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Relationship Between the Church Involvement and the Self-Esteem in Urban African American Adolescents

Ywinta Jones

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH INVOLVEMENT AND THE SELF-ESTEEM IN URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

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An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the relationship between the level of church involvement and self-esteem in African American adolescents from the area of St. Louis, Missouri. Participants were 58 adolescents who were given two instruments: The Hare Self-esteem Scale and Church Involvement Assessment Scale. The Hare Self-esteem was administered to measure the level of self-esteem. The researcher designed the Church Involvement Assessment Scale to measure the level of involvement in church related activities. The hypothesis was that the adolescents who are more involved in church related activities would tend to have a higher self-esteem than adolescents who are less involved in church related activities. The results were significant, showing that adolescents who reported higher involvement in church activities, tend to have higher self-esteem than those who were less involved in church related activities. These finding indicate that involvement in church related activities might be one of the variables influencing the level of self-esteem in African American adolescents.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Erikson (1950) considered the development of self-esteem as a dimension of self-evaluation. Self-esteem is a representation of how people perceived themselves in terms of how they feel, think, value and view themselves as individuals. It also includes self-confidence, self-respect, independence, self-reliance, self-image, and self-worth (Johnson & Smith, 1994). Essentially, self-esteem refers to how the self, body and mind is viewed and valued. When reference is being made to self-esteem in children, it refers to how children feel about themselves, how they judge themselves in terms of skills, talents, abilities, and attributes, as well as how much they value and respect themselves (Cutright, 1992).

The self-esteem of adolescents is particularly essential. As adolescents become more independent, a sense of self-worth will determine the manner in which their behavior is displayed.

Urban African American youth are being raised during a critical period where they are increasingly exposed to many negative influences within their living environment. Black youth are much more affected by negative factors due to frequent of life stressors such as teen pregnancy, crime/delinquency, absent fathers, low educational/vocational attainment, dysfunctional families, which may jeopardize their development of self-esteem (Dryfoos, 1990).

The Black church has been identified as one intervention to combat the negative factors that impact urban African American youth while increasing their self-esteem. The new era church has moved beyond the religious work and moved into the social sphere, influencing and confronting problems, such as family instability, youth development, problems of the elderly, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other health issues. The church has become a place that provides emotional and social support and teaches others to live a good life, work hard, and to be kind and considerate to others. For centuries, the church has provided comfort to many African Americans. Presently, the modern church strives to do the same by addressing obstacles, which African Americans meet in everyday life (Richardson, 1999).

It seems that many African American adolescents come from broken families, and support provided by the church is essential in their development. According to DuBois (1978) church is an essential spiritual foundation for Black Americans and serves to keep families together. He observed church as a social institution, which is connected with those who are affected by the society.

Another researcher Frazier (1974) studied the Black church and he also perceived it as a social institution. Frazier (1974) depicted the Black church as an important element that provides social support to families and communities. This institution has become an important element in

extending support to people who lack a support system outside the realm of the church.

The Black church promotes positive images of African American adolescents. Research on religious involvement suggests that it is positively related to other positive outcomes such as an overall well-being, supportive family relationships and the use of effective coping and decision making skills. Ultimately, the Black church has been identified as a powerful a stable force in the lives of African American youth and families. When the self-esteem of adolescents is nurtured throughout childhood it reduces the propensity for the engagement of psychosocial risk behaviors and promotes Black youth to view themselves as worthy individuals (Wiley, 1991).

This study examined the relationship between the church involvement and the self esteem in urban African American adolescents to demonstrate that involvement in church related activities does improve self-esteem in adolescents.

Hypothesis

In this study, the hypothesis is that the highly church involved African American adolescents tend to have significantly higher self-esteem that the African American adolescents who are not involved in church related activities. The Hare Self-esteem Scale and the Church Involvement Assessment Tool were instruments utilized in this study. The Hare Self-esteem instrument was used to measure the self-esteem. The

Church Involvement Assessment Tool was designed by the author to

measure the level of involvement in church related activities.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Today's urban African American youth are being raised during a critical period where they are increasingly exposed to many negative influences within their living environment. African American adolescents are vulnerable to destructive circumstances. Adolescents risk a lack of productivity and stable transition to adulthood primarily from the following factors such as low educational/vocational attainment, crime/delinquency, teenage pregnancy, dysfunctional families and absent fathers (Dryfoos, 1990). These significant problems continue to grow among the African American adolescent population and they have been documented by researchers to have a negative impact on the development of the self-esteem (Brendgen & Vitaro, 1998; Johnson & Smith, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; & Smith 1994).

Developmental Tasks for Adolescents

Adolescence is a turbulent time for youth. The early adolescent phase begins around the age of 12 through 18 and later adolescence begins at age 18 through 24.

Erickson's psychological theory views adolescence as a single stage unified by the resolution of the central conflict of identity versus identity confusion. It has been concluded during this stage that there are two distinct periods of psychosocial development that occur during these years. Early adolescent begins with the

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onset of puberty. This stage characterized by rapid physical changes, significant cognitive and emotional maturation, sexual awakening and a heightened sensitivity to peer relations. The psychosocial crisis of this stage is group identity versus alienation. critical task as identity versus identity confusion. The later adolescence stage is characterized by new advances in the establishment of autonomy from the family and the development o a personal identity. The psychosocial crisis of this period is individual identity versus identity confusion (Newman & Newman, 1999, p. 304).

During this stage adolescents are concerned with developing a sense of personal identity, which entails finding out who they are, what they can do and how they fit into the world. By trying various styles, adolescents learn to eliminate and identify what best suits them. Individual youth need to develop confidence in their own preferences. Without this type of search for their own identity, youth will become a victim of low-self esteem and lack self-awareness, as well as be easily influenced by peers in turn, end up making inappropriate decisions for themselves (Dekovic & Grgin, 1990).

Self-Esteem

Erikson (1950) considered the development of self-esteem as a dimension of self-evaluation. Self-esteem is generally a representation of how people perceive themselves in terms of how they feel, think, value,

and view themselves as individuals. It also includes self-confidence, self-respect, and pride in yourself, your independence, self-reliance, self-image, and self-worth (Carlson, Processor & Uppal, 2000). Basically, self-esteem refers to how the self, body and mind is viewed and valued.

When reference is being made to self-esteem in children, it refers to how children feel about themselves, how they view themselves as measuring up in terms of skills, talents, abilities, and attributes, as well as how much they value and respect themselves (Curry & Johnson, 1990).

It's important to recognize the contribution of self-esteem to a person's emotional well being and mental health. Self-esteem plays a major psychological role throughout the lifespan in a person's capacity to face challenges and cope adaptively with stress (Apter, 1997).

The foundation of self-esteem is established during the early stages of child development even before a child can understand words of praise, the child is aware of the manner in which the parent responds to him or her. Theorist Alfred Adler believes, that a child earliest recollection influences their world view therefore it is important that a child is exposed to positive situations to assist in developing a positive self-esteem (Hergenhahn & Olson, 1999, p. 104).

The parent's encouragement and support enables the child to learn, take risks, tolerate frustration, and feel proud of their accomplishments. Research recognizes that the parent is crucial in the development of self-esteem. Parents' unconditional acceptance of their child as a person,

including their limitations and imperfections contribute to a positive self-esteem. When a child experiences such acceptance, she/he establishes a sense of worth regardless of any particular ability or attribute, and that she/he deserves good relationships and positive experiences in life (Mandara & Murray, 2000).

Helping a child develop a strong and positive sense of competency is another essential aspect of fostering healthy self-esteem. If the child can recognize and appreciate the impact of choices and behavior, she/he will be more likely to view themselves as competent, rather than a victim of circumstances and fate. This sense of understanding is essential in all aspects of the child's life. Parents' expectations for appropriate behavior and implementation of consistent consequences facilitate the development of the aspect of children's self-esteem (Cutright, 1992).

Self-esteem affects how children will approach new tasks or challenges and how they interact with others. Children with high self-esteem feel a sense of trust, security and acceptance by others. They understand their own self-worth, have self control and are willing to take on challenging or difficult tasks. High self-esteem is also associated with developing appropriate problem-solving skills. Children gradually develop and learn through experiences, language, adults, and peers who they are and what they can become. If children repeatedly experienced these kinds of situations it will help them to have more confidence and self-esteem as adults (Curry & Johnson, 1990).

The self-esteem of adolescents is particularly crucial. As adolescents become more independent, a sense of self-worth will determine the manner in which their behavior is displayed. Self-esteem determines an adolescent's investment in their physical health as well as influencing potential college and/or career path decisions (Anderson, Redman & Rogers, 1991).

Low Self-Esteem

People of any age who suffer from low self-esteem are prone to many self-destructive behaviors. This is a maladaptive effort to defend against painful feelings of inadequacy which can lead to serious forms of emotional and physical abuse of others (Owens, 1993).

Low self-esteem is formed in childhood as a result of exposure to negative situations the child experiences which include the following: frequent criticism, lack of affection, lack of support, lack of encouragement, and lack of respect. Furthermore, exposure to verbal, physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse as well as parents' emotional unavailability, and parents' discounting their child's feelings also contribute to low self-esteem in children (Dekovic & Grgin, 1990). Once low self-esteem is formed, fear and anxiety affects an individual's psychological, physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities.

Many people who have low self-esteem avoid seeking new challenges, developing relationships, and learning new skills for fear of rejection or failure. Furthermore, they often become subjected to

refraining from sharing their opinions, becoming underachievers, and tend to be passive. (Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela, & Gaus, 1994).

Adolescents with low self-esteem may avoid challenging activities because they lack self-confidence. Teens with poor self-esteem are more vulnerable to negative peer pressure and they are at higher risk to take dangerous risks. Although, some teenagers who are bright and competent but with low-esteem deprive themselves of reaching their greatest potential and withdraw from situations that offer opportunities for growth (Wood et al., 1994).

Building Self-Esteem

The development of self-esteem is critical during childhood. Parents with positive self esteem help their child feel confident and comfortable within themselves by nurturing their qualities. Therefore, parents and significant others in the adolescent's life play a vital role in creating a foundation for building positive self-esteem in the youth movement towards adulthood. Parents should share positive dialogue with their children, praise them for their diligence and efforts, and highlight their strengths. In addition, parents should provide age appropriate choices for their children to build upon their problem solving and decision making skills. Children should be provided with opportunities to contribute to assist their parents when appropriate in which parents have realistic expectations of their child abilities. Parents should promote the child

identifying and expressing their feelings and teach the child to be accountable for their behavior (Apter, 1997).

Some researchers believed that the level of self esteem and their coping skills are affected by an adolescent's gender. Male adolescents with low self esteem tend to displace their anger onto others as a coping mechanism while females with low self-esteem usually tend to feel more comfortable with communication their feelings. Adolescents with high self-esteem direct their energy towards resolutions. These findings add to the growing literature supporting the importance of positive self-esteem and self-worth among African American adolescents who must cope effectively with stress in their lives (McCreary & Slavin, 1996; Burnett & Anderson, 1995).

African American Youth

Urban African American youth are subjected to poor developmental outcomes in which many suffer such as crime/delinquency, teen age pregnancy, low educational/vocational attainment, and lack of parental support. They are faced with stressful environments, which presents an increased risk for adverse emotional, intellectual, physical, and behavioral outcomes. They are furthered exposed to economic disadvantages, which are often associated with problem behaviors that may result in a low self esteem. However, African American youth with positive relationships with valued significant others with positive attitudes

usually attribute to decreased problem behaviors and a higher self-esteem (Livingston, 1993).

Low Educational/Vocational Attainment

The African American adolescent population is at risk of academic failure. The school performance of African American youth remains an urgent issue in education. According to researchers, early adolescence is a vulnerable period when African American students begin to make choices that will effect their future educational and vocational paths (Constantine & Erickson, 1998). Researchers have found that for many of these adolescents, there is a decline in academic motivation, behavior, and self-esteem leading to lower academic achievement and increased rates of school dropout (Smyer & Whaley, 1998).

Statistics revealed that the vast majority of Black teens rank highest in the high dropout rates, daily attendance, and referrals to programs for maladaptive behaviors (Jackson, 1999; Voelk, Welte & Wieczorek, 1999). Statistics further notes that nearly half of African American adolescents lack basic skills necessary for gainful employment and continuing education. African American males in particular have high dropout rates. Dropping out of school is a concern because it is associated with negative outcomes such as low wage earnings, higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, welfare dependency and criminal behavior (Erickson & Constantine, 1998). In addition, poor grades and

low-test scores occur too often among members of the Black youth population, especially those in urban school districts.

African Americans have a higher school dropout rate; much of the effect may be attributed to the influence of socioeconomic status. An estimated 40 percent of Black youth in the United States are at risk for school failure due to poverty, race, living in a single-parent family, parents with little education, or health problems (Gleason & Vartanian, 1999).

African American youth with low self-esteem are usually a result of unsuccessful school experiences such as school failure, dropping out of school and disengagement from academic activities. Once African American youth associate school with low self esteem, they begin to develop pessimistic feelings toward acquiring an education thus, they lose the sense of connection with the school environment. Furthermore, socioeconomic barriers have been found to have an adverse effect on the career development of African American adolescents (Joseph, 1992).

Crime/Delinquency

According to statistics, Black youth are disproportionately associated with crime. In 1994, young black males were most vulnerable to violent crime; one in 16 compared to one in 20 whites, and one in 17 males compared to one in 24 females (Perkins & Klaus, 1994). According to researchers, African American male adolescents and young adults, compared with other racial/ethical groups, are the groups most susceptible to injury or deaths as a result of assault violence. Homicide is the second

leading cause of death for person 15-24 years of age and the leading cause of death for African Americans youth in this age group (Mazza & Overstreet, 2000).

The epidemic concerning African American violence continues to claim the lives of many young lives in urban communities. Violent behaviors among African Americans has been an ongoing phenomenon for the past several years. Exposure to violence in urban adolescence is commonly recognized as a stressful period (Bumby, Jones, Kashani, Kurt & Thomas, 1999).

Black youth crime rates have been negatively linked to low socioeconomic status and unemployment, which ultimately results in low self esteem. Consequently, Black youth are exposed to high unemployment rates and increased numbers of these youth are either in low paying or low status occupations, which provide minimum support for future success in today's society (Tatum,1996; Duster 1987). Exposure to and participation in criminal activities increases defiant and aggressive behaviors; it teaches maladaptive patterns of behavior, which ultimately has a negative impact on the development of self-esteem in African American adolescents (Bumby, et al., 1999).

Teenage Pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancy is a chronic concern in the African American community. Young Black females are two to three times more likely than white females to conceive during their adolescent years

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(Johnson & Smith, 1994). Within the African American population, over 1/3 of pregnant teens receive inadequate prenatal care (Spence & Adams, 1997) and approximately half of the mothers receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) were less than 17 years old when they had their first child. In addition, these adolescent mothers have a second child within 24 months of their first child.

Statistics show that teen childbearing occurs disproportionately among low-income black females. The issues of pre and postnatal care (Spense & Adams, 1997), adolescent parenthood, the ignored teenage father (Gilmore & DeLamater, 1996) and concerns regarding sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS (Smith, 1994) all stem from adolescent sexual activity. Early child bearing compromises a young African American female's opportunity to attain a high level of education and employment, in which her overall quality of life is impacted. Being raised in a single parent African American family headed by a teenage mother within a stressful environment creates a risk of adverse developmental consequences for the child. According to researchers, the age of the mother at birth affects intelligence, achievement test scores, and other indicators of performance. Black teen pregnancy leads to increase welfare cost, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, and increased high school drop out rates. Many of these teen mothers come from already disadvantage backgrounds and too often, early childbearing perpetuates or

increases that disadvantage (Bates, Fitzgerald, Key, Luster & Vandenbelt, & Key, 2000).

Over the past several years, issues related to Black adolescent sexual behaviors include the increasing proportion of Black adolescents who are sexually experienced and a decline in the age of initial intercourse, as well as the rising rate of non-marital births to African American young females (Smith, 1994). Black adolescent mothers who are frequently unprepared for the responsibilities of parenthood, often live below the poverty level in disadvantaged environments, have higher level of stress, less education, and fewer resources (Butts, 1995). Therefore, the African American teen mother is forced to take on the responsibility of parenthood prior to completing the stages of adolescence herself. Due to the challenges of parenthood this responsibility tends to be overwhelming for Black teenage mothers. These teen mothers tend to associate their parental abilities as a parent with how they feel about themselves therefore, without adequate support, they tend to lean towards low self-esteem . Black teen mothers with low self-esteem tend to experience intercourse at an early age without the use of contraception (Brown, 1995).

Dysfunctional Families

Fifty percent of African Americans delinquents come from broken homes, families are increasingly being broken by the parental absence or lack of parental support. According to researchers certain consistent

family characteristics such as the following has been identified to be related to delinquent behaviors: a home without structure, a home in which attitudes of rejection prevail, homes demonstrating a lack of consistency and adequate discipline as well as poor family attachments (Barclay & Morgan, 1988). The lack of parental and family cohesion has been related to delinquency of African Americans. Due to the parent-child relationship within dysfunctional families African American children are usually influenced by their families to engage in delinquent behavior (Rodney & Mupier, 1999; Adair, Frienman & Savage, 1978).

Research shows that delinquency rates for African American children exposed to long-term parental neglect are particularly high. Child maltreatment places children at risk for a variety of adolescent problem behaviors for instance, drug use, school failure, and teen pregnancy. Studies have shown that child maltreatment lead to a series of negative outcomes for African American children and youth such as poor self-esteem, poor academic performance, learning disorders, and health issues (Cobb, Crosby, Davies, DiClement, Harrington, Hook, Oh, Sionean & Wood, 2001; Brendgen & Vitro, 1998).

Kaplan's (1975) theory of self-esteem motivation states that negative attitudes may prompt individuals to engage in deviant patterns of behavior. The poorer an adolescent's self-esteem the greater the risk for delinquency. Furthermore, the lack of a close bond within African American families has been associated with Black youth involvement

within delinquent behaviors. Consequently, poor relationships with valued family could lead to feelings of self-rejection and a decrease in the adolescent self-esteem. The lack of a close relationship with parents may possibly result in youth developing low self-esteem, which in turn might stimulate them to seek delinquent behaviors for compensation purposes.

Absent Fathers

Dysfunctional families deprive adolescents of parental support, often creating a lack of positive male role models, especially for African American adolescents. When the father is absent from home, the effect centers on disturbed social behaviors for boys. Fathers' absence produces poor social relations especially for boys (Coley, 1998; Brody & Flor, 1998).

A father's absence is often detrimental to a child's social development, particularly in African American communities where the rate of female-headed households is high and continues to increase. Children who live in homes with only one parent or in which marital relationships have been disrupted by divorce or separation are more likely to display a range of emotional and behavioral problems, including delinquency, than children from two-parent families. The proportion of American households that have children who live with both parents has declined substantially. Seventy-five percent of African American children will experience parental separation or divorce before the age of 16 and

many of these youth will experience multiple family disruptions over time (Florsheim, Tolan, & Smith, 1998; Mandara & Murray, 2000).

The African American male has often been portrayed in research as an absent family member. As a result, African American males often have been perceived as being in a subordinate status in the family. Furthermore, some African American males have been victimized and their quality of life diminished because many have been denied the opportunity to become providers for their families. Some researchers have identified African American males as individuals who display destructive behaviors and are unable to assume the responsibilities of fatherhood (Gadsden & Smith, 1994). Contrary, Mizell (1999) reported that when African American males have the opportunity to be wage providers, there is a greater possibility that they will be responsible parents to their children and commit to their families. Not being able to function successfully in the male role can cause the African American male to lose a sense of masculinity and social identity which ultimately leads to low self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness.

The African American Church

To combat the issues that plague urban Black families, one intervention has been the African American church. Several African Americans are members of churches and they believed that religion has significance in their lives. For centuries the African American church has served as an integral support system to families. In recent years, the

modern church has changed dramatically to accommodate the rising

obstacles and barriers facing families. To reach the total family, it is not

enough to concentrate solely on saving souls. Church administrators have

come to the realization that they must address its congregation by

implementing a holistic approach to address the intensifying problems that

afflict the African American community (Beecher & Hicks, 1994).

African American Church During Slavery

Various literature offers the diversity in which the church and

religious tradition was initiated and experienced. (Weatherford, 1970;

Bowden, 1991). During slavery the church provided slaves with hope

although, they were headed by white clergy. At worship service, white

slave owners and other clergy preached obedience to their owners (Hizer,

2000).

The early Black church the emphasized the development of an

intimate relationship with God and to teach slaves that they were not

denounced by God to serve as slaves to white people. The church provided

slaves with the reassurance of God's love, salvation, and redemption into

the hopelessness of slaves. The church served as a place of psychological

refuge and it provided one of the ways for enslaved African Americans to

express and sustain their hope for a better future (Watley, 1993).

The African American Church After Slavery

In 1863, slaves were emancipated from slavery and after the civil

war many slaves were freed. It became evident that there was a need to

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organize and construct religious communities to assist in reconstructuring lives. The church aided in teaching slaves ultimately how to live and survive as citizens. The growth among African Americans during the nineteenth century increased the number of independent Black churches in the United States. Black churches sponsored schools, improvement organizations, and furthered offered a variety of social services to African Americans (Weatherford, 1970; Hosmer, 1970).

Research on the Contribution of the African American Church

Scholars DuBois (1978), Frazier (1974), Lincoln (1990) have all established that the Black church is a profound social institution that offers social reform to church members. W.E.B DuBois was the first sociologist to study the black church as a social institution. He researched the black communities in the North and South in urban and rural areas, as well as in small towns and large cities. He found differences between large and small churches, denominations, and preaching styles. But despite the differences, he notes that the church serves a significant spiritual function within African Americans' lives. He also identified a positive profound relationship between the church and the family unit (DuBois, 1978).

E. Franklin Frazier studied the Black church for 40 years. In all Frazier's work, he depicted the black church as a social institution, a multifaceted religion, social, economic, educational, cultural, and political institution that offered a wide spectrum of social functions. Frazier recognized the link between the church, the family, and the support system

each provided to the family and the community. He also identified the church as the institution responding to the changes in its social environment (Frazier, 1974).

Lincoln is a theologian as well as a sociologist and was a member of the Black church. Lincoln views the Black church as being involved in all aspects of the lives of its members, including political, economic, educational, and social concerns. He believed that the Black church met the holistic needs of its members (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

The African American Church Today

The African American church has proven to be the most viable and inclusive entity within the Black community. From their earliest beginning in the 1790's, Black churches became and have contributed to be the focal point of virtually every moment for change that affects their communities. The church has shown a serious commitment to enhance the quality of life in the community in which it is located (Steward, 1994; Gilkes, 1998).

Any institution that hopes to survive must take account of the dynamism that characterizes the life of its community (Frazier, 1968). The new era church has moved beyond their religious work to confront social, economic, and political problems facing the African American community. The contemporary Black churches reach out to embrace the confronting pressing problems today, which include but is not limited to family instability, youth development, and problems of the elderly, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other health issues (Richardson, 1999).

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The church provides a place that nurtures emotional and spiritual growth, fellowship, hardwork, scholarship and kindness to others. In addition, it creates a balance within the life of its congregation where they think well of themselves, get along with others, obey rules and authorities, and respect themselves and others (Ellison & Gay, 1990; Kane, 2000; & Brookins, 1996).

For African American youth, establishing a strong spiritual core can support the development of a high self-esteem and self-awareness to effectively cope with oppressive challenges in their lives. African American churches are involved in the day to day struggle to strengthen Black families. Many members of the church monitor, mentor, and minister to the daily needs of the inner city. Faith driven community activities strive against the odds to help and provide guidance for the youth to reach adulthood physically, educationally, emotionally, mentally, and economically whole (Brookins, 1996).

Due to the church existence millions across the nation have been able to obtain resources essential to social, emotional, and spiritual development. Institutions such as the African American church employ many methods to promote a positive self-esteem for African American growth (Ellison & Gay, 1990).

Specific Services Offered by the African American Church

Black churches may function differently from one another in addressing the needs of their members and the surrounding community.

Nevertheless, the core function of the Black church is to address the present day spiritual, physical, social, and emotional needs of the congregation. The Black church serves as one of the social networks where Black youth obtain assistance in handling day to day problems. The Black church instills hope and faith within the youth so that they can effectively resolve problems of daily living. Within the church environment, African American adolescents are provided with guidelines for moral behaviors and insight into the meaning of life. Additionally, the church defines obligations and responsibilities as well as informing of expected behaviors towards themselves, family, and society. Furthermore, the church provides guidance for dealing with life transitions and problems and African American teens have the opportunity to assume leadership roles and to develop leadership organizational and public speaking skills. Religious participation of Black youth allows them to feel a sense of achievement and worth by involving themselves in roles that are valued and respected (Wiley, 1991).

The Black church provides prevention and education relevant to reducing Black youth teen pregnancy. Support groups are offered in which the church provides education regarding decision-making, communication of feelings, moral values, education regarding anatomy, dating relationships, venereal diseases, and contraception. In addition, the Black church also supplies guidance regarding sexual values and behavior, the freedom to discuss controversial topics in a context of values and moral

decision making which will effect sexual learning and responsible actions. The church environment is an appropriate setting for enhancing self-esteem in Black youth and promoting positive sexual attitudes (Stevenson, 1990).

Furthermore, the Black church provides education concerning African American history and culture, which is designed to instill a sense of pride within the African American adolescent. Black youth are presented with the opportunity to learn about their enriched history which consequently, broaden their awareness about their culture (Brookins, 1996).

Mentoring programs are offered to African American youth within the church setting as well. The mentors/role models are portrayed as friends, positive role models, and surrogate parents. The mentoring relationship with youth provides an adult to confide in and share intimate feelings, educating, providing nurturing and parental guidance, and interacting within a social context. The mentoring program contributes to building youth's self-esteem and providing guidance (Portia & Struchen, 1997).

Individual, family, and marital/couple counseling services are frequently available through the church. Due to these services, alternative outlets can be sought to strengthen family relationships and address conflict within the family thus, promoting cohesion within the family unit (Cooper, McRae & Thompson, 1999). During these sessions, families are

taught conflict resolution techniques, anger management, family problem solving and social skills.

In conclusion, the Black church promotes positive images of African American adolescents. Research on religious involvement suggests that it is positively related to other positive outcomes such as an overall well-being, supportive family relationships and the use of effective coping and decision making skills (Huges & Demo, 1989). Ultimately, the Black church has been identified as a powerful and stable force in the lives of African American youth and families. When the self-esteem of adolescents is nurtured throughout childhood it reduces the propensity for the engagement of psychosocial risk behaviors and promotes Black youth to view themselves as worthy individuals (Wiley, 1991).

It is clear that many negative psychosocial outcomes can be linked to low self-esteem. Based on the review of the literature, the African American adolescents' involvement in church plays a significant role in buffering them from negative environmental stressors in their life through bolstering their self-esteem. This research is designed to examine the degree to which church involvement is related to positive self-esteem in African American adolescents.

Chapter 3

Method

<u>Participants</u>

Participants were 58 adolescents who were randomly selected from a middle school and church located within the same urban African American community. Out of 60 surveys, 58 were completed and returned. The age ranged from 12 to 18, with the mean of 14.08 years (SD=1.25). Participants were 38 % female (n=22) and 62% male (n=36). Fifty-seven participants reported being Black and one reported being other. Out of 58 participants, 11 % (n=6) reported being in 6th grade, 44 % (n=24) reported being in 7th grade, 35 % (n=19) reported being in 8th grade, 6 % (n=3) reported being in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades, and 4% (n=6) reported being in 12th grade. Eight participants reported living with both parents, 29 reported living with their mother only, five reported living with their father only, seven reported living their grandparents, four reported living with a relative, and five reported living either with father and stepmother or mother and stepfather.

<u>Instruments</u>

The Hare Self-Esteem (HSS) and the Church Involvement Assessment Tool (CIAT) are the two instruments that were utilized to collect data from all of the participants, which included African American adolescents, church and non-church members.

The HSS is designed to evaluate the self-esteem of each adolescent within three subgroups, which include peers, home, and school. The

survey consisted of a total of 30 statements, 10 per subgroup. The responses ranged from 1-strongly agree to 4-strongly disagree. The participants were asked to select the response that best depicted their feelings about the sentence. The scores ranged from 30 to 120. Once the surveys were completed, the scores were tallied with the higher scores indicating a higher self-esteem and low-test scores indicating a lower self-esteem (See Appendix A).

This instrument has been validated with fifth and eight graders, the means ranging from 90.4 to 95. The group mean for all subscales was 91.1. The HSS also shows adequate reliability and validity measures. Test-retest correlations range from .56 to .65 for the subscales, and .74 for the general score, which indicate good stability. The test also correlated well with other measures of self-esteem such as Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, which indicates the test's excellent concurrent validity.

This tool has been noted to be appropriate for youth ages 10 and above; therefore it is suitable for the targeted middle school population. It usually takes students 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey. The instrument is easily read, it offers simple directions and written responses. It can be administered individually, within groups, orally, or in written form. It is relatively simple to administer and interpret the results.

Another instrument utilized in this study was the Church Involvement Assessment Tool (CIAT). This researcher developed the

CIAT survey specifically for this study due to the lack of instruments to assess the church involvement (see Appendix B). The CIAT survey includes demographic questions such as the following: age, living arrangement which describes whom the adolescent lives with, grade, gender, and race. In addition, three questions were asked to assess the church involvement of each student. These questions were: 1. "How often do you take part in church services?; 2. "Are you involved in any other church activities/program?; and 3. "How often do you take part in church activities/programs other than church services?" Responses and their equivalent scores for questions # 1 and 3 were as follows: none (0); one time a month (1); two times a month (2); and three times a month (3). Responses for the second question with their equivalent scores were as follows: "no" (1) and "yes" (2). Responses for question 3 were rated on a scale ranging from 1, indicating no involvement in church related activities to 8, indicating high involvement in church related activities. Higher scores indicated more church involvement by the adolescents and the lower scores represented a lack of involvement in church activities/services. Scores were divided into two groups based on the level of involvement as following: scores from 1 to 3 were categorized as "low involvement" and scores from 4 to 8 were categorized as "high involvement."

<u>Procedure</u>

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between the church involvement and the self-concept in African American adolescents. The hypothesis is that the church involved African American adolescent will tend to have a significantly higher self-esteem as opposed to the African American adolescent that do not attend church.

The sample was selected from a population of students from middle school and church located within the Wells-Goodfellow area in the western part of St. Louis city. The researcher arranged a meeting with the church administrators and school officials to solicit their participation in the study. The school officials and church administrators were given approximately one week to determine if this is a project they would consider to partake. After they decided to participate, a few days were given to share the information with other necessary pertinent personnel such as teachers and congregations. In addition, a date was decided upon for the researcher to return to distribute the consent forms. Due to the targeted population being under the age of 18, parental consent forms were first distributed to parents through the students (see Appendix C). On a designated day, the researcher returned to the school setting where one class per grade level 6th through 8th was randomly selected and approached to participate in the study.

The volunteer sample from the church setting were chosen from the students who were in the middle school age group that participated in the Bible study class. The researcher explained to the students the nature of the study and reassured them that only group results will be reported and their identity will remain anonymous. All participants were given an envelope that contained a parental consent form and an enclosed envelope for return. The students were given a time limit of one week to return the forms. The youth were encouraged to prompt their parents/guardians to complete the forms by offering a token of appreciation upon receipt of forms by the deadline date. The Bible study teachers and schoolteachers collected the consent forms as the students returned them and they passed them on to the researcher. The following week the researcher administered the surveys to students of parents who had consented to their participation.

It took approximately 5 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The survey was comprised of thirty questions that measured the self-esteem, three questions to assess the extent of church involvement, and demographic information regarding age, grade, whom the adolescent lived with, and gender. Once the surveys had been collected, they were numbered in the upper right hand corner of the survey to keep track of the number of surveys returned. When the surveys were completed, a token of appreciation in the form of candy was distributed to all participants.

The research design for this study attempts to explore the relationship between two variables. In the study, the variables of the study are church involvement and self-esteem, which cannot be manipulated by the researcher. The hypothesis examined whether the church involvement relates to the self-esteem.

Chapter 4

Results

The hypothesis is that the highly church involved African

American adolescents tend to have a significantly higher self-esteem as

opposed to the African American adolescents that are not involved in

church related activities.

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for the Church Involvement

Assessment Scale and the Hare Self-esteem scale are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the Church Involvement Assessment

Tool (CIAT) and the Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Church Involvement (CIAT)	58	3.17*	2.57
Self-esteem (HSS)	58	80.55**	17.48

* Possible range from 1 (no involvement) to 8 (high involvement)
** Possible range from 30 (low self-esteem) to 120 (high self-esteem)

Furthermore, the correlation between the Church Involvement

Assessment Scale, and Hare Self-esteem Scale was calculated. Results

indicated that there is a moderate positive correlation ($r = .56$, $p<.01$)

between the Church Involvement Assessment Score and the Hare Self-

esteem Score. The positive correlation indicated that adolescents who are more involved in church activities tend to have a higher self-esteem.

Participants were divided into two groups based on their involvement in church activities. The first group labeled "low involvement in church activities" consisted of 34 participants who scored from 1-3 on the Church Involvement Assessment Scale, and the second group was labeled "high involvement in church activities" consisted of 24 participants who scored from 4-8 on the same scale. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if these two groups differed on self-esteem ratings. Results indicated that there was a significant difference on the participants' ratings on self-esteem between these two groups ($\underline{t}$ (56) = -5.155, $\underline{p}$ < .01). Overall, participants in the "high involvement in church activities" group had higher self-esteem than the participants in the "low involvement in church activities" group (see Table 2).

Table 2

Results of independent t-tests

Group	N	Mean (HSS)	SD	t
High church involvement	24	95.82*	12.909	-5.508
Low church involvement	34	74.22*	15.128	-5.155

* Possible range from 30 (low self-esteem) to 120 (high self-esteem)

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the relationship between the church involvement and the self-esteem in African American adolescents. In this study of 58 African American adolescent participants who reported high involvement in church related activities indicated a significantly higher rating of self-esteem compared to the participants who reported low to no involvement in church related activities. Thus, those adolescents who chose to be involved in church related activities had a more positive rating of their self-esteem. These findings indicated that involvement in church related activities might be one of the variables influencing the level of self-esteem in African American adolescents.

This study discussed some of the prevalent issues that the African American adolescents experience residing within urban communities and how the Black church currently provides a wide spectrum of social services directed towards strengthening families and enhancing the development of children and youth.

However, it is also important to look at the value of the African American church role in raising Black adolescents. Black churches have a history of being instrumental within the Black communities. Increasing evidence reveals that African American adolescents that are involved within the church have a high self-esteem as opposed to those who are not involved within the church. This research study supports these findings.

Religious commitment has had a strong correlation with lower rates of school drop out, crime/delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and parental support. Black churches have proven to be a major resource for family support (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1999).

Limitations

This study examined the relationship between the church involvement and the self-esteem in African American adolescents. The participants were selected from one impoverished neighborhood located in St. Louis, Missouri, which in turn limited the socioeconomic status of the respondents. Therefore, the results are unable to be generalized to the greater population although they were consistent with previous research.

The researcher noted that some students seemed to struggle with understanding the survey and this may have played a role when responding to the survey. Also, it is noted that students may have provided socially desirable responses.

Another problem that was encountered with this study was that the church involvement was measured by only one item, which was the adolescent's self report. There are questions about the validity of this measure. Future research should utilize a more valid tool and rely on behavioral measures of church involvement rather than self-perceptions.

Recommendations

It was taken for granted that the middle school students were able to read and comprehend the survey questions since they were rated as

appropriate to elementary students. It may be helpful for the forthcoming researchers to read aloud and explain each question on the survey in an effort to ensure the survey is being answered with understanding and clarity. Consequently, the researcher will obtain more accurate results.

The African American church administrators should maximize their potential through participation of trainings and seminars on an annual basis to remain abreast with information relative to families and communities interventions. Since we live in a time where matters are constantly changing, being currently with literature allows effective interventions to be pursued.

Since gender differences exist concerning self-esteem in males and females, this area should be furthered explored and a curriculum should be developed to that reflects these differences. Since this was a small sample it is recommended that a study is conducted with a larger sample, which will allow the researcher to obtain sufficient males and females participants. This literature should be shared with families, school and church administrators.

Furthermore, families, school and church officials should work in conjunction to devise effective strategies in working with adolescents in their movement towards adulthood. It takes a village to raise a child, therefore all entities are pertinent and should be actively involved in this transition.

Further research is needed to examine what particular aspects of church involvement directly relate to building self-esteem and if this can be replicated in non-church settings.

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Appendix A: Hare Self-Esteem Scale (HSS)

Directions: Write the number that best describes how you feel about the sentence.

1= Strongly Disagree
2= Disagree
3= Agree
4=Strongly Agree

_____ 1. I have at least as many friends as other people my age.

_____ 2. I am not as popular as other people my age.

_____ 3. In the kinds of things that people my age like to do, I am at least as most other people.

_____ 4. People my age often pick on me.

_____ 5. Other people think I am a lot of fun to be with.

_____ 6. I usually keep to myself because I am not like other people my age.

_____ 7. Other people wish that they were like me.

_____ 8. I wish I were a different kind of person because I'd have more friends.

_____ 9. If my group of friends decided to vote for leaders of their group I'd be elected.

_____ 10. When things get tough, I am not a person that other people my age turn to for help.

_____ 11. My parents are proud of the kind of person I am.

_____ 12. No one pays much attention to me at home.

_____ 13. My parents feel that I can be depended on.

_____ 14. I often feel that if they could, my parents would trade me in for another child.

_____ 15. My parents try to understand me.

_____ 16. My parents expect too much from me.

_____ 17. I am an important person to my family.

_____ 18. I often feel unwanted at home.

_____19. My parents believe that I will be a success in the future.

_____20. I often wish that I had been born into another family.

_____21. My teacher expects too much from me.

_____22. In the kinds of things we do in school, I am at least as good as other people in my class.

_____23. I often feel worthless in school.

_____24. I am usually proud of my report card.

_____25. School is harder for me than most other people.

_____26. My teachers are usually happy with the kind of work I do.

_____27. Most of my teachers do not understand me.

_____28. I am an important person in my classes.

_____29. It seems that no matter how hard I try, I never get the grades I deserve.

_____30. All and all, I feel I've been very fortunate to have had the kinds of teachers I've had since I started school.

Appendix B: Church Involvement Assessment Tool (CIAT)

Directions: Circle the correct answer.

Age: 12   13   14   15   16

Gender: Male   Female

Race: Black   White   Other

Grade Level: 6th   7th   8th

I live with: My mother and father

                Father only

                Mother only

                My father and stepmother or girlfriend

                My mother and stepfather or boyfriend

                My grandparents or grandfather or grandmother

                A relative

                A friend

1. How often do you take part in church services?
A. 1 time per month

B. 2 times per month

C. 3 or more times a month

D. None

2. Are you involved in any other church activities/program?
A. Yes

B. No

3. How often do you take part in church activities/programs other than church services?
A. 1 time per month

B. 2 times per month

C. 3 or more times per month

D. None

Scoring Key for the Church Involvement Assessment Scale

Questions 1 through 3 assess the degree of church involvement or non-involvement of the adolescent. The following letters are equivalent to the corresponding numbers:

1. How often do you take part in church services?
A. 1 time per month

B. 2 times per month

C. 3 or more times a month

D. None

2. Are you involved in any other church activities/program?
A. Yes

B. No

3. How often do you take part in church activities/programs other than church services?
A. 1 time per month

B. 2 times per month

C. 3 or more times per month

D. None

Questions 1 and 3   Question 2
A= 1   A=2
B= 2   B=1
C= 3
D= 0

Scoring:
There is a total maximum of 8 points to be categorized within the following 2 groups:

-Low to Moderately Church Involved Adolescent Participant
Points range from 1 to 3.

-Highly Church Involved Adolescent Participant
Points range from 4 to 8.

Date:

Dear Parents/Guardian:

My name is Ywinta Jones and I am a graduate student at Lindenwood University. I am currently working on my thesis and I need your help to complete this project. I am conducting a study that will examine the relationship between the church involvement and the self-esteem in African American adolescents.

Since the students targeted for this study are under the age of 18, your parental consent is needed. I am submitting this letter to ask if you will allow your child(ren) to participate in this study. If permission is granted the youth will receive a survey during the church Bible study service. The survey will take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The survey will contain questions that will assess the church involvement and the self-esteem of each adolescent and the student is only required to circle and write (1 through 4) the response that applies. The data collected for this study will be used to get a picture of the influence that the African American church has on the adolescents who are involved within the church. The survey questions are anonymous and only group results will be reported.

The survey is completely voluntary and anonymous. The information will remain confidential and no one else in the school will have access to this information. Only group data will be presented; no individual will be identified. All students who participate in the study will be given a token of appreciation.

Please sign below if you give permission for your child to participate in the study and return the form as soon as possible in the enclosed envelope to the Sunday School teacher.

Thank-you for your help and if you have any questions or would like more information, feel to contact me at my pager number (314) 606-7791. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Assistant Professor, Anita Sankar at Lindenwood University, Professional and School Counseling Program at (636) 916-8254 if further assistance is needed.

Sincerely,

Ywinta Jones

My signature on this form states that I understand what the study is about and give my consent for my child's participation in the study

_____
Signature of Parent/Guardian

Parental Consent Form for School

Date:

Dear Parents/Guardian:

My name is Ywinta Jones and I am a graduate student at Lindenwood University. I am currently working on my thesis and I need your help to complete this project. I am conducting a study that will examine the relationship between the church involvement and the self-esteem in African American adolescents.

Since the students targeted for this study are under the age of 18, your parental consent is needed. I am submitting this letter to ask if you will allow your child(ren) to participate in this study. If permission is granted the youth will receive a survey within the school setting. I will personally administer the survey to the students, no teacher in the school will have access to the survey results. The survey will take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The survey will contain questions that will assess the church involvement and the self-esteem of each adolescent. The student is only required to circle and write (1 through 4) the response that applies. The survey questions are anonymous and only group results will be reported.

The survey is completely voluntary and anonymous. The information will remain confidential and no one else in the school will have access to this information. Only group data will be presented; no individual will be identified. All students who participate in the study will be given a token of appreciation.

Please sign below if you give permission for your child to participate in the study and return the form as soon as possible in the enclosed envelope to your child who will in turn give it to their teacher.
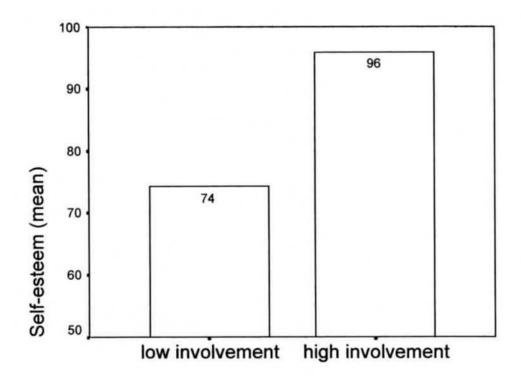
Thank-you for your help and if you have any questions or would like more information, feel to contact me at my pager number (314) 606-7791. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Assistant Professor, Anita Sankar at Lindenwood University, Professional and School Counseling Program at (636) 916-8254 if further assistance is needed.

Sincerely,

Ywinta Jones

My signature on this form states that I understand what the study is about and give my consent for my child's participation in the study.

_____

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Self-esteem (mean)

100
90
80
70
60
50

74

96

low involvement   high involvement

Level of church involvement