

My name is Denise Lanier and I am a graduate student in the MSW Program at California State University, Sacramento. I am currently working on my master’s project and would greatly appreciate your help. The purpose of this research study is to evaluate whether a positive youth development modeled program, which is culturally sensitive, will assist African American youth in coping with the adversity they face in the city of Davis.

This study is considered “minimal risk.” Your involvement in this research project is voluntary and involves participating in a recorded thirty to forty-five minute interview. The questions will focus on any changes that you have observed in your son’s behavior, attitudes and character. You will also be asked about conversations you have had with your son about his involvement in the PYD program. You may skip questions if you feel uncomfortable or stop your participation at any time, for any reason. If after your participation in the interview you wish to seek support, you may contact Yolo Family Service Agency at (530) 753-8674. Additional referrals are listed on the attached document for your convenience.

There is no compensation being offered for your participation. The results of the research project may be published, but your name will not be used. Consent forms will be stored separately from recorded interviews to protect your confidentiality. Information that is recorded and transcribed from the interviews will be stored in a separate file in the home of the researcher. All documentation and recorded interviews will be destroyed after the study is complete.

The results of this research project will be available after May 2010. If you would like to see a copy of the results, read the finished product, or if you have any concerns regarding your participation, you may contact me at (530) 758-1183 or by email at dl735@saclink.csus.edu. For specific inquiries or concerns pertaining to this study or your participation, you may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Joyce Burris, at (916) 278-7179 or by email at burrisj@csus.edu.

By signing or initialing below you are indicating that you have read the consent form and agree to participate in the research project. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you upon request. Thank you for your participation.

_____________________________ ______________________________
Signature/Initials of Participant  Date
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. Define your son’s identity?
   a. Have you seen this definition change since being involved in the group? If yes, give examples.
2. Talk about how your son perceives himself?
   a. Have you observed any changes since he has been a member of the group?
3. What improvements have you observed in your son’s self-esteem?
   a. How does he exert self-esteem or confidence?
4. Have you observed any changes in your relationship with your son?
5. What are some of the messages you give your son in terms of racial socialization?
6. What are some of the messages about culture that your son received from the group?
7. How has the group helped your son to become more culturally competent?
8. How has the group helped him to communicate these messages through speech, behavior, and attitude?
9. Tell me about your son’s academic experiences.
   a. What areas need improvement?
   b. Have you observed any improvements?
   c. What are his strengths?
   d. How does your son communicate that he needs help?
   e. Talk about the relationship that your son has with his educators.
   f. How do these relationships affect your son’s educational experience?
   g. What has your son communicated to you about being able to explore culture in an education setting?
10. Talk about the relationships that your son has established with other group members.
11. Have you observed an increase in social activities?
    a. If yes, what kind of activities does he now participate in that he did not prior to the group?
12. What did your son like most about the group?
13. What did he like least about the group?
14. How do you think a positive youth development program, which is sensitive to this population will benefit the local environment?
REFERENCES


