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Religion, Racism, and Ecological Stress Among African-American Families: A Qualitative Analysis of Perceptions and Coping Strategies

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RELIGION, RACISM, AND ECOLOGICAL STRESS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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in

The School of Human Ecology

by
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I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely wife, Loetia Young-Jones and my children, Rhonda G. Leblanc, Steven E. Jones, and Rodney B. Jones.

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ABSTRACT

Americans do not reside in what many consider now a Post-Racial society. A remarkable number of researchers found that African Americans are more likely than any other racial group to experience racism, manifested by racist attitudes and practices, which negatively affect their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (health). Very importantly, numerous scholarly works have examined racism and Black women qualitatively. Unfortunately, less has been known about the personal processes and meaning-making mechanisms of Black married couples and African American males in terms of how they cope with racism, and ecological stress. To address this gap, this study uses qualitative responses from 23 multi-denominational Christian heterosexual married couples (made up of those who are Catholics, Protestants, LDS and Non-Denominational individuals) (N = 46 individuals) from across the United States. Grounded Theory methodology was used to reveal the following themes: (1) Religion and Stress, (2) Racism and Stress, (3) Perceived Factors of Stress, and (4) Coping Strategies. As part of the findings, the study reveals that African American families, or Black minority families, experienced more institutional racism from White Americans than any other group. It was also observed that African Americans are generally faced with institutional racism in most bi-racial environments, and these encounters have negative effects on their social well-being. Additionally, the study revealed that African Americans adopted several strategies to deal with the stress that emanated from White racism which included, Self-Directed Coping Strategies, Collaborative Coping Strategies, and Deferred Coping Strategies.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Ecological stress is an unavoidable part of today's fast-paced but competitive world. Stress, as an entity is the body's instinctive response to external environmental cues as well as to one's inner thoughts and feelings. Haas (2010), Cohen, et al., (1998), and Alexander (1999) have similar views regarding the conceptualization of ecological stress; they see it as environmental demands that levy or exceed the adaptive capacity of an organism, which result in biological and psychological changes that may be detrimental to health, because it places the organism at risk for disease or disability. In addition, they further argue that stress can take many forms, which can include economic difficulties, religion and spirituality, physical deprivation, low status, occupational strain, the death of a spouse or loved one, family responsibilities or difficulties, neighborhood instability, and discrimination (Alexander, 1999; Cohen et al. 1998; Haas, 2010).

Pearlin et al., (1981) and Pearlin and Schooler (1978) theorize that individual stress processes relate to larger family stress processes, which have implications for the general well-being of parents and their children. They further elaborate that at the individual level, the stress process model illustrates the progression, through which individuals attempt to cope with exposure to stressors. Particularly, greater exposure to stress may diminish their ability to cope or manage ecological stress thereby leaving them vulnerable to acute and chronic physical and psychological health problems (Pearlin et al., 1981).

Self-concepts play a major role in buffering the deleterious impact of stress among individuals; those with higher levels of mastery and self-esteem tend to be more resilient and are less likely to experience depression due to stressful contexts (Christi-Mizell & Erickson 2007; Rosenberg et al., 1995). Also relevant is the fact that the extent to which individuals perceive

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events as stressful is very likely linked to their own levels of self-esteem; individuals with low self-esteem are generally at higher risk of experiencing elevated depressive symptoms (Pearlin,1989). Moreover, for those vulnerable in the stress process, who experience declines in self-concept and elevated levels of depressive symptoms, there are interpersonal consequences, including increased negative interaction with family members, church members, and neighbors, a situation that may exacerbate the risk of other members experiencing distress (Christi-Mizell & Erickson 2007; Pearlin, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1995).

The family is a fundamental element in human society. Therefore, many stressors may come from either the nuclear or the extended family. A recent study reveals stress in Black families most often relate to economic hardship, work-related stress, racial discrimination, parental conflict, elevated levels of distress and depression, and youth with lower levels of adjustment (Broman, 2001; Gutman et al., 2005; Hammen et al., 2004; Murray et al., 2001). For example, Black families and their population in the United States of America, figure 1.1 below, describes the percentage of the U.S population identifying as both Black or African American and non-Hispanic families that are more likely to experience stress resulting from economic hardship, work-related stress, and racial discrimination (Broman, 2001; Gutman et al., 2005; Hammen et al., 2004).
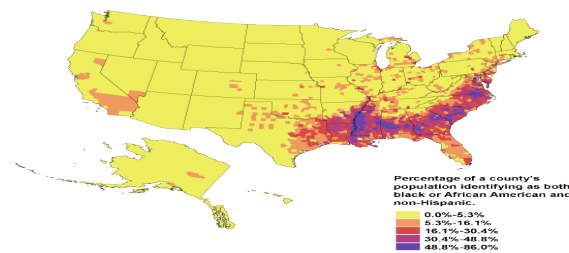
Figure 1.1: Percentage of U.S population identifying as both Black or African American and non-Hispanic families
Source: http://www.censusscope.org/us/map_nhblack.html

Very importantly, the term African Americans families are also referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans, and formerly as American Negroes families. These families are citizens or residents of the United States who have origins in many of the Black populations of Africa (McKinnon, 2007). According to the 2009 American Community Survey, there were 38,093,725 Black and African Americans in the United States, representing 12.4% of the population. In addition, there were 37,144,530 non-Hispanic Blacks, which comprised 12.1% of the population (McKinnon, 2007; U.S Census Bureau 2010).

This number increased to 42 million according to the 2010 United States Census, when including Multiracial African Americans, making up 14% of the total U.S. population (U.S Census Bureau, 2010). Blacks and African Americans make up the second largest group in the United States, but the third largest group after White Americans and Hispanic or Latino Americans (U.S Census Bureau, 2010). However, it was underscored by the U.S Census Bureau (2010) that the majority of the African-American population (55%) lives in the South; compared to the 2000 Census, there has also been a decrease of African Americans in the Northeast and Midwest (see figure 1.2 below). (McKinnon, 2007; U.S Census Bureau, 2010).
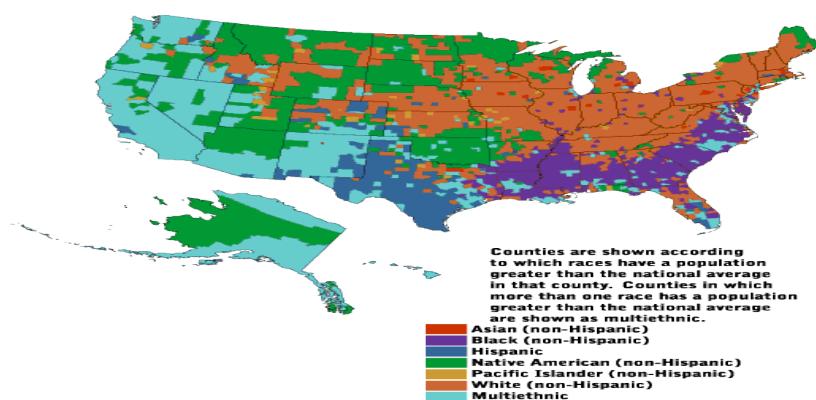
Figure 1.2: Racial Populations

In the context of the ecological stressor, several eminent scholars argue that outside family pressures, religion and racial factors contribute immensely to the ecological stress of African American communities. For example, in a seminal book, titled Mighty like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform, authored by Andrew Billingsley, a sociologist, it was asserted that the Black church is the only African American institution that has not been re-envisioned in the image of whites. In addition, Dr. Billingsley's research for the book illuminated the role of religion in building the resilience that allows Blacks as a people to overcome the various forms of systemic racism and oppression that they have endured for many centuries at the hands of White supremacists (Billingsley, 1999; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Carten (2015) argues that in paying homage to church and family in buffering blacks against the full effects of White racism, society must not obscure or diminish racism's impact on the mental health or stress of the few minorities (Blacks). He further asserted that there is increasing evidence that repressing feelings, which are associated with acts of White racism, may be psychologically damaging to the extent of either fomenting or laying the foundation for future mental health or stress problems and behaviors symptomatic of post-traumatic stress syndrome among the Black minority (Carten, 2015; Carter, 2007; & Clark, et al., 1999).

Meanwhile, racism has become a battling phenomenon among the African-American population (minority communities), especially where Black men are concerned. In fact, when compared to individuals of other races, African-American men are at greater risk for adverse health outcomes. Scholars also outline several ecological stressors resulting from racism among African-American men including the lack of opportunity to have health insurance, to utilize health services when insured, and at greater risk of receiving lower quality care when seeking services, than men

from other racial groups. Moreover, their life expectancy is as much as 5.4 years lower than other racial groups (Chung et al., 2015; Cole, 2014; Crocker, 2007).

According to Chung et al., (2015) African-American men experience disproportionate stress due to specific social determinants, namely those that relate to health, unemployment, poverty, and discrimination. Additionally, community participants from an earlier study report neighborhood stress (e.g., noise, decaying buildings, and community violence), economic factors (e.g., poverty and unemployment) and racial discrimination as significant causes of "stress and drama," with has a detrimental impact on physical and emotional well-being. Towards the end of the analysis by Chung et al. (2015), they underscore that stress, particularly as it relates to finances and racism, is common among African American men. However, at the same time, most men found support for resiliency to ameliorate stress produced by religion and nuclear families (Billingsley, 1968; Choi, 2009; Chung et al., 2015; Deaton, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Narayan, 1999).

Miranda et al., (2013) finds 25% of African-American, men test positive for depression, which is a common mental health problem associated with mental health outcomes relative to exposure to stress. Although some research studies have examined the relationship between stress and health outcomes in African-American men, several scholars have indicated that they are not aware of studies that used a community-developed design to investigate ecological stress, religion, and racism. This study is designed to help fill or address the relevant literature gap. Therefore, the research earmarks on an examination of religion, race, and ecological stress among African-American Families and their coping strategies (Carter, 2007; Caughy, 2004; Crocker, 2007; Miranda et al., 2013).

1.2. Problem Statement/Identification

Marriage has been a declining institution among all Americans and this decline is even more evident in the African Americans community. In fact, in 2016 the U.S. Census Bureau for American Community revealed that only 29% of African Americans were married compared to 48% of all Americans. Additionally, it was further revealed that 50% of African Americans have never been married compared to 33% of all Americans. In relation to the 2016 U.S. Census Bureau for American Community data, the following observations were made; (1) fewer Black women were "now married", and (2) more Black women than Black men have been married at least once. The disparities were evidenced since higher percentage of Black women were divorced and widowed than men. Also, in 2016 just under half or 48% of Black women had never been married which was up from 44% in 2008 and 42.7% in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Table 1.1: Percentage of Married African Americans in the U.S. [Marriage rates]

Marital Status				
15yrs & older	African Americans			All
	All	Men	Women	USA
Married	29%	32%	26%	48%
Divorced	12%	10%	13%	11%
Separated	4%	3%	4%	4%
Widowed	6%	3%	8%	6%
Never married	50%	52%	48%	34%

Source U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community
Survey 1-Year Estimates
Note: figures are rounded and therefore may not total 100%
BlackDemographics.com

Meanwhile, despite the declining nature of marriages among the African American community, diversity in the United States' Black population is rapidly increasing. The number of

foreign-born Blacks grew by 27.2% in the 1980s and by approximately 42% during the 1990s and by about 50% in the 2000s (U.S. Census Bureau 2005; 2007). In addition, in 1998, there were approximately 8.4 million African-American households in the United States. With a total population of approximately 34.5 million, African-Americans, as estimated, made up of 13% of the total population of U.S. families. At present, the United States Black population numbers approximately 36 million and about 8% of that population is foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Among foreign-born Blacks, about 60% are of West Indian or Caribbean descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). While the ethnic diversity of the United States Black population continues to grow, limited research examines ethnic heterogeneity among Blacks, their mental health outcomes, as well as the ecological stress they experience (Lincoln et al., 2007; U.S. Census Bureau 2005; 2007).

Studies show that family exposure to stress leads to numerous harmful outcomes for youth and adults, including elevated depressive symptoms, poor health, and more youth behavioral problems (Conger et al., 2002; Gutman et al., 2005; Wikrama et al., 1997). In addition, neglect, police brutality, microaggressions, lack of economic resources, and racial discrimination make Blacks especially vulnerable to acute and chronic stress (Carter, 2007; Pyke 2010; Sternthal et al., 2011).

Although an extensive literature illustrates the consequences of acute and chronic stressors within the context of families across race and ethnic groups, there is a dearth of research on intra-racial differences in adjustment to the presence of events perceived as stressful. Interestingly, empirically tested theoretical models of the family stress process for economically disadvantaged families (i.e. minority community's) suggest that the exposure of an individual to stress include activities or events associated with poverty that inherently function across race/ethnic groups, and

that families generally use different coping strategies. For example, African Americans frequently rely on religiosity as a buffer to adversity (Conger et al., 2002; McLoyd, 1998; Narayan, 1999).

Religion is as old as humankind. For example, primitive man had primitive religions, and worshipped the elements of nature like the sun, earth, air, cloud, water, etc., prior to the advancement in civilization, which led to institutionalized religions (Behere, et al., 2013). Additionally, scholars have underscored that the basic characteristics of many religions are similar, including belief in a higher being, and unseen controlling power. Historically, religion, as a spiritual ecological phenomenon, has been a psychological necessity for all humanity; this appears to be especially true with respect to the mind-set of most African Americans (Behere, et al., 2013; Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Religious Composition
All numbers shown are percentages.

Total U.S. population

| Evangelical Protestant churches 26 | Mainline Protestant churches 18 | Historically black Protestant churches 7 | Catholic 24 | Unaffiliated 16 | Other 8 | Don't know/Refused 1 |

African-Americans

| Evangelical Protestant churches 15 | Historically black Protestant churches 59 | Mainline Protestant churches 4 | Cath. 5 | Unaffiliated 12 | Oth. 5 | Don't know/Refused 1 |

Source: Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007, released in 2008
Note: Due to rounding, totals in this report may not sum to 100, and nested figures may not sum to the subtotals indicated

Figure 1.3: Religious Compositions

According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, while America is generally a highly religious nation, African-Americans are markedly more religious on a variety of measures than the U.S. population in general. Many of these measures relate to level of affiliation with a religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer and the salience of religion in life. Compared

with other racial and ethnic groups, African-Americans are among the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation, with fully 87% of African-Americans describing themselves as belonging to one religious group or another (Behere, et al., 2013; Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008).

The Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008) also found that nearly eight-in-ten African-Americans (79%) said religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56% among all U.S. adults. In fact, even a large majority (72%) of African-Americans who are unaffiliated with any faith said religion plays at least a somewhat important role in their lives; nearly half (45%) of unaffiliated African-Americans say religion is very important in their lives, roughly three times the percentage who said this among the religiously unaffiliated population overall (16%). Indeed, on this measure, unaffiliated African-Americans more closely resemble the overall population of Catholics: 56% said religion is very important and the figure for mainline Protestants was 52%. (Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008).

It is very important to note that religion, which evolved due to the basic psychological need of humankind, has later metamorphosed. Progressively, religious practices have developed into dogmas and superstitions; often taking most of the African-American families' times (both leisure and working hours). Meanwhile, Bellamy (2016) discusses Black churches have historically served oppressed communities by addressing their secular, social, and spiritual needs as well as affirming human dignity and advancing social justice. This praxis of liberation through community engagement necessitates acknowledging the oppressive contexts in which the Black church began and continue to respond to the social location of Black people in America (Behere, et al., 2013; Bellamy, 2016; Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

From a mental health perspective, religion provides needed guidelines, which can help individuals create a path for their lives (Cohen et al., 1998). Towards this end, Cohen et al. (1998) further assert that religion defines African-American community roles and responsibilities over time. They suggested that religion can minimize the ecological stress, strains and uncertainties of life among African-Americans. It is unclear, whether religion is a positive factor or negative factor to ecological stress. Nonetheless, Gutierrez, et al. (2014) argues family is the principal context for religious and spiritual participation. They further note that religion remains a central force in the lives of most African American families. However, it is not clear how religious activities and race among the African-American population serve as stressors (Bellamy, 2016; Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Cohen et al., 1998; Gutierrez, et al., 2014; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Few studies have examined the relationship between stress and race as well as the health outcomes in the African-American population. Nonetheless, in perusing the numerous studies, none of the studies used a community-developed design, to examine the relationship among ecological stress, religion and racism within African-American families. This study is designed to predict, investigate and examine religion, race, and ecological stress among African-American Families and their coping strategies (Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Clark, et al., 1999; Crocker, 2007).

1.3. Purpose of the Current Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship among religion, racism and ecological stress within the context of African-American families. In addition, this study will also focus on the interpretations of African-Americans perceptions and highlight their coping strategies. Upon the perusal of relevant literature, which explains ecological stress, it is still not clear about how religion and racism elucidate the concepts of human ecological stress, specifically among the African-American families. This study is designed to provide empirical data that will

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be useful to stakeholders relative to pertinent information regarding the research questions outlined or listed in this study. In the final analysis, policymakers, scholars, politicians, and students will have a better appreciation or understanding regarding the interactive relationship between religion, ecological stress, and racism among African-American communities/families (Chaney, 2008; Frey, 2008; Gutierrez, et al., 2014; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the relationships among religion, racism, ecological stress, and coping strategies within the context of African-American families. The objectives are as follows:

- To explore the relationship between religion and stress among African-American families
- To explore the relationship between racism and stress among African-American families
- To reveal the perceived factors that cause stress among African-American families
- To identify and analyze the various coping strategies adopted by African-American families to deal with stress

1.5. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this work:

- Is there a relationship between religion and stress among African-American families?
- Is there a relationship between racism and stress among African-American families?
- What are the perceived factors that cause stress among African-American families?
- What coping strategies do African-American families use to deal with stress?

1.6. Significance/Relevance of the Study

There are several reasons why this study is significant which are as follows: Frist of all, this study can be a source of pertinent and empirical data that can be beneficial for the following stakeholders: federal and local government, African-American communities (or Minority communities), healthcare practitioners, religious entities, students, and scholars. For example, the findings in this study can be useful in developing policies and intervention strategies designed to eliminate racial differential treatment of African Americans, contribute to the scholarly knowledge base regarding the negative effects of racism, provide relevant information regarding the sources and extent of racism, expand public awareness of the acute and chronic health conditions experienced by the African American community that results from the ecological stress related to the prevalence of White racism, and provide the Black community with knowledge of hidden damaging physical and psychological effects of racism (Carter, 2009; Harrell, 2000; Pyke, 20010).

Specifically, for federal and local governments, the study may guide policymakers at both federal and local levels with relevant empirical information from the primary stakeholders (minority communities); the study will serve as a bottom-up approach system, whereby we solicit relevant data and information from African-American families, which can inform the public and the policymakers. Turning attention to African-American Families/Communities, the study will benefit various African-American families by providing them with useful and relative information regarding the physical and psychological effects of racism. For example, the findings of the study will unveil the obscured consequences of stress which will be useful in selecting effective coping strategies necessary to deal with stressors or ecological stress that emanate from racism and religion (Carter, 2009; Harrell, 2000; Mellor, 2004; Pyke, 20010).

With respect to healthcare practitioners, stress is a topical issue in the field of Medical and Allied-Health sciences. Therefore, the thematic subject under investigation will unveil some coping strategies or solution to stress that emanates from racism and religious activities. The findings of this study will also enable healthcare practitioners to treat stress-related sicknesses more effectively. In addition, the findings of the study will be beneficial or useful for both governmental and non-governmental agencies regarding the development of intervention and coping strategies designed to address stress-related issues experienced by African-American communities. Finally, Students, Scholars, and educational institutions will benefit from the study by having access to a body of empirical knowledge related to the relationship between racism and stress, which is relevant to the undertaking of future studies (Mellor, 2004; Pyke, 2010).

1.7. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study will explore the relationships among religion, racism, and ecological stress within African-American families. Historically, the propensity of stress among the minority communities is unprecedented and capricious as compared to the other racial bodies. In fact, African-American families provide the idealistic milieu and researchable conditions for such a study. Finally, the study's necessity is driven by ecological theory to create a model to be applied in similarly situated conditions across a wide range of racial bodies within the country, where there is a need to address the concerns of minority groups and, in the end, to advocate on behalf of their interests (Carter, 2009; Harrell, 2000; Mellor, 2004; Pyke, 20010).

1.8. Organization of Study

The study comprises five (5) total chapters. The first chapter addresses the significance of the study. The second chapter includes the relevant scholarly literature. The third chapter outlines

the methodology of the study. The fourth chapter presents the data. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses and summarizes the study (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This section highlights relevant scholarly literature for the study. In addition, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant conceptual framework as well as the theoretical framework, and theoretical literature reviews of race, religion, and stress among African Americans families that are outlined sequentially from the period of slavery, post- slavery, Jim Crow and the present. The primary sources of research are derived from empirical literature reviews from scholarly articles, studies, and Journals that are relevant to the subject matter of this study (Carten, 2015; Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

2.2 Conceptual Framework of Environmental Stimuli

The diagram below depicts the conceptual framework of racism as a stressor for African-American families that involves several components. These components are constitutional factors, socio-demographic factors, psychological or behavioral factors, environmental stimuli and perceived factors. Therefore, racism, or stressors experienced in the environment (environmental stimuli), can influence how an individual cope, or respond to stress. With respect to this study, racism, religiosity, and spirituality may be a source of stress and various behavioral ecological factors influence how individuals perceive and respond to environmental stimuli and stress (Adams & Dressler, 1988; Pearlin, 1989).
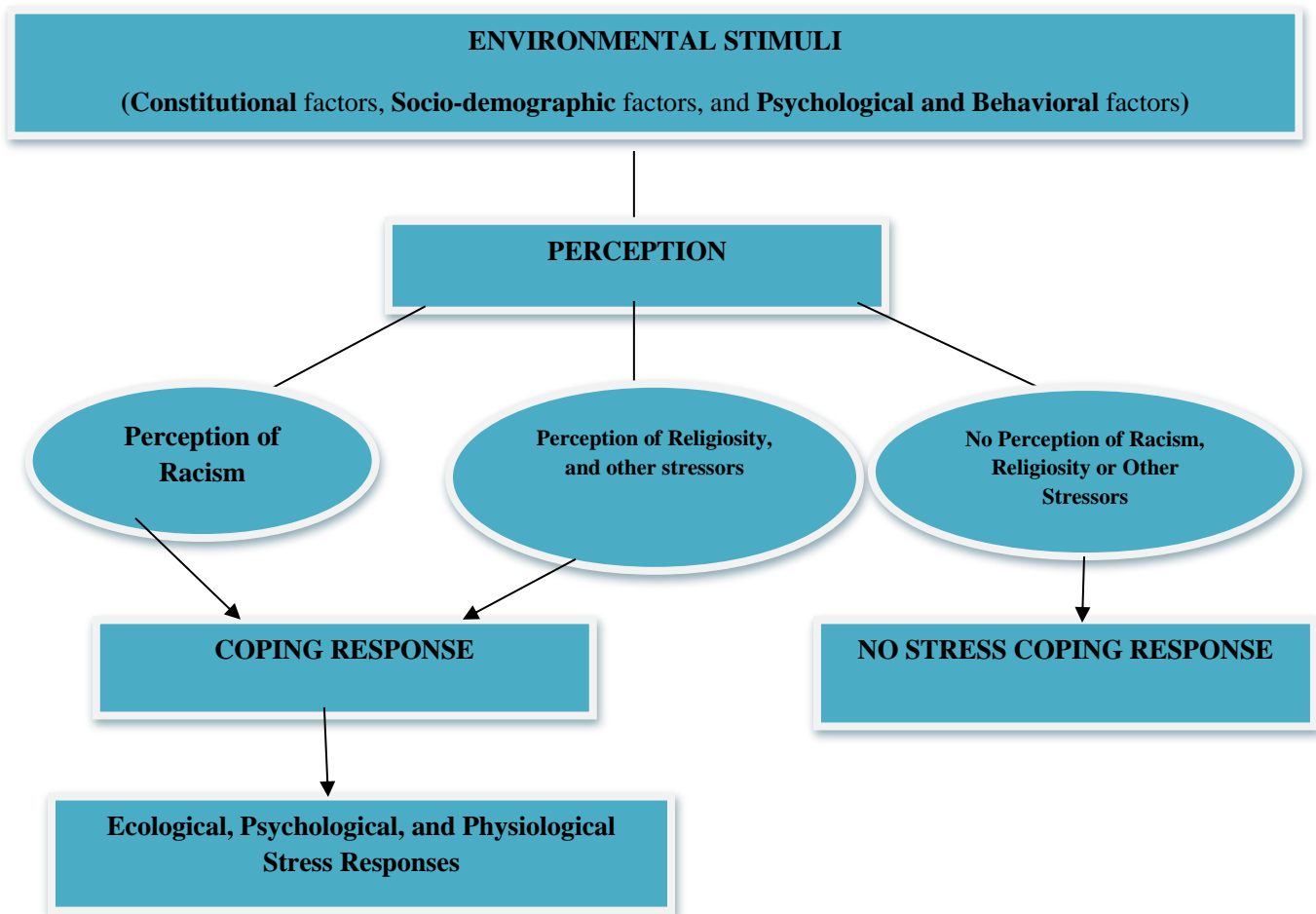
Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of Perceived Stress, Racism and Religiosity
Source: Author's Modification of Clark et al., (1999). A Conceptual Framework of Racism as a Stressor for African-American Families

According to Clark et al., (1999), African-Americans have disproportionate exposure to negative environmental stimuli, which may cause chronic and acute stress (James, 1993; Outlaw, 1993; Sears, 1991). These researchers further argue that few ethnic groups have historical exposure to these experiences to the extent as African-Americans. To support this perspective, Sigelman and Welch (1991) contend that more than 50% of African-Americans attribute racism (or ethnic discrimination) to substandard housing, lack of skilled labor, and managerial jobs, and lower wages. Interestingly, Clark et al., (1999) further assert that other environmental stimuli include

constitutional factors, socio-demographic factors, psychological and behavioral factors. Studies have underscored that numerous constitutional factors influence the relationship between exposure to environmental stimuli and stress (or overall health outcomes). For example, Clark et al., (1999) argue that among African-Americans, skin tone has been associated with such factors as perceptions of ethnic discrimination, occupational status, and personal income (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Keith & Herring; 1991; Udry, Bauman, & Chase, 1971).

According to Clark et al., (1999), one socio-demographic factor that is particularly relevant to the proposed model of the environmental stimuli was socio-economic status (SES), which relates to perceptions of racism. However, a study by Sigelman and Welch (1991) finds a positive relationship between SES and discrimination. Conversely, under the concept of psychological and behavioral factors, Pearlin (1989) argues that any human event can be perceived as stressful (Clark & et al., 1999; Pearlin, 1989).

2.3. The Perception Factor

Perceived racism and religiosity (beliefs) generally refer to subjective experiences of prejudice or discrimination (Clark et al., 1999). Therefore, perceived racism is not limited to experiences one may "objectively" view as racism. For example, McConahay and Hough (1976) and Sears (1991) assert subtler forms of racism usually include belief systems and symbolic behaviors that promulgate the ideology of "free will" (McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears 1991).

2.4. The Context of Coping Strategies/Response

Meanwhile, Clark et al., (1999) advance the contention that African-American, who perceives certain stimuli as stressful, are likely to have individual differences in ecological, psychological, and physiological stress responses. They further theorize the magnitude and duration of these stress responses would depend on the availability and use of coping strategies. However, adaptive coping responses mitigate enduring psychological and physiological stress responses and thereby reduce the potential untoward effects of racism, spirituality, and religiosity on health (Burchfield, 1979; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker, 2007; Harrell, 2000; Hill, 1958).

2.5. Theoretical Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory explains the role and influences of different environmental systems in the development of social behavior and attitudes regarding elements of the social environment. (Haas, 2010; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). According to Bronfenbrenner (1989), ecological system theory is an approach to the study of human development that consists discovering how certain systems in the environment influence individual development. For example, the immediate settings, in which a person lives and the larger contexts in which the settings occur, interact and provide the framework or foundation of development. (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Ecological systems theory uses different types of relationships as well as surroundings to explain factors related to human development, and consist of four distinct components: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem. The focus of this theory is the interactions of structures within a layer and the interaction of structures between layers. A significant theoretical assumption of the ecological systems theory is that the immediate

environment, or system closest to a person/child, the micro system, will have the greatest impact on cognitive perceptions of social reality, psychological development, and behavior, or how one responds to the external social environment. However, all the systems play a major role in shaping perceptions of social reality. An illustration of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development is represented in figure 2.2. (Addison, 1992; Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Lin, 1999; Paquette & Ryan, 2001).
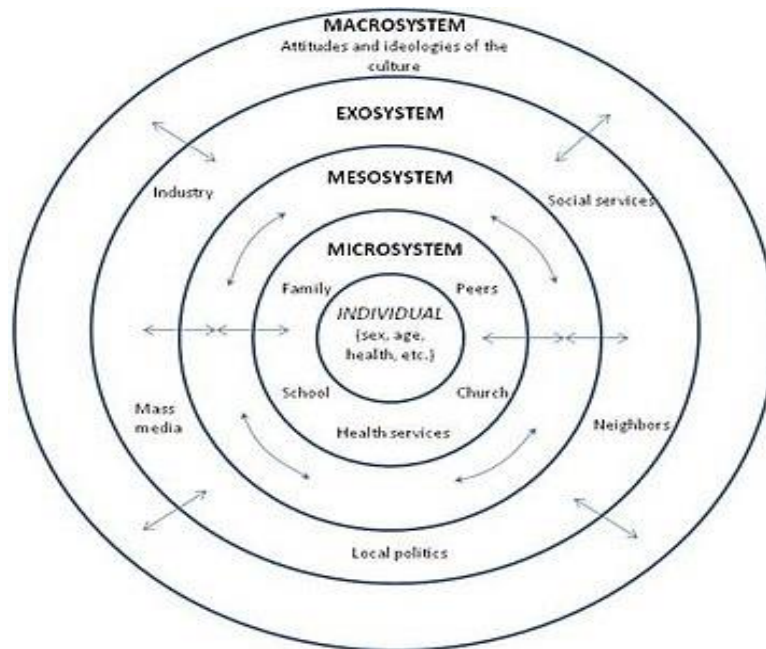
Figure 2.2: Ecological System Theory of Development

Source: Bronfenbrenner (1989), the Ecological System Theory

The Microsystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1989)**,** the microsystem is the most influential component that has the closest relationship with the person, and it is the one through which direct contact whereby occurs. Examples of Microsystem include school, home, work, church, community; all

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of which play a significant role in individual development. It should be noted, however, that the family is generally considered the most influential social structure in the micro system, followed by peers and community (Berk 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Lin, 1999; & Mitchell, 2012; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

The Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner classified the mesosystem as the connecting of the structures of the microsystem, which consist of or constitute, (but not limited to) rules, policies, ethics, morals, and acceptable etiquette. The mesosystem refers to the point in which two social microsystems merge. For example, a mesosystem may be described as the combination of the home and school environments; these social structures intersect and become a mesosystem when events, situations, work and friendships interact between both environments. The primary significance of the mesosystem is its influence on the micro system. (Berk, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Lin, 1999; & Mitchell, 2012; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

The Macrosystem

The macrosystem is the outside level of Bronfenbrenner's structure and involves the laws, customs, resources and values of a given society. However, the kind of influences a person, in the inner levels of the exosystem, affects the macrosystem as well. Therefore, the macrosystem affects the exosystem, mesosystem and the microsystem. For instance, the government regulations, policies, adoption laws, as well as values and customs are all are integral components of this system. Above all, macrosystem develops and implements cultural beliefs, ideologies, customs and policies. As it relates to ecological systems theory, the author concludes a person's development influences or affects everything within the surrounding environment (Berk, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Lin, 1999; & Mitchell, 2012; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

2.6. Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

According to several scholars, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade took place between the 16th and 19th centuries. Historically, the trade involved the transportation by slave traders of enslaved African people to the Americas and their dispersal through retail trading transactions. Based on a report by International Slavery Museum, retrieved on October 4, 2015, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade used mainly the triangular trade route and the Middle Passage to transport their human cargo (Daniel, 1962; Greta, 2015).

The report further outlined that the vast majority of those who were enslaved and transported were Africans from central and western Africa, who had been sold by other West Africans to Western European slave traders or captured directly by the slave traders in coastal raids and subsequently brought to the Americas; none came voluntarily. The Trans-Atlantic Slave endeavor was a physical and psychological taxing experience for the Black captured slave, and source of unimaginable stress. Mannix Daniel (1962) argues South Atlantic and Caribbean economies were dependent on the supply of secure external labor to produce commodity crops, making goods and clothing to sell in Europe. These are some of the reasons that motivated or prompted slave traders to indulge in the business of selling Black human cargo. (www.britannica.com/topic/Middle-Passage-slave-trade).

Daniel (1962) points out that Western European countries, in the late 17th and 18th centuries, were competing to create overseas empires and this factor contributed immensely to the need for vast amounts of labor. He also noted that the Portuguese were the first to engage in the Atlantic slave trade in the 16th century and completed the first transatlantic slave voyage in 1526, and other European countries quickly followed. As Daniel (1962) observed, most of the African slaves worked on coffee, tobacco, cocoa, sugar, rice, and cotton plantations; they also worked in

gold and silver mines, construction industries, and as domestic servants (Daniel, 1962; Greta, 2015).

It is interesting to note that, according to Daniel (1962), the first Africans imported to the English colonies were not slaves. Rather, they were classified as "indentured servants" and "apprentices for life." From all indications, their status in the New World was the same as those of workers coming from England. This suggest, to some degree, that in the beginning of the New World experience, the social status of Black and White Americans was not predicated or based on an ideology of White racial innate superiority. This implies that class, not race, generally determined how individuals and groups of individuals were viewed or categorized in society; skin color was not an issue until later in the American experience (Daniel, 1962; Greta, 2015).

However, in the middle of the 17th century, slavery had hardened as a racial caste system, slaves and their offspring's during that time were stripped of their humanity and legally assumed as the property of their owners and more important, children born to slave mothers were also considered to be slaves. This period of Black dehumanization is perhaps the birth of modern-day racism, and the origin of much of the systemic ecological stress experienced by African-Americans and African American families in modern day society -see figure 2.3- (Daniel, 1962; Greta, 2015).
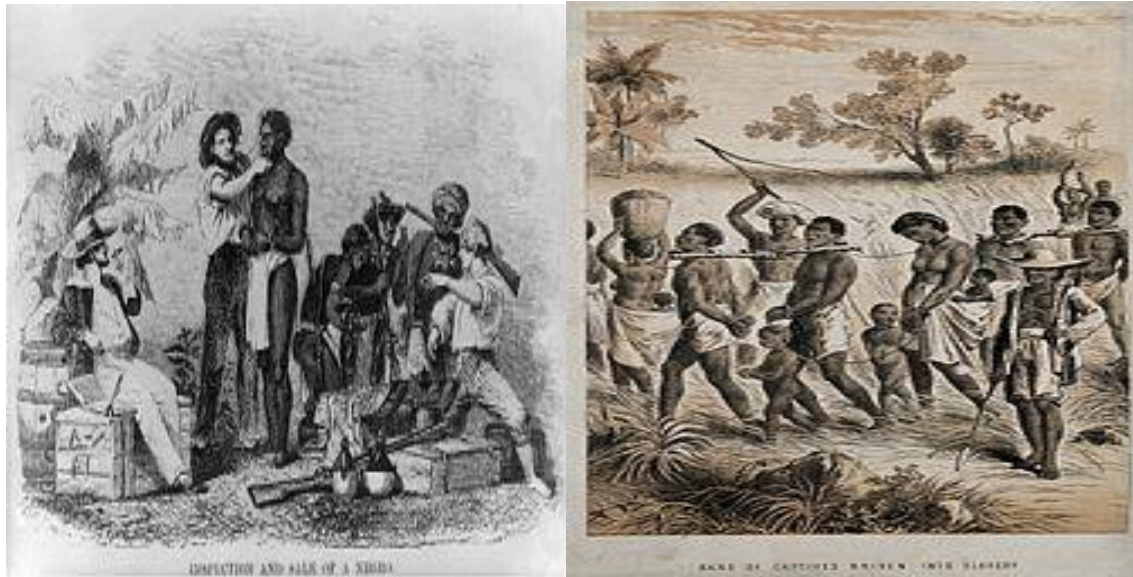
Figure 2.3: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: African Slavery
(Slave Inspection)   (Slaves Harassments: Systematic Stress)

Historically, the major Atlantic slave trading nations were: the Portuguese, British, French, Spanish, and Dutch Empires. According to Klein and Klein (1999), "The Atlantic Slave Trade" members of these nations established outposts on the African coast where they purchased slaves from local African leaders and dispatched slave-hunting parties to capture African men and women and later transported to the so-called New World and other distance parts of the globe. It is not unreasonable to assume that Black children were among the captured (Daniel, 1962; Greta, 2015; Klein & Klein, 1999).

It is difficult to ascertain precisely the number of Black men and women that were snatched from the shores of Africa by White Christian slave hunters, however, Segal (1995) and other historians, estimate that there were approximately 12 million Africans captured and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to various parts of the world. In discussions involving the "Atlantic Slave Trade," generally, historians have given limited or insufficient time to discussing the inhumane conditions and treatment to which African slaves were subjected; the high death rate during the

middle passage is evidence of the sub-human treatment and conditions. Historical records reflect that the psychological challenge experienced by the slaves was so demanding, many of them chose death over life (Eltis, & Richardson, 2002; Klein & Klein, 1999; Segal, 1995).

Basil Davidson (1980), a British historian, underscored in his work titled, "The African Slave Trade," that near the beginning of the 19th century, various governments realized the systematic stress impose on the Africans slaves, who therefore acted to ban the trade, although illegal smuggling still occurred. Notwithstanding, in the early 21st century, several domestic and international governments issued apologies for the transatlantic slave trade. Granted, apologies and recognition of the inhumane and barbaric treatment of the forebears of African Americans are noble and appreciated gestures, however, what is more significant is the recognition and appreciation by White America of the psychological damages that has been trans-generationally transferred to the contemporary Black community in the form of chronic stress (Davidson, 1980; web.stanford.edu/~omidf/KarinaSchumann_Home/Publications_files/Blatz.Schumann.Ross.Polit ical Psychology.2009.pdf).

2.7. The Atlantic Voyage

The establishment of the Atlantic slave trade was trading contacts between the "Old World" (Afro-Eurasia) and the "New World" (the Americas). For centuries, tidal water currents made ocean travel particularly difficult and risky for the ships that were then available, and there was little if any, maritime contact between peoples living in these continents (Thornton, 1998, pp. 15-17). In the 15th century, however, new European developments in seafaring technologies resulted in ships being better equipped to deal with the tidal currents and could begin traversing the Atlantic Ocean under safer conditions (see below figure 2.4). (Thornton, 1998).

Between 1600 and 1800, approximately 300,000 sailors that visit West Africa engage in the slave trade (Christopher, 2006, p. 127). In doing so, they met societies living along the West African coast and in the Americas, which had never previously encountered (Thornton 1998, p. 13). Historian Pierre Chaunu terms the consequences of European navigation "dis-enslavement", with it marking an end of isolation for some societies and an increase in inter-societal contact for most others (Chaunu 1969, pp. 54–58; Christopher, 2006; Thornton, 1998).
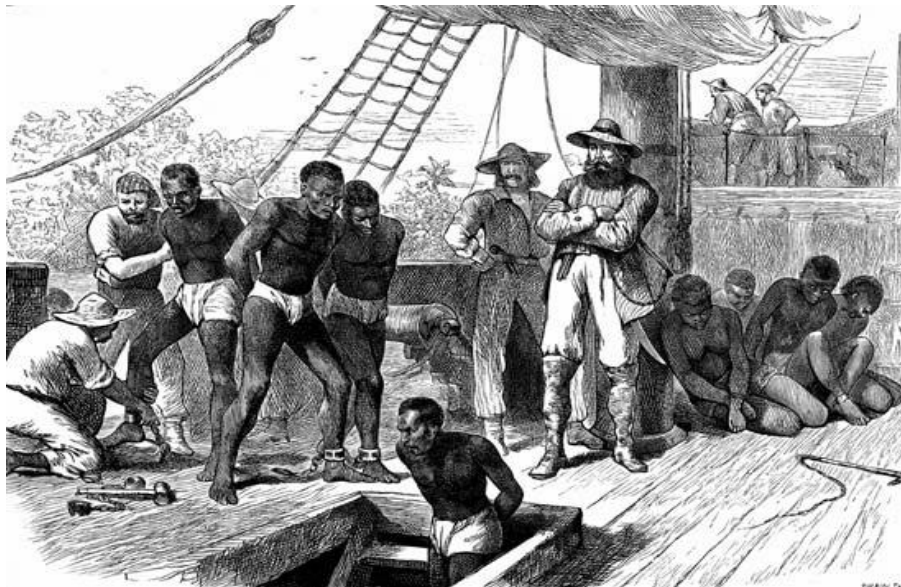
Figure 2.4: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: African Captives Being Transferred to Ships along the Slave Coast, in 1880
Source @ Photos.com/Thinkstock

Historian John Thornton notes, "a number of technical and geographical factors combined to make Europeans the most likely people to explore the Atlantic and develop its commerce" (Thornton 1998, p. 24). He identified these as being the drive to find new and profitable

commercial opportunities outside Europe as well as the desire to create an alternative trade network

to that controlled by the Muslim Empire of the Middle East, which was viewed as a commercial,

political and religious threat to European Christendom. In particular, European traders wanted to

trade for gold, which could be found in Western Africa, and also to find a maritime route to "the

Indies" (India), where they could trade for luxury goods such as spices without having to obtain

these items from Middle Eastern Islamic traders" (Thornton 1998, pp. 24–26).

While Iberians led many of the initial Atlantic naval explorations, members of many

European nationalities were also involved, including sailors from Portugal, Spain, Italy, England,

France as well as the Netherlands. This diversity in nationalities led Thornton to describe the initial

event as exploration of the Atlantic as "a truly international exercise, even if many of the dramatic

discoveries were made under the sponsorship of the Iberian monarchs", (Thornton 1998, p. 27).

2.8. African-American Education from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War

According to Phillis Wheatley (1834), during the era of slavery in the United States, the

education for freed and enslaved African-Americans was often discouraged, except for religious

instruction. Eventually, education was illegal in many Southern States. During the period of

slavery, Wheatley believes literacy was incompatible with the institution of slavery and could

ultimately lead to its downfall through rebellion as well as educated Blacks demanding the same

rights that Whites enjoyed (Phillis Wheatley, 1834). In addition, Langhorne (2000) observed in his

early manuscript that both free and enslaved African-Americans continued to learn to read and

write because of clandestine efforts of African Americans themselves, as well as schools and

informal education that operated during this period. Adding to that, he further observed that the

slaves used storytelling, music and crafts to pass along cultural traditions and other information

(Hausmann et al, 2007; Henderson, 1995; Langhorne, 2000; Sutton, & Kimbrough, 2001; www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/phillis-wheatly).

Meanwhile, Kimberly (2014) argued that in the Northern States, African-Americans had more access to formal schooling and were more likely to have basic reading and writing skills. The Quakers were important in establishing education programs in the North in the years before and after the Revolutionary War (Kimberly, 2014). Also, during the U.S. colonial period, two prominent religious groups, Congregationalists and Anglicans, both saw the conversion of slaves as a spiritual obligation, and the ability to read scriptures was seen as part of this process (Hausmann et al, 2007; Henderson, 1995; Monaghan, 2001). As stated earlier in the historical development of African-American religion, the Great Awakening served as a catalyst for encouraging education for all members of society (Kimberly, 2014).

Although the ability to write was a mark of high status, most Europeans believe it was unnecessary for slaves. This is because many had to learn how to read to be able to write. For example, runaway Wallace Turnage learned how to read and write during that time [of his enslavement] and since [he] escaped the clutches of those held who held [him] in slavery (Davis, 1991). One scholar believes slaves taught Turnage to read and then assisted him to escape to the next town. Memorization, catechisms, and scripture form the basis of slave education (Davis, 1991).

Even though receiving an education was stressful for most slaves, a few slaves had the opportunity to read and write. Prior to the 1710's, slaves received biblical literacy instruction from their masters. The most notable among these was enslaved writer Phillis Wheatley who learns to read and write in the home of her master and promptly used her skills to write poetry (which

receives admiration on both sides of the Atlantic) and articulated her feelings regarding slavery to leaders of government [See Figure 2.5] (www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/phillis-wheatly).

Figure 2.5: Phillis Wheatley frontispiece 1834

Several writers note most slaves did not have the opportunities that Wheatley had. However, only slaves whose owners allow them to read benefited from Christian instruction. Some slave owners merely encouraged literacy for slaves because they needed someone to run errands for them and for other small reasons. Otherwise, they did not encourage slaves to learn how to write. Unfortunately, slave owners saw writing as something that only educated Whites should know (Dika & Singh, 2002; McClure, 2006; Schiller, 2008; 2009).

Some of the African-American preachers would often attempt to teach some of the slaves how to read in secret, but there were very few opportunities for concentrated periods of instruction. Through Negro spirituals as well as storytelling, and other forms of oral literacy, preachers, abolitionists, and other community leaders imparted valuable political, cultural, and religious information to those enslaved. It is noteworthy to point out that Black bondsmen were always eager to learn how to read and write and took every opportunity to do so (Bennett, 2016; McClure, 2006; & Schiller, 2008; 2009).

Over the years, there has been evidence of slaves practicing how to read and write in secret. For example, slates or chalkboards near George Washington's estate in Mount Vernon show writings carved in them. In addition, Antonio Bly notes, 237 unidentified slates, 27 pencil leads, 2 pencil slates, and 18 writing slates were uncovered in houses once occupied by Jefferson's Black bondservants (Bly, 2008; Feagin et al, 1996). This is an indication that slaves were secretly practicing their reading and writing skills when they had time alone, most likely at night. They also believed that slaves practiced their letters in the dirt because it was much easier to hide than writing on slates. Slaves generally passed on their newly learned skills to others (Bly, 2008; Feagin et al, 1996).

Furthermore, Bly (2008) notes that during slavery, mistresses were more likely (than masters) to ignore the law and teach slaves to read. In addition, children were, by far, the most likely to flout what they saw as unfair and unnecessary restrictions. While peer tutelage was limited in scope, it was common for children in slavery to carry White children's books to school. Once there, they would sit outside and try to follow the lessons through the window. In fact, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and some of his contemporaries estimated that, by 1865, up to 9% of slaves attained at least a marginal degree of literacy (Bly, 2008; Dika & Singh, 2002; Douglass, 2016; Du Bois, 2018; Fisher, 2007; Fleming, 1984; Patilla et al 1997; Snodgrass, 2015).

Additionally, Eugene Genovese (1972) a leading historian with expertise in the study of slavery, commented that, with reference to the statistics, "this is entirely plausible and may even be too low" (p. 562). The interesting scenario was that, in cities and other large towns, many free Blacks and literate slaves had greater opportunities to teach others, and that both White and Black activists conducted illegal schools for enslaved Blacks in such cities as Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Charleston, Richmond, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Diego, and Atlanta. It is known that

several, notable educators like John Berry Meachum, a Black pastor, created a Floating Freedom School on the Mississippi River as a way to circumvent anti-literacy laws (Fleming, 1984; Patilla et al 1997; Snodgrass, 2015). Surprisingly, the regular practice of hiring out slaves to help on the plantation spread literacy. As seen in Frederick Douglass's narrative, it was common for the literate slaves to share their learning skills (Dika & Singh, 2002; Douglass, 2016; Genovese, 1972; Snodgrass, 2015).

The significance of education was recognized and appreciated by many slaves. For example, Fredrick Douglass stated in his autobiography that he understood the pathway from slavery to freedom, and that it was to have the power to read and write. In contrast, Schiller (2009) writes, after all, most educated slaves did not find that the acquisition of literacy led inexorably and inevitably to physical freedom and the idea that they needed the education to achieve and experience existential freedoms is surely problematic (Bly, 2008; Feagin et al, 1996; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough &Hutcheson, 1998; Schiller, 2009).

2.9. Post -Traumatic Slave Syndrome

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is America's Legacy of enduring injury and stress as experienced by African Americans. A well-known book written by Dr. Joy DeGruy in 2005 discusses the topic. It describes the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome among African-Americans as a set of behaviors, beliefs and actions associated with or related to multi-generational trauma experienced by African Americans that include, but are not limited to, undiagnosed and untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in enslaved Africans and their descendants (DeGruy, 2005).

Again, DeGruy pointed out that centuries of slavery in the United States, followed by systemic and structural racism and oppression, including lynching, Jim Crow laws, and

unwarranted mass incarceration, have resulted in multigenerational maladaptive behaviors, which originated as survival strategies to stress and injuries. The syndrome continues because children whose parents suffer from Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome mimic the same behaviors, long after the behaviors have lost their contextual effectiveness. DeGruy (2005) states that Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) is not a disorder that can simply be treated and cured clinically but rather, it also requires a profound social change in individuals, as well as in institutions that continue to reify inequality and injustice toward the descendants of enslaved Africans (DeGruy, 2005).

Black lynching's are perhaps the greatest single contributor to the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. This uncivilized, cruel, and inhumane behavior by Whites ensured the Black community lived in unimaginable mental anxiety, fear, and perpetuate terror. Obviously, such a constant psychological state of mind produced an unusual amount of stress for African Americans whose physical existence were literally in the hands of folk who viewed them as sub-human, devoid of all rights, including the right to life. Perhaps the saddest commentary of all regarding the history of lynching's in America is the silence of the Christian church, and the indifference of the White community to human pain and suffering (DeGruy, 2005; Genovese, 1972; Lartey & Morris; 2018; Raper, 2003)

What the history of Black lynching's clearly teaches is that racism is a perverted psychological crutch used to justify or rationalize inhuman transgressions; and any discussions of racism should take into consideration that its scope ranges from simple racial avoidance to mob violence. A fact that many generally overlook regarding Black lynching's, is that, for many, they were a source of entertainment. According to Lartey and Morris (2018), among the most unsettling realities of lynching is the degree to which White Americans embraced it, not as an uncomfortable necessity or a way of maintaining order, but as a joyous moment of wholesome celebration; some

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even saw a lynched Black man's pain and suffering comical and amusing (Lartey & Morris, 2018; Raper, 2003).

Figure 2.6 White Amusement: Lynched African American

What many generally ignore regarding discussions of Black lynching is that they were a source of entertainment for entire White families including women and children, young and old. For example, Lartey and Morris (2018) point out that, whole families came together, mothers and fathers, bringing even their youngest children. It was the show of the countryside – a very popular show, read a 1930 editorial in the Raleigh News and Observer. Men joked loudly at the sight of the bleeding body … girls giggled as the flies fed on the blood that dripped from the Negro's nose (Lartey & Morris, 2018).

Figure 2.7: Sad Commentary: A White Family Affair

White lynch mobs did not discriminate between Black males and Black females when it came to the life and death of innocent African American men and women. On some occasions, even though some of the women were pregnant, their maternal condition was of little or no consequence and they still lost their lives. Furthermore, the lynching of most Black women took place because they were trying to prevent the murder of their husbands or other members of their immediate families. Although most lynching involved Black males as victims, and to a lesser extent, Black females, the lynching of White males primarily occurred because they tried to prevent the lynching of an innocent Black man or because they spoke out publicly against the practice. On rare occasion, a White female was also lynched (DeGruy, 2005; Lartey & Morris, 2018; Raper, 2003).

In 1918, a 21-year-old pregnant Black woman's husband was lynched by a white mob for a crime believed that he did not commit. She spoke out publicly against what they did to her husband. Angered, the white mob found her when she attempted to get away. They tied her by her ankles, and she hung upside down. While she was still living they cut her stomach open with a knife. Her unborn child fell from her belly. When her baby let out a cry they stomped on it and crushed it. They doused her body in gasoline and set her on fire. #BADFAITH

Figure 2.8: Innocent Victims: Mother and Child

Figure 2.9: Black Lives Don't Matter: Even the Unborn

While the records indicate that lynching's were widespread in the South, it was a nationwide social phenomenon that affected all racial groups but not equally so. However, no other ethnic or racial group have suffered more from or affected by the inhumane, senseless, and barbaric practice of human lynching than African Americans. According to Dr. Joy DeGury (2005), slavery, Jim Crow laws, oppression, and Black lynching is part of structured, systemic racism that most African Americans have experienced. Consequently, these traumatic experiences have left an indelible psychological mark on the African American community as manifested by what she terms Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, passed from generation to generation in the form of prolonged systemic stress. However, it is important to note that while lynching generally occurred

in the South, this was not always the case, and in some instances, Blacks were not the only victims (DeGury, 2005; Lartey & Morris, 2018; Raper, 2003).

Lynching's: By State and Race, 1882-1968 *

State	White	Black	Total
Alabama	48	299	347
Arizona	31	0	31
Arkansas	58	226	284
California	41	2	43
Colorado	65	3	68
Delaware	0	1	1
Florida	25	257	282
Georgia	39	492	531
Idaho	20	0	20
Illinois	15	19	34
Indiana	33	14	47
Iowa	17	2	19
Kansas	35	19	54
Kentucky	63	142	205
Louisiana	56	335	391
Maine	1	0	1
Maryland	2	27	29
Michigan	7	1	8
Minnesota	5	4	9
Mississippi	42	539	581
Missouri	53	69	122
Montana	82	2	84
Nebraska	52	5	57
Nevada	6	0	6
New Jersey	1	1	2
New Mexico	33	3	36
New York	1	1	2
North Carolina	15	86	101
North Dakota	13	3	16
Ohio	10	16	26
Oklahoma	82	40	122
Oregon	20	1	21
Pennsylvania	2	6	8
South Carolina	4	156	160
South Dakota	27	0	27
Tennessee	47	204	251
Texas	141	352	493
Utah	6	2	8
Vermont	1	0	1
Virginia	17	83	100
Washington	25	1	26
West Virginia	20	28	48
Wisconsin	6	0	6
Wyoming	30	5	35
Total	1,297	3,446	4,743

Source: *Statistics provided by the Archives at Tuskegee Institute.

Figure 2.10: Lynching's: By State and Race

2.10. Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation

Originally, the term "Jim Crow" refers to a black character in an old song as well as a popular dance in the 1820's. Around 1828, a minstrel show performer named Thomas "Daddy" Rice developed a routine, in which he blacked his face, sang and danced in imitation of an old Black man in ragged clothes. By the early 1830's, Rice's character became tremendously popular and eventually gave its name to a stereotypical negative view of African Americans as uneducated, shiftless, and dishonest (www.brittanica.com/amp/story/what-is-the-origin-of-the-term-jim-crow).

Beginning in the 1880's, Jim Crow was a reference to practices, laws or institutions relating to the physical separation of Black people from White people. Jim Crow laws in various states required the segregation of races in such common areas as restaurants and theaters. The "separate but equal" standard established by the Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) supported racial segregation for public facilities across the nation. Largely, the Supreme Court decision was ineffective, in terms of ensuring racial equality, for African Americans (Fremon, 2000; Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896; Woodward, 1995).

In fact, a Montgomery, Alabama ordinance compelled Black residents to take seats apart from Whites on municipal buses. At the time, the "separate but equal" standard applied, but the actual separation practiced by the Montgomery City Lines was not equal. Montgomery bus operators were supposed to separate their coaches into two sections: Whites up front and Blacks in back. As more Whites boarded, the White section assumes to extend toward the back. On paper, the bus company's policy was that the middle of the bus became the limit if all seats farther back were occupied. Nevertheless, that was not the everyday reality. During the early 1950's, a White person never had to stand on a Montgomery bus. In addition, Blacks boarding the bus had to stand in the

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back even if seats were available in the White section (Burns, 1997; Fremon, 2000; Woodward, 1995).

After the Civil War and the adoption of the 13th Amendment, most States of the former Confederacy adopted Black Codes, which were laws, modeled on former slave laws. Black codes limited the new freedoms of emancipated African Americans by restricting their movement and forcing them into a labor economy based on low wages and debt. Vagrancy laws allowed the arrest of Black for minor infractions. The establishment of a system of penal labor known as convict leasing forced Black men convicted of vagrancy to be unpaid laborers, and thus effectively become re-enslaved (Blackmon, 2008; Fremon, 2000; Woodward, 1995).

Quarry at State Lime Grinding Plant. State convicts employed. Cost of production at the minimum.
One Hundred and Three
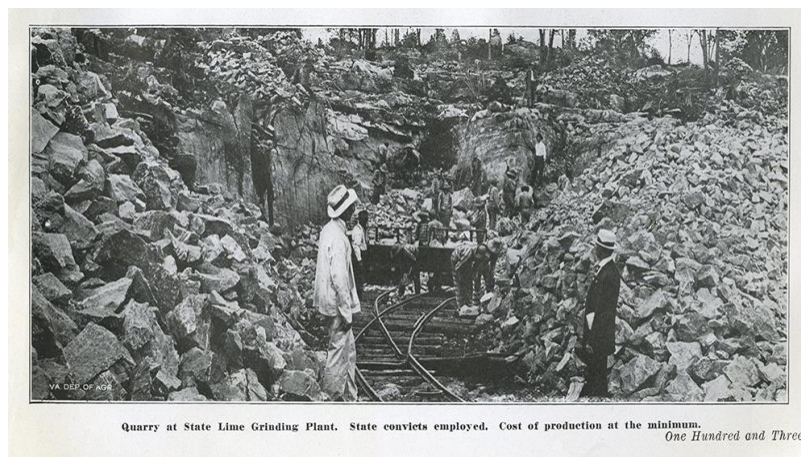
Figure 2.11: Convict Labor at the State Lime Grinding Plant, Virginia

The Black Codes outraged public opinion in the North and resulted in Congress placing the former Confederate states under Army occupation during Reconstruction. Nevertheless, many laws restricting the freedom of African Americans remained in the books for years. The Black Codes laid the foundation for the system of laws and customs supporting a system of White supremacy, or Jim Crow. Most of states and local communities passed "Jim Crow" laws that

mandated "separate but equal" status for African Americans (Klarman, 2004; Solórzano, et al 2000).

Jim Crow Laws were, indeed, statutes and ordinances established between 1874 and 1975 to separate the White and Black races in the American South. In theory, it was to create "separate but equal" treatment, but in practice, Jim Crow Laws condemned black citizens to inferior treatment and facilities. Finally, education and public facilities such as schools, hotels, restaurants, and hospitals were racially separate. Jim Crow Laws played a major role in confirming the ascribed White positive racial attributes which are related to the ideology of White superiority and Black inferiority (Klarman, 2004; Solórzano, et al 2000).

2.11. Restricting African-American Education (Legislation and Prohibitions)

During slavery, the exclusion of Black scholars from learning institutions was common during the 1710s [see figure 2.12 below].

Figure 2.12: Anti-Slavery Almanac

South Carolina passed the first laws prohibiting slave education in 1740. While there were no limitations on reading or drawing, it became illegal to teach slaves to write. This legislation

followed the Stono Rebellion. As fears proliferated among plantation owners concerning the spread of abolitionist materials, forged passes, and other incendiary writings, the need to restrict slaves' ability to communicate with one another became more pronounce (Albanese, 1976). The State Assembly enacts, "Be it therefore Enacted by the Authority aforesaid, that all and every Person and Persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any Slave to be taught to write or shall use to employ any slave as a Scribe in any Manner of Writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such offense forfeit the Sum of One Hundred Pounds current Money" (Albanese, 1976). While the law does not clarify if there were any consequences for the slaves, who might attain this more highly prized form of literacy, the financial consequences for teachers is apparent. However, it seems clear that the law reflects White racism (Albanese, 1976; Monaghan, 2001; Roderick, 1957).

In 1759, Georgia models its ban on teaching slaves to write after South Carolina's earlier legislation, however, the ban did not prohibit reading. Throughout the colonial era, reading instruction related to the spread of Christianity did not suffer from restrictive legislation until much later (Monaghan, 2005). The most oppressive limits on slave education were a reaction to Nat Turner's Revolt in Southampton County, Virginia during the summer of 1831. This event not only caused shock waves across the slaveholding south, but it had a particularly far-reaching impact on education over the next three decades (Albanese, 1976; Monaghan, 2005; Roderick, 1957).

The fear of slave insurrections and the spread of abolitionist materials and ideology led to radical restrictions on gatherings, travel, and—of course—literacy. The ignorance of slaves was necessary to the security of slaveholders (Albanese, 1976). Not only did owners fear the spread of specific abolitionist materials, they did not want slaves to question their authority; thus, reading and reflection were to be prevented at any cost. Although preventing slaves from learning to read

and write was a widespread practice, many slaves, nevertheless, acquired skills to do so. This implies that African Americans have always had a desire to better themselves or improve their lot, however, it is also true that White racism have generally served as an obstacle to achieving that end, an observation that is frequently overlooked in discussions involving racial inequality. (Albanese, 1976; Dika & Singh, 2002; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Fremon, 2000).

Although Mississippi already had laws designed to prevent slave literacy, in 1841 the state legislature passed a law that required all free African Americans to leave the state so that they would not be able to educate or incite the enslaved population. The same legislation required that any Black preacher must receive permission to speak before appearing a congregation. Delaware passed an 1831 law that prevented the meeting of a dozen or more Blacks late at night; additionally, Black preachers were required to petition a judge or justice of the peace before speaking before any assembly (Franklin & Moss, 2009; Fremon, 2000; Miles, 1994).

Viewed from a historical perspective, there have always been attempts by White America to deprive African Americans of the ability to educate themselves while at the same time, maintaining that Blacks could achieve equality if only they would improve themselves. This apparent contradiction in logic, or views of distorted thinking, is not unusual in the culture of a racist dominated society in that the ideology on which racism is based is seriously flawed and indicative of ignorance, misinformation, and the need to justify racial oppression. But more important, blaming the victim for in-group differential treatment of others, is not a new phenomenon (Fanon, 1961; Fremon, 2000; Miles, 1994).

While states like South Carolina and Georgia had not developed legislation that prohibited education for slaves, other, more moderate states responded directly to the 1821 revolt. In 1833, Alabama enacted a law that fined anyone who undertook a slave's education between $250 and

$550; the law also prohibited any assembly of African Americans—slave or free—unless five slave owners were present or an African-American preacher had previously been licensed by an approved denomination. Even North Carolina, which had previously allowed free African-American children to attend schools alongside whites, eventually responded to fears of insurrection. By 1836, there was a strict prohibition on public education of all African Americans (Segal & Wilson, 2004).

2.12. Racism

Although there is no scientific basis to justify dividing human beings into distinct racial groups, perceptions of race and racial differences are deeply ingrained in the American psyche. For example, Rogers (2003) asserts that, race is a false classification of people not based on any real or accurate biological or scientific evidence. Nevertheless, people of color, especially African Americans, generally do not receive the same opportunities as Whites. In short, White America is, nevertheless, a racist society, a reality that most White Americans are reluctant to concede. (Allport, 1954; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012; Rogers, 2003).

2.13. The Historical Classifications of Race

The literature clearly reveals that the distinctions the dominant group makes between the races are not, and never have been, based on scientific evidence; in the final analysis, race, as pointed out by Rogers (2003) and other scholars, is not a scientific construction. As Rogers (2003) notes, race is a political and social construction to classify human beings with the purpose of giving power to White people and to legitimize the dominance of White people over people of color; in short, the basis of racial distinctions is not scientific yet, White racism is the major cause of the

inequality experienced by African Americans (Allport, 1954; Greene, 1998; Fanon, 1961; Rogers, 2003).

As Greene (1998) and other scholars have pointed out, the basis of White superiority is not based on biological or scientific evidence but rather, it reflects the desire for power and domination; it is generally recognized that outgroup racist ideology created it, and political, social, and economic, power maintain it. This observation implies that White racism is manifested in a variety of ways, however, micro and macro conceptualizations of racism are the most common forms. Among scholars, there appears to be a general agreement that Microaggressions are the most problematic for African Americans. (Allport, 1954; Greene, 1998; Fanon, 1961; Rogers, 2003).

Rogers (2003) observations regarding the concept of race with respect to scientific evidence are not new yet, racism continues to play a vital role in the interactions between the dominant group in our society and people of color; in short, oppression, discrimination, and unequal opportunity are normative; this is especially true with respect to the treatment of African Americans. From a historical point of view, the pseudo-scientific perspective, used to categorize the races in the past, as pointed out by Rogers (2003), is no longer widely respected as a creditable justification for the unequal treatment of African Americans and yet, racism abounds (Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Rogers, 2003).

For example, Frederick Farrar (1867), a nineteen-century cleric, classified human beings into three distinct groups: Savage, Semi-Civilized, and Civilized. Moreover, this cleric classified Africans, indigenous people, and people of color savages, and Chinese as semi-civilized. Interestingly, the only people that Farrar (1867) categorizes as civilized are European, Aryan, and Semitic. Not all scholars agree with Farrar's (1867) classification of African people as savages

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that have not made valuable contributions to civilization; the evidence contradicts the Black savage perspective (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1961; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Frazier, 1939; Harpers, 2008a; 2008b).

In his book, Before the Mayflower, Bennett (2016) states that, for a long time, the only people on the scene were Africans and that for 600,000 years Africa and Africans led the world. Most scholars who study the origins and societies of human kind maintain the birth of civilization occurred in Africa and not in Europe, and that ancient Africa made an undeniable contribution to the civilizations of the world. The racist view that only Whites or Europeans have made noteworthy contributions to world civilization is a concocted myth conceived by the dominant group to justify the oppression of people of color (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1961; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Frazier, 1939; Harpers, 2008a; 2008b).

Unfortunately, the Black man's contributions to global civilizations are not well known; this is especially true with respect to African Americans. For example, in addressing several achievements of Blacks, Dr. Taylor (2000) points out that, from African Americans came America's first clock, in 1754 by astronomer Benjamin Banneker; the world's first blood plasma, from Dr. Charles Drew; the world's first successful heart surgery, performed by Daniel Hale Williams, a Chicago surgeon, and numerous other achievements. By ignoring the contributions made by Africans and their descendants to world civilization, the claim of Black inferiority is made more convincing; historically, this has been a strategy used by White America to validate the claim of White superiority and to justify Black inequality or White racism (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Taylor, 2000).

Such noteworthy Black contributions or achievements, as pointed out by Dr. Taylor (2000), are unknown by both Black and White Americans. Consequently, the belief that Africa is

the home of savages, that Africans and Americans contributed very little to America and world civilizations, is a source of much of the misinformation by which White racism is justified. However, equally important, if not more so, is the fact that many African Americans, willingly or unwillingly, have internalized the myth of White superiority and Black inferiority based on centuries of Black repression and cultural symbolism (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1960; Fremon, 2000; Greene, 1998; Taylor, 2000; Woodward, 1995).

It is reasonable to assume that Farrar (1867), and others who were unaware of the scientific cognitive attributes of the human species, was completely unaware of the accomplishments of the African people when he classifies them as savages. On the other hand, he may have been but chose to distort or disregard the facts in the interest of promulgating a false narrative related to racial attributes or characteristics to perpetuate the myth of White intellectual superiority; in human discourse regarding race, facts have often been overlooked or disregarded. For example, in modern day America, racial inequalities and negative perceptions of African Americans are not supported by scientific evidence and yet, White racism abounds and constitutes, what many would argue, the nation's greatest dilemma (Bennett, 2016; Harrell, 2000; Rogers, 2003; Myrdal, 1944; Taylor, 2000).

Needlessly to say, African Americans in the United States experience many negative effects from White racism; to many White Americans, racism is a structural or systemic cultural necessity. For example, according to Harrell (2000), racism is a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial-group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant- group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable. Harrell's (2000) conceptualization suggest that the crux of racism, or the race problem, is rooted in the dominant group's need for power, dominance, and privilege. To some extent, this implies that the belief that

racism can be eliminated from the social system is delusional for two primary reasons. First, racism serves an essential functional role for the dominant in-group which is necessary, as Harrell (2000) noted, to maintain power over out-groups (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Harpers, 2008a; 2008b; Kendall, 2002; Parson, 1939; Taylor, 2000).

Secondly, it determines the boundary and the existence of the in-group in terms of merits and attributes. For example, White ascribed superiority vs. Black ascribed inferiority. In this case, what separates the in-group from the out-group are perceived differences between the groups based on positive and negative qualities, attributes, or characteristics. Equally important is the fact that perceived differences generally determine privileges and the nature of in-group-out-group interaction (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Harpers, 2008a; 2008b; Kendall, 2002; Parson, 1939; Taylor, 2000).

In America, White Americans generally believe that they are entitled to privileges that are denied African Americans solely based on their race. Usually, they do not view White privileges as White racism nor are they inclined to perceive Black racial inequality as a manifestation of White racism. Generally, they tend to deny the fact that White racism is associated with or related to the adverse physical, psychological, and socioeconomic conditions experienced by African Americans. Most maintain that the root of the problem is not systemic rather, it is viewed as being individualistic in nature. In other words, they are usually inclined to blame the victims, not the system; such a perception is tantamount to denying the existence of White racism or that it is not a factor associated with racial inequality experienced by African Americans. (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Harpers, 2008a; 2008b; Kendall, 2002; Parson, 1939; Taylor, 2000).

Many studies reveal that institutional and individual racism are still major problems in the United States today and are primarily responsible for much of the economic inequality and stress

faced by the African American family. Some scholars note that African Americans are the most disadvantaged group in America and the basis of their disadvantage is racism. Despite the evidence, many White Americans rarely, if ever, admit that they are racist or that racism even exists. Unfortunately, denying the presence of racism in society has the effect perpetuating the problem in that it creates a state of social blindness; you cannot confront what you cannot see. (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Rogers, 2003).

Scholars generally agree that micro and macro racism constitute the greatest challenge faced by the Black community in America today in that they have an adverse effect on the daily lives of African Americans at every socioeconomic level. However, the stress that emanates from the daily experiences of confronting microaggressions are more profound and damaging to the Black victims that are situated at the lower end of the socioeconomic continuum. This is due mainly to the fact that lower socioeconomic African Americans lack the social capital and economic resources available to middle- and upper-class Blacks. (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Rogers, 2003).

While we may live in what many deem a post-racial society, many members of the dominant group still cling to the idea that Blacks, and other minorities, are racially inferior and consequently, many clings to the belief that the disadvantages experienced by African Americans are just and deserving. In short, the myth of the Black savage has been replaced with the myth of Black inferiority or White superiority. The result is out- group inequality; a natural manifestation that emanates from White racism; based on several indicators, one might argue, convincingly, that America is not a post-racial society as it is at times claim to be (Bennett, 2016; Billingsley, 1968; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Fanon, 1961; Kendall, 2012; Taylor, 2000).

Over a century ago, Du Bois (1903) argued, that the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the "color-line." Since that declaration, the "color line" remains a major impediment faced by African Americans in their pursuit of justice and equality. The literature reveals that there are grave disadvantages and negative dimensional consequences experienced by African Americans living in a society dominated by micro and macro or individual and institutional racism. In addition to the lack of adequate economic resources, African Americans face higher levels of health, emotional and mental health problems as consequences of racism (Carter, 2007; Clark, et al., 1999; Crocker, 2007; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Pedersen, 2013; Smith, 2010).

In America, the White dominant groups do not have to face the consequences of micro and macro racism as stressors in their daily lives as do African Americans and other people of color; this is due in large measure to the presence of White privilege as described by Kendall and others. (2012). For example, Lawrence and Keleher (2004) point out that, structural racism encompasses the entire system of White supremacy that affect the lives of African Americans in several diverse ways that result in stress and distress; the negative effects of racially-induced stress experienced by African Americans are well documented (Crocker, 2007; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012).

Perhaps most individuals would agree that stress is a condition experienced by all Americans regardless of their race; nonetheless, the stress levels, and their adverse effects, are considerably more profound and devastating among African Americans than they are among their White counterparts; and a major source of their stress is individual and institutional racism. While it is true that all families, regardless of their race, experienced stress in their daily lives, White families do not face racially induced stress (Crocker, 2007; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012).

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In short, African Americans are deprived of many of the privileges experienced by White Americans due to their race. Consequently, Blacks are more susceptible to psychological, physical, and economic stress than White Americans. Granted, stress is a common psychological condition experienced by both Black and White Americans, however, stress within the Black community is disproportionately higher than it is in the White community, and a major cause of the difference is the racial inequality that emanates from micro and macro racism (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois 1903; Festinger, 1957; Harrell, 2000; Rogers, 2003).

The "color line," as W. E. B. DuBois (1903) notes, remains a formidable obstacle faced by people of color, especially African Americans in achieving equality. It is reasonable to assume it will continue to be a major roadblock in the plight of Blacks in their effort to achieve equal economic opportunity and social justice in a society that continues to view and evaluate its people based on their color instead of evaluating them based on their merits and achievements. One might argue that if the major institutions in America are dominated by the white power elite, racism will continue to abound in that it is a source of power that ensure domination and control of essential resources. (Bennett, 2016; Crocker, 2007; Du Bois 1903; Festinger, 1957; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Kendall, 2012; Rogers, 2003).

Harrell (2000) argues that, members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege. These members do this by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that exclude members of the non-dominant group from obtaining power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources; the inevitable outcome is structured, or institutionalized inequality experienced by African Americans and other people of color. A major cognitive problem faced by White America is that the treatment of people of color in this country runs counter to the values of equality on which the foundation of this nation rests, and generally subscribed to by most

Americans (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010).

As previously noted, White racism is based primarily on the ideology of Black inferiority and not on scientific evidence; despite this fact, in America, racism still endures. Equally important is the fact that the concept of White superiority is an ascribed positive racial characteristic, an in-group quality not earned or innately determined. Nevertheless, according to Kendall (2002), racism creates a situation in which White Americans frequently receive from society certain benefits denied people of color solely based on the color of their skin (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Taylor, 2000).

Lawrence and Keleher (2004) conceptualize racism as, the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by White supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for White people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Frazier, 1939; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002).

Most scholars support the assertion that, of all the people of color in our society, none has suffered more from the negative impact of racism than African Americans with respect to the lack of political, social, and economic opportunity. Viewed from a historical perspective, there are many reasons as to why this is the case. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that unlike all the other groups who ventured to America in pursuit of justice and economic well-being, the Black man came in shackles and chains. Frequently, it seems, many scholars ignore or do not

seriously consider this realization when addressing the Black socioeconomic status (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1961; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Frazier, 1939; Greene, 1998).

The Black condition, or racial inequality, in America can best be explained, to some extent, by the experiences of slavery and the racism that emanated from the slave condition. A considerable amount of research has shown that the socioeconomic condition of African Americans in the United States is based largely on institutional racism; again, an inevitable outcome of micro and macro racism which created and sustained the institution of slavery. This realization does not ignore the fact that many African Americans may inadvertently contribute to their substandard socioeconomic status based, in part, on their perceptions and behavior as a sub-group within the African American community. Nevertheless, with that said, it should be noted that Black intra-group perceptions and anti-social behavior did not create the institution of slavery, racial segregation, Jim Crow, and all the other psychosocial variables associated with White racism (Bennett, 2016; Du Bois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Frazier, 1939).

When one looks at employment rates, it is evident not only that Black men experience higher rates of unemployment but that even when they are employed, their incomes are significantly less than those of their White counterparts. Some have argued that these types of statistics reflect the impact of structural racism and represent a significant source of stress that is associated with the unequal status experienced by Blacks in the United States. As previously noted, insufficient income is a major source of stress among all racial groups but more profound among African Americans due, in large part, to racial inequality. What is frequently overlooked, with respect to employment rates, is that a job is more than a source of income, it is also a source of pride and it provides the individual with a sense of worth (Pieterse & Carter, 2007, p. 101).

Findings from the empirical literature in general support the notion that racism-related stress influences psychological health. Moreover, qualitative studies examining the experience of discrimination as reported by Blacks indicate that racism is perceived as stressful and that these experiences are reported as having a negative influence on an individual's sense of well-being. Regarding gender, studies have suggested that Black men have a higher incidence of racial harassment and discrimination than Black women. For example, African American women generally are not the targets of police profiling and unarmed murders as are Black men; members of law enforcement are major environmental stressors in the daily lives of African American men; in short, racism experienced by the Black community vary as a function of gender (Pieterse & Carter, 2007, p. 105).

There are many definitions of racism in the literature and racism affects all people, both dominant and nondominant group members but not to the same degree. Nonetheless, it is important to note that racism is a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon that is manifested and conceptualized in several ways. For example, Harrell (2000) provides a very interesting and comprehensive definition. She defines racism as:

> A system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant-group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable; and occurring in circumstances where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving nondominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources (p. 43).

According to Harrell (2000), "racism can be overt or covert, intentional or unintentional. The definition offered here, by focusing on racism in dominant/nondominant racial-group interactions, renders "reverse racism" a nonsensical construct" (p. 43).

With respect to the magnitude and diverse forms of racism, Beagan, et al. (2012), pointed out that racism operates at multiple levels, sometimes through outright discrimination, more often through unintended institutional or individual practices which have inequitable impacts. While the forms racism may vary by time and place, usually articulating to current socioeconomic conditions, there are nonetheless distinct, discernible practices related to skin color, guided by a politics of white privilege. Actual instances of racism, which may occur in micro-level interpersonal interactions, gain their power through the weight of historical race relations and contemporary structural relations of power. Together, the various forms of racism take a considerable toll on people from racialized groups (Beagan, et al., 2012, p. 104).

Most scholars probably would agree that racism in the United States has its roots in slavery; the atrocities of Black bondage have left, seemingly, an indelible mark on the face of the nation. Based on the evidence, it is difficult to deny that White America is a racist society and yet, there are those who will not accept this apparent revelation. But more important, far too many individuals are inclined to rationalize, deny, or justify the differential treatment of African Americans, or admit that slavery played a role in shaping contemporary White racist ideology and behavior. And many of those that recognize the influence and impact of the institution of slavery, do not hesitate to point out that they are not responsible for the behavior or deeds of their ancestors; it is reasonable to assume that their views are attempts to manage "White stigma" or to resolve cognitive dissonance (Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; Kowal, 2011, p. 319).

There appears to be a striking resembles between the views of post-Holocaust Germany and post-slavery America as noted by their perceptions of past race-related activities on the part of their forebears. For example, According to Kowal (2011), many German intellectuals today defend the national collective identity from such negative associations, arguing (for example) that

Germans born after the end of the war cannot be held responsible for the events of the Holocaust. A minority, however, contend that every generation of Germans must come to terms with the events of the Nazi genocide and their country's role in it. It is noteworthy to emphasize that the German people who insist that their nation must bear the blame for Nazis barbaric behavior do not represent the views of the majority (Kowal, 2011, p. 319).

These are precisely the views and arguments of many White Americans regarding slavery of the past, and modern-day racism in America today; some take responsibility for the past treatment of African Americans by their forebears, and do not excuse themselves; and others do not. Nevertheless, the intent here is not to compare or equate the Nazi Holocaust with slavery in America. Rather, the goal is to point out similarities in the thought process between people of different times and places, and to suggest that the inhumane treatment of human beings is contrary to human nature and to justify such behavior, the victims must first be stripped of their humanity. The process of dehumanizing the Jews in Nazi Germany mirrors, to some extent, the process of dehumanizing African Americans during the era of slavery in America (Kowal, 2011, p. 319).

Racism experienced by African American comes in a variety of forms. However, racial microaggressions appears to be the most common form of micro racism but it is frequently ignored or misconstrued by the victims; this is not so with respect to the prevalence of macro or institutional racism which is generally overt and simple to document. For example, the employment and promotion records of an agency can be examined to determine whether White applicants are given preferential treatment in terms of hiring and advancements; the records of banks and other lending institutions will reveal whether its loan practices favor White applicants as opposed to African Americans; the records provide documented evidence. In the final analysis, it appears that the most

common incidents of White racism, microaggressions, are the most difficulty to identify, prove, and correct (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016, p. 393; Sue, et al., 2008).

For example, DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby, 2016, states that racial microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to People of Color because they belong to a racial minority group. Racial microaggressions can also be described as "subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones. There are three types of transgressions, including micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations. Micro-assaults are the direct and explicit verbal or nonverbal attacks that are intended to hurt or offend someone. Examples of micro-assaults include using racial slurs or displaying a racially charged symbol such as noose. Micro-assaults are considered "traditional" hate speech and symbols, in that they are overtly racist. These are symbolic of the permanence of racism. Micro-insults and micro-invalidations, however, are covert and aversive ways of communicating racist beliefs. Micro-insults are used to indirectly insult a person's racial heritage or racial identity by offering a negative compliment (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016, p. 393; Sue, et al., 2008).

DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, (2016) argue that micro-insults are rooted in beliefs of White superiority. Similarly, micro-invalidations are statements that belittle, challenge, or negate the experiences of People of Color. An example of micro-invalidations would be to say to an African American woman that "You don't look like most African American women," suggesting that she does not share the same racialized experience as other African Americans because of the way she looks. Conversely, micro-invalidations are often reflections of color-blind beliefs; color blindness, utilizes race-neutral assumptions, suggesting that race is not important. What all these forms of racism have in common are their negative impact on the physical and psychological health of their victims (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016, p. 394; Sue, et al., 2008).

According to Banks & et al., (2006), current theoretical models suggest that the most potent and impacting discrimination experienced by African Americans in the post Jim Crow era are subtle and unconscious forms of discrimination that are experienced daily. Researchers have investigated the experience and effects of discrimination on stigmatized groups and found that discrimination is associated with both mental and physical health symptoms among African Americans and can adversely affect physical and mental health. Everyday discrimination refers to familiar practices that reflect systematic, institutional bias in daily attitudes and behaviors. The stress from everyday discrimination, such as being ignored or overlooked while waiting in line or being mistaken for someone who serves others (e.g. maid, bellboy) is thought to accumulate over time and constitutes a major source of stress in the Black community (Banks et al., 2006, p. 55; Sue, et al., 2008).

Discrimination is a stressor conceptualized to be attributed to numerous factors (e.g. race, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation. African Americans have consistently been found to report higher levels of discrimination based on race compared to other racial or ethnic groups. Even when asked about general discrimination, African Americans frequently attribute experiences of discrimination to race/ethnicity. With respect to gender, the literature has consistently reported higher rates for women in comparison to men for self-reported psychological distress, prevalence of depression, anxiety and phobias. Similarly, African American women report higher rates of psychological distress, depression, anxiety and phobias in comparison to African American men. Research also shows a positive relationship between discrimination and mental health to be stronger among women in comparison to men; research in this area is comparatively limited (Banks et al., 2006, p.558; Sue, et al., 2008).

In addition to gender differences in mental health outcomes, evidence also suggests there are gender differences in how individuals respond to negative experiences. Research suggests that stigmatized African Americans respond to stressors in various ways. For example, some respond with avoidance, denial or minimization of the discrimination; while others, engage in problem solving and emotion expression in response to such events. Women have been found to ruminate on stressors exacerbating symptomatology and this internalization strategy in the face of discrimination might manifest in depressive or anxiety symptoms. Men, however, have been found to engage in more outward or externalizing coping strategies such as substance, athletic involvement, verbal, and physical confrontation (Banks et al., 2006, p.560).

The daily racism experienced by African American comes in a variety of forms. However, micro racism is the most common. Scholars generally agree that aversive racism, a sub-category of micro racism, is the most problematic for the African American community even though institutional racism receive the most attention. Aversive racism is subtle usually subconscious and unintentional; it creates in society what has been described by Gunnar Myrdal as, the "American Dilemma." Seemingly, the crux of the so-called "America Dilemma is the observation that the professed values regarding freedom and racial equality held by the White dominant group, are inconsistent with the treatment of people of color; especially African Americans. In addition, racial inequality, is not consistent with the dictates of the United States Constitution nor the principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Sue, et al., 2008).

In their discussion of the conflict between values and White behavior in the United States, Gaertner & Dovidio (2005) points out that this dilemma reflects the tension between central principles of equality and fairness in the society and the daily operation of systematic prejudice and discrimination, at an individual and societal level, which produces racial inequality and

reinforces racial disparities. Sixty years after Myrdal's (1944) observation, regarding the American dilemma, is still evident today. The principle of equality remains a fundamental social value and, since the civil rights legislation of the 1960s that made racial discrimination not simply immoral but also illegal, overt expressions of prejudice of Whites toward Blacks in the United States have declined significantly over the past several decades. Nevertheless, evidence of racial disparity and discrimination remains (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, pp. 617-618).

Aversive racists, in comparison, sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but, at the same time, possess negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks, which may be unconscious. Aversive racism is qualitatively different from blatant, "old-fashioned," racism. It is subtler and is presumed to characterize the racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal Whites in the United States. How many White Americans conceptualize or define racism is not consistent with the scholarly operationalization of the term. Generally, most Euro-Americans do not consider themselves racist nor do they categorize contemporary America as being a racist society. This may be due to the fact that they may not have a full appreciation of the diverse forms of racism or it may be a form of denial (Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 618).

What many White Americans seemingly fail to understand is the lack of membership in the Klan or because they may support Affirmative Action, are not the only measures of a non-racist; racism may also be sub-conscious. Nevertheless, the consequences of aversive racism (e.g., the restriction of economic opportunity) are as significant and pernicious as those of the traditional, overt form. It should be note, however, that aversive and institutional racism may be intertwined. For example, the restriction of economic opportunity generally falls under institution racism. Nevertheless, regardless of the form, both have an adverse effect on the physical and psychological

health of African Americans in that racism, regardless of form or source, is a major ecological stressor experienced daily (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 618; Sue, et al., 2008).

Whites who consciously, explicitly, and sincerely support egalitarian principles and believe themselves to be nonprejudiced also harbor negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks and other historically disadvantaged groups. These unconscious negative feelings and beliefs develop because of normal, almost unavoidable and frequently functional, cognitive, motivational, and social-cultural processes. In terms of cognitive processes, people normally categorize others into groups, typically in terms that delineate one's own group from other groups. This mere classification of people into the ingroup and outgroups is enough to initiate bias. In the United States, Whites automatically categorize people based on race, and this categorization spontaneously elicits evaluative racial biases and stereotypes. With respect to motivational processes, people have basic needs of power, status, and control not only for themselves but also for the ingroup, which exacerbates bias and often produces intergroup conflict. About socio-cultural influences, people often adopt, without question, cultural stereotypes and justifying ideologies for group inequalities that reinforce group hierarchy (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 618).

In America, racism is taboo. Consequently, most Euro-Americans will go to great length to conceal their true feelings to avoid being identified as racists. Nevertheless, according to Gaertner & Dovidio (2005), aversive racists can thus be identified by a constellation of characteristic responses to racial issues and interracial situations. Aversive racists, in contrast to old-fashioned racists, endorse fair and just treatment of all groups, but they unconsciously harbor feelings of uneasiness toward Blacks, and thus try to avoid interracial interaction (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 619).

When interracial interaction is unavoidable, aversive racists experience anxiety and discomfort, and consequently they try to disengage from the interaction as quickly as possible. In addition, because part of the discomfort that aversive racists experience is due to a concern about acting inappropriately and appearing prejudiced, aversive racists are motivated primarily by avoiding wrongdoing in interracial interactions. Nevertheless, their negative feelings often are manifested in subtle, indirect, or rationalizable ways (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 619).

The "aversive" in aversive racism therefore reflects two types of aversion. Because of the anxiety and discomfort that aversive racists experience, they find interracial interaction aversive and try to avoid it. Also, aversive racists, who believe that they are nonprejudiced and who consciously embrace egalitarian ideals, would find aversive any thought or indication that they might be racist. Therefore, aversive racists are primarily motivated to avoid wrongdoing or acting inappropriately in interracial situations. They try to avoid thinking bad thoughts about Blacks, experiencing bad feelings toward Blacks, and behaving in a discriminatory way toward Blacks. The fact that aversive racist go to such great length seem to suggest that have internalized egalitarian principles or such behavior is an attempt to resolve cognitive dissonance (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 619).

As previously noted, researchers do not always conceptualize or define racism in the same manner. However, the literature suggests that there is a consensus among scholars regarding its adverse effects on the physical and psychological health of African Americans. For Example, according to Sue, et al., (2008), racism can be defined as a complex ideology composed of beliefs in racial superiority and inferiority and is enacted through individual behaviors and institutional and societal policies and practices. Racism devalues, demeans, and disadvantages Black Americans by treating them as lesser beings and by denying equal access and opportunity. Over

the years, however, social scientists have noted that racism in American society has shifted from overt acts and messages to subtle and implicit expressions. These manifestations have been labeled aversive racism, implicit racism, and modern racism and reside in well-intentioned individuals who are not consciously aware that their beliefs, attitudes, and actions often discriminate against Black Americans (Sue, et al., 2008, p. 329).

The subtler forms of racism are defined as microaggressions and are the most common types experienced by African Americans and consequently, adversely affect their social well-being. For example, according to Sue, et al., (2008), racial microaggressions cause considerable psychological distress among Black Americans and are manifested in nearly all interracial encounters. They set in motion energy-depleting attempts to determine whether incidents were racially motivated. Reactions can be classified into 4 major themes: healthy paranoia, sanity check, empowering and validating self, and rescuing offenders. Microaggressions result in high degrees of stress for Blacks because of denigrating messages: "You do not belong," "You are abnormal," "You are intellectually inferior," "You cannot be trusted," and "You are all the same." Feelings of powerlessness, invisibility, forced compliance and loss of integrity, and pressure to represent one's group are some of the consequences (Sue, et al., 2008 p.329).

Sue, et al., (2008) note two forms or microaggressions that are deemed especially problematic for African Americans: microinsults and microinvalidations. Both tend to be expressed unconsciously by the perpetuator yet communicate a hidden demeaning message to the person of color. Microinsults are described as behavioral and verbal expressions that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean an individual's racial heritage or identity. When professors, for example, comment to Black students with tones of surprise that they are very articulate, the underlying message is that Blacks as a group are unintelligent. Microinvalidations invalidate, negate, or

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diminish the psychological thoughts, feelings, and racial reality of Black Americans. When Blacks are told that "people are people" and that "we are all human beings," the inherent message is that their experiences as racial cultural beings are not valid (Sue, et al., 2008 p.329).

Both forms are difficult and problematic to both perpetrator and victim because of their unconscious, subtle, and covert nature. These manifestations are often dismissed as innocent acts by the perpetrator with minimal psychological harm to Black Americans. From the perspective of the perpetrator, microaggressive slights may appear banal and trivial (micro), but they have serious detrimental effects on the target person or group. Microaggressions can induce enormous stress and anger, ultimately generating feelings of invisibility and marginalization in Blacks. The fact that microaggressions may represent "small acts" does not consider their cumulative nature or the power of the demeaning message. White Americans who exhibit microaggressive behavior generally do not consider their overt racial expressions as racist therefore, they are inclined to mistakenly view themselves as being non- racist (Sue, et al., 2008 p.329).

Studies show that microaggressions are widespread in society. For example, microaggressions are implicated in creating inequities for Black Americans in education, employment, and health care. Microaggressions, for example, may partially explain why Black Americans underutilize traditional mental health services and prematurely terminate sessions with their White therapists. In the world of work, microaggressions contribute to the glass ceiling effect for Black employees by sending messages of exclusion and expectations of failure and by sapping their psychological and spiritual energies in the workplace. In the classroom, Black students report microaggressive behaviors by White teachers that negate their contributions, communicate low expectations, and exclude their participation in school activities. Unlike overt macro racism,

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microaggressions frequently go unrecognized and as such, uncancerous perpetuated racism is the inevitable result (Sue, et al., 2008 p.330).

It is an unavoidable fact that the ambiguous nature of many microaggressions places Blacks in an unenviable position of trying to ascertain the meaning of the communication, whether the incident was intentional or unintentional, and the quandary of deciding an appropriate response. Microaggressions inevitably produce a clash of racial realities where the experiences of racism by Blacks are pitted against the views of Whites who hold the power to define the situation in nonracial terms. The power to define reality is not supported at the individual level alone but at the institutional and societal levels as well studies suggest that the worldview of Black Americans is constantly assailed in America. Finding ways to validate the worldview of Black Americans and to immunize them against the constant onslaught of microaggressions will continue to be major challenges (Sue, et al., 2008 p.330).

African Americans in the United States are exposed regularly to racism which usually represent a continuous stressor, influence their responses to stress, and affect their levels of psychological well-being. In addition, research indicate that stress may also affect physical health. Several studies indicate that stress can be manifested in a variety of ways and may be chronic or acute, depending on the influence and nature of the ecological stressors. Scholarly empirical investigations reveal that African Americans have the highest levels of stress in the nation and a considerable amount can be attribute to racism in the form of microaggressions and structured institution racism. Findings from several studies also suggest that both recent and lifetime racism-related events tend to be stressful for African Americans and require the use of a variety of coping strategies (Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Harrell, 2000; Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 433; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008).

Although racism-related stress often is referred to as a unidimensional phenomenon (e.g., counts of specific events or racially discriminating acts), several examples highlight racism-related stress as a multidimensional construct. For example, African Americans may experience individual racism in the form of personal threats or treatment that implies they are less important or intelligent than Whites or other non-Blacks; these personal treats are defined as microaggressions which represent the most common form of micro racism in that microaggressions constitute daily experiences. Moreover, when seeking housing, employment, or services within institutions, many Africans Americans systematically are denied access or opportunities, treated with less respect and courtesy, or ignored because of their cultural group membership. This form of behavior represents a combination of institutional racism and microaggressions (Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 434; Sue, et al., 2008).

In addition to institutional and microaggressions, African Americans may be subject to cultural racism. However, unlike intuitional racism and microaggressions, the experiences of cultural racism are usually indirect. For example, negative portrayals of the Black culture in the media (e.g., on TV, on the radio, newspapers, magazines, or in historical accounts). The cognitive or emotional impact of cultural racism experienced by African Americans will vary; so too will their coping strategies. Some may choose denial as a coping strategy, some may internalize the negative portrayals, and still others may choose confrontation or religion as a coping a strategy. Generally, family and community socialization will determine, in large measure, their reaction to the stressors (Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 434).

Generally, African Americans will use Culture-specific strategies to manage ecological stressors. According to Lewis-Cole and Constantine (2006), coping refers to the ways in which members of a cultural heritage draw on a fund of cultural knowledge to assign meaning to a

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stressful event and to determine available resources for dealing with the stressor. One form of culture-specific coping has been identified as Africultural coping. Africultural coping has been conceptualized as comprising four primary components: cognitive/emotional debriefing (i.e., adaptive reactions by African Americans to manage their perceived environmental stressors), spiritual-centered coping (i.e., coping behaviors based on African Americans' sense of connection with spiritual elements in the universe, and with the Creator), collective coping (i.e., coping behaviors relying on group-centered activities), and ritual-centered coping (i.e., the use of rituals, such as lighting candles or burning incense, to manage a stressful situation (Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 435).

Perceptions of how blacks are treated in the U.S. vary widely by race

% saying blacks are treated less fairly than whites in the country

● Whites ● Blacks

In dealing with the police: 50, 84

In the courts: 43, 75

When applying for a loan or mortgage: 25, 66

In the workplace: 22, 64

In stores or restaurants: 21, 49

When voting in elections: 20, 43

0% ————— 100%
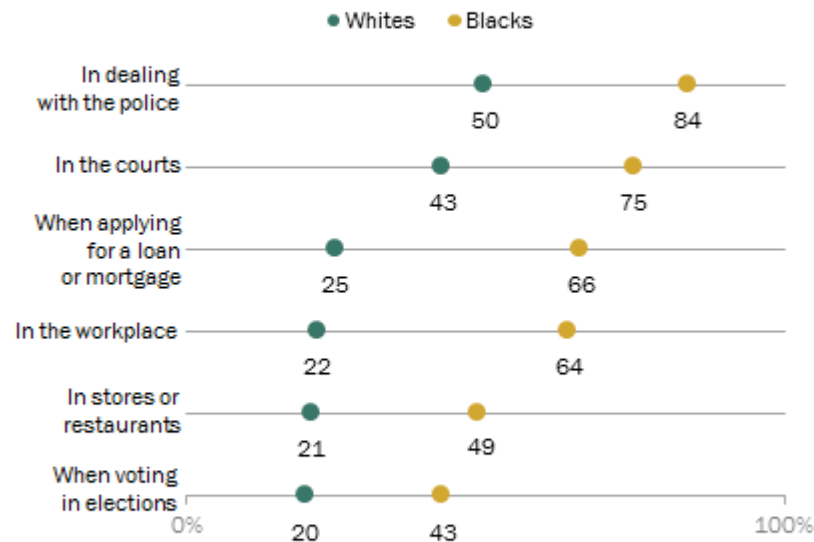
Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016. Q19F2a-f.
"On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites are Worlds Apart"

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Figure 2.13: Perceptions of How Blacks are treated in the United States

According to (Greene, 1998), and several other scholars, institutional racism accounts largely for the lack of enough resources among African American families and therefore, they are subjected to conditions that are not experienced by the White dormant group, at least to the same degree. Nonetheless, research generally show insufficient economic resources contribute immensely to the problems faced by African American families; problems that usually result in stress and distress. A considerable amount of the stress and distress, so common among African Americans, is since many of them cannot meet their basic daily needs. Usually, this situation is psychologically and physically taxing and creates a perpetual state of stress, which leads to

widespread health problems (Crocker, 2007; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Kendall, 2012; Rogers, 2003).

2.14. Relationship between Racism and Ecological Stress

Harrell (2000) points out that, while everyone experiences stress, it is not always easy to recognize the signs and symptoms. Stress can manifest itself in many ways. Not everyone experiences stress the same way and it can manifest itself through a variety of signs. Generally, discussions involving stress usually revolve around the symptoms and manifestations of stress from a physical health-related perspective such as hypertension and diabetes. However, according to Harrell (2000) and other scholars, individuals and families may also experience cognitive, and emotional stress as well; emotional and cognitive stress may prove to be more debilitating than physical stress and in the modern world, most of the stress we feel is in response to psychological rather than physical threats (Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Harrell, 2000).

The lack of economic resources, as previously discussed, is the primary cause of the stress so common among African American families. Generally, if unresolved over an extended period, stress generally leads to distress. Where this is the case, the physical and psychological health of the family is negatively affected. For any family to be functional enough resources must be available to meet their daily needs; this is true for all families regardless of their race. However, poor White families do not have to face institutional racism in their pursuit of meaningful employment or economic resources; macro-racism is a major and common source of the stress experienced by African American families (Bennett, 2016; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Kendall, 2002; Rogers, 2003).

Greene (1998) views racism as a major social problem in society and defines it as, *a*ny attitude, action or institutional structure, which subordinates a person or group because of their

color…. Racism is not just a matter of attitudes; actions and institutional structures can also be a form of racism. Although Greene (1998) believes White racism remains a major problem in the United States for the African American family, he also maintains that African Americans have an important and personal role to play in dismantling the social, political, and economic structures that contributes to outgroup inequality. He points out that a myth has crippled African-Americans, is the belief that racism is the dominant influence in our lives (Greene, 1998).

The point that Greene (1998) is seemingly making is that African Americans need to exercise free will. By suggesting, that African Americans should take the lead in improving their common lot does not minimize the role played by racism in depriving them of equal opportunity. For example, in Greene's (1998) words, we do not deny that racism, and all its attendant evils, has thrown roadblocks into the path toward success for African Americans. This is a clear recognition that he has not lost sight of the role that institutional racism plays in the plight of the African American family (Greene, 1998).

In short, Greene (1998) is not excusing institutional obstacles or impediments that block equal opportunity or contributes to the inequality experienced by African Americans. The argument that Dr. Greene (1998) is seemingly making or notes is that, African Americans are not powerless, and they must remain resilient and hopeful even though the crisis in the African American family looms so large that many challenges seem beyond their control. Nevertheless, African Americans can do much. First, he points out, there must be a change in Black attitudes and perceptions; instead of resigning themselves to victim status, it is time for African Americans to act (Greene, 1998; Raspberry, 1990).

Greene (1998) further argues that the basis of inadequate receipt of economic resources for African American is not merit or qualifications, but rather racism. The lack of equal opportunity and access

to resources are the natural outcome of ecological racism. Green (1998) maintains that the Black church can play a decisive role in eliminating the lack of adequate economic resources experienced by African American families by combing its economic resources, which can create jobs and thereby eliminate a major source of African American family economic stress (Billingsley, 1968; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012).

In Greene's (1998) view, the Black church plays an important role in the struggle for social justice; however, he asserts African Americans and the Black church alone cannot solve the racial challenges in America. He views racism in America as a White problem. In his words, Greene (1998) points out that, White society created it and keeps it going through its institutions. Greene (1998) views racism from a power perspective and agrees with Beverly Tatum (1997) who argues that, Blacks in America cannot be racist because they lack control over the major institutions of society. Dr. Greene believes that White Americans and the White church have a major role to play in removing the roadblocks that prevent the African American from achieving equal opportunity (Billingsley, 1968; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Tatum, 1997).

According to Greene (1998), the ideal and humane way for the White church to eliminate institutional racism is to change its attitudes about African Americans, then restructure, and reorganize its institutions so that they are no longer oppressive. Given the long history of Black oppression and the role of the White historical church to justify White domination and global conquest, it seems unlikely that religious intervention will prove to be an effective strategy necessary to eliminate racism. This is largely because racism transmits through the White family, not the White church (Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010; Taylor, 2000).

Granted, the church can be a powerful change agent in bringing about a more just and humane society. However, the political establishment is where most of the focus should be in that it is

power that, largely, determines the norms of social interaction; political behavior, or politics, in large measure, play a major role in creating the norms of group behavior. In revisiting the role of the church, one must recognize that the church, historically, has play a major role in the creation and justification of White racism in America; more important, regarding racial integration, churches may be the most segregated institutions in America. Nevertheless, the church has a major role to play in the fight and elimination of racism from society. Most people would probably agree that the transforming power of religion is telling (Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012; Pyke, 2010; Taylor, 2000).

Lawrence and Keleher (2004) identify two distinct forms of racism African American face: Individual racism and Institutional racism. Individual or internalized racism lies within individuals. These private manifestations of racism reside inside the individual. Examples include prejudice, xenophobia, internalized oppression and privilege, and beliefs about race influenced by the dominant culture. While it is true that White micro racism is a source of stress in the African American family, it is also true that the magnitude of its effects is more harmful and profound than the effects of institutional racism (Allport, 1954; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Kendall, Lawrence & Keleher, 2004; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008; Tatum, 1997).

However, both forms of racism adversely affects the well-being of African Americans; this implies that micro or individual internalized racism and macro racism combined constitutes a serious problem for the Black community in that they are the primary cause of the stress and distress experienced by African Americans; a eustress, regardless of its origin, has negative economic, physical and psychological consequences for those individuals who are subject to its influences. The point here is that institutional racism may be the greatest obstacle confronted by African Americans in their pursuit of equal economic opportunity primarily because of its power

to obstruct or deny access to resources, or provide equal racial opportunity, whereas micro racism is more damaging physically and psychologically. (Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Kendall, 2012).

From a practical point of view, all forms of racism are detrimental to the wellbeing of people of color in that they affect every aspect of their functionality and life chances. Individual racism is more of a problem for African American than it is for other people of color; the same applies to institutional racism as well. This is due, in large measure, to the nature of the historical social interaction between White and Black Americans. For example, neither Lantos nor Asians were ever slaves in America nor were they subjected to the abuse, ideology, and practice of Jim Crow to the extent that African Americans had to endure (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004; Rogers, 2003).

Lawrence and Keleher (2004) points out that, unlike micro racism, macro racism occurs within and between institutions. Institutional racism is discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities based on race, produced and perpetuated by institutions (schools, the workplace and mass media, etc.). Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they act in ways that advantage and disadvantage people, based on race. This category of racism is the greatest obstacle faced by African Americans in their pursuit of social, political, and economic equality (Greene, 1998; Lawrence & Keleher, 2004; Rogers, 2003; Tatum, 1997).

However, the common theme that runs throughout the works of scholars with respect to racial inequality, is that the manifestations of racism experienced by the African American family is not based on merits or qualifications of Blacks. Rather, racism in America stems from the remnants of both past and present ignorance on the one hand, and the need of the dormant group to maintain power and control on the other and finally, to justify global economic plunder. Nevertheless, the stress experienced by the African American family that emanates from racism,

has a negative and telling effect on the physical, psychological, economic and general wellbeing of the Black family (Bennett, 2016; Crocker, 1999; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Lawrence & Keleher, 2004; Rogers, 2003).

Crocker (1999) discusses the physical and psychological manifestations of stress as it relates to African Americans. He points out that, it is important to understand the interconnectivity of psychological and physical health when considering the negative effects of racism. Racism-related stress complicates the lives of non-Whites in several very serious ways. In addition to creating the widely discussed social inequalities, racism has a negative impact on one's psychological and physiological well-being (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 1999; Nyborg, & Curry, 2003).

Crocker (1999) also argues that, the psychological distress caused by racism-related stress can be debilitating and may increase the potential that one will adopt negative coping strategies to alleviate their depression, anxiety, frustration, and anger. Negative coping strategies, such as substance abuse and poor eating habits, affect one's physiological and social well-being and do not serve to eliminate one's problems. The race related unemployment rate in the Black community is a major source of stress in the African American family (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 1999; Nyborg, & Curry, 2003).

According to Crocker (1999), prolonged exposure to racism-related psychological distress can also cause psychosomatization, which can affect one's physiological wellbeing in several serious ways. One may experience increased blood pressure, hypertension, poor immune system functioning, and a slower rate of healing because of stress-related psychosomatization. Negative coping strategies, such as substance abuse and poor eating habits, affect one's physiological and social well-being and do not serve to eliminate one's problems (Clark et al. 1999; Crocker, 2007; Nyborg, & Curry, 2003).

Pyke (2010) defines and addresses the issue of internalized racial oppression. He argues that there is a tendency to misconstrue internalized oppression as reflecting some problem of the oppressed; he also explains what internal racism is not. Like all forms of internalized domination, internalized racism is not the result of some cultural or biological characteristic of the subjugated. Nor is it the consequence of any weakness, ignorance, inferiority, psychological defect, gullibility, or other shortcoming of the oppressed. He emphasizes the psychic costs of internalized racial oppression experienced by African Americans (Crocker, 2007; Pyke, 2010).

According to Pyke's (2010) view, internalized racism is the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one's racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one's race and/or oneself. Pyke (2010) also points out this emphasis on individual psychological wounds is evident in a legacy of personal, often anecdotal, accounts of struggles with internalized racial inferiority that span the twentieth century. Any discussion of internalized racism should involve or consider the fact that it is a process of cognitive coping necessary to resolve the psychological conflict generated by self-perception and social reality (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Du Bois, 1903; 2000; Festinger, 1957; Pyke, 2010).

Some researchers argue that White Racism in America is a complex psychological mindset that rests on a false in-group theoretical perspective that maintains there are innate differences between European Americans and African Americans in terms of their cognitive or intellectual capacities. Consequently, White Americans are considered superior to Blacks and as such, they are entitled to privileges that are denied people of color; especially members of the Black community (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Kendall, 2002).

Nevertheless, from a theoretical perspective, one cannot explain White micro or individual racism, per se, solely based on racially ascribed in-group superior characteristics in that the views and values of the members of in-groups and out-groups are heterogeneous, not homogeneous. For example, all White Americans are members of the White dormant group, but not all White Americans are prejudice; nor do they discriminate against Blacks. How can one explain these differences in White thought and behavior? (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Kendall, 2002).

According to Bobo and Fox (2003), for more than three decades, scholars belonging to three main schools of thought have proposed competing theories to explain what one might term the White racial paradox. The three competing theories, as noted by the researchers, are social-psychological, social- structural, and principled politics theories. While it is true that each school of thought may differ in its theoretical assumptions, Bobo and Fox (2003) maintain they all share the assumption that old-fashioned racism has not disappeared but been replaced by a new and different brand of racism, variously called symbolic racism or racial resentment (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Lin, 1999; Mitchell, 2012).

With respect to the prevalence of racism on a global basis, most African Americans believe America is the most racist society in the world and that, among all people worldwide, the White race is the most racist or least racially tolerant. However, this perspective is not supported or consistent with the results reported by the findings of the World Values Survey. This survey reported that the United States is the most racially tolerant countries among all nations of the world. Therefore, from these survey results, one could argue, viewed from a global perspective, White Americans are the most racially tolerant group among all people of the world, a view most African Americans would probably disagree based their daily encounters with White Anti-Black behavior

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that frequently result in harmful or debilitating physical and psychological effects (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Carter, 2007; Crocker, 2007; Slife & Williams, 1995).

Nevertheless, before accepting or rejecting the results of the World Survey findings, one should be mindful of the fact that all social research is subject to flaws with respect to validity and reliability; the World Values Survey is no exception. For example, in America and in many other Western countries, racism is taboo, therefore, most individuals are inclined to hide their racial intolerance or concede that they are indeed racist or racially intolerant, or that the United States is a racist society (Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Slife & Williams, 1995).

Consequently, the answers or responses given to the researchers that conducted the World Values Survey may or may not represent their true beliefs or feelings. Clearly, the taboo regarding racism in the World Values Survey, poses a threat to internal validity. Whether America is the least or most racially tolerant nation in the world will require further research. However, it appears factful that America is a racist society and that racism is the source of much of the stress experienced by African Americans and other people of color (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Campbell & Stanley, 1966; Carter, 2007; Crocker, 2007; Slife & Williams, 1995).
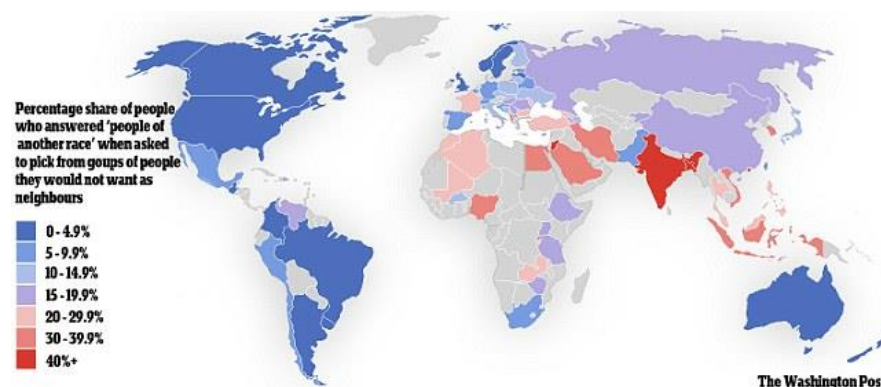
Figure 2.14: Map of Global Racial Tolerance
        Source: The Washington Post.

THE LEAST RACIALLY TOLERANT COUNTRIES		
40% + (of individuals surveyed would not want a person of another race as a neighbour)		
India, Jordan		
30 - 39.9%		
Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Korea		
20 - 39.9%		
France, Turkey, Bulgaria, Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Zambia, Thailand, Malaysia, The Philippines, Bangladesh, Hong Kong		
THE MOST TOLERANT COUNTRIES		
0 to 4.9%		
United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Britain, Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Australia, New Zealand		
5 - 9.9%		
Chile, Peru, Mexico, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Belarus, Croatia, Japan, Pakistan, South Africa		
10 - 14.9% Finland, Poland, Ukraine, Italy, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia		
15 - 19.9% Venezuela, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Macedonia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Russia, China		

Figure 2.15: Least and Most Racially Tolerant Countries'

Bobo and Fox (2003) point out that proponents of social-psychological theories contend that whites' opposition to affirmative action or to voting for a Black candidate is due largely to their negative stereotypes regarding African Americans. Social-psychological theories also attempt to explain ascribed in-group merits and positive characteristics. In addition to racial negative sentiments based on stereotypes associated with African Americans, these theories address the issues of socialized racism or how racism, based on the views of Bobo and Fox (2003), is transmitted from one generation to the next through early childhood socialization. A noteworthy attribute of social-psychological theories is they explain, in part, the perpetuation of racism in society despite serious efforts to eliminate it (Bobo & Fox, 2003).

According to Bobo and Fox (2003), a second set of theories, called social- structural theories, differs from social-psychological theories in that they take competing group interests seriously. In addition, they generally maintain that individuals identify with their own racial or ethnic group, that group conflict emerges from competing interests, and that dominant groups develop and propagate ideologies that maintain and even legitimize their higher social status. In these models, prejudice is not an irrational psychological disposition amenable to curing through proper socialization. Rather, prejudice emerges from competition and struggle over real or symbolic resources and privileges. To some extent, one might infer that, based on the assumptions of social-structural theories, eliminating racism from society is unrealistic in that privileges and competition over resources dictates the dynamics of group interaction; neither competition nor privilege or likely to become irrelevant or disappear from the social order (Bobo & Fox, 2003).

The third theory of racism mentioned by Bobo and Fox (2003) is referred to as the principled politics theory. According to this model, Whites' opposition to liberal racial policies, designed to benefit African Americans, roots not in any new racism nor in competing group interest, but rather in race-neutral values and ideologies such as fairness or individualism. They also note empirical and experimental studies link Whites' racial attitudes to opposition to a wide array of explicitly racial policies including busing, affirmative action, bilingual education, federal aid to blacks, and residential integration. Racial attitudes also influence evaluations of political candidates in many contexts, not merely when candidates of different racial back- grounds compete. Even though the researchers identify three distinct schools of thought, or theoretical perspectives regarding White racism, the three theories are not mutually exclusive; there is considerable overlap (Bobo & Fox, 2003).

With respect to the dynamics of racism, generally, the White dormant group defines the nature of blackness in terms that are, for the most part, always negative and debasing. Unfortunately, many African Americans internalizes or accepts the White dormant group's categorization of the qualities inherent in or associated with blackness which, oftentimes, results in feelings of inferiority, and negative perceptions of their race. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that living in a society where negative racist stereotypes abound; feelings of powerlessness, anger, and resentment greatly influence the mindset of most African Americans. Pyke (2010) termed such cognitive phenomenon as hidden psychological injuries that have a profound and debilitating effect on the psychic of African Americans (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Du Bois, 1903; Pyke, 2010).

Given the negative impact that racism has on the psychological and physical well-being of the African American family, few scholars have examined the strategies African Americans use to cope with the stress and distress of racism. However, most of the research that examines the negative consequences of stress generally finds stress within the African American family is widespread and that coping strategies are not homogenous. However, there appear to be universal coping strategies that African Americans generally use to cope with ecological induced stress (Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Hill, 1958; Pyke, 2010).

2.15. The Historical Salience of Religion

Studies find that most African American families rely on religion as the primary means of coping with the stress experienced in their lives. "From slavery to freedom," regardless of their socioeconomic status, African Americans have turned to religion as a source of strength when facing the adverse conditions so common in their lives. According to the Pew Forum U. S. Religious Landscape Survey (2007), as a group, African American are the most religious of all the

races in America. In the African American community, nothing is more important than religion; it provides them with hope, strength, and the will to survive in a hostile racial environment (Billingsley, 1968; Clark et al., 1999; Du Bois, 1903; Hill, 1958).

African Americans, more than any other group, are disproportionately more disadvantaged because of the adverse effects of micro and structured institutional racism. Granted, all people of color in the United States have experienced some degree of racism but not to the same extent as African Americans. Likewise, all people of color have experienced racially induced stress but again, not to the same degree. This is largely because African Americans oppressed by the institution of slavery were racial scapegoats. Furthermore, only African Americans served as objects of White hostility and misplaced aggression, manifested in the brutal, and inhumane widespread practice of Black lynching's (Billingsley, 1968; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1961; Lartey & Morris, 2018; Pyke, 2010).

Importance of Religion
% saying "very important"

African-Americans	79
Protestants	86
Members of hist. black churches	85
Members of evangelical churches	89
Members of mainline churches	76
Catholics	66
Unaffiliated	45
Total population	56
Protestants	70
Members of hist. black churches	85
Members of evangelical churches	79
Members of mainline churches	52
Catholics	56
Unaffiliated	16

Source: Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007, released in 2008
Question wording: How important is religion in your life – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Figure 2.16: Pew Forum Religious Landscape Survey Importance of Religion

Caughy et al., (2004) examined the relationship between parents' experiences of racism and children's well-being and the influence of the residential neighborhood characteristics on this relationship. They were interested in the relation between children's mental health and neighborhood characteristics, parental experiences of interpersonal racism, parental coping behaviors, and parental racial socialization practices. Their multilevel liner regression analysis and ecological systems theoretical framework provides several interesting results (Caughy et al., 2004).

Most noted, denying the existence of racism (experienced by oneself or individuals within one's own racial group) to cope leads to poor physical and mental health. Clearly, the negative manifestations of stress involve coping strategies that may result in unexpected physical and psychological unfavorable consequences, which Pyke (2010) terms "hidden injuries." Denying the existence of racism can prove to be counterproductive in terms of facing the issue in that a perception of nonexistence negates corrective behavior (Caughy et al., 2004; Pyke, 2010).

Caughy et al., (2004) asserts that, Africans Americans will experience negative residual psychological and physical defects, regardless of whether they use internalization or denial as a coping strategy to deal with racism. An enlightening finding of their study is the fact that parents who deny experiencing racism have the highest behavioral problems among their children. They also find parents who report actively coping with racism by confronting the person involved or taking some sort of action in response to racism report fewer behavioral problems in their children (Caughy et al., 2004; Krieger & Sidney, 1996).

Caughy et al., (2004) supports Krieger's (1996) hypothesis regarding the harmful effects of conscious or unconscious denial of racism. Krieger study also reveals racism has a profound effect on the physical health of African Americans. His findings are consistent with the results of

other scholars. Krieger (1996) also indicates that previous research into questions of how parental experiences of racism might affect the well-being of African American children is nonexistent. It is interesting to contemplate as to why scholars of family dynamics have shown so little interest in the pathological effects of racism regarding the dynamics of family functioning (Caughy et al. 2004; Krieger, 1996).

Many individuals in America profess to be Christians and support the foundational values of America: namely freedom, justice, and equality and yet racism, which counters Christian ideology, is a common practice. Festinger (1957) termed the contradiction between belief and behavior cognitive dissonance. This relates to individuals who engage in racist behavior but profess to believe in racial equality. One can argue that in America, there are clearly profound differences between the belief system of many members of the White dominant group and their overt behavior; and that racism is essentially responsible for the contradiction that exists between their beliefs, behavior, and values. (Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; Pyke, 2010; van Dijk, 1992).

For example, if White Americans believe that "all men are created equal," how do they explain the political, social, and economic inequality that abounds in America's social structure? How do they explain the preferential treatment of White offenders' or the double standards inherent in the Criminal Justice System? A common strategy used to address such issues and questions associated with the manifestations of racism experienced by African Americans is denial or pretending racism does not exist. This is a strategy commonly used to resolve cognitive dissonance that emanates from the disconnect between foundational values and inconsistent behavior (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; Pyke, 2010).

Denial of the perceptions that are part of one's psychological mindset is a common defense mechanism; the same is true with respect to contradictory behavior. This is, to some extent, why

many racists usually will not admit or believe that they are racist; equally important is the fact that racism runs counter to America's system of human values; in America, racism is taboo. In short, to concede that one is a racist or share racist views and perceptions, is tantamount to rejecting the American creed that "all men are created equal" (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; Pyke, 2010).

Related to this situation, van Dijk (1992) maintains that, one of the crucial properties of contemporary racism is its denial, typically illustrated in such well-known disclaimers as 'I have nothing against blacks, but . . .' He points out that there are various strategies used by individuals and the White dormant group regarding issues of racism as they relate to people of color. Among these forms of denial are disclaimers, mitigation, euphemism, excuses, blaming the victim, reversal and other moves of defense, face-keeping and positive self-presentation in negative discourse about minorities. Denials come in many forms, each with its own cognitive, emotional, social, political and cultural functions. Perhaps the most common form of denial, with respect to African Americans, is blaming the victim (Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; van Dijk, 1992).

According to van Dijk (1992), there are several cognitive and social strategies closely relate to denials. The first is justification. For example, structured societal impediments that serve to deny equal opportunity for people of color, especially Africans Americans, or justified because of some ascribed outgroup pathology, defect, or stereotype. Similarly, in everyday conversations, people may justify a negative act or discourse relative to a minority group member by justifying it as an act of legitimate defense, or by detailing that, the other person was indeed guilty and, therefore, deserved a negative reaction (Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; van Dijk, 1992).

With respect to the negative consequences of stress, research shows high levels of stress can lead to mental and physical health problems. Individuals with lower socioeconomic status

report more severe stress as well as a greater number of traumatic events in their childhood. In addition, African-Americans and U.S.-born Hispanics report more stress than their non-Hispanic White counterparts do, which directly relates to greater exposure to discrimination and a tendency to experience more traumatic violent. Pedersen (2013) study validates the findings of other researchers in that people of color experience more stress than the dominant group (Bowen-Reid & Harrell 2002; Choi, 2009; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Pedersen 2013).

Pedersen (2013) finds that stress affects how we perceive and react to the outside world. Low socioeconomic status has been associated with negative thinking about oneself and the outside world, including low self-esteem, distrust of the intentions of others, and the perceptions that the world is a threatening place and life has little meaning. Such a negative perspective or views of the world have the potential of becoming life-threaten or may result in negative coping strategies such as alcohol and drug abuse, as well as incidents of misplaced aggression. Stress also contributes to mental depression (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Clark et al., 1999 Crocker 2007; Pedersen, 2013).

Scholars have ascertained that there is a strong relationship between stress and health. For example, research finds chronic stress leads to poor health outcomes, and African Americans are especially vulnerable to suffer disproportionately from stress-related diseases (i.e., high blood pressure, hypertension, stroke, and coronary heart disease). Thus, unparalleled health disparities that exist between African Americans and their White counterparts relate to race and racism. Moreover, one should view White racism, as experienced by the Black community, from a health perspective and categorize it as a disease because of its adverse psychological and physical consequences (Billingsley, 1968; Bowen-Reid & Harrell 2002; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 1999; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Pedersen, 2013).

In addressing the ecological stress experienced by Black Americans, Bowen-Reid and Harrell (2002) point out that, African Americans often live in dilapidated housing, receive inadequate healthcare treatment, and have limited educational and job opportunities. Consequently, these conditions produce a type of stress that gnaws away at family life, interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and eventually, the physical health of Black people. Increasingly, scholars have come to recognize these ubiquitous forms of ecological stress as outgrowths of racism. The research reveals that there is a high correlation between the acute and chronic stress experienced by African Americans and institutional racism (Billingsley, 1968; Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Carter, 2007; Caughy, et al., 2004).

Choi (2009) argues that the threat of ongoing debt or insufficient income can result in feelings of loss of control, anxiety, and other mental and emotional distress. In addition, chronic financial stress links to a cycle of increased workplace absenteeism, diminished workplace performance, and depression. The stress caused by overwhelming debt is also having a devastating impact on the wellbeing of America's children (Billingsley, 1968; Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Choi, 2009).

According to Choi (2009), school psychologists and guidance counselors report an increase in the number of children stressed due to family financial problems. Research shows children who experience socioeconomic adversity at an early age are at increased risk for experiencing mental health challenges during their teen years. Choi (2009), points out that, young people from poor families are particularly vulnerable to the self-perpetuating cycle of adverse life circumstances and poor health and African-Americans are more likely to experience institutional and financial stress (Choi, 2009; Greene, 1998; Lawrence & Keleher, 2004).

Choi (2009) argues that the most common causes of stress among both White Americans and people of color relate to insufficient financial resources, conditions in the workplace, and health, however, African Americans' are frequently exposed to stressors in the workplace that are not experienced by White Americans. Generally, Blacks are victims of negative perceptions and racial stereotypes. Bobo and Fox (2003) argue that workplace discrimination remains a significant concern for many African Americans. Racism, in all its various forms, inflicts a heavy toll on the psychological and physical health of African Americans (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Brondolo, et al. 2009; Greene, 1998; Pyke, 2010).

To reiterate, insufficient economic resources, or the lack of adequate finances, are a major source of ecological stress experienced not only by African American families, but equally so for all families. However, Black families are disproportionally impacted due to higher unemployment rates that generally stems from the differential treatment in the workplace. Most studies involving the negative consequences of stress usually focus on physical and psychological health issues. Scholars have not been inclined to study stress from a holistic perspective, therefore, the knowledge of how stress affects intimate relationships, for example, is somewhat limited. Nonetheless, available research reveals that the impact is greater within African American "low-income populations, where divorce rates are higher and levels of relationship satisfaction lower than in other segments of the population" (Maisel & Karney, 2012, p. 65).

With respect to the high levels of stress, socioeconomic status is paramount. Indeed, low-income African American families experience more acute stressful life events and report poorer mental health than more affluent Black families. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the greater risk of relationship problems in low-income populations stems at least in part from their greater exposure to factors like stressful life events and poor mental health that generally harm intimate

relationships. Although stressful life events and mental health problems are generally associated with poorer relationship outcomes whenever they are studied, they seem likely to pose greater challenges for low-income populations than more affluent populations. Money has been called a "flexible and broadly useful coping resource" (Maisel & Karney, 2012, p. 65).

According to Banks & et al., (2006), current theoretical models suggest that the most potent and impacting discrimination experienced by African Americans in the post Jim Crow era are subtle and unconscious forms of discrimination that are experienced daily. Researchers have investigated the experience and effects of discrimination on stigmatized groups and found that discrimination is associated with both mental and physical health symptoms among African Americans and can adversely affect physical and mental health; these findings are consistent with those of other studies (Banks et al., 2006, p. 556; Crocker, 2007; Harrell, 2000; Nyborg, 2003; Sue, et al., 2008).

Everyday discrimination refers to familiar practices that reflect systematic, institutional bias in daily attitudes and behaviors. The stress from everyday discrimination, such as being ignored or overlooked while waiting in line or being mistaken for someone who serves others (e.g. maid, bellboy) is thought to accumulate over time and constitutes a major source of stress in the Black community. These forms of micro racism are generally conceptualized by researchers as microaggressions and as such, they pose the greatest threat to the health of African Americans due, in large measure, to the frequency of encounters or experiences (Banks et al., 2006, p. 556; Crocker, 2007; Harrell, 2000; Nyborg, 2003; Sue, et al., 2008).

Discrimination is a stressor conceptualized to be attributed to numerous factors (e.g. race, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation. African Americans have consistently been found to

report higher levels of discrimination based on race compared to other racial or ethnic groups. Even when asked about general discrimination, African Americans frequently attribute experiences of discrimination to race/ethnicity. With respect to gender, the literature has consistently reported higher rates for women in comparison to men for self-reported psychological distress, prevalence of depression, anxiety and phobias. Similarly, African American women report higher rates of psychological distress, depression, anxiety and phobias in comparison to African American men. Research also shows a positive relationship between discrimination and mental health to be stronger among women in comparison to men; research in this area is comparatively limited (Banks et al., 2006, p.558).

In addition to gender differences in mental health outcomes, evidence also suggests there are gender differences in how individuals respond to negative experiences. Research suggests that stigmatized African Americans respond to stressors in various ways. For example, some respond with avoidance, denial or minimization of the discrimination; while others, engage in problem solving and emotion expression in response to such events. Women have been found to ruminate on stressors exacerbating symptomatology and this internalization strategy in the face of discrimination might manifest in depressive or anxiety symptoms. Men, however, have been found to engage in more outward or externalizing coping strategies such as substance, athletic involvement, verbal, and physical confrontation (Banks et al., 2006, p.560; Hill, 1958; Hill, 1972; Mellor, 2004).

Studies reveal that African Americans in the United States are exposed regularly to racism which usually represent a continuous stressor, influence their responses to stress, and affect their levels of psychological well-being. In addition, research indicate that stress, as previously noted, may also affect physical health. Several studies indicate that stress can be manifested in a

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variety of ways and may be chronic or acute, depending on the influence and nature of the ecological stressors. In addition, it has been reported by researchers that acute and chronic stress are prevalent in African Americans due, to some extent, constant exposure to ecological stressors, especially in the work environment (Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Harrell, 2000; Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 433; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008).

Scholarly empirical investigations reveal repeatably hat African Americans have the highest levels of stress in the nation and a considerable amount the stress can be attribute to racism in the form of microaggressions and structured institutional racism. Findings from several studies also suggest that both recent and lifetime racism-related events tend to be stressful for African Americans and require the use of a variety of coping strategies necessary to effectually reduce the mental or psychological strain. In the Black community, coping with racially induced stress is a constant struggle (Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Harrell, 2000; Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 433; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008).

Although racism-related stress often is referred to as a unidimensional phenomenon (e.g., counts of specific events or racially discriminating acts), several examples highlight racism-related stress as a multidimensional construct. For example, African Americans may experience individual racism in the form of personal threats or treatment that implies they are less important or intelligent than Whites or other non-Blacks; these personal treats are defined as microaggressions which represent the most common form of micro racism in that microaggressions constitute daily experiences. Moreover, when seeking housing, employment, or services within institutions, many Africans Americans systematically are denied access or opportunities, treated with less respect and courtesy, or ignored because of their cultural group

membership. This form of behavior represents a combination of institutional racism and microaggressions (Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 434; Sue, et al., 2008).

In addition to institutional and microaggressions, African Americans may be subject to cultural racism. However, unlike intuitional racism and microaggressions, the experiences of cultural racism are usually indirect. For example, negative portrayals of the Black culture in the media (e.g., on TV, on the radio, newspapers, magazines, or in historical accounts). The cognitive or emotional impact of cultural racism experienced by African Americans will vary; so too will their coping strategies. Some may choose denial as a coping strategy, some may internalize the negative portrayals, and still others may choose confrontation or religion as a coping a strategy. Generally, family and community socialization will determine, in large measure, their reaction to the stressors (Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 434; Sue, et al., 2008).

Generally, African Americans will use Culture-specific strategies to manage ecological stressors. According to Lewis-Cole and Constantine (2006), coping refers to the ways in which members of a cultural heritage draw on a fund of cultural knowledge to assign meaning to a stressful event and to determine available resources for dealing with the stressor. One form of culture-specific coping has been identified as Africultural coping. Africultural coping has been conceptualized as comprising four primary components: cognitive/emotional debriefing (i.e., adaptive reactions by African Americans to manage their perceived environmental stressors), spiritual-centered coping (i.e., coping behaviors based on African Americans' sense of connection with spiritual elements in the universe, and with the Creator), collective coping (i.e., coping behaviors relying on group-centered activities), and ritual-centered coping (i.e., the use of rituals, such as lighting candles or burning incense, to manage a stressful situation (Lewis-Cole, & Constantine, 2006, p. 435).

African American women experience various forms of oppression, including a specific form, gendered racism; the oppression African American women experience is structured by racist perceptions of gender roles. Gendered racism suggests that African American women are subject to unique forms of oppression due to their simultaneous "Blackness" and "femaleness." For some African American women, the experiences of being both a woman, and an African American, cannot be easily separated, and they may perceive discrimination due to being an African American woman (Jones-Thomas et al., 2008, p.307).

Although women in general experience sexism and harassment, the confluence of racist attitudes can lead to a different and perhaps more harmful forms of sexism for Black women. Most African American women report occasional experiences of gendered racism from service professionals, including waiters/waitresses, and sales clerks. The negative perceptions and lack of respect of Black women, when compared to non-Black females, reflects the values of a racist society. In America, African Americans do not receive the same respect as other racial groups simply because of the color of their skin, therefore, it is not surprising to learn that women of color, especially Black women, experience more sexism, harassment and microaggressions than their White counterparts. (Jones-Thomas et al., 2008, p.307; Pyke, 2010).

The notion of gendered racism applies to men and women of all racial/ethnic minority groups. Gendered racism is demonstrated through societal stereotypic images of men and women of color. Thus, African American men are stereotypically viewed as criminals and absent fathers. Latino women are stereotypically viewed as hypersexual and promiscuous. Asian women are stereotyped as exotic and submissive. African American women are stereotyped as Mammy figures, promiscuous, and emasculating. Studies suggest that gendered racism has a pervasive effect on the psychological distress of African American women, even in the presence of coping mechanisms.

The most prevalent forms of gendered racism occur within the context of interpersonal settings and relationships (Jones-Thomas et al., 2008, p.307).

In terms of coping strategies designed to buffer the effects of gendered racism, African American women are more inclined to use avoidant coping style, namely cognitive–emotional debriefing. The cognitive–emotional coping partially influences the relationship between gendered racism and psychological distress. Because the mediation is partial, gendered racism has some direct effect on distress beyond coping mechanisms. The cognitive-emotional debriefing style includes efforts to manage environmental stressors, such as attempting to forget the situation or minimize the negativity of the situation or engaging in distracting activities. Some components of the cognitive-emotional debriefing may be a more passive attempt to cope with stressors, like avoiding thinking about the experience (Jones-Thomas et al., 2008, p.312).

Generally, according to Jones-Thomas et al., (2008), avoidance has been found to be negatively related to self-esteem and life satisfaction. Avoiding the issue may temporarily minimize the pain for women, who may find themselves more upset when confronted with gendered racism. In addition, research suggest that African American women are often socialized to be strong, so a coping style of avoiding or minimizing experiences may help to keep the facade of strength and competence (Jones-Thomas et al., 2008, p.312; Nyborg, 2003; Pyke, 2010).

However, the more gendered racism an African American woman experiences the more distress, and the more she is going to engage in cognitive-emotional debriefing coping to manage the negative emotions and distress associated with the incidents. Studies show that Stressful situations for African Americans, more than any other group, often lead to the culturally specific coping styles of reliance on the extended family and community, and spirituality and religious

beliefs; this is true for both Black men and Black women. The Black church, religion, the community, and the extended family have always served as buffers to the adversity experienced in the daily lives of African Americans (Chaney, 2008; Jones-Thomas et al., 2008, p.312; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Nyborg, 2003; Pyke, 2010;).

With respect to stereotypical perceptions in the work environment, according to Bobo and Fox (2003), White employers generally have stereotypical views of Blacks, rate Black workers as having weaker hard and soft skills, and openly acknowledge discriminatory recruiting and screening procedures during the hiring process. From all indications, such practices and negative perceptions, regarding the quality of African Americans, provide evidence of the prevalence of both micro and macro racism in the workplace. Equally important is the fact that African Americans in the workplace do not have the same opportunities for promotion, even though in many cases, they have greater qualifications than Whites (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012).

The literature reveals that there is considerable evidence that institutional racism is a major obstacle faced by African Americans with respect to equality of opportunity. Perhaps another significant variable to consider, regarding the socioeconomic status of African Americans, is the position of power held by the White dominant group. From a historical perspective, generally the most powerful group in any known society is positioned at the apex of the social structure and usually determines the norms and rules that govern social interaction among its members. And since White Americans are in leadership positions in practically all major institutions in America, their decisions affect the lives of African Americans, especially in the workplace (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012; Tatum, 1997).

For example, Greene (1998) underscores that Whites in America have control over most institutions in society, and this gives them tremendous power over the people of color. This view is also shared by Tatum (1997). Needlessly to say, the lessons of history indicate that the power elite is never willing to surrender its position of power voluntarily and therefore, they create ingenious means and strategies to preserve the status quo; in America, one of the most effective strategies has been to create and maintain a social system of racial inequality. Generally, the literature reveals that, in the United States, institutional racism is the primary practice of the White power elite to maintain its power over African Americans and other people of color (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012; Tatum. 1997).

Bobo and Fox (2003) maintain that numerous studies have documented the disadvantaged position of Blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities in the contemporary urban labor market. With that said, many contests the reason for this disadvantage, especially the significance of race. One argument is that the importance of race in determining Blacks' life chances was declining relative to class. To some extent, this implies that equality and inequality, or the state of the Black socioeconomic condition, is not a function of racism, rather, it is a function of social class (Caughy et al., 2004; Greene, 1998; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; van Dijk, 1992).

Generally, the research does not support the so-called class hypothesis regarding the manifestations of racism experienced by African Americans; all African Americans regardless of their socioeconomic class, experience the effects of institutional racism. Studies generally show that racism and its effects is not peculiar to the socioeconomic class occupied by African Americans and other people of color. However, poor Blacks might suffer more profoundly than middle class Blacks from the manifestation of racism due to the lack of enough economic resources

and social capital (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Caughy et al., 2004; Greene, 1998; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; van Dijk, 1992).

To some degree, this implies that the view regarding the importance of class as the dominant factor in determining the socioeconomic status of African Americans, maybe construed as a form of denial in that it overlooks the effects of discrimination and racism experienced by African Americans in the workplace at every position or class level; especially at supervisory positions. For example, members of the White dormant group generally head all of America's upper level economic institutions; the same is true for mid-level management positions; major colleges and universities are no exception (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010).

Clearly, this is not solely a supply and demand situation; it is, for the most part, an issue of racial inequality in that African Americans do not have the same opportunities for employment and promotions as do White Americans. It is not unreasonable to infer that if the major institutions in America are controlled and managed by members of the White dominant group, White Americans will have an advantage over African Americans in that they will generally show a preference for their own racial group. However, pro-White may not always mean anti-Black. Nevertheless, to the African American community, the results are the same regardless of the motivation (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010).

Scholars generally agree that racism serves as a source of power and as an in-group justification for its position of ascribed status in the social system. Kendall (2002) refers to this as "White Privilege," a system that advantage White Americans based simply on membership in the in-group. In short, it is not merit or personal achievement that determines the measure of the

individual, rather, privileges and preferential treatment are based on the color of skin and not on the content of character. It is noteworthy to point out that studies reveal that in America, White skin determines privilege and opportunity; the reverse is true in the case of African Americans: Black skin is associated with the lack of privilege and equal opportunity. (Bobo & Fox 2003; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Du Bois, 2018; Fanon, 1961; Greene, 1998; Pyke, 2010).

Studies generally show that regardless of the socioeconomic status of African-Americans, racism in the workplace is the primary cause of unequal opportunity and is a major source of stress Blacks and other people of color. For example, Bobo and Fox (2003) point out that, economists and other social scientists predict demands of the competitive labor market would eliminate racial discrimination in the workplace. A major weakness of this observation is that, to some extent, it overlooks the fact that there have always been demands of the competitive labor market, and these demands have not eliminated racial preferential hiring and promotional practices (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker, 2007; Greene, 1998; Parsons, 1939; Pyke, 2010).

With that said, it appears that the problem of racial inequality is not necessarily in the competitive labor market per se, as some scholars suggest but rather, perhaps it is in the mindset, attitudes and behaviors of the White dominant group who manage and participate in the market. In short, the decision makers are generally members of the White dominant group that determines vertical mobility and hiring practices in the labor market. Therefore, institutional racism ensures that White Americans receive preferential treatment with respect to hiring and promotional opportunities in that Whites are generally able to decide what race of employees are hired or promoted, and they frequently select individuals from their own race. (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Clark, et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Parsons, 1939; Pyke, 2010).

With respect to the structure and dynamics of the social order, micro and macro racism are the cultural norms in society, but more important, racism is deeply rooted in American experience and dates to the birth of the nation. Historically, White racism has served as the primary ideology necessary to validate the enslavement of Blacks as well as justify the inhumane treatment of Native Americans and other people of color. For example, White racism gave birth to the ideology of "Manifest Destiny," an ideology of White superiority claimed to be ordained by God, which gave White Americans the right and justification to subjugate, mistreat, and oppress people of color, especially Mexicans and Native Americans (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Clark, et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Fanon, 1961; Parsons, 1939; Pyke, 2010).

Today, just as in the past, White racism still serves as a justification for the social, political, and economic inequality experienced by the African American community, and to justify White privilege. Above all, racism is a source of White power that the privileged dominant group is unwilling to share or surrender; but more important, it largely determines the socioeconomic status of individuals in society. Nevertheless, one should not lose sight of the fact of the psychological role that racism plays in the minds of White Americans: It resolves the "cognitive dissonance" created by the conflict between White belief and White behavior with respect to racial equality (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Clark, et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957; Greene, 1998; Parsons, 1939; Pyke, 2010).

Dr. Kendall (2002) argues that, racism provides greater access to power and resources for White Americans. She maintains that White Americans' position of privilege is not based on individual or group merit, but rather race and skin color. This implies that all White Americans benefit or receive privileges from society regardless of their individual attributes. It is skin color, not personal merits that determine the recipients of privileges in society; this fact is extremely

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significant in any discussion regarding racial differential treatment. Kendall's (2012) observation regarding skin color and privileges, is a focus or position that is generally overlooked or discounted by White Americans regarding issues of racial inequality (Billingsley, 1968; Clark, et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012; Tatum, 1997).

Kendall (2012) goes on to point out that, White Americans are sometimes granted opportunities because they deserve them; often they have granted them, as individuals, because they belong to one or more of the favored groups in our society. Just as America's institutions grant opportunities to White Americans because of their skin color, likewise, African Americans do not receive opportunities because of the color of their skin. This reality is frequently ignored by those in society that are inclined to blame the victims for the lack of social and economic equality (Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Du Bois, 2018; Greene, 1998; Fanon, 1961; Kendall, 2012; Tatum, 1997).

Greene (1998) shares the observations of Kendall (2002) regarding White privilege and the role played by institutional racism in depriving African Americans of equal opportunity. However, he notes that African Americans must revisit their attitudes and perceptions regarding institutional racism and not regard themselves as helpless victims. To some extent, Dr. Greene (1998) implies that racism is both a White and a Black problem and consequently, African Americans must correctly conceptualize the race problem to effectively address the manifestations of micro and macro racism (Billingsley, 1968; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2012; Tatum, 1997).

Generally, the literature suggests that there are two primary competing ideologies regarding the substandard socioeconomic status of African Americans: the liberal view, and the conservative view. Conservatives are inclined to blame the victim whereas, Liberals tend to blame

the system. Perhaps the more convincing argument, in terms of correctly identifying the problem, is to objectively examine the merits of the systemic and individualistic positions to determine the overlap or the outcome of merging the two ideological perspectives. The syntheses derived from both perspectives would probably reveal that the blame lies with both the system and with the African American community, but not equally so (Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Tatum, 1997).

For example, as previously noted, members of the White dormant group are in positions of power in most of America's institutions and therefore, White Americans can influence the socioeconomic status of African Americans by depriving them of equal opportunity. On the other hand, African Americans must be mindful of the fact that personal preparation, in terms of education and skills, are prerequisites for equal opportunity. However, they must also be realistic in their expectations; for example, African Americans may continue to be victims of institutional racism regardless of their qualifications; preparedness will not guarantee success; however, unpreparedness will usually guarantee failure, and failure is a major source of debilitating chronic stress experienced by the Black community (Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Tatum, 1997).

Ecological stress is a serious problem in the Black community. However, despite their ethnic origin, all families experience and respond to stress in different ways. But more important, whether an incident or situation is defined as a stressor, depends largely on its effect and how it is perceived by the family or individual. Nonetheless, most individuals and families consider the lack of enough economic resources as a major acute or chronic stressor. For example, the quality of marital and family life is largely a function of the economic resources available to individuals and families (Billingsley, 1968; Choi, 2009; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Hill, 1958; McKenry & Price, 2000).

Resources allow families and individuals to meet their most basic needs, and if resources are plentiful, it makes it possible for families to satisfy many of their personal and collective needs. Unfortunately, most poor families have limited resources and must manage them accordingly. This is especially true among poor Black families as oppose to middle or upper socioeconomic classes who have greater access to social and economic resources. The availability of economic resources is directly related to employment. Studies show that the unemployment rate for African Americans are considerably higher than it is among White American due in large measure to the effects of institutional racism (Billingsley, 1968; Choi, 2009; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; McKenry & Price, 2000).

As previously noted, most Black families do not have adequate economic resources to meet their daily needs and therefore, these families live in a constant state of chronic stress which adversely affect their state of social-wellbeing. Many of the physical and psychological health problems they experience are directly related to the stress. Based on the literature, the greatest stressor for Black families is inadequate finances. This is due, in large measure, to discrimination in employment and the lack of equal promotional opportunities in the workplace. For the most part, African Americans are generally the last group considered for employment and promotions and the major reason, without exception, is institutional racism (Billingsley, 1968; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; McKenry & Price, 2000).

When one considers the fact that resources, determine family economic well-being, as well as how families cope with economic stress, it become clear that some African American families may be successful in managing stress than other families for a variety of reason. Black families that are unsuccessful in managing stress generally become victims of distress, which is a more a debilitating experience. African American families, like all families, are not homogenous in terms

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of their coping skills; this is also true in terms of their perceptions and categorizations of stressors as well as their means to manage stress (Choi, 2009; Crocker 2007; Hill, 1958).

Since economic resources vary in most African American families, adaptation to stressful family environment will also vary. Most scholars agree that insufficient finances are the primary cause of stress experienced by individual families, regardless of their ethnicity. Just as economic resources vary, likewise, the magnitude, effects, and interpretation of stress will also vary; this suggest that stress in one family may constitute distress in another. African American families, like all families, are not homogenous in terms of interpreting and responding to ecological stressors therefore, they generally use different coping strategies; religion is perhaps the most frequently used coping response to ecological stressors (Choi, 2009; Clark et al., 1999; Crocker 2007; Hill, 1958).

Scholarly literature reveals that financial stress affects Black families in several specific ways. For example, research shows that there is a direct correlation between inadequate finances and health. When people deal with significant debt, they are much more likely to have health problems; according to an Associated Press health poll conducted in 2008, roughly "10 to 16 million people are suffering terribly due to their debts, and their health is likely to be negatively impacted." It is noteworthy to point out that most of the "10 to "16 million people alluded to in the Associated Press health poll are African Americans. that are negatively impacted because of debt, are African Americans. (Caughy et al., 2004; Choi, 2009; Clark et al., 1999; Harrell, 2000; Pedersen, 2013).

Some scholars argue that while everyone experiences stress, it is not always easy to recognize the signs and symptoms. Stress can manifest itself in many ways. Not everyone experiences stress the same way, and it can manifest itself through a variety of signs. Generally,

discussions involving stress usually revolve around the symptoms and manifestations of stress from a physical health-related perspective such as hypertension and diabetes. However, individuals and families may also experience cognitive and emotional stress as well; emotional and cognitive stress may prove to be more debilitating than physical stress and in the modern world, most of the stress we feel is in response to psychological rather than physical threats (Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Harrell, 2000; Hill, 1958; 1972; Pyke, 2010).

This is especially true with respect to African Americans. Not only is the physical health of Black families adversely affected by the lack of adequate economic resources, their psychological health or emotional state of being is also negatively impacted by ecological stressors that emanate from daily exposure to White racism. For example, As Choi (2009) points out, money is more than just the accumulation of cash and coins, money also provides feelings of security, power, independence, and freedom. Moreover, the threat of ongoing debt or insufficient income can result in feelings of loss of control, anxiety, and other mental and emotional distress (Billingsley, 1968; Carter, 2007; Choi, 2009; Frazier, 1939; Pyke, 2010).

Choi (2009) also notes how economic stress may impact performance in the work environment. For example, he points out that, chronic financial stress links to a cycle of increased workplace absenteeism, diminished workplace performance, and depression. Needlessly to say, increased workplace absenteeism and diminished workplace performance can result in the loss of employment, which in turn, can lead to a state of depression. Negative coping strategies, as noted above, are common among many African American family members that find themselves in a situation of insufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs. (Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Choi, 2009; Crocker, 2007).

Given the fact that the family is a system implies that the negative impact of insufficient resource takes its toll on each member in the family; this implies that the negative effects of ecological stress are systemic. Given the fact that children are part of the family configuration, they may be impacted by the presence of family stress. For example, according to McKenry and Price (2000), several psychologists and guidance counselors who collect and analysis data on school children have reported an increase in the number of children experiencing and struggling with the manifestations of stress because of their families' financial problems. In addition, as noted by McKenry and Price (2000), some research has shown that children who experience socioeconomic adversity at an early age are at increased risk for experiencing mental health challenges during their teen years (Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Harrell, 2000; McKenry & Price, 2000).

While it is true that all families, regardless of race or ethnic origin, experience stress due mostly to insufficient economic resources, Black families are far more susceptible to the influences of stress and distress than their White counterparts in that they do not have to cope with the effects of racially induced stress. As previously stated, stress takes its toll on the entire family system; however, because each member is unique in terms physical and psychological characteristics, the effects or manifestations are not homogenous or may vary. This implies that children in the family system may have a different impact than the adults. For example, as pointed out by McKenry & Price (2000), several psychologists and guidance counselors who collect and analysis data on school children have reported an increase in the number of children experiencing manifestations of stress because of their families' financial problems (Hill, 1958; McKenry & Price, 2000).

Some research has shown that children who experience socioeconomic adversity at an early age are at an increased risk for experiencing mental health challenges during their teen years.

While all families, regardless of race or ethnic origin, experience stress due mostly to insufficient economic resources, Black families are far more susceptible to the influences of stress and they are more likely to need and seek external support than their White counterparts. Furthermore, one might conclude, based on an analysis of the data related to socioeconomic adversity and mental health challenges, Black children are at greater risk (Fox, & Bartholomae, 2000; Harrell, 2000; McKenry & Price, 2000).

The social construction of reality implies that are several ways that families address the issue of racially induced stress. For example, according to the views of Billingsley (1968), Black families historically have dealt with economic adversity with the help of extended kin networks, reciprocal intergenerational relations, and strong bonds within the community, church, and friends. These various social networks provide direct and in-kind assistance to moderate the impact of economic stress. For instance, in Black family households, the incidence of nonnuclear family members contributing to family income is much greater than in White household (Billingsley, 1968; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1958; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Strong family and community bonds are the primary sources for dealing with stress resulting from the lack of economic resources. In fact, Hill (1958) argues that the African American extended family is the major source of strength and support in the Black community. It is noteworthy to point out that the Black church is another significant source of support for African American families in terms of both spirituality and economic needs. Viewed from a historical perspective, religion and the Black church have been relied upon consistently by African Americans to buffer the effects of misfortune and adversity (Billingsley, 1968; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Chaney, 2008; Hill, 1958; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; McKenry & Price, 2000).

Family support, whether economic, social, or psychological, serves as major coping strategies among Black families in dealing with stressors or stress. Generally, most discussions involving the negative effects of stress within Black families, focus mainly on function of economic resources. However, the stress that African American endure most frequently is produced by White racism, specifically, White microaggressions, the forms of racism that have long been replaced by Jim Crow and Black lynching's. (Billingsley, 1968; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Choi, 2009; Sue, et al., 2008).

Granted, the lack of economic resources has a grave and devasting effect on the social well-being of African Americans. However, to minimize or overlook the consequences of microaggressions makes it extremely difficult to fully appreciate the magnitude of the psychological pain and damage that they experience. For example, the constant verbal and behavioral indignities, the negative prejudicial slights, ethnic slurs, and racial insults, communicate to Black Americans that because of the color of their skin, they are a special category of human beings and, therefore, are not entitled to common courtesy respect. The major problem with microaggressions is they may be intentional or unintentional. Nevertheless, the results are the same: PAIN (Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008).

Some research indicates that economic factors (unemployment, low income, e.g.) have a negative effect on the mental health and well-being of individuals. Reactions to economic stress appear to have common psychological and social costs. For example, according to Nyborg (2003), studies consistently show a relationship between economic strain and distress, including increased levels of anger, hostility, depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, and poorer physical health. How Black families cope with psychological stressors vary. However, extended and nuclear or intra-family dialogue is a common coping practice. Oftentimes, simply having someone to talk with

who has an appreciation of one's situation can prove to be an effective strategy for coping with psychological stressors (Carter, 2007; Crocker, 2007; Hill, 1958; 1972; Nyborg, 2003).

As previously pointed out, macro and micro-racism are major stressors experienced by Black families in our society and consequently, require diverse coping strategies. According to Carter (2007), encountering frequent experiences of racial discrimination can create feelings of self-devaluation among Black men and women. This sense of invisibility can contribute to feelings and beliefs, that as Black Americans families that they cannot control whether others acknowledge their talents, abilities, character, and right to safety in society. To effectively cope with such negative psychological consequences, African Americans frequently rely on the family, church, and friends (Brondolo et al., 2009; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009).

Carter and Forsyth (2009) point out that, racism can take on many forms including racial macroaggressions, which are overt racist experiences including being called a racial or ethnic slur, being physically assaulted due to race, or being denied fair wages due to race. They also indicate that racial macroaggressions are subtle, intentional or unintentional slights that denigrate or degrade individuals of color due to race. Examples of micro aggressions include assumptions of inferiority or criminality due to race. Coping with racism and racial trauma is a complex process that demands mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical energy and effort (Brondolo et al., 2009; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009; Sue, et al., 2008).

Harrell (2000) argues that, the coping strategies used by Black families depend on several factors, including their racial socialization experiences, racial identity development, personal experiences, collective experiences, individual characteristics, and situational characteristics. Given the fact that Black families vary in several characteristics, they generally use different coping strategies. For example, Harrell (2000) maintains that many Black families

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have several characteristics in common, their respective life experiences play a major role in terms of their perceptions and responds to stressors and stress. This implies that coping strategies in the African Americans are different and depend on the situation (Harrell, 2000; Hill, 1958; Sammons, 2007).

For example, according to Harrell (2000), family structure and dynamics shape the nature and quality of social relationships, communication style, and strategies for dealing with conflict, all of which affect the ways in which the individual copes with racism. In addition, family structure and dynamics shape the individual's and Black families' respond to conflict, stressors and stress; this is also true with respect to manifestations and affects. Harrell's (2000) observations are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Cheng, 2003; Harrell, 2000; Hill, 1958; Sammons, 2007).

Mellor (2004) argues that, strategies Black families use for coping with racism fall into three categories: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and support seeking. Problem-focused coping occurs when the victim responds directly to the racism. Essentially, problem-focused coping looks at the environment or specific racialized incidents and how things can be resolved. An example of problem focused coping is to have a physical altercation with the oppressor. Emotion focused coping is characterized by avoidance. To reiterate, Black coping strategies are diverse (Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1958; Mellor, 2004).

According to Mellor (2004), examples of this form of coping include detachment and internalization of the racism. In addition, Mellor (2004) maintains that, while seeking support can fall under both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, it is often in its own separate category. As previously pointed out, the characteristics of families vary; so, will their coping strategies. For example, one family may choose detachment as a coping strategy whereas another

family may choose internalization; the point is that families differ in terms of their life experiences and consequently, so will their coping strategies (Brondolo et al., 2009; Hill, 1958; Mellor, 2004).

As previously stated, how Black families' response to racism may differ. Also, there is a difference between coping and responding. Mellor (2004) noted several coping responses that include defensive, controlled, and offensive responses. Defensive responses, refers to cases in which the victims defend themselves from the racism by having a defeatist attitude (e.g., accepting the racism and withdrawing or denying one's racial identity). In addition, Mellor (2004) points out that, controlled responses, also encompasses responses not aimed at the racist situation or the perpetrator directly (e.g., ignoring the racist incident and not responding). Offensive responses focus on individuals' direct responses to racism (e.g., educating the oppressor and demanding better treatment) (Hill, 1958; Mellor, 2004).

Many scholars agree that Black families routinely rely on religion as a means of coping with adverse circumstances; including the manifestations of racism; religion gives them a sense of hope and strength. In their minds, there is no earthly power greater than the power of God. They reason that, no matter how challenging life maybe, God can, and will, deliver them from their adverse circumstance or condition. Of all the factors that contributes to the quantity of their resilience, none is greater than their spirituality (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Frazier; 1939; Hill, 1972; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Again, some research indicates that African Americans are more religious than any other ethnic group. For example, as previously noted, the Pew Landscape Survey found that nearly eight-in-ten African-Americans (79%) say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56% among all U.S. adults. In fact, a large majority (72%) of African-Americans who does not affiliate with any faith say religion plays at least a somewhat important role in their lives. On the other

hand, nearly half (45%) of African-Americans, that do not affiliate with a church say religion is very important in their lives, roughly three times the percent who say this comprise the religiously unaffiliated population, overall (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Hill, 1972; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008).

A considerable amount of the ecological stress experienced by African Americans can be attributed to living conditions which affects both the adults and children that comprise the family system. For example, adolescents who live in a low-income urban setting are at risk for the development of depressive symptoms as this population experiences quantifiably more stress than other populations. In addition to the tangible effects of such stressors as poverty, low-income adolescents, particularly those of color, often bear the burden of systemic stressors such as discrimination and racism (Carleton, et al., 2008, p. 113).

Given the well-established link between stress experienced and depressive symptoms, it is not surprising that rates of depressive symptoms seem to be higher in this population, and like their Black adult counterparts, African American adolescents generally experienced more stress than White adolescents due, in large measure, to their espousal to ecological systemic racism. Most of the studies that investigate the ecological effects of stress involve adults and children to a lesser extent. However, when the unit of analysis is the entire family system, the focus includes both adult members as well as children (Carleton, et al., 2008, p. 113).

Studies consistently show that religion play a vital role in the lives of African Americans; this is true regardless of the age group or socioeconomic status. For example, African American adolescents turn to religion for the same reason as Black adults and that reason is the pursuit of psychological tranquility. Religion mediates the stress and adversity that is so common among people of color. Empirical studies have noted that, on average, African Americans and Hispanic

Americans score higher on a wide variety of measures of religiosity and spirituality than their white counterparts and are more likely to draw support from religious organizations (Carleton, et al., 2008, p. 113; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Comparatively speaking, people of color normally live in economically disadvantaged urban areas; such living areas are usually stress producing because of high rates of criminal activity and threats to personal safety. They encounter the effects of racism on almost a daily basis; Black families have higher unemployment rates than all other ethnic groups; have higher death rates, and experience more economic related stress than any other group in society. And because their social capital and economic resources are limited, especially among poor African American families, frequently turn to God for assistance in coping with the stress produced by what they perceive as a hostile and seemingly indifferent world (Carleton, et al., 2008, p. 113; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Research findings of scholars indicate that, the linkage between health and religiosity in African Americans is generally stronger than in Whites; African Americans experience and report higher levels of almost all dimensions of religiosity than do their White counterparts. When compared with non-religious Blacks, Blacks who are religious not only live longer but also benefit from greater mental health and experience lower levels of psychological impairment, suicide, substance abuse, depression, and report higher levels of life satisfaction. Blacks attend religious services more frequently than Whites, with 52.3% reporting that they attend at least two to three times per month, in comparison to 43.2% of Whites and are more likely than Whites to view religious involvement as" very important." (Marks, et al., 2005, p. 449; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

The fact that African Americans record of church attendance and religious commitment exceed those of White Americans should not come as a surprise given the long history of enslavement, oppression, and human suffering of which they had to endure. To African Americans, the historical Black church has not been simply a monolithic religious institution serving only the spiritual needs of its members. Quite the contrary; the church has always provided economic, psychological, social assistance as well. It is one of the first places that Blacks turn to during adversity and hard times. Today, in modern America, the church is a source of strength and hope; it is the fuel of Black resilience in a society where White racially-induced stress Is the norm (Billingsley, 1999; Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

African Americans have always relied on the church to assist in meeting their needs without exception. As Marks, et al., (2005) noted, the arm of the Black church is both long and strong, and the interdependence of religious and nonreligious functions existing within the African American church presents a pragmatic pull, even on those who may be less interested in religion per se because the Black church is also "an especially important source of racial pride, hope, and optimism" with significant social benefits. Specifically, the Black church's arm extends into economic, political, and human services arenas where predominantly White churches are comparatively less active. One of the noteworthy functions of the Black church in White America is its role in assisting African Americans in coping with the stress that emanates from their daily experiences with Micro and Macro racism which is manifested in a variety of ways (Marks, et al., 2005, p. 449).

Studies consistently show that African Americans are more religious than their White counterparts. What is frequently overlooked in the discussions regarding Black religious participation is the quantitative differences between religion and spirituality. At the core of

quantitative research is the need for adequate operational definitions of spirituality and religion. Spirituality is a worldview or belief system that is a part of the Afrocultural psychological orientation and tends to be a central cultural concept for most persons of African descent. A person can have a deep sense of spirituality without any formal religious participation. Spirituality operates as a belief system that guides daily behavior and can be practiced in a very personal and private way (Walker & Dixon, 2002, p. 108).

Although spirituality and formal religious participation are two distinct entities, persons who participate in formal religion may have a sense of spirituality, and those who are spiritual may express their spiritual beliefs through formal religious practices. For all practical purposes, one might argue that spirituality is a cognitive process whereas religion involves behavior. Viewing or operationalizing the two concepts from this perspective, frequent church attendance may or may not be indictive of the depts of an individual's spirituality; a person can have a deep sense of spirituality without any formal religious participation Nevertheless, from all indications, the research show that African Americans have a strong belief in God, as evidenced by their religious behavior, and that belief gives them the strength to survive in a world that many consider hostile and unforgiving (Chaney, 2008; Marks, & Chaney, 2006; Marks et al., 2006; & Walker & Dixon, 2002, p. 108).

Studies clearly document that African American students at predominantly White institutions often experience higher levels of stress, have lower persistence rates, and have lower self-esteem than do their White counterparts due to their minority status. These variables have an impact on well-being and adjustment. Spirituality and religion buffer the stress and other challenges experienced by African American students and serves as major sources of social support, coping, and adjustment. Generally, Black student's academic performance at

Predominantly White institutions is lower than those of White students and it is reasonable to assume that stress may be a contributing factor (Walker & Dixon, 2002, p. 111).

Religion and spirituality are very important to African Americans and play a major role in every aspect of their lives. Studies have convincingly shown that next to the family, religion is the most cherished institution in the Black community; and there are many reasons why this is so. Above all, religion and spirituality are sources of hope, strength, courage, and provide the resilience that's needed to successfully compete in a society where skin color take precedence over merit and qualifications, a society where racial inequality is the norm. As several scholars have noted, the ideology of racism is predicated on the myth of White superiority and Black inferiority; these variables affect perceptions of self-identity, self-evaluation, and perceptions human worth. In a racist society, the dominant group decides which human attributes or characteristics are valuable and which are worthless. Consequently, there is a struggle by the oppressed to maintain their sense of human significance; African Americans have relied on religion and spirituality as a source of psychological support in combating White ascribed perceptions of the self (Chaney; 2008; Ellison, 1993; Marks, & Chaney, 2006; Marks et al., 2006).

There is mounting evidence that religious cognitions and practices occupy an important place in the efforts of many individuals to cope with undesirable or threatening events and conditions. Several studies indicate that individuals are especially likely to report turning to religion for solace in confronting threats to the physical self, such as illnesses and physical disabilities. Further, the available evidence suggests that religious cognitions and behaviors are more effective than other types of coping strategies in reducing depression and other negative psychosocial states that often follow from bereavement and health-related stressors. Blacks also report considerable satisfaction with the outcomes of religious coping efforts; religious coping is

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a common strategy in the African American community (Chaney; 2008; Ellison,1993, p. 5; Marks, & Chaney, 2006; Marks et al., 2006).

Religious involvement also cushions the harmful effects of certain types of adversity on black self-esteem. This stress-buffering pattern is particularly evident about states of the physical body, its attractiveness and its health. Frequent participation in church communities appears to moderate the negative consequences of physical unattractiveness for black self-esteem. In religious settings, interpersonal evaluations may emphasize perceived social and/or spiritual attributes ("inner beauty"), rather than superficial physical characteristics; the soul is perceived to be more beautiful than the body. But more important, religious involvement prevents internalizing negative self-perceptions (Chaney; 2008; Ellison, 1993, p. 17; Marks, 2004; Marks, & Chaney, 2006; Marks et al., 2006).

How individuals evaluate themselves have been shown to affect human behavior. For example, speaking to the issue self- perception, Ellison (193) argued that two important dimensions of self-perception are self-esteem, or positive evaluations of the self, and personal mastery, or feelings of empowerment and control over one's affairs. While the evidence is not unequivocal, it has been suggested that these aspects of self-perception influence a wide range of social and behavioral outcomes, including adolescent social problems such as delinquency, school failure, and teenage pregnancy, as well as adult criminality, chronic welfare dependency, child abuse, and alcohol and drug use. In addition, self-esteem and personal mastery appear to mediate the links between social location and psychological distress and psychiatric impairment in a variety of ways (Ellison, 1993, p.1).

According to Levin (1984), a large amount of evidence identifies Black Americans as victims of and neglect by the medical establishment. Being a Black American put one at significant risk for a wide variety of ill health and denies one the appropriate primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Poorer health status and lower life expectancy are consequences of lower income, which, in turn, is a consequence of occupational prejudices preventing Blacks from holding certain well-paying jobs. Occupational racial inequality is a major source of the stress so common in the African American community in that it is directly related to the factors associated with social well-being (Levin, 1984, p. 477).

Because of insufficient economic resources, the medical needs of Blacks generally go unmet and this contributes immensely to the comparatively higher mortality rates when contrasted with the death rates of White Americans. In addition to being financially unable to meet their medical needs, large amount of evidence identifies Black Americans as victims of neglect by the medical establishment. Furthermore, the epidemiologic literature on black excesses in morbidity and mortality strongly points to the protective effect of being nonblack in the United States. (Levin, 1984, p. 477).

Traditionally, the black church has occupied a special place in the Black experience. As the only autonomous social institution in the Black community, it has had to attend to the total needs of its members. The Black church has been the conservator of the defining values and norms of black Americans. Black churches have served as houses of worship, schools, meeting places for fraternal organizations, and loci of community organization. In addition, it has also provided mental health services to its members in the form of individual and group counselling as well assisting with economic needs. Needlessly to say, African Americans are an at-risk and underserved group regarding health status indicators and the provision of preventive health care,

respectively, the Black church is an extremely relevant locus for the practice of community medicine (Levin, 1984, pp. 477-478).

In their discussion of spirituality and religion with respect to their roles in the Black community, Mattis and Jagers (2001) point out that historically, religion and spirituality have been at the center of African American community life and folk experience. However, within the social sciences, research on the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of African Americans has remained limited and disjointed. Some attention has been given to the study of African American Christian churches. Much of this research has focused on these churches' roles in meeting service needs that have been abdicated by other service institutions. Some studies have explored patterns of religious involvement (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks, & Chaney, 2006; Marks et al., 2006; Mathis & Jagers, 2001, pp. 519-520).

Others have focused on the mediating effects of religion on psychological and physical health However, little empirical attention has been given to the functions of religion and spirituality in the everyday lives of African American people. As such, although sociological and psychological research can cogently argue that religion and spirituality are important in the lives of African Americans, these disciplines can say little about why religion and spirituality are important, or about their roles in structuring daily affairs. (Mathis & Jagers, 2001, pp. 519-520).

With respect to the definition of religion and spirituality, to date there is no scholarly consensus on their meanings nor do scholars agree on how they affect the lives of individuals. However, research show that religion and spirituality have positive effects on behavior; especially in the Black community. For example, African American adolescent males who hear, and presumably internalize, messages about religion and spirituality tend to engage in greater levels of

anger control and fewer acts of overt aggression than their counterparts. These findings suggest that religion and spirituality play roles in adolescents' efforts to achieve emotional and behavioral self-regulation, particularly in times of interpersonal conflict (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 524).

Religion and spirituality also have been found to promote personal well-being and to mediate negative outcomes for African American adults and serve as a buffer to racially induced stress. For example, some studies report religious salience to be positively associated with psychological well-being among African American college students. Importantly, it appears that this relationship may be partially mediated by respondents' belief in the life-enhancing meaning of God and self-affirming religious affiliations. Religiosity also has been found to be negatively associated with symptoms of psychological distress among African American women. It appears that religion may affect well-being by providing concrete strategies for coping with distress and adversity. In addition to their role in coping, religion and spirituality have been theorized to play a part in the development of prosocial attitudes and behaviors among African American adults (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 524).

Mattis & Jagers ((2001) pointed out that, highly religious African American men and women, and those who engaged in frequent private devotional activities, such as prayer, tended to be more open and cooperative, less suspicious, and more congenial than less religious individuals. Likewise, in an interview, individuals who reported that religion and spirituality influenced their daily lives and their personal behaviors were friendlier and less hostile than their counterparts. The characteristics associated with these more religious African American people are qualities that are promotive of positive interpersonal relationships. Numerous studies consistently find that

spirituality and religion play a vital role in the lives of most African Americans (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 524).

For example, the African American community thrives on such aphorisms as "the family that prays together stays together." Further, African Americans frequently refer to importance of having a "church family." Despite the obvious importance of religion and spirituality to African American families, the available empirical research on the role of religion and spirituality in African American family life has been conceptually and methodologically limited. Nonetheless, most empirical research consistently finds African Americans to be the most religious group in the nation (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 526).

Addressing the diverse functions and activities of the church and religion, Mattis & Jagers (2001) point out that, married men and women are more likely to report that religion is important to them and to identify themselves as more religious than their unmarried counterparts. For African Americans the church and religion had several family-relevant functions. The church and religion reinforce parents' moral values, give meaning to marriage and family, reinforce values related to the role obligations of spouses, and outline criteria regarding mate selection; and the church provides a venue in which individuals can meet potential life-partners. In addition, the church and religion foster positive perceptions of the self and enhance self-esteem (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 526).

According to Levin et al., (2005), the connection between religion and health among African Americans consistently show a positive relationship. Evidence mostly supports a protective religious effect on morbidity and mortality and on depressive symptoms and overall psychological distress among African Americans. Studies by research teams have been

instrumental in providing empirical evidence that the unique patterns of religious expression among African Americans have measurable impacts on a variety of physical and mental health indicators. (Levin, et al., 2005, pp. 237-239; Marks, et al., 2005).

Over the past century, hundreds of published studies have identified religious differences in a wide range of physical health outcomes and have examined effects of religiousness on health status indicators and measures of disease states. Studies undertaken since the 1990s have identified the complexities of racial differences in religion-health associations. In one study, while frequent religious attendance was found to predict the health of both African Americans and whites, African Americans with the highest levels of functional health impairments engaged in more private devotional activities than less impaired African Americans, to the greater benefit of their self-assessed health (Levin, et al., 2005, pp. 237-239; Marks, et al., 2005).

Numerous studies have consistently shown a positive relationship between religion and spirituality in the Black community. For example, Levin, et al., (2005) note five interesting positive outcomes that may emanate from committed religious involvement: First, strong commitment to a system of religious beliefs may lead to avoidance of destructive habits and adoption of healthy behaviors known to reduce the risk of morbidity among African Americans. Second, frequent church involvement may strengthen bonds to the most significant network of social support in the African-American community, a key resource for health promotion and disease prevention (Chaney, 2008; Levin, et al., 2005, p. 245; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Finally, the worship experience in African-American churches may produce positive effects that could potentially influence susceptibility to or cause of illness or even be therapeutic, such as through psychoneuroimmunology or neuroendocrine pathways. Fourth, certain healthy beliefs

which motivate preventive healthcare practices may be consonant with or supported by the beliefs of world views promoted by African-American churches. Finally, the positive expectations of persons of faith, such as those promoted by readings of scripture, by sermons or by pastoral counseling encounters, may be an especially potent resource for preventing psychological distress in African Americans (Chaney, 2008; Levin, et al., 2005, p. 245; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Marks, 2005).

Religion and religious institutions have been instrumental in the development and maintenance of political resistance and activism, social, emotional, and economic support, as well as the intellectual, educational, and artistic development of African Americans. Churches serve as arenas in which Black men and women can develop and assert personal and organizational leadership skills that are discouraged elsewhere. Black churches are particularly important for African American women for whom the multiple concerns of racism and sexism are negotiated through religious and spiritual convictions and beliefs. This observation implies that Black women may be more susceptible to ecological stressors than are Black males due to gender differences (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Taylor et al., 1999, p. 525).

Taylor et al. (1999), addressing functions of religion and spirituality in the lives of African Americans, point out that religious and spiritual beliefs and practices provide a meaningful context within which African Americans interpret and respond to both life's hardships and joys. These roles for religion and spirituality have been especially significant for investing meaning in the individual (e.g., personal, spiritual) and collective (e.g., cultural) experiences of African Americans. African American religious traditions reflect a rich and diverse cultural and historical background. Religion and spirituality have garnered significant attention from Afrocentric theorists who are interested in the philosophical foundations, ritual practices, and

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psychotherapeutic treatment implications of Black religiosity and spirituality. These and other efforts indicate a growing recognition of the importance and centrality of religion and spirituality in the lives of African and African American people (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Taylor et al., 1999, p. 528).

According to the research conducted by Taylor et al., (1999), African Americans demonstrated high levels of various indicators of subjective religiosity. For example, Black Americans overwhelmingly indicated that (a) religious comfort and support was extremely helpful in coping with life problems and difficulties, (b) religious and spiritual beliefs were important in their daily lives, (c) they felt close to God, and (d) they considered themselves to be religious. The strong emphasis placed on subjective religious experience was evident among both adults and high school seniors. These findings corroborate other research indicating that, historically and contemporaneously, religion and religious institutions play a significant role in the lives of African Americans (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Taylor et al., 1999, p. 536).

Taylor et al., (1999), pointed out that, in comparison to African American men, African American women are more likely to be church members, attend religious services, and participate in church activities. With respect to devotional activities, women pray, read religious materials, and listen/watch religious programming more frequently than do men. The present findings of consistent gender effects for subjective religious involvement corroborate the depiction that African American women are more religiously involved than are men. Generally, however, women are more religiously involved than men regardless of race. The researchers also noted that Black respondents displayed significantly higher levels of subjective religiosity than their White counterparts (Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Taylor et al., 1999, p. 537).

In addition to race and gender differences, regions exert significant and pervasive effects on subjective religiosity. Southerners indicate higher levels of spirituality and subjective religious participation than their non-southern counterparts. These facts findings are supportive of a large body of other research indicating that Black adults who reside in the South have higher levels of organizational, non-organizational, and subjective religiosity than their non-southern counterparts, as well as the general characterization of the South as possessing a heightened sensitivity to religious concerns and issues (i.e., the Bible Belt). Specific analyses involving Northern versus Southern African Americans suggest that the overall character and significance of religious participation differs markedly by region. In general, sociodemographic factors are more important as determinants of religious involvement in the South, whereas religious commitment factors are more salient in the North (Taylor et al., 1999, p. 539).

Mattis (2002), maintain that religiosity plays a significant role in the lives of African American women and is defined as the degree to which individuals adhere to the prescribed beliefs and practices of an organized religion. "Spirituality" refers to an individual's belief in the sacred and transcendent nature of life, and the manifestation of these beliefs in a sense of connectedness with others (e.g., humans, spirits, and God), and in a quest for goodness. Religiosity/spirituality have been treated with a fair amount of ambivalence and skepticism in the social sciences (Mattis, 2002, p. 309).

For example, some scholars have embraced religiosity/spirituality as important dimensions of human life. Others have conceptualized religiosity/spirituality as escapist, illogical and pathological responses to adversity and existential angst. Nevertheless, African American women frequently turn to religion as a strategy to buffer ecological stress; and generally, they exhibit more religiosity and spiritualty in their daily lives than African American men. As to why this is so, will

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require further research. However, some research findings have shown that the stress levels among Black women exceed that of Black men. Contrary to traditional social scientific perspectives that posit that individuals use religion and spirituality exclusively as sources of emotional comfort or to shield themselves from the realities of their circumstances, some research show that African American women use religion/spirituality to help them to confront and accept reality. (Mattis, 2002, pp. 309- 316).

Emerson et al., (1999) argue that despite decades of policy efforts and programs, U.S. black-white socioeconomic inequality remains pervasive. African Americans fall below the poverty line more than three times as frequently as non-Hispanic whites, and the median household wealth of African Americans is but eight percent that of Anglos. Most people would probably agree that institutional racism plays a significant role in the sub-standard socioeconomic status of the African American community and view macro racism from a structured systemic perspective. Consequently, they are inclined to place the blame on external factors such as discrimination or racial differential treatment in the workplace; this perspective is considered as a liberal analysis. (Choi, 2009; Emerson, et al., 1999, p. 398; Greene, 1998).

However, there are individuals and groups that tend to categorize the racial inequality issue in society as an internal problem; they argue that the blame is to be found among the victims; this is a conservative analysis. In large measure, this perspective has support from both political and religious institutions in America. For example, Emerson, et al., (1999) that argue that, religion influence how people explain inequality-in this case, black/ white socioeconomic inequality. It is reasonable to assume that because religion plays a part in racial inequality explanations, racial inequality may be far more difficult to reduce via government policies and programs than previously understood. Generally, both political and religious conservative oppose government

policies as a remedial strategy for addressing the racial inequality experienced by African Americans (Emerson, et al., 1999, p. 399).

Emerson, et al., (1999) point out that religious factor is missing explanations of inequality. They argue that understanding the cultural tools people use to make sense of their world illuminates how they construct reality-including their explanations of inequality. As an example, they examined the ideology of white conservative Protestants to illustrate their point- because of their clearly defined subcultural "tool kit." For this group, which comprises nearly 25 percent of the white American population, religion plays a key part in their cultural construction of reality and provides a set of tools with which they make sense of and negotiate their realities. They point out that a focus on this group is particularly germane due to their large influence politically and socially (Emerson, et al., 1999, p.399). Because of their opposition to government programs designed to eliminate structured institutional racism it is usually assumed that they are uneducated, lower- socioeconomic White Americans (Emerson, et al., 1999, p.399).

However, according to Emerson, et al., (1999), the stereotype of white conservative Protestants as rural, lower-class southerners is inaccurate. White conservative Protestants work in all occupations, live in every region of the country, are married, single, young, old, have children in public schools and private schools, and have incomes and education comparable to other Americans. What distinguishes this group, we argue, are not these structural factors, but a subculture that stresses, through theological linkages, a way of viewing the world. For example, White conservative Protestants are more individualistic and less structuralist than other white Americans in their explanations of racial inequality. Given Americans' pervasive individualism, and that the crux of white racial ideology in the post-civil rights era is a near absolute denial of

structural causes and a strong affirmation of individual causes to racial issues (Emerson, et al., 1999, p.399).

Historically and contemporaneously, spirituality is an important element of life and a major source of coping in the African-American community; it was widely relied on by Africans during slavery and freedom. Billingsley (1968) and other scholars highlight the vital role that religion plays in the daily lives of African Americans and it remains the primary source of their strength and hope, and this is generally true regardless of age group as indicated by church affiliation (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008).

Research by several scholars and polls indicate that church affiliation is important to African Americans regardless of their age group and levels of education attainment. However, according to the Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008), church affiliation appears to be higher among the less educated. Nevertheless, the differences appear to be marginal; the same is true with respect to age. The differences are minimal (Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008).

Religious Affiliation by Education

Among…	Evang. Prot. churches %	Mainline Prot. churches %	Hist. black Prot. churches %	Catholic %	Unaffil. %	Other/Don't know/Ref %
African-Americans	15	4	59	5	12	5=100
Total population	26	18	7	24	16	9=100
Less than high school						
African-Americans	13	2	63	5	13	4=100
Total population	31	11	9	29	15	5=100
High school grad						
African-Americans	15	3	60	4	12	5=100
Total population	28	18	8	23	16	8=100
College grad						
African-Americans	15	9	53	8	10	5=100
Total population	20	23	4	23	17	13=100

Source: Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007, released in 2008

Figure 2.17: Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey-Religion Affiliation by Education

Religious Affiliation by Age

Among…	Evangelical Prot. churches %	Mainline Prot. churches %	Hist. black Prot. churches %	Catholic %	Unaffiliated %	Other/Don't know/Ref %
African-Americans	15	4	59	5	12	5=100
Total population	26	18	7	24	16	9=100
Age 18-29						
African-Americans	13	2	55	6	19	5=100
Total population	22	12	8	22	25	10=100
Age 30-49						
African-Americans	17	3	57	5	13	5=100
Total population	27	17	6	25	17	8=100
Age 50-64						
African-Americans	15	5	64	4	7	5=100
Total population	27	20	7	23	13	9=100
Age 65+						
African-Americans	13	6	65	5	7	4=100
Total population	30	25	6	23	8	7=100

Source: Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007, released in 2008

Figure 2.18: Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey-Religion Affiliation by Age

The scholarly literature also indicates cultures transmit belief systems that may affect the way their members make sense of stressors and, consequently, how well they are able to cope with them. One such example is religious belief. Billingsley (1968) maintains that people with a strong religious belief system may be able to draw on 'divine assistance' to help them cope with the stressors that affect them; there is no better example than the Black community who extensively rely on religion to provide the strength necessary to cope with deprivation and neglect. Frazier (1939) holds similar views regarding the role of religion in the lives of African Americans (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Hill 1972; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

As previously noted, African Americans frequently rely on religious and spiritual beliefs to cope with stress and distress; such reliance usually has a positive effect on their general wellbeing. For example, as observed by Billingsley (1968) and others, from a physical health perspective, studies find religious coping (e.g. praying for assistance) relates to significant reductions in blood pressure amongst African Americans but not in a matched sample of European Americans; religious and spiritual beliefs also had a positive impact on their psychological or mental states as well. African Americans, perhaps more than any other ethnic group, rely on religion or prayer to assist them in dealing with their earthly advertises (Billingsley, 1968, Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1972; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Spirituality and religion are deeply rooted cultural values in the Black community. Spirituality represents the divine expression and belief of a higher power that governs one's existence and acknowledges the connection between human lives. As Frazier (1939) notes, historically, African Americans frequently turn to religion to buffer racial oppression. For example, Frazier (1939) argues that African American religion historically has functioned as a "refuge in a hostile White Society." At another level, however, it has served as a form of cultural

identity and resistance to a White-dominated society. Religion has been, and still is, the primary source of Black resilience (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1972; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

For example, there are documented cases where doctors indicated that death was imminent in the case of their patients and yet, the patients survived. Granted, there may be several explanations to explain the occurrence of such a phenomenon, however, African Americans will overwhelmingly attribute the outcome to God's intervention and emphasize the power of God in comparison to that of man. An unwavering belief in divine intervention has been a major source of strength and resilience among African Americans from slavery to the present (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1972; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

The scholarly literature on religious and spiritual beliefs and practices reveal people who are religious or spiritual tend to have lower levels of stress, distress and anxiety, as well as better overall health outcomes. They can cope with various issues and problems more effectively. This is especially true with respect to African American families who constantly cope with stressors and stress derived from the manifestations of racism (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Deaton, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Levin, 2010; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Another major stressor that Black families must cope with is separation anxiety. According to Shaw (2010), in Western cultures, more than 90 percent of people marry by age 50. Healthy marriages are good for couples' mental and physical health. They are also good for children; growing up in a happy home protects children from mental, physical, educational and social problems. However, according to the finding of some studies and related data, about 40 to 50 percent of married couples in the United States divorce. Shaw (2010) states that, separation and divorce is emotionally difficult events; therefore, married couples who experience a divorce are

generally subject to both economic and emotional stressors as well as stress (Marks, et al., 2006; Shaw, 2010).

The importance of functional marriages is well known. According to Shaw (2010), research has shown that a healthy marriage provides stability and contentment and has a positive impact on the overall health of married couples. In addition, marriage is also good for children; growing up in a happy home protects children from mental, physical, educational and social problems. However, Shaw (2010) points out about 40 to 50 percent of married couples in the United States divorce. Separation and divorce are emotionally difficult events; therefore, married couples who experience a divorce are generally subject to both economic and emotional stressors as well as stress; this is especially true with respect to African American families (Marks, et al., 2006; Shaw, 2010).

The Black incarceration and homicide rates are also major stressors experienced by Black families. There are more Black men in prison and jails than any other race or ethnic group. Statistics reveal that one in nine African-American males between the ages of 20 to 34 are in prison. Some claim there are more African American males in prisons and jails than there are in college; though others anecdotally disagree. Nevertheless, high incarceration and crime rates have devastating effects on the structure and stability of the African American family and constitute a major source of stress and distress in the Black community (NAACP, 2017; National Urban League, 2017; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

Police brutality is another major source of stress among African Americans, especially Black males. Discriminatory practices, like racial profiling and excessive force, brutality, and murder, simultaneously heighten the fear of Black males and the communities in which they reside. According to the National Safety Council, statistics show that Black males are 21 times more likely

than any other ethnic group to be victims of shootings, maim, or killed at the hands of police than any other racial group (Cole, 2014; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

Members of law enforcement that are armed murder many African-American males that do not pose a safety threat (Chaney, 2013; Chaney, 2014; Chaney & Robertson, 2015; U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). Profiling continually affects mostly Hispanic and Black males as most assume Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to be the perpetrators of crime than their counterparts are. Chaney & Robertson (2014) reveals that since the Rodney King incident in the 90's, police brutality among Black males in America continues to be an alarming problem with little opposition (Chaney, 2013; Chaney & Robertson, 2014; & U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

In all these tragic incidents of police brutality and neighborhood guards taking the law into their own hands, the responsible individuals were all white and the murder victims were all Black males. Given these facts, it is difficult to dismiss racism as a factor in the number of unarmed African American males killed by White police officers and why stress among African American males is disproportionately higher than any other group (Chaney, 2013; Chaney & Robertson, 2014; Cole, 2014; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

2.16. The Role of Black Church

This section of the study provides a summary of the historical overview of African-American religion as well as the historical development of the early Black church, and the role that it played in the lives of African-American's families. Historically, the Black church has been the most important social institution in the lives of African Americans and has always served as a source of spiritualty and strength. For example, Nickens (2008) asserts that religion is the foundation of Black community life. Studies also document the extensive religious involvement

and practice within the African American community (Billingsley, 1968; Chaney, 2008; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1972; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Nickens, 2008).

With respect to the early historical development of the Black church, before 1775, there is only scattered evidence of organized religion among Blacks in the American colonies. Nickens (2008) further indicated that Methodist and Baptist churches became much more active in the 1780's, after which the growth was quite rapid for about 150 years. According (Nickens 2008), it was not until after President Abraham Lincoln promulgated the Emancipation Proclamation that the Black church experienced its greatest period of growth due, in large measure, to the organizing efforts of free Blacks (Nickens 2008).

Regarding various denominations, Baptists and Methodists were the leading Black religious institutions followed by the catholic church. Subsequently, during the early 20th century, Pentecostal and Holiness movements were important, and Jehovah Witnesses later followed. From a broader perspective, Nickens (2008) points out that, the Islamic movement during the 1900's, made significant inroads into the Black community and many African Americans became members of the Nation of Islam. Perhaps the most influential leader in the Islamic Nation was Malcolm X, one of the most devoted members of the Muslim faith. Although African Americans are members of all major Western religious denominations, most are currently Baptists and Methodists (Nickens, 2008).

In the scholarly work, "In Pursuit of Letters: A History of the Bray Schools for Enslaved Children in Colonial Virginia," Antonio T. Bly (2011) documents that during the 1770's, no more than one percent (1%) of Blacks in the United States were connected to organized churches. He further acknowledges that these numbers grew rapidly after 1789 and attributes the growth to the efforts the early Anglican Church. The Anglican Church was also an advocate of Black literacy

and believed that the ability to read was essential in order to promote Christianity among free and enslaved African Americans (Bly, 2011; Fisher, 2007; Fleming, 1984; Frey, 2008).

To the Black slave, Christianity, was a strange and unfamiliar spiritual ideology; in their homeland, Africa, Islam was the primary religious faith. Those who did not subscribe to the Islamic faith, believed in magic; also, many of them were polytheistic in their religious convictions and practice, therefore, the role of the Anglican Church to convert Black slaves to Christianity was a challenging and monumental task for two primary reasons. Frist, slaves could not read and there were concerted efforts by the White ruling class to keep them from learning to do so. Secondly, as noted by Frey (2008), most of the slaves brought from Africa to the New World socialized belief systems that proved to be resistant to change (Bly, 2011; Fisher, 2007; Fleming, 1984; Frey, 2008; Raboteau, 1978).

According to Frey, there were no organized African religious practices in the thirteen American colonies, however, there was a surreptitious or underground practice of Islam throughout the era of Black enslavement in America. To some extent, such behavior may be construed as a form of slave resistance to the teachings of Christianity. Rejecting the spiritual ideology of a foreign religious belief system is understandable when considering the psychological impact of deeply ingrained cultural values. However, views of how the world works can change, and often do; but time is required (Frey, 2008). For examples, for centuries, African slaves resisted the teaching of Christianity and its version religiosity; today, African Americans are the most religious group in the nation (Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Frey, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Raboteau, 1978).

Rabinowitz (1978), notes that prior to the 1770's, most Blacks live in rural areas, where church services were in small makeshift buildings and bushes (see below figure 2.8).
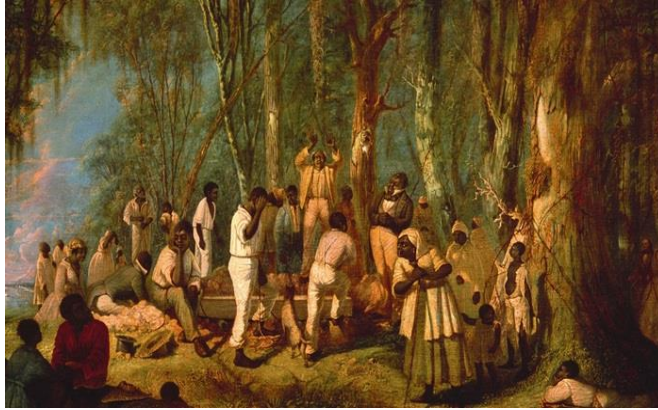
Figure 2.19: African-American Worship Held in Small Makeshift Buildings, or Bush
Source: Antrobus, John (1837-1907) / The Historic New Orleans Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library

In addition, Rabinowitz (1978), argues that Black churches in the city were more visible and early religious services include such activities as scheduled prayer meetings, missionary societies, women's clubs, youth groups, public lectures, and musical concerts. Furthermore, Black churches scheduled regular revivals and outreach programs over a period of weeks to reach out to large, appreciative and noisy crowds (Rabinowitz, 1978). [See figure 2.9].

Figure 2.20: Afro-American Religion with Women Engaged in Worship in 1941

Frey and Wood (1998) note scholars disagree on the extent of the native African content of Black Christianity that emerges during 18th-century America. Instead, they assert evangelism grounds the Black population to Christianity. Furthermore, Raboteau (2001) reveals the centrality of The Black Church, which was the first community institution that African Americans established. He argues the development of the Black church started with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church during the 1800's, followed by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, followed by other churches. Raboteau (2001) further argues the Black church grew to be the focal point of the Black community, was an expression of community and unique African-American spirituality as well as being a reaction to discrimination (Raboteau, 2001).

Raboteau (2001) identifies the early church as a neighborhood center where free Black people could celebrate their African heritage without intrusion by white detractors. Adding to that, he showed that the early church also served as the center of education. Furthermore, Raboteau observed that the church was part of the community, which provided education to freed and enslaved Blacks. However, in the quest of seeking autonomy, some Blacks like Richard Allen founded separate Black church denominations, which led to the Second Great Awakening (Raboteau, 2001).

James H. Hutson (1998) describes the Second Great Awakening period – which was between 1800's and 1820's -- to be the central and defining event in the development of Afro-Christianity. He also stated that free Blacks established Black churches in the South before 1860. After the Great Awakening, many Blacks joined the Baptist Church, which allowed them to have active participation, including played roles as elders and preachers. For instance, First Baptist Church and Gillfield Baptist Church of Petersburg, Virginia, had organized congregations by 1800 and were the first Baptist churches in the city (Hutson,1998; Raboteau, 1978).

After the 1865 or earlier African-American Civil Rights Movement, Daniel W. Stowell (1998) and Clarence Earl Walker (1982) reveal in their early writings that Black Americans, once freed from slavery, were very active in forming their own churches. They argue most of them were either Baptists or Methodists, and their ministers participate in moral and political leadership roles. Meanwhile, Stowell (1998) and Walker (1982), coincidentally argue that in a process of self-segregation, practically all Blacks left White churches so that few racially- integrated congregations remained -apart from some Catholic Churches in Louisiana- (Stowell, 1998; Walker, 1982).

The writers further underscore four (4) main organizations competed across the South to form new Methodist churches composed of freedmen. They were the African Methodist Episcopal Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (which was sponsored by the White Methodist Episcopal Church, South) and the well-funded Methodist Episcopal Church, which was made up of the Northern White Methodists (Stowell, 1998; Walker, 1982). By 1871, the Northern Methodists had 88,000 Black members in the South, and opened numerous schools for their children (Stowell, 1998; Sweet, 1914; Walker, 1982).

According to Donald Lee Grant (1993), during Reconstruction, Black churches were active in the Republican Party and their ministers had power and political influence. Grant (1993) argues the position of Black ministers was unique because, unlike teachers, politicians, businesspersons, and tenant farmers, they did not rely on white support. Others note the distinct position of Black ministers. Charles H. Pearce, an AME minister in Florida asserts, "A man in this State cannot do his whole duty as a minister except he looks out for the political interests of his people" which motivates more than 100 Black ministers to involve themselves in politics. Several are a part of Congress and one, Hiram Revels, serves in the U.S. Senate (Foner, 1988, p. 93; & Grant, 1993).

Charitable activities were the hallmark of the Black churches, which were mostly extended to the sick and needy. The larger churches had a systematic education program, besides the Sunday schools, and Bible study groups. They held literacy classes to enable older members to read the Bible. Private Black colleges, such as Fisk in Nashville, often began in the basement of the churches. Church supported the struggling small business community (Rabinowitz, 1978).

Socially, churches hosted protest meetings, rallies, and Republican Party conventions. Prominent nonprofessionals and ministers negotiated political deals, and they often ran for public offices until disfranchisement took effect in the 1890s. In the 1880's, the prohibition of liquor was a major political concern that allowed for collaboration with like-minded White Protestants. In every case, the pastor was the dominant decision-maker. His salary ranged from $400 a year to upwards of $1500, plus housing, which for the time was good pay for unskilled physical labor (Rabinowitz, 1978).

Increasingly, the Methodists reached out to college or seminary graduates to secure ministers, but most Baptists felt education undermined the intense religiosity and oratorical skills they demanded of their ministers (Rabinowitz, 1978). After 1910, as Blacks migrated to major cities in both the North and the South, there emerged the pattern of a few very large churches with thousands of members and a paid staff, headed by an influential preacher. At the same time, there were many "storefronts" churches with a few dozen members (Myrdal, 1944).

Historically, religion and religious activities have assisted the African-Americans families materially and psychologically through varieties of ways and supports (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990 cited in Chaney, et al, 2008). According to Marks and Chaney (2006) and Taylor, Chatters, and Levin (2004), the Black church usually provides material, emotional, financial, and social assistance to its members-persons and families that historically and/or presently tend to have

limited access to non-religious, and traditional social institutions (Levin, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

In addition, Chaney, et al. (2008) further argued that many Black churches organized, and operated community outreach programs designed to serve others in the community (food and clothing programs, visiting programs to the sick and shut-in and so on). In addition, Marks (2004) further postulates that within Black churches, the opportunity to serve and contribute in meaningful ways is just as important as receiving service from others (Chaney, et al., 2008; Marks, 2004).

Wind & Lewis (1994) conclude people in a congregation can experience a sense of belonging, receive value, protection, and feel as if they are home. Again, Chaney, et al. (2008) as well argued that African-American congregations is particularly important, since many individuals may be searching for new ways of establishing the kinds of trusting relationships which are essential for their sense of security, but which are no longer necessary being provided by their neighborhoods (Giddens, 1990 cited in Chaney, et al, 2008; Wind & Lewis, 1994).

Then, Berger (1967, p. 6) cited in Chaney, et al. (2008) also argue that by the Black church ability to facilitate individual and group identity, the faith community provides a distinct form of social interaction that can facilitate "common thought, purpose and drive" (Berger 1967; Giddens, 1990; Wind & Lewis 1994).

Interestingly, Miller & Thoresen (2003, p. 25) also theorize that for a "significant minority" of the American population, religion is not only a physical support and resource, rather it is reported as "the single most important influence in the lives of the African American families". Additionally, it is therefore not surprising that several eminent writers including the lives of Roof and McKinney (1987), Taylor and Chatters (1991), and Taylor, Chatters, and Levin (2004) reveal African-Americans tend to be relatively orthodox in theology and frequently study the Bible and

pray. Additionally, Ellison (1997) also observed and theorized that to being more likely engage in private religious practices, African-Americans are also more likely to attend church regularly, and their attendance is associated with greater benefits (Chatters, & Levin, 2004; Ellison, 1997; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Taylor & Chatters 1991).

From the landmark national survey study, Hummer et al., (1999) underscored that Americans who attend worship services more than once a week live an average of 7.6 years longer than those who never attend. However, Hummer et al., (1999) further argue that within the Black community, there is nearly a 14-year advantage [80.1 versus 66.4 years in longevity] for those who attend worship more than once in a week compared with those who never attend. What is the rationale for differences in mortality (Hummer et al., 1999; Marks et al., 2005)?

Marks et al., (2005) report religion may influence the well-being of African-Americans in at least six ways: (a) active faith involvement gives the aged a sense of meaning, respect, and veneration that helps "keep them alive…"(b) religious coping, in addition to any helpful effects it may provide, tends to minimize or even displace harmful negative coping (e.g., praying instead of drinking heavily); (c) church involvement is a buffer against and an alternative to involvement in the dangerous "street life;" (d) faith provides hope, and conversely, "giving up on faith is presumed to be giving up on life;" (e) the church provides strong social support ("church family is family"); and (f) the outlet of prayer allows persons to "cast their cares upon the Lord" (Marks et al., 2005, p. 454).

Above all, Chatters and Taylor (1994) establish a linkage between well-being and religiosity in African-Americans that is generally stronger than in Whites. Fundamentally, African-Americans experience and report higher levels of religiosity than do their Whites counterparts. Moreover, when compared to non-religious Blacks, those who are religious not only live longer,

but also benefit from greater mental health. In the process, members of this group experience lower levels of psychological impairment, suicide, substance abuse, depression, and report higher levels of life satisfaction (Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003 cited in Chaney, et al., 2008).

2.17. Empirical Literature Review

According to Marks et al., (2006), the most predominant problem among the African-American families is economic stress. Neighbors (1996) review and contribution to the literature on economic stress highlights two ways that low income (as a proxy for economic stress) serves as a stressor for Black families. First, Neighbors (1996) argues that low income is a direct stressor because such parents face constant concern of whether they will be able to afford the necessities of life for their own children. Second, Neighbors (1996) and Marks et al. (2005) reveal in their studies that low-income families live in low cost and high-risk neighborhoods (Marks et al., 2006; Neighbors, 1996).

In a study conducted by Ulbrich, Warheit, and Zimmerman (1989), low-income African-Americans experience more undesirable acute stress such as illness, death of family members, addiction, crime victimization, and chronic economic problems than middle and upper-income Blacks who live in relatively secure neighborhoods. Additionally, as children grow in number and age, families often experience increased financial strain (Ross & Huber, 1985), and overcrowding (Ross, Mirowsky & Golden, 1990).

Moreover, Marks et al. (2006) reports parenthood is another key source of stress. In fact, Marks et al, (2006) elucidates parenthood brings additional stressors to the marriage and has the potential to intensify pre-existing adverse conditions. Additionally, Crohan (1996) observes that during the transition to parenthood, marital satisfaction and positive interactions between parents typically decrease, while negative interactions, tensions and conflict increase. Very importantly,

Marks et al. (2006) concluded that even though parenting can add additional stress to a marriage, unmarried mothers are at an even greater risk of experiencing stressful events and chronic strains (Crohan 1996; Marks et al., 2006).

Another noteworthy study by Marks et al., (2006) uses a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with thirty-two (32) African-American families (i.e. 16 mothers and 16 fathers) from four regions of the United States. In addition, the study uses a purposive sampling technique to identify the African-American coupled or parents (both married and remarried). As part of the study findings, Mark and his colleagues point out the workplace was a primary stressor for the married parents. They further observe highly-stress parents have lower levels of skills, training, and education frequently change jobs (Marks et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Mark and his colleagues reveal that as part of the coping strategies attached to historical racism, many parents respond to racism and discrimination by leaving the corporate world and starting their own personal business. Finally, the study documents two major sources of stress among the African-American families, namely stress in the workplace and the stress of balancing work and family (Marks et al., 2006).

In that same year, Marks and Chaney (2006) examine faith communities and African-Americans families because scholars know little regarding the "how's," "whys," and meanings behind what researchers frequently refer to as "the faith factor" as well as the influence of faith communities for African-American individuals and families. These scholars use in-depth qualitative interviews to obtain a total sample size of 40 from highly religious African-American parents (i.e. 20 mothers and 20 fathers). Purposively, the sample was highly religious African-American parents that live in five (5) different states from a wide range of faiths, social classes, educational levels, and residential locations (Marks & Chaney, 2006).

The study used grounded theory methodology to determine recurring themes the participant provided. As part of the findings, the research revealed that historically, no institution has produced more gains that are positive for African-Americans than the Church. Added to this, the study explains Black have experienced many stressors in this country, and when their families were separate, they cling to the church. Moreover, even though African-Americans continue to struggle, the church gives them hope and, in the process, conveys to them they are strong, worthy, responsible, capable, and process the power to face and defeat adversity with God's help all by themselves in the final analysis, and without exception, the Black church fuels Black resilience (Marks & Chaney, 2006).

2.18. Summary and Observations

Both the conceptual framework and the literature review have demonstrated convincingly how micro and macro racism affects the African American community; specifically, African American families. The manifestations of White racism negatively impact the social well-being of all people of color but not to the same magnitude or extent. Generally, the literature reveals that Black Americans encounter racially-oriented behavior daily, usually in the form of microaggressions. The constant encounters, or daily experiences with microaggressions, are the primary sources of the acute and chronic ecological stress experienced by the Black community (Carter, 2007; Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008).

In addition, the literature reveals that the health-problems among African Americans are disproportionately higher than they are in other groups and the cause is directly attributed to White racism. However, studies reveal that not all racially-oriented behavior is intentional. Nevertheless, the resulting effects are the same. While both physical and psychological health is negatively

impacted, the greatest damages is related to mental or psychological problems produced by intentional and unintentional microaggression. Above all, the acute and chronic stress derived from White racism impact all members of the family system, including children (Carter, 2007; Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2008).

The literature reveals that the Black church is a significant institution in the lives of most African American families and that religion serves as the cornerstone of their lives. Generally, they routinely rely on religiosity as a strategy to buffer adversity or the negative experiences in their daily lives. However, the church and the family were also major sources of ecological stress. Finally, the experiences of slavery, reconstruction, lynching's, and Jim Crow laws contribute to the prevalence of stress in the contemporary African American community; the physical and psychological consequences derived from the above experiences has been conceptualized as post traumatic slavery syndrome; this implies that much of the stress among contemporary Black Americans originated in the historical past and is based on White-oriented racial behavior (Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks & Chaney, Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology for the study and contains six (6) thematic sections. The first section discusses the study design. The second section describes the sample. The third section examines data sources. The fourth section describes the data collection procedures. The fifth discusses the Grounded Theory Research Model. The final section demonstrates the procedures for the analysis of data gathered from an interview (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

3.2. Study Design

The study design is exploratory in nature, and involves "grounded theory," or building theory from existing information or data obtained from a sample population. In the context of the Grounded Theory methodology, the data collection and analysis are simultaneously collected, and researchers refer to this process as theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). Subsequently, throughout the theoretical sampling process, the study will utilize themes that emerge from research data (e.g., interviews, and focus groups) for the development of questions for the next round of data collection; as explained by other experts, this process occurs until no new themes emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, Grounded Theory will explain themes and concepts using a process of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process identifies and analyzes emerging themes and concepts from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Above all, the dataset will provide relevant research information from an interview process based on a structured questionnaire (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

3.3. Study Population

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census (2005), with respect to the 2000 and 2010 population census on housing, the overall population of Blacks or African-Americans in the year 2000 was estimated to be 36,421,906, representing 12.9%, of the total population. In 2010, however, with an estimated number of 42,020,743, African Americans represented 13.6% of the U.S. population. The study population (i.e. Black or African-American) has experienced a population growth or change of 9.7% in the United States over the past decade. This growth has resulted in wide range of denominational preferences and religious practices (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

Using the African American Families of Faith Data Set, collected between 2002-2016, a smaller subsection of the national American Families of Faith Project, the sample consists of in-depth interviews with 23 randomly selected multi-denominational Christian heterosexual and married couples (i.e. Catholic, Protestant, LDS and Non-Denominational). The summary comprises 46 individuals, who were from across the United States, including interviewees from the States of Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. On average, the selected couples are in their mid-40's, have been married for an average period of 20 years each, have an average of three children, and have at least, one child; single parents were not included in the study. The sample has the following characteristics: (a) a generally high level of religious commitment (as reported by referring clergy and the participants), (b) religious diversity (among Christianity), (c) a wide range of socioeconomic and educational levels, and (d) geographic diversity. The identity of all participants is protected via pseudonyms (African American Families of Faith Data Set; Subsection of the American Families Faith Project).
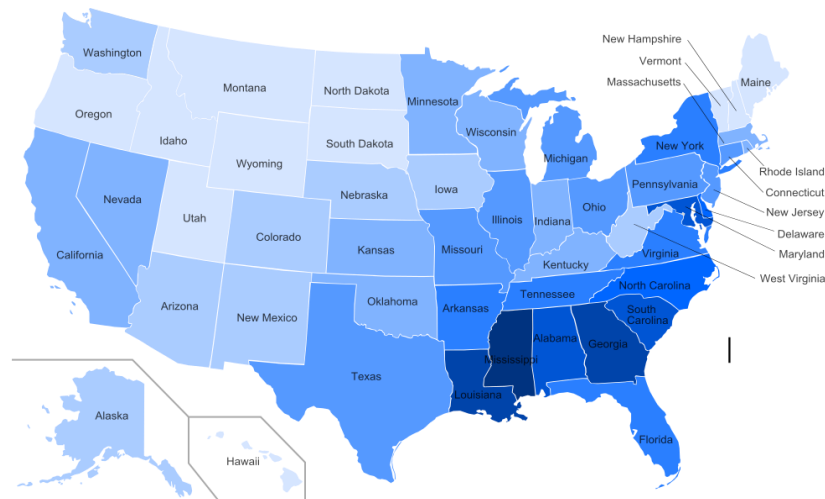
Percentage of population self-reported as African-American by state in 2010: ⬜ less than 2% ⬜ 2–5% ⬜ 5–10% ⬜ 10–15% ⬜ 15–20% ⬜ 20–25% ⬜ 25–30% ⬜ 30–35% ⬛ 35–40%.

Figure 3.1: Map of USA, showing percentage of population self-reported as Afro-American by States in 2010
Source: https://www.google.com/search?q=Map+of+USA,+showing+percentage+of+population+self-reported+as+Afro-American+by+States+in+2010:

3.4. Sample Size (Participants) and Sampling Technique

A purposive sample of 46 African-American parents (23 mothers and 23 fathers) participated in an interview. To contact these parents, several clergy members identify marriage-based families with children, which were still committed to and involved in their respective religious faiths. In the process, families were contacted to determine their willingness to participate in the interviews for the study. The following were characteristics of the sample: (a) a generally high level of religious commitment (as reported by various referring or recommended clergy and the participants), (b) religious diversity (among Christianity), (c) a wide range of socioeconomic and educational levels, and (d) geographical diversity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

The age of the participants ranges from 25 to 65 years of age. The mean age for the women was 42 years, while the average for years of education was 13; the men's average age was 48years, and the average for years of education was 13. Both men and women reported that they were happily married. Furthermore, the participants ranged from low middle-to-middle socio-economic status (SES). Above all, the data showed that the participants were dual salary earners for most of their married lives and the average cumulative household income was $ 64,000 per family. Data diversity and stratification across all the participants were adopted to provide a rich portrait of how religion generally plays a key role in the lives of African-American families for them to deal with systemic racism across the different income groups (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

3.5. Data Sources and Type

This study utilizes a primary-source data and focuses on the level of religious commitment, religious diversity (among Christians), a wide range of socioeconomic and educational levels, and geographical diversity among African-Americans and their faith. Again, to reiterate, the interviews will be conducted with 23 multi-denominational Christian heterosexual married couples (made up of those who are Catholics, Protestants, LDS and Non-Denominational individuals), who are selected across the United States of America from such States as Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, Mississippi and Wisconsin (African American Families of Faith Data Set; Subsection of the American Families Faith Project).

3.6. Data Collection Procedure

The basis data collection procedure is African American Families of Faith Data Set qualitative method of collecting information across the concept of a "whole-family" research for a comprehensive study. Participants provided their informed consent to participate in the study; they complete detailed demographic characteristics, which include information regarding their age, gender, and education, marital and parental status. In all, the participants responded to 20 open-ended questions, which addressed the various aspects of religion, systemic racism, and the religious- coping strategies among the African-American families. The study used an interview style process procedure to obtain in-depth, relevant information from the participants regarding the requisite subject matter. The interviews were conducted between 2002-2016 and transcribed verbatim by undergraduate, graduate, and faculty members of the American Families of Faith research team (including Tayna Davis, Katrina Hopkins, Gloria Nye, Antonius "Skip" Skipper, and Loren Marks) which occur in the participants' homes, generally lasting one to two hours; some interviews went considerably longer than planned. All the interviews were audio recorded. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

The interview questions focused on connections between religion, systemic racism, and the religious coping strategies among the African-American families. About the semi-structured interview questionnaires, only nine of the 23 interviews were with couples (27%) where questions are posed regarding experiences with racism and how each participant dealt with that experience. Even so, all but six of the interviewees (82%) addressed racial issues and experiences with racism of varying degrees, (most without prompts). To ensure interrater reliability, multiple researchers transcribed and coded each interview. Furthermore, critical text analysis determined the amount

of time certain words or phrases were used and then coded to reflect meaning, context, and interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).

3.7. Grounded Theory Research Model

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the Grounded Theory Research Model developed by Glasser and Strauss (1967). The following are three purposes of Grounded Theory: (1) Rationale of the theory to be grounded is that this theory helps close the gap between theory and empirical research, (2) Helped in suggesting the logic of grounded theories, and (3), the Grounded Theory Research Model helped to legitimize careful qualitative research. Indeed, it was so important that by the 1960s, quantitative research methods had taken an upper hand in the fields of research and qualitative method was no longer an adequate method of verification (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This theory mainly came into existence due to the wave of criticism regarding the fundamentalist and structuralist theories that were deductive and speculative in nature. After two decades, sociologists and psychologists showed some appreciation for the new theory because of its explicit and systematic conceptualization. After the simultaneous publication of The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967) in the United States and the United Kingdom, the theory is now common among qualitative researchers and graduate students of those countries. The theory seeks to understand and build a substantive theory regarding the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

In its original sense, the theory is a unique research methodology, especially so as the researchers do not begin their studies with a hypothesis or theoretical framework. The theory emerges from the data, which is why it is termed "Grounded Theory (GT) (Merriam, 2009). The

emerging theory in this study, based on the Grounded Theory Method, is Symbolic Interaction. Since the researcher expects to be heavily involved in the process, the subjective nature and rigor of GT studies frequently receive criticism. (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kelle, 2005).

Overall, it is a structured methodology, as the development of grounded theories consists of systematic, rigorous, and orderly processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After Glaser and Strauss first introduced the theory as a methodology in 1967, they later developed two opposing views of it. Later, Glaser argued that researchers could form a grounded theory using "Ad-Hoc" themes that emerged, while Corbin and Strauss introduced a coding paradigm to help researchers organize the data (Kelle, 2005). Subsequently, Glaser argues Corbin and Strauss' approach frequently forces themes to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kelle, 2005). It is notated that both Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Corbin and Strauss (2008) Grounded Theory theoretical conceptualizations was used in this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990).
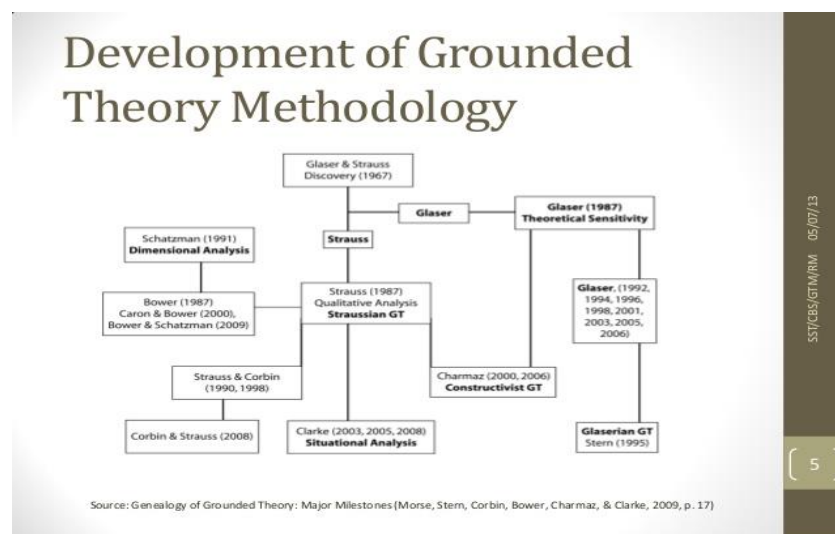

Figure 3.2: Development of Grounded Theory Methodology

3.8. Theory Justification and Development
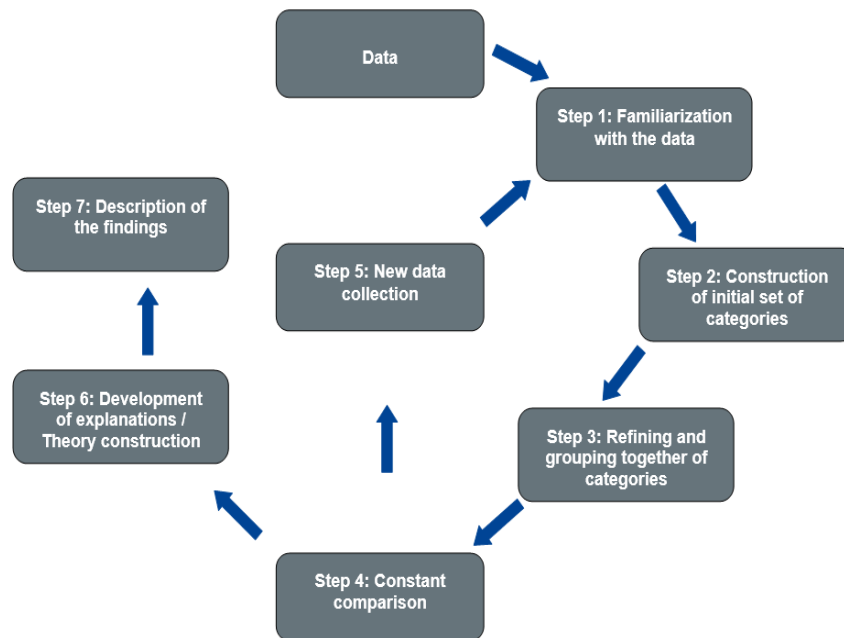
Figure 3.3: General Principles and Processes of Grounded Theory

The "Grounded Theory Research Model" guides the researcher on matters of data collection and details rigorous procedures for data analysis. It is not biased towards the nature of data type since it can use either quantitative data or qualitative data of any type from video, images, text, observations, spoken word, interviews and many others. Furthermore, Grounded theory serves, as a research tool, which enables the researcher to seek out and conceptualize the latent social patterns and structures of one's area of interest through the process of constant comparison. Finally, it uses an inductive approach to generate substantive codes from available data, and later aid in the development of theory. Concisely, the theory serves as a research method that will enable this study toward this end to develop a theory, which will offer an explanation about the main concerns of African-American families as well as religion and stress- coping strategies within a substantive area of study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.9. Criticisms and Advancements

As underscored earlier, critics assert the Grounded Theory (GT) methodology lacks rigor, is too lengthy, consists of small sample sizes, and relies on "floating" hypotheses (Goldthorpe, 2000; & Mjøset, 2005). Furthermore, some scholars argue that the theory may not be plausible in its original sense because researchers bring their views, assumptions, and biases to the study (Charmaz, 2006; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

However, the theory has a place in qualitative research. After all, constructivist grounded theorists, according to some scholars, "do not attempt to be objective in their data collection or analysis, but instead seek to clarify and problematize their assumptions and make those assumptions clear to others" (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 212). Additionally, constructivist GT studies are important in socially constructed hierarchies such as race (Charmaz, 2006) because the researcher brings his/her knowledge of these social constructions to the study. For these reasons, I will utilize a constructivist Grounded Theory approach to explore the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.10. Data Analysis

The study utilized the constructivist Grounded Theory approach and techniques to explore the research questions. The analysis started with open coding, and later moves to more selective coding where one systematically code with respect to core concepts or the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Based on the open coding strategy, the researcher identifies themes, and concepts such as (1) Religion and Stress, (2) Racism and Stress, (3) Perceived Factors of Stress, and (4) Coping Strategies: Self-Directed Coping Strategies, Collaborative Coping Strategies, and Deferred Coping Strategies, that are salient and recurring in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This section of the dissertation essentially underscores the purpose of the study and, in the process, ensures that the identified research questions receive an adequate response. Also included are the discussions of the findings. However, the latter is the chapter summary. As stated earlier, in chapter one, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship among religion, racism and ecological stress factors within the context of African-American families. In addition, the study also focuses on the interpretations of African-Americans perceptions, and highlights their coping strategies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Upon the perusal of relevant literature, which were expected to explain ecological stress, it is important to point out the fact that it is still not very clear about how religion and racism elucidate or explain the concepts of human ecological stress, specifically among the African-American families. This study brings a clearer view of understanding to policymakers, scholars, politicians, and students on matters regarding the interactive relationship between religion and ecological stress as well as racism among the African-American communities/families (Chaney, 2008; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

4.2. Analysis: Addressing Research Questions

Four research questions were the basis of this investigation. As also stated earlier in chapter three, the study utilized the transcription procedures, whereby a three-person team in a manner that is consistent with grounded theory methodology, analyzed interview data; see figure 3.3. (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Marks & Chaney, 2006). The identification of concepts mentioned by the participants occur via an open coding approach on an interview-by-interview basis. When all

interviews had been coded, concepts or themes that consistently recurred across interviews were identified. There were countless themes focusing on a variety of topics, some of which have been addressed by prominent authors in reputable journals and publications on African American religion, faith, Black churches, and longevity (Marks et al., 2005; Marks et al., 2006; Marks & Chaney, 2006); and stressors and strengths in Black families (Marks et al., 2005; Marks et al., 2006). However, this study and its findings focus on recurring concepts and themes, which relate to religion, racism and ecological stress within the context of African-American families (Marks et al., 2005; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

4.3. Research Question One: Is there a relationship between religion and stress among African-Americans families?

To re-emphasize its importance, the answer to this research question was based on the experiences and explanations of the African- Americans Christian parents, who were highly engaged in the interview, regarding the argument of whether there is a relationship between religion and stress? Based on the discussion of the transcription of the interviews in this section, participant responses are presented, which explain and explore five reasons why the Black church matters. The recurring themes will, however, address the following: Religion, The Black church, and African American Families. (Marks et al., 2005; Marks et al., 2006; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

4.4. Religion, The Black Church, and African American Families

The role of the Black in the African American community has been extensively documented by many scholars. Most agree that the church's support extends into economic, political, and human services arenas where predominantly White churches are comparatively less active (Hill 1958; Smith 2010). With respect to the relevance of the Black church among African

American families, religion has become a central part of parenting and parenthood. Studies, regarding the Black church- Black-family connection, consistently reveal that the church service to the African American family is polylithic. For example, Duke University's late Professor C. Eric Lincoln (1924-2000) stated the following:

> Beyond its purely religious function, as critical as that function has been, the black church in its historical role as lyceum, conservatory, forum, social service center, political academy and financial institution, has been and is for black America the mother of our culture, the champion of our freedom, the hallmark of our civilization (as cited in Billingsley 1992, p. 354).

Professor Lincoln also pointed out that, it is difficult to fully convey the importance of this hallmark of [African American] civilization and its influences on African American parenting or parenthood (Billingsley, 1992; Chaney, 2008; Marks, et al., 2005; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

Historically, no institution has produced gains that are more positive for African Americans than the Church. As noted by W.E.B. DuBois (1903), the Black church was the only social institution among Blacks that survived the rigors of slavery, served as a critical part of the Underground Railroad, and was the only place, where children could receive both secular and religious education, both during and after the period of enslavement. According to Frazier (1968), the church was the most important institution next to the family for African Americans in the Black rural South (DuBois, 1903; Frazier, 1968). Other scholars have also noted the significance of religion in the lives of African Americans; they include the works of Chaney (2008), Marks et al., (2005), and Marks and Chaney (2006).

In addressing the function and significance of religion and the Black Church in the lives of African American Families, 46[1] African American parents were interviewed and asked to present their views from a personal perspective. The Brown's family gave the following transcribed comments:

> Husband: We've struggled, and when you struggle, you want somewhere you can go and have an outlet, and a source where you go and realize that those kinds of things are in place and you have that kind of structure in the family, they get through it better because they just have that support background. They've grown up in that environment and they've been taught that when people go through hard times, or if they do, this is what they do. They have a better sense of history, either from a black culture perspective or a family perspective. You know, that even without a religious background, and I know some families like that, they have these other structures that they put in place, so they say, "Ok, you know, we're black people and we've endured other things, and so, we can endure this too. As a family, we've been through worse than this, so I'm expected that we can get through this." So, the expectations are high. People usually just rise to that and go through it, because they have that foundation in their minds. Ok, being involved in your church and having a place to go now." But then, when I had Kimberly, I realized, you gotta go. Because it's not, I couldn't imagine raising a child not having church.

Based on the responses of the husband, the church plays a vital role in the lives of African American families. Equally important is the function of the black family structure as well as Black culture in coping with the adversities of life. From all indications, the Black church is a major source of hope and resilience in African American families and rearing a family without the involvement of the church is inconceivable. The husband's remarks also speak to the issue of the significant of religion in Black families. But more important, the Black church function in the African American family system is far from being monolithic.

> Wife: argued that……. You grow up realizing that, it was the same thing, my parents made us go to church, whether they went or not, we had to go to church. So, you grow up realizing the importance of church. And the black church in particular has so many other functions outside of just religion. There's the [political arm] of it, there's the [social arm] of it, the [community arm] of it, all of those

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[1] The name is a pseudonym and all actual names have been replaced.

things come out of the black church, so even those people who aren't necessarily quote-unquote religious, if they're community-minded, it has to go through the church. You know, if you want to be social, it probably has to go through the church. You know, it comes out of, from a historical perspective, it comes out of a place, because everything that we did came through the church, all of the things we need to teach people, for example, how to be parents. We need to teach people how to be young men, young women, old men, old women. We need to teach people how to do that, because a lot of people have missed that, somehow. Somewhere in that transition, I believe, from the 60s through the 90s, a lot of the things that made the black church as strong as it was, because that's the reason why we went through all those things pre-1969, we've lost. We gained a lot of material things, we gained a lot of access to a lot of things, education and higher positions, but in that, we've lost a lot of our spiritual, moral foundation, training that we had. And the church needs to take it old garment on to train the young ones again.

The remarks made by the wife mirrors those of the husband in terms of the significance of the Black church and religion in the African American family as well as emphasize the role played by the Black culture in shaping church-related family values in the African American community. She also reflects on and speak to the issue of the multiplicity of church functions in Black families, pointing out that the church has an important role to play in socializing the young to be responsible adults. To some extent, this implies that, in her view, the church is the third or co-parent in helping to rear productive Black children.

Again, as previously noted, scholars have repeatedly pointed out that historically, the Black church has been one of the most important institutions in the lives of African Americans. From slavery to the present, the church has always been the primary source of strength so necessary to confront a hostile and unforgiving world; a world where the color of the skin determines White privilege and Black pain. Without hope, life is meaningless. Hope provides a reason to live and a belief that victory is assured regardless of the odds. Most of the hope in the African American community, as recognized by many scholars, is provide by the Black church. Speaking to this issue, for example, Bob, the father of two adult children, related the following:

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> Black individuals have been through a lot in United States. In fact, during the time of slavery, when our families were torn apart, the church gave us a home to stay. Hmm…we're still struggling, but this church nurtures and instill hope in us. The church teaches and trains us to be strong, responsible, and capable, as well as worthy and can handle anything with the help from God.

The views regarding the historical and present role of the Black church in the lives of the African American family, as articulated by Bob, are not a function of gender or gender-specific. For example, both African American men and African American women share similar perspectives of the role and significant of the Black church in the African American community. For instance, Mary, the mother of three, supports the observations of Bob relative to the importance of the church in the lives of Black Americans, made the following observations:

> If you go into the average African American vicinity, you might either find a barroom or a grocery store, but certainly you're going to find a church!... Yes a church! I think that dates back to slavery, when African Americans were first brought over here. All we had was our hope in God through church, and I think that helped sustain our ancestors…on the new world. I also believe that [Church] was one of the things that kept them going: their faith, their belief in God and their assembling together to have their worship services. It's just been passed on from generation to generation, and it's an important part of who we are, and what we have become as a whole.

Franklin (1997) has argued that the church, in the Black community, is more than a religious institution, it is also a social and psychological necessity. It is a community organization. It is a formulator of practical solutions to everyday living and psychological problems; the church has political, social and community arms that extends to the African Americans families. Dr. Franklin's (1997) observations are consistent with those of other scholars and research participants. For example, Chaney, (2008) and Marks and Chaney, (2006) have made the same or

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related observations. Bob and Mary, research participants, hold similar views (Chaney, 2008; Franklin,1997; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

4.5. Research Question Two: Is there a relationship between racism and stress among African-Americans families?

Studies show that micro and macro racism constitute major problems for people of color in the United States; this is especially true within the Black community. Based on the responses of the participants in this study, African Americans experience incidents of both individual and institutional racism daily in a variety of settings. For example, the workplace, medical facilities, churches, shopping centers and dining facilities are common environmental locations where White racist behavior most frequently occurs. In this study, participants were asked to reflect or think back to a time since they've been married where they have experienced racism (Clark, et al., 1999; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000).

The following are perceptions regarding institutional racism articulated by the participants. The discussion begins with the Robinson's family. The husband and his wife were asked the following question: "can you reflect back or think back to a time and location where you've experienced racism since you've been married?

> Husband: Yes, I have in many cases experienced racism. And after I finished cussing and screaming, I guess I pray over it and discuss it with my wife. And Mel has always had a very important part of her character where she finds something good in everybody. And she would and I'm putting all of these incidents together she would always say that "Lin look, people do things because of certain pressures, and everybody's not a bigot and uh these kinds of things." And she always had the ability to get me to stop and look at the situation in an intelligent way rather than being mad and ready to go out and kill somebody. So, you know racism Katrina is a very sick thing and we have it in our race as well as other races. I've experienced a lot of it and thank God I haven't let it influence me, because I don't hate anyone because of their race.

The husband's response indicates that his experiences with White racism are numerous as evidenced by the frequency of his encounters. Although he does not identify a specific location or setting, it seems reasonable to assume that his experiences are not restricted to any specific environment. It is noteworthy to point out that while he is inclined to use overt verbalization as a response to racism, he, nevertheless, resorts to prayer as a coping strategy. This suggest, to some extent, that religion plays a significant role in regulating or buffering his otherwise combative behavior. From all indications, it appears that the church plays an important role in his life as evidenced by his reference to prayer. In addition, his response reflects the significance of the family as a system of support during challenging times. For example, his wife is instrumental in not only helping him to cope, her world view of people and circumstances helps to keep him anchored to social realty: not all White people are bigots or racist.

> Wife: Yes, there have been times, even in my job that would arise, but I would always have to look beyond that. And I always taught myself if a person wanted to behave that way they had the problem. And I went out of my way to be extremely nice in order to make that person really feel bad of their behavior. And that's the way I did that throughout my life. I never let racism really get to me because I always thought that as myself I was just as important as the next person. And that I was in the job because I was qualified to be in the job, so and as time would go by and everybody really gets to know one another, that [inaudible] passes. And I just try, like my husband say to see the good in everybody. There is some good in everybody I don't care how bad they behave or whatever. But prejudice is something that has never really bothered me.

As predicted, the wife's response to racism differs from that of the husband. Where he is inclined to respond in a hostile, verbal, confrontational manner, the wife is generally more introverted and philosophical. She uses kindness as a coping strategy as well as introspection coupled with a positive evaluation of her personal qualifications. It also appears from her response, that she views racism as being more of a problem for the White racist than it is for the Black victim. Contrasted with the response and coping strategies of the husband, the wife has come to terms with

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racism and chose to overlook, disregard, or minimize it as a problem. Despite her experiences with White racism, she is unwilling to categorize all White Americans as racists; this is also true of the husband as well and perhaps their values regarding racism is influenced by their religious practice and orientation: "there is good in everybody."

The Brown's response to racism differ from that of the Robinson family in several respect. First, the wife is inclined to avoid confronting the issues that she finds disturbing or threatening. In addition, the wife of the Brown family tends to be somewhat more sensitive to the manifestations of microaggressions and is inclined to avoid physical or verbal confrontation unless the incident involves significant others. When asked to reflect and comment on experiences with racism, she stated the following:

> Wife: I'm the type of person with uncomfortable things I bury them subconsciously and consciously. Huh!! …. Memory loss over time. One time the two of us went to the [beach] at the crab fest there was a woman giving free samples to all the people around me, but not me. So I asked her for a sample, she resented the fact that I asked. He and I talked about it. I was pretty upset at the time. I was reading books at the time that didn't help the situation. There have been several time I have experienced racism. We used to be militant and belligerent in college. We are both more laid back now, laid back so we won't blow up. Unless it has to do with my children or my mother. But we do talk about it a lot, we process it and we have a lot to those discussions. I tend to be more passionate in my style, so he'll talk me down. The husband, who happens to be an elder, gave the following responses when asked to reflect and comment on experiences with racism:

> Husband: the very first one now we weren't married yet, I was teaching in a [class] in LA and a Mexican boy called me a black nigga. I stood toe to toe with him and he wouldn't back down. I haven't seen a lot of overt racism. I have the kind of personality white people like. My best friend is white. The best man in my wedding was white. Things happen but I don't let it bother me too much. I don't discuss my problems too much, sometimes, but not often. I hardly play the race card. I learned at a young age that that's not me through experiences.

Based on the husband's response, he has been exposed to the manifestations of White racism on many occasions and seemingly, he is not affected or troubled by racist behavior. What appears to be apparent in the case of the husband is his unwillingness to harbor Black racist sentiments or feeling toward Whites despite his personal experiences with racism. A common personal attribute shared by both families is restraint and composure when confronted with micro racism. For example, the encounter with the Mexican student did not result in a loss of control. Responding and coping with racism among African American is not homogeneous in nature (Mellor, 2004; Pyke, 2010).

Generally, the use of such a derogatory expression results in a physical confrontation. It is reasonable to assume that most African American males would have responded differently in that being mocked and called a "black nigga" is the most negative of all racial insults. However, the way this situation was responded to is consistent with the views of the Brown family; the way African Americans and African American families cope and respond to an act of racial behavior will, again, vary. However, acute and chronic stress will generally be the inevitable results (Mellor, 2004; Pyke, 2010).

In a summary, African American families or Black minorities, experienced more institutional racism from White Americans than is generally realized; and equally important is the fact that such encounters leave lasting psychological scars that are usually manifested by emotional pain, stress, and frequently, but not always, as evidenced by the mindset of the Brown and Robinson families, result in White resentment. It is noteworthy to emphasize that African Americans have a commendable capacity to forgive; it is much easier to hate those who hurt you than it is to love them. What is astonishing about the responses from both the Brown and Robinson families regarding their experiences with White racism, was their ability to separate White racism

from White people; during the interview, they did not co-mingle the two (Carter, 2007; Greene, Mellor, 2004; Pyke, 2010; Rogers, 2003).

4.6. Research Question Three: What are the perceived factors that cause stress among African-Americans families?

Studies show that stress is a psychological phenomenon that is part of life. However, external or environmental stressors will vary depending on individual perceptions. In addition, stress can be either acute or chronic, depending on the onset and duration. If stress is not control, it can become chronic which is generally considered to be more serious in terms of its effects on physical and psychological or mental health. When addressing the issue of stress, it should be noted that events or activities (stressors) do not determine or cause stress, rather, it is perceptions and meanings that produce stress. This section attempts to ascertain what environmental or ecological factors African Americans perceive as stressful in their daily lives (Hill, 1958).

4.7. General Perceived Factors of Stress

To obtain information related to perceived ecological stress among African American families, participants were asked to answer the following question: "What are some stressful things or hassles that you have to deal with almost every day?'' This question was first posed to the Johnson family and they provide the following response:

> Husband: Stress related to work, you know, because we have to make it to work, and there's stress related to having two young adult sons in our home, so. Just having to make decisions about, whether it's staffing, or things related to occupations, all over the hospital, so just trying to prioritize and different things like that.

The husband's response regarding work as an ecological stressor is consistent with the findings of studies related to stress. According to the husband, in addition to stress experienced in the workplace, based essentially on the pressure generated by the decision-making process, components of the family system are also perceived as environmental or ecological stressors. To some extent, it may be inferred that the Johnson family may be in a state of chronic stress giving the fact that their young adult sons are permanent components of the family system. Chronic stress, as previously noted, adversely affects physical and mental health; the lack of knowledge regarding such consequences can be detrimental to the social-wellbeing of the family system and may lead to devastating family systemic damage. On the other hand, knowledge of the effects will lead to the development of effective intervention strategies necessary to eliminate or minimize the negative effects of chronic stress. His wife was asked the following question: what makes having the kids stressful?

> Wife: What kind of stress is it having two young adults for kids? Oh, things like curfew. You know, not so much for the older but for the youngest, trying to make decisions that are fair and then trying to give the younger person the opportunity to be who he is, and then just remembering that, you know, we're parents and trying to make decisions that line up with God's will, you know, that kind of thing. And praying that God will help them ???, that they have good priorities, that have good priorities, that kind of thing.

The wife response supports those of the husband with respect to perceptions of ecological stress. Both view the dynamics of the family system to be a major source of ecological stress. The wife appears to be conflicted between allowing the children to explore their environment by giving them freedom to exercise free-will or make personal choices. At the same time, however, she gives the impression that she should influence their decision-making to ensure that their choices are spiritually and morally appropriate. A major difference between the views of husband and wife is

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that she is inclined to solicit divine intervention and rely on the power of God and prepared to accept His will. Nevertheless, both husband and wife experience stress based on the presence of children in the family. The family, in this case, is a source of stress.

The husband digressed and alluded to other variables that he considered significant regarding ecological stress. He stated the following:

> Oh yeah, not too much for work. Haha..… In fact, violence, anger,..um.. drug things. No I don't deal with drug, but I've seen, even people in my family, I've seen negative things happen, just done in anger, and influence of drugs. Or even, I think marriages break up just because something very stressful happened. I think what comes to mind, my sister and her husband lost a baby and because of that, their marriage couldn't survive that. So I know it was stressful and so, they obviously couldn't deal with that type of stress, so there was a lot of anger and a lot of guilt and that kind of thing.

Based on the responses of the above research participants, most of the general perceived stress (or stressors) among the African American families are related to the following: (1) racism, (2) conflict between work activities and family responsibilities, (3) dynamics in the workplace environment, (4) marital conflict and friction, (5) family systemic structures, (6) anti-social behavior, (7) economic resources, (8) anger and guilt, and (9) traumatic experiences. With respect to a traumatic event, most families will generally experience stress but not to the same degree. However, regardless of the nature or characteristic of the stressors, the effects will normally be based on perceptions, interpretation, and resources (Hill, 1958).

4.8. Religion as a Perceived Source of Stress or Stressor

Historically, as previously pointed out, the Black church has played a significant role in the lives of African Americans. It has given them a sense of belonging, provided resources for economic needs, provided psychological therapeutic counselling, assisted with social issues, and served as a buffer zone during times of adversity and despair. However, we cannot adequately

understand why the Black church plays such a critical role in the African American community today without understanding why it has mattered so much in the past. In addressing the role of the Black church in the lives of American Americans, the focus has generally been on service and support. Nonetheless, the church has also been a source stress; a fact that is usually disregarded or overlooked. Many of the African Americans interviewed in this study view some of the church activities as stressors; the observations and perceptions from the following participants speak to the issue (Billingsley, 1999; Chaney, 2008; Marks, & Chaney, 2006).

Bob, a church elder and a father of two sons, offers his opinion in the following statement:

> [To understand the religion or black churches, and their activities as a stressor] I believe you have to look back to slavery times, when that's basically all they had was their religion. All they had was to gather together and sing praises and all that to lift up their spirits, and it just carried on through generations. I mean…it's an inheritance you receive, that's how I look at it…. It doesn't matter whether you like the church or not, it doesn't matter how tired you are, it doesn't matter being rich or poor or young or old, all you have to do is to go to the church. Blacks cling to the church more for support, and they have to do what it takes to keep the church moving. I think the responsibility of keeping the church moving irrespective of our conditions or states makes it stressful. Other than that…. Hmmm!!!.. It is a good thing.

A major inference related to Bob's view of church-generated stress is that liturgical requirements or needs must be satisfied regardless of the personal cost or demand that it places on the individual. For example, "keeping the church moving" requires an individual to attend church services or activities whether he desire too or not; physical exhaustion, age, or some other impairing condition is no excuse for failing to fulfill one's duty to the church. The same applies to socioeconomic status; financial obligations cannot be excused due to limited monetary resource. This implies that church-generated stress is derived from the demands that it places on the time and economic resources of its members.

From all indications, church-generated stress is not limited to regular members of the congregation, it also affects the leaders of the church as well. For example, Larry made the following observations:

> Larry: ……. some pastors and elders loves the church, yes!!..... no doubt!. I have seen couples of them devoting almost all their time, energy, and finances to keep this church alive. Huh…. This seems to me as a huge task.

Finally, the study underscores stressful activities, involving perceptions and behavior of some clergy and church elders, generally categorized as "crooks" or "hypocrites by many members." These church leaders were perceived this way because of inappropriate behavior or misconduct. For example, some of the Black church leaders were accused of misappropriation of church funds and marital infidelity; this inappropriate behavior contributes to cognitive dissonance which results in religious based stress. Nevertheless, some of the devoted church members continued to support the church by contributing monetary resources and service to keep it functioning (Fanon, 1961; Festinger, 1957).

4.9. Research Question Four: What coping strategies do African-American families use to deal with stress?

4.10. Self-Directed Coping Strategies

During the interview section, from the first to the last participant, it was observed that a self-directed coping strategy among the African American families was used in dealing with racially induced stress derived from discrimination and prejudices. Self-Directed Coping Strategies include the following: self-discipline, faith, prayers, and self-confidence. For example, the interview with Henry, a father of two, who explicitly gave a very resounding response regarding stress at work (prompted by institutional racism). Henry stated the following:

You mean …Stress at work? Stress at work!! For me, I just try to maintain a positive attitude and just remembering… who I am [Self-pride or Self-confidence]. Try to always reflect, you know, you know, who I represent [self-discipline]. Try not to, and I really don't, you know, go off the handle and that kind of stuff, and go in my office, take a deep breath, go back outside, and make some decisions [self-discipline].

The restraint, self-discipline, self-pride, self-confidence, and coping techniques exhibited by Henry to cope with occasions of stress in the workplace, which generally emanates from institutional racism and emotional challenges in the workplace environment, are commendable and noteworthy. Concerning the same work-related situation and work-related stress, Henry's wife gave the following response:

Wife: Huh….Stress at work, I just try to do my best and when I've done my best, and realize I've done all I can do, I don't worry about it anymore, because it's not necessarily on me, but I've done all I can possibly do to make this thing happen, meet the deadline, something like that. And if I've done all that, I'm satisfied that I've done my best.

From all indications, his wife appears to have internalized the realty regarding the manifestations and existence of workplace related stress; consequently, her coping strategies involve perceiving the situation to be beyond her control; and she takes no personal responsibility for the workplace conditions. To some extent, it is reasonable to assume that her perceptions of the situation, and selective coping strategies, provides her with a sense of what one may term psychological tranquility.

A conversation with Bill, the father of two young adult sons, revealed that faith, and lifestyle is one of the self-directed tools or strategies used to address ecological stress regardless of the setting or environment, be it church, workplace, social gathering, or in the family. Specifically, Bill was asked how he personally copes or deals with stress or stressful situations at home, at work, and outside the home. He gave the following response:

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Yeah. I think it's because, [lifestyle] is one, you know, obviously you're not out partying and doing other things that not good for your health, but from a mental standpoint, I think your perspective on life changes, you deal with life's stresses better. You know, you go through a little valley, but you can deal with it, because you have [faith] that you'll go through it, and as you go through it, you come out of it usually, most people that are Christians or most people that have some kind of religious faith, when they go through things like that, they endure it, and they come out, and sometimes you can hardly tell the difference, or you can't hardly tell that they even have problems. And I think the reason for that is just purely because of their [faith]. They actually believe that they'll endure the things and actually come out for their betterment, even if they don't survive it. They believe that something better, that something better is, there's something better for them at the end of it. And I think that is what plays into the whole health issue. Your whole attitude toward life is different. You know, you tend to be less depressed, less stressed, you handle all those things in everyday life differently than, than the majority of people outside of…

Bill offers an interesting philosophical perspective based essentially on religiosity, which suggest that the obstacle in life can be removed are overcome with faith. His perspective is seemingly influenced by the church, a place where most African Americans have relied on for hope, redemption, courage and resilience all of which are necessary and essential to face the daily challenges of life.

Finally, there was an extended conversation with Delores, a church deaconess, with two young adult children, and with the Robinson family. An open conversion with these two families was conducted to get their observations and perceptions regarding their outreach evangelism activities, and how they perceived the non-believers' thought process and behavior in terms of dealing with stress. Based on their statements, the interview revealed that smoking, drinking, and clubbing are the main self-directed tools or strategies non-believers use to cope or deal with ecological stress be it school, workplace, or social gathering (Billingsely,1968; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Frazier,1939; Hill, 1958). The following is what Delores stated:

You mean…..any non-believer I have come across….things they do to overcomes tress, right?.... um…um.. Yeah, I can talk from the perspective of my sister's husband [James].. African American non-believer [He does

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> not go to church]. I think what I normally see him doing anytime he gets out of work... shopping.. is smoking and drinking alcohol. Sometimes he goes out clubbing as well, leaving the wife at home. I remember, my sister said, to me that.. those things my husband do… hmmm… makes him forgets about his stress, hassles, and troubles.

Delores noted, with interest, that African American non-believers generally result to negative coping strategies to deal with the challenges of life. However, it should be noted that not all non-religious African Americans turn to negative coping strategies to deal with ecological stress. Likewise, it is reasonable to assume that some religious African Americans may supplement their religious faith with selective negative coping strategies to eliminate or minimize the ecological stress to which they are subjected. In the final analysis, one should be mindful of the fact that there is a distinction between religiosity and spirituality. Therefore, it should not be assumed that non-religious African Americans are also non-spiritual. In comparison to Delores's views on how non-believers deal with ecological stress, Bob's views and observations included life and death strategies. For example, he stated the following:

> I've had coworkers who have committed suicide, on average, like one a year for the last four years, and where they used drugs or other things, just to try to be able to cope with family matters, and even just talking with people who are contemplating it, and just? You know, those type of things, you know, you want to, that was stressful.

In conclusion, this section revealed that most of the self-directed coping strategies utilized by African American families in dealing with racial related stress, discrimination, and prejudices include the following: (1) self-discipline, (2) faith, (3) prayers, (4) self-confidence, (5) suicide, and (6) lifestyle (like smoking, extensive use of alcohol, drugs, clubbing, hostility and mis-placed aggression).

4.11. Collaborative Coping Strategies

Based on the responses of some of the research participants, the church was the main source used by African American families as a collaborative tool or strategy to deal with racially-induced stress in the form of discrimination and prejudices. For example, the interview with Todd, a father of two, explicitly stated that as a member of a Black church, the pastor helps him to cope with challenges and "move on." Todd made the following remarks:

> I don't really have a set way of dealing with stressful times, [but on] Wednesday nights when I go to Bible study, it seems like my pastor always is going to say something that I need to hear, as far as, you know, letting some things go and trying to move on.

A very concise illustration of a collaborative strategy of dealing with perceived stress that emanated from discrimination, racism, and religion. Ann, a mother of five and devoted church member, stated the following:

> I [would like to] talk about the women's group that we, a friend and I…a Bible study that we started. That has been such a place of community for lots of women, 10-12 women. It's a place where they can come and really be able to share, on a personal basis, and learn from each other, and learn from God's word what direction to go in. So, it's really been a good thing. [The] connection, it's a love connection that we have with each other [as sisters].

Also, Bessie gave another interesting illustration of the collaborative strategy used by many African Americans to cope with ecological stress, whether they were part of a church family or not. Usually, they turn to significant others when facing racial related problems and constraints or seek advice, regarding the stress and distress they experienced in their daily lives. The primary sources of their support are extended families, members of the church family, selective members of the Black community, and church leaders. Clearly, Bessie's remarks provide an excellent

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example of the use of collaborative strategies when confronted with ecological stress. For example, she made the following comments:

> Your parish [neighborhood]..um..Your Friends ….for non believers. But for Believers Your pastor, Church members [congregation], Your parish..um..Your Friends. In fact, members of the church, your friends, and most of the time, they're the ones that can really give you the most beneficial support. But for us, we kind of like deal with it among ourselves. We don't usually, we haven't, well, we have gone to the pastor or gone to friends, but we usually try to resolve it among ourselves, the two of us.

In summary, this section concludes that most of the collaborative coping strategies African American families utilize in dealing with racial stress, discrimination, and prejudices include the following: (1) clinging to friends, (2) clinging to faith, (3) clinging to social and church groups, (4) clinging to community members or neighborhoods, and (5) clinging to church (congregations), (6) and clinging to family.

4.12. Deferred Coping Strategies

An analysis of all the transcribed interviews, line-by-line, revealed that many of the African American families used prayers, faith, self-esteem (psychological pride) and the word of God as a deferred coping strategy or to forget about their problems (or stress). Deferred coping strategy is defined as any strategy that help an individual to deal with his or her problems (stress) indirectly or with fewer efforts (or forget about the problems with the hope that one day it will be over). Through the Black church, many of the African American families perceived that faith, prayers, and the studying of the word of God can help them to defer or shift their problems to God. For example, Tommy noted the following:

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I can take notice of her in the mornings saying prayers…. [Well], they have a thing where they…call each other in the mornings, like 5:00am, and pray on the phone, pray [about] whatever is going on. I don't necessarily do those type of things, but I do pray in my own way, in my own space, in my own time. So, I think that's something that's… [different about us]. I think this are some of the way it helped Stela to forget about her problems.

Tommy and his wife were not the only couple that differed in their approach regarding prayer as a mechanism to deal with racial and religious stress. For example, Bill, the father of two, explained how the structured nature of the Black church helps many of the African American families and individuals to deal with their problems and avoid chaotic lives; it also serves as a moral compass that assist them in their journey through life. In addition, the Black church provides them with a sense of security and stability. According to Tommy, the Black church is a kind of safe place where stress and problems can become lighter—or be met with the help of others. He points out the following:

African American families that [pray and go to church], I think their life is a little bit more structured than people that don't attend the church…so, when you do have problems, it just seems to be a place that you can go to, it's a…less stressful place, where you can wear out that stress and wear out that pressure.

This observation is consistent with the findings of the following prominent scholars Chaney, 2008; Franklin, (1997), Marks et al. (2005) and Marks and Chaney (2006), who symbolically observed the Black church in their study as an "arm" that is long and strong for the Black family. In addition, an interview with the Jettson family reveals that faith buffer the pain of racism and help in deferring stress. The Jettson family made the following statements:

Wife: That faith gives you peace, it's an inner peace that, an outsider might not experience that level of peace, you know. Contentment. You talk about strongholds, you know, usually, yeah, you're.

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Husband: I agree with that, that it's peace, but it's not just, to me, it's not just peace, meaning, you know, I'm just kind of calm, I'm just going through things. The peace of knowing that you can endure things, but also the strength side, the strength that there are things that you would normally think that you would not be able to accomplish, would not be able to understand or overcome, that you actually can get, you have the strength to do it. So, it's not just the peace, because the peace kind of deals with, goes with, I'll settle for things the way they are. But it's also the strength, and I think that's why you see a lot of people in the church especially particularly young people, they have this, I'm not sure what the word for it is, but they seem so mature in their faith that's strong in the way they approach life. They're very confident. And part of that, I think that confidence comes from their faith, that they've been taught and told, "Well, you can do this, you can overcome this. No matter what these things are, you can do it, you can do it." It's kind of different from my generation, where my generation pretty much dealt with the peace side of it, settle for things the way they are, and you can endure, ok. But this generation is actually, more so the strength side of it.

Regarding peace and inner-strength, consider the response obtained from Helen related to control and letting it go [forgiveness]. Her statement appears to reflect a very strong belief in deferring strategies as means of coping with ecological stress; this is evident by her reference to the power of God:

Helen: Well I think that I have basically, have let go of a lot of things and still to some extent have to work on that from time to time. I think more than anything it was just coming to the realization that there are so many things that I don't have control over and I think for me it really took me getting sick to get it. And then just letting God take over and direct what happens.

Finally, the interview with the Black family reveals that music (or songs), word of God (or sermons), prayers, and faith in the Lord help many African American families in deferring the manifestation of stress (or dealing with stressors). For example, this is what the Greene family reports:

Wife: But a lot of times when the stress actually happens, it may not work because you gonna need the [strength to pray]. Old folks used to say we prayed up (?) because when stressful situation come upon you, you have already a good relationship with the Lord, and that he understands that you can pray with him,

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[pray to him], and at the times when you are just so stressed that maybe you can`t talk. But after, you kind of come to grips with everything, your prayers may not be anything at all that you don`t have to do, but he actually can help you, you ask him for mercy, you ask him to help you get through it, and you try to remember some of the terms that you`ve heard, you know, kind of be able to talk about it that were not able to do before, and reflect on that…

Husband: I think, that`s what gets you through stress most of the time, you remember those things you have heard in the [sermon], or things that you have heard on the radio, a song, even just a [song] can ease your mind sometimes when you feel so stressed, when you hear a song, it just, it kind of calms you down in those situations, because sometimes you just get to the point where you can't even think sometimes when things are very serious and very stressful, and that`s the only comfort you have. And I know, quite often, I have some stressful times at work, with certain coworkers, and that`s the only thing that gets me through, I always remember [what God said], not what Arthur said, and that always tends to come back to my mind, in those situations, and I keep comparing to him, and trying to cool me down, because a lot of time the stress ?? because he's upset, and trying to help him to be more calm in those situations, because at my job, you have very quiet a few stressful times, just about, oh just yesterday, and so, that`s the way I deal with it, because I know there is someone there to get me through this, you know, the Lord's gonna bring me through this. I don`t know how, but he's gonna bring me through, and that's what I depend on.

In a summary, this section concludes that most of the deferred coping strategies African American families utilize in dealing with racial and/or religious stress, discrimination, and prejudices, include the following: (1) prayer, (2) faith, (3) word of God, (4) music), and (5) collective pain sharing among friends, church members, and neighbors.

4.13. Discussion of Findings

Based on the data analysis, the various perceived factors that cause ecological stress among African-American families can be grouped into the following broad themes or categories; social, financial (or occupational), and emotional (or psychological) stressors and they are discussed in detail below

4.14. Perceived Social Stressors

This section categorizes and identify the perceived social stressors experienced by African Americans in their daily lives. Generally, most of the stress emanates from the effects of macro and micro racism. Although institutional racism usually receives the most attention, Microaggressions are the primary sources of most of the physical and psychological damage to their health and social wellbeing. In addition, microaggressions are associated with the high levels of acute and chronic stress so common in the Black community, and White racism is the primary cause and explains, to a large degree, why the levels of stress among African Americans are so profound and disappropriately high (Carter, 2007; Choi, 2009; Crocker; 2007; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2007).

The manifestations of racism deprive members of the Black community access to many of the privileges granted to White Americans and therefore, they are frequently denied equal opportunity to participate in a merit-based economic system. Generally, this situation contributes immensely to the lack of adequate monetary resources to meet their daily needs which, oftentimes, lead to conditions of acute and chronic stress. Usually, wherever and whenever there is interracial interaction between Black and White Americans, racial behavior occurs either intentionally or unintentionally in the form of microaggressions which are, again, essentially responsible for much of the acute and chronic stress experienced by African Americans (Carter, 2007; Choi, 2009; Crocker; 2007; Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010; Sue, et al., 2007).

The findings of this study are consistent with the research of scholar who study the cause and effects of White racism. For example, many African American families are devout church members; they attend church not of their own volition but because it is a family tradition that they

feel compelled to respect, and because the church has always been the primary source of their resilience during the most challenging times of their lives. However, based on the views of many of the participants of this study, their unwavering devotion sometimes creates stress in their lives in that frequently, church activities and worship schedules conflict with their daily activities (Billingsley, 2003; Festinger, 1957; Frazier; 1939; Hill,1972).

When such situations arise, the only option left is to sacrifice personal activities (visiting of friends, having fun, site seeing, and playing games etc.) for church services or choosing other activities. Sometimes this leave them with a sense of guilt, which one may construe as religion-induced stress, or stress that emanates from the conflict between religious services and other significant personal activities. However, the intensity of the stress will generally vary due to the influence of socialization and cognitive internalization of traditional values (Billingsley, 2003; Festinger, 1957; Frazier; 1939; Hill,1972).

4.15. Financial (or Occupational) Stressors

Enough economic resources are imperative to meet the daily needs of all families regardless of race. However, many African Americans are disadvantaged due to racial inequality in the workplace. All too often, they are either unable to find suitable employment and many times, African Americans are usually the first to be terminated. In addition, frequently their White counterparts are selected for promotion even when Black workers may be more qualified. Consequently, these situations have a negative effect on income which naturally leads to financially induced stress based essentially on racial inequality. The research shows that the workplace is perhaps the primary stressor experienced by most families due primarily to work related activities and the lack of adequate pay. The latter is especially relevant to African

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Americans in the labor market. The research reveals that racial inequality generally serve as an impediment to upward mobility in the workplace, which, in most cases, contributes to Black financial vulnerability that frequently result in economic stress (Choi, 2010; Kendall, 2003).

This research revealed that sometimes African American families focus more on church/religion activities and obligations than their work or businesses. Many of the research participants in this study indicated during the interview that sometimes church activities and worship schedules conflict with their daily working hours or business meetings; when such situations arise, they must choose between work and church; such decision- making tends to create an acute state of stress. For example, opting to attend church instead of going to work places their jobs in jeopardy; the realization that the loss of a job is a possibility generally is very stressful; on the other hand, neglecting spiritual expectations also produces stress (Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004).

4.16. Emotional (or Psychological) Stressors

This section is categorized as perceived emotional (or psychological) stressors in that from the interviews, it became apparent that racism diminishes Black Americans' self-esteem, disparage, distract, and emotionally or psychologically demoralize them. For example, in James's testimony about racism, it is obvious that she was emotionally affected by the White racist attitude that she experienced at the beach to the extent that she was unable to concentrate on her reading. Needlessly to say, the psychologically manifestations of racism can be very taxing from an emotional perspective and, therefore, they may produce negative or adverse acute and chronic mental health problems (Carten, 2015; Carter, 2007; Pyke, 2010).

One should not minimize or disregard the psychological impact of White racism and prejudice that emanate from encounters of everyday racism so common in the African American experience. But more important, is the fact that the chronic emotional or psychological damage experienced by Black Americans is transferred from generation to generation, a fact that has not received adequate scholarly attention. Granted, macro or institution racism is a major problem faced by African Americans and is generally discussed more frequently in that it is directly related to racial inequality. However, it is micro or everyday racism that is more detrimental to the social well-being of African Americans in that it affects the perception of the self (Carten, 2015; Carter, 2007; Degruy, 2005; Pyke, 2010; Sue & et al., 2007).

4.17. Racism, as a Perceived Stress

The results of this study, above all, is consistent with the findings of scholars who study the effects of White racism as experienced by African American families and communities. Because racism is so deeply ingrained in society, and for such a long and extended period, its presence is frequently ignored, minimized, denied, or simply viewed as a cultural imperative. Black minorities experience micro and macro racism more frequently than is generally known or accepted; it is a social phenomenon that is widespread throughout the social order (Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Rogers & Bowman, 2003; Tatum, 1997; van Dijk, 1992).

This study reveals that macro and micro racism generally occurs in the following settings: airports, hotels, workplaces, churches, clinics, train stations, schools, organizations, hospitals, shopping malls, grocery stores, restaurants, and the Criminal Justice System. In short, African Americans are confronted with the reality of White racism wherever there is contact or interaction between the groups. The physical and psychological damages, or negative effects, emanating from

such personal encounters have been extensively documented by social scientists who study the prevalence and manifestations of White racism. Most agree that emotional trauma and diminished self-esteem are common occurrences. (Clark & et al., 1999; Crocker & et al., 1999; Crocker, 2007; Greene, 1998; Harrell, 2000; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Lincoln et al, 2005; Nyborg & Curry, 2003).

Are White Americans affected or similarly affected by Black racism? To some extent, this question buttresses the view of Beverly Tatum's argument on racism, which states that Blacks are not capable being racist because they have never had economic power in America (Tatum, 2010). Racism as demonstrated by the furnished narratives (interviews) is one-sided and generally perceived that way in American by study participants. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with the arguments of Rogers (2003). As noted, race is a political and social construction to classify human beings with the purpose of giving power to White people and to legitimize the dominance of White people over people of color; in short, the basis of race distinctions is not based on scientific truth (Greene, 1998; Rogers, 2003; Tatum, 2010).

Greene (1998) and other scholars point out that, White superiority is not based on biological or scientific evidence but rather, it is a racially ascribed non-scientific conceptualization concocted by the white dominant group to justify "White privilege," to oppress people of color, and a desire for power and domination; outgroup racist ideology created it, and political, social, and economic, power maintain it. In addition to its relationship to White racism, the concept of White superiority also serves to distinguish the boundaries of merit and fitness between and among racial groups. (Allport, 1954; Greene, 1998; Fanon, 1961; Kendall, 2002; Rogers, 2003).

4.18. Religion as a Perceived Stressor and Buffer

In the African American community, religion serves as both a stressor and buffer to White systemic racism. Generally, stress is related to a disconnect between religious belief and irreligious behavior or misconduct among church members, especially among church elders. In addition, religion is a major source of Black resilience in the African American community in that it is the primary means of perseverance, strength, and hope during the times of adversity and differential treatment (Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

4.19. General Perceived Factors that causes Stress

Regarding the general perceived stress factors (or stressors) among the African American families, this study finds the following to be related significant ecological stressors experienced by Black families: (1) racism, (2) time management, (3) dysfunctional marriages, (4) family resources, (5) family structure (6) anti-social activities, (7) religion (Choi, 2009; Marks, et al., 2006).

4.20. Coping strategies

Based on the responses of the research participants, the self-directed coping strategies used by African American families when dealing with racially-induced stress, discrimination, and prejudices include the following: (1) self-discipline, (2) faith, (3) prayers, (4) self-confidence, (5) suicide, and (6) lifestyle. The most frequently used collaborative coping strategies included the following: (1) clinging to friends, (2) clinging to faith, (3) clinging to social and church groups, (4) clinging to parish members or neighborhoods, and (5) clinging to church congregation (Chaney, 2008; Hill, 1972; Marks, et al., 2006; Mellor, 2004).

Finally, based on the transcribed information, the deferred coping strategies African American families utilize in dealing with racial and/or religious stress, discrimination, and prejudices include the following: (1) prayers, (2) faith, (3) word of God (4) music, and (5) collective pain sharing among friends, church members, and neighbors (Chaney, 2008; Hill, 1972; Marks, et al., 2006; Mellor, 2004)

4.21. Chapter Summary

Four research questions were stated and answered in this chapter. As stated earlier in chapter three, the study utilized the transcription procedures. The transcription procedure followed the processes consistent with grounded theory methodology. The concepts that were analyze in this chapter include the following: (a) Religion and the Black church, (b) African American families, (c) microaggressions and institutional Racism, (d) General perceived factors of stress, (e) religion as a perceived factor of stress, (f) self-directed coping strategy, (g) collaborative coping strategy, (h) and deferred coping strategy. Other related concepts included the following: (a) social perceived stressors, (b) financial or occupation perceived stressors, and (c) emotional or psychological perceived stressors (Chaney, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hill, 1972; Marks, et al., 2006; Mellor, 2004).

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This section of the dissertation discusses the summary, conclusion, and policy implication. The summary of the research process discusses the rationale of the study, purpose of the study, research questions and summary of data analysis.

5.2. Summary of Research Process

Generally, most White Americans believe that America is a post-racial society, though others disagree. Several researchers found that African Americans are more likely than any other racial group to experience racism, and are subject to racist attitudes and practices, which negatively affect their social wellbeing. A considerable amount of scholarly work has examined and documented the adverse effects White racism on the physical and psychological health of Black Americans from both a qualitatively and quantitative perspective. Unfortunately, studies related to the personal processes and meaning-making mechanisms of Black married couples are limited; especially as they relate to how the African American families cope with racism; the same is true with respect to African American males (Alexander, 1999; Carter,2007; Cauhgy, et al., 2004; Crocker, 2007; Sternthal et al., 2011).

To address this gap, this study uses qualitative responses from 23 multi-denominational Christian heterosexual married couples (made up of those who are Catholics, Protestants, LDS and Non-Denominational individuals) (N = 46 individuals) from across the United States designed to address the following research questions: (a) Is there a relationship between religion and stress among African-Americans families? (b) Is there a relationship between racism and stress among

African-Americans families? (c) What are the perceived factors that cause stress among African-Americans families? (4) What coping strategies do African-American families use to deal with stress (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008)?

The transcription procedure was consistent with grounded theory methodology to develops concepts such as: (a) religion, the Black church, and African American families, (b) racism, and institutional racism, (c) general perceived factors of stress, and religion as a perceived factor of stress, (d) self-directed coping strategy, collaborative coping strategy, and deferred coping strategy. All of these concepts were analyzed and examined in order ascertain their function and impact with respect to the manifestations of micro and macro racism (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As part of the findings, this study reveals that African American families, or Black minorities, experienced more micro and macro racism from the White dominant group than most other persons who are described as people of color. Generally, institutional racism occurs in the following settings: workplaces, churches, hospitals, shopping malls, clinics, airports, train stations, schools, hotels, private organizations, grocery stores, bus stations, restaurants, and any environment where there is contact or interaction between the groups. In addition, research reveals that African Americans face microaggressions and institutional racism more frequently in most bi-racial workplace environments; usually, they experience trauma due to experiences of racism, which tend to diminish their self-esteem, and make them feel belittled (Carter, 2007; Clark, et al., 1999; Festinger, 1957).

Furthermore, the study reveals that some religious perceived forms of stress are related to inappropriate behaviors of clergy and church elders who are categorized by some church members as "crooks" or "hypocrites" that had mislead the church by taking advantage of their position;

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some of them allegedly engaged in marital infidelity or misappropriation of church funds. Such behavior on the part of elders, and other respected members of the church, was a major source of stress in that it created a conflict between belief and observed behavior; a psychological state that Festinger (1957) conceptualized as "cognitive dissonance" (Carter, 2007; Clark, et al., 1999; Festinger, 1957).

However, most of the members continued to devote resources to the church to keep it running, which very demanding financially and psychologically which generally proved to be stressful. Again, this study underscores some of the general perceived ecological stress factors (or stressors) among the African American families to include the following: (1) racism, (2) trade-off time between work activities and home chores, (3) anger and violence in marriages, (4) financial responsibility in marriages, (5) childlessness in marriages, and (6) open use of drugs.

As part of the findings regarding coping techniques, the self-directed coping strategies African American families generally utilize in dealing with racial stress, discrimination, and prejudices include the following: (1) self-discipline, (2) faith, (3) prayers, (4) self-confidence, (5) suicide, and (6) lifestyle (like smoking, drinking alcohol, or clubbing, generally applied to non-believers). These ecological stress-reducing, self-directed, coping strategies were frequently used to acquire a state of mental or psychological tranquility that had been severely diminished by experiences of White micro and macro racism (Billingsley, 1968; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1958; 1972).

The collaborative coping strategies used most frequently by African American families in dealing with racial stress, discrimination, and prejudices, are consistent with the findings of other scholars and include the following: (1) clinging to friends, (2) clinging to faith, (3) clinging to social and church groups, (4) clinging to parish members or neighborhoods, and (5) clinging to

church (congregation). Finally, the primary deferred coping strategies used were as follows: (1) prayers, (2) faith, (3) word of God (4) music and (5) collective pain sharing among friends, church members, and neighbors (Billingsley, 1999; Chaney, 2008; 2010; Frazier, 1939; Marks, 2004; Marks & Chaney, 2006).

5.3. Conclusion

The study concludes that African Americans in the United States experience many negative physical and psychological effects derived from racism. Frequently, they invariably perceived the Black church as a coping tool or strategy for dealing with ecological stressors; they view White racism as the main source of ecological stress experienced in their daily lives. Most observed, also, that the people of color, especially African Americans, generally do not receive the same opportunities as Whites due, in part, to the fact that America is a racist society (Billingsley, 1968; Fox & Bartholomae, 2000; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Frazier, 1939; Hill, 1958; 1972).

This research also finds that institutional and individual racism are still major sources of ecological stress (or problems) in the United States today, and it is primarily responsible for much of the economic, social, and political inequality and stress faced by many African American families. Racism, according to the findings of this study, continues to play a vital role in the interactions between the dominant group in our society and people of color; in short, oppression, discrimination, and unequal opportunity are normative; this is especially true with respect to the treatment of African Americans. Racism in the United States was born out of the need for power, dominance, White privilege, and the need to justify the inhumane treatment and oppression of African American and other people of color; most participants in this study share this view (Fanon, 1961; Greene, 1997; Kendall, 2003; Tatum, 1997).

5. 4. Policy Recommendations and Implications

Based on the findings of this study, the following actions are paramount and recommended:

- Addressing race inequalities, that lead to ecological stress demands time and an unwavering commitment to justice. Racism in this country is not a Black or White problem; it is both. Therefore, the elimination of racism from the American society will require a coalition of Black and White Americans of good faith to come together and develop strategies designed to be effective in addressing the problem of inequality in our society wherever it exists. Granted, African Americans are not responsible for the existence of racism in the United States, however, they are responsible for helping to eliminate it (Allport, 1954; Greene, 1998).

- Properly and objectively, conceptualizing and coming to terms with the problem is essential. African Americans should dispense with the mindset that they are helpless victims of a racist society and consequently, they lack the power to influence social, political, and economic systemic change. Ethnicity-based discrimination and racism in American society are products of both internal and external factors; blaming the victim solely for differentiated treatment or the inequality in our society, will not solve the problem of racism; likewise, solely blaming a racist system for the injustice experienced by African Americans will yield similar results (Greene, 1998; Sears, 1991; Tatum, 1997).

- A complex and enduring problem such as racism cannot be solved quickly or easily; it requires a sustained and profound political attention and innovated policy implementation at the state, federal, and local levels of government. Needlessly to say, the fight to eliminate micro and macro racism from society is, and will continue to be, a long and trying endeavor; after all, the Civil War was fought over a 150 year ago and yet, racial justice in America is still not a reality (Dubois, 1903; Greene, 1998; Tatum,1997).

- However, responsible individuals should not be discouraged by the magnitude of the struggle or demoralized by systemic resistance to the elimination of racism and inequality. African Americans who are victims of institution racism should be mindful of the fact that laws exist against such practices and should be utilized fully; complaining and not acting, is a losing and ineffective strategy and will never render positive results (Dubois, 1903; Greene, 1998).

- The rigorous enforcement of civil rights laws is paramount and without exception, violators should receive severe punishment; this requires taking legal action when necessary. The fight against White racism must not only be fought in the political, economic, and legal arenas; rather, it must also be fought in the hearts and minds of racists as well as non-racists. This means that the White church should become actively involved in the fight to eliminate racism in our society; this is especially true with respect to addressing the issue of micro racism. White church leaders should remind their followers that racism is not only an economic, political, and legal issues; it is also a moral issue and to harbor racist sentiments in their hearts and minds is contrary to the teachings of their faith (Billingsley, 2003; Fanon, 1961; Greene, 1998).

- Black church leaders should consistently remind their congregations that Black racism is as undesirable as White racism. But more important, Black church leaders should do all that is in their power to impress upon their congregations that behavior have consequences and that there is far too much negative and destructive behavior in the Black community. Black church leaders must remind their congregations that prayer alone will not solve the problem of micro and macro racism that is so common in their daily lives; in addition, it will also require remedial action from every segment of the African American Community (Billingsley, 2003; Fanon, 1961; Greene, 1998).

- Racism is not solely a White problem; it is also a Black problem. Stated differently, White Americans are not the only group that harbor negative racist perceptions and sentiments about people of color; America has its share of Black racists as well. This is especially true with respect to micro racism. Many generally overlook this fact primarily because institutional racism has been the primary focus of researchers when addressing the issues of equal opportunity, which is related mostly to the domain of economics. In short, when confronting or discussing the race problem, it is recommended that both White and Black Americans do essentially the following: be honest, regardless how uncomfortable the topic, accept documented evidence, take responsibility for one's thoughts and behavior, and above all, avoid the temptation to generalize the merits and personal attributes of the out-group (Billingsley, 2003; Greene, 1998; Tatum, 1997).

- Although both Black and White racism are prevalent in society, it is noteworthy to point out there are differences with respect to causation and justification. Properly conceptualizing and understanding the differences will require a critical analysis of the historical and psychosocial factors that gave rise to racism in America, from both a White and Black perspective; failure to do so is likely to produce a serious distortion of realty and will most certainly hamper effective strategies necessary to address the issue. For example, most Black racism is based on White oppression or on how African Americans have been historically treated, and currently being treated, by the White dominant group; White racism, on the other hand, is based primarily on an ideology of White superiority or in-group ascribed positive characteristics and attributes, and on the myth of Black inferiority (Fanon, 1961; Franklin & Moss, 2009; Kendall, 2002).

- Finally, in the view of the researcher, racism in America has its roots in the family system and perpetuated by the family; this implies that racism is a socialized culturally transmitted phenomenon. Stated differently, no one is a born a racist. People learn to be racist either by instruction or by silence. Through the process of socialization, children internalize the family values of their parents. If their parents harbor racial negative perceptions and practice and overt racial behavior, their children will, for the most part, imitate what they hear and observe; this theoretical perspective is supported by Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory which argues, in part, that individuals learn from one another via observation, imitation and modeling Bandura, 1977; Greene, 1998; Kendall, 2002).

- In the theoretical view of the researcher, the family generationally transfers racism from one generation to the next, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the family must be the point of intervention to reduce or eliminate it from the main stream of society. Perhaps the most effective way to influence family values, with respect to stereotypes, or negative racial perceptions and sentiments, is to involve the church as a change agent in that religion has proven to be a telling and effective transforming resource; consequently, church leaders, both Black and White, must stand in the vanguard in the fight to eliminate racism from the social order thereby ensuring that racial equality and equal opportunity are experienced by all of America's people of color: especially those of America's formal slaves (Bandura, 1977; Greene, 1998).

5.5. Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher suggests that students, scholars, academia, and policymakers continue to investigate the issues related to racial inequality and the role that racism play in the process. Such additional research would add to the knowledge base as it relates to racial injustice, and provide needed insight regarding the prevalence, source, perpetuation, and negative psychological and social consequences related to micro and macro racism. Specific research investigations should focus on how racism directly affects minority performances and relationships in schools, workplaces, businesses, family systems, and other related environments, both public and private. The literature reveals that research in these areas is somewhat limited (Kendall, 2002; Pyke, 2010).

Further research should not focus solely on the adverse effects of racism in terms of how it affects the African American community; also, scholarly studies should investigate how major institutions such as educational, political, economic, and other related public and private social systems or organizations are impacted. Such empirical knowledge would provide useful information in ascertaining how institutional policies and practices contributes to and perpetuate racial inequality, or micro and macro racism; more important, it will provide stakeholders and policy makers with essential, objective information to use in formulating and developing effective intervention strategies necessary to eliminate racial differential treatment wherever it exists (Greene, 1998; McConahay & Hough, 1976).

The primary focus of this study has been on White racism and its effects on African American families; their perceptions and coping strategies regarding the stress they experience because of espousal to racial inequality, were also examined. Only religious Black families were participants. Therefore, a major limitation of this research is its lack of generalizability; in short,

the findings cannot be applied to the entire African American community. To fill this gap, future studies, should include the views and perception of non-religious Blacks with respect to the effects of racism and how they cope with racially induced stress (Fox &Bartholomae, 200; Hill, 1958)

Since this study dealt with African American families only, further studies should examine how White American families cope with stress. Such future studies would add to the knowledge base regarding inter-racial family functions and dynamics regarding perceptions and coping strategies related to stressful events in their daily lives. In other words, do African Americans and White families experienced the same ecological stressors in their daily lives, and to what extent do both groups rely on religion as a coping strategy (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Greene, 1998)?

What is clear is that both White and African American families maintain that finances or insufficient resources are major stressors in their lives; what is not fully appreciated or known is whether they use identical or similar coping strategies to address adverse economic circumstances. These questions merit further investigation. Scholars have not extensively investigated the coping strategies of both Black and White non-religious individuals and families; future studies in these areas will contribute considerably to the body of knowledge relative to the effects of ecological stress and the coping strategies of non-religious African Americans (Carter, 2007; Choi, 2009).

A considerable number of studies addresses the negative physical and psychological effects of White racism as experienced by African Americans. However, the literature reveals that scholars have not shown the same amount of interest in studying how Black racism affects White Americans, if at all. Perhaps the lack of such scholarly interest stems from the fact that racism generally is viewed from an economic or institutional perspective. For example, Dr. Beverly Tatum (1997) advances a unique position regarding racism and power. She asserts that, since

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White Americans control most institutions in America, African Americans are not able to deprive the White dominant group of equal opportunity and therefore, it is not possible for the latter group to be racist. (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Brondolo, et al., 2009; Carter, 2007; Rogers & Bowman, 2003; Tatum, 1997; van Dijk, 1992).

In the view of the researcher, the problem with such an argument or conceptualization of racism is that it neglects the fact that the structure of racism consists of more than simply economic factors or racially oriented behavior. Racism consists, also, of negative attitudes, negative racial sentiments, negative belief systems, negative stereotypes, myths, and internalized racial ideologies. These are general common cognitive or psychological perceptions that one finds among individuals who harbor racial sentiments regardless of their race or color (Brondolo, et al., 2009; Carter, 2007; van Dijk, 1992).

Perhaps African Americans cannot be institutional, or macro racist, given their lack of power, as argued by Dr. Tatum, but they can be, and many are, micro racist; this view is based on anti-White sentiments held by many members of the Black community. In addition, future studies should provide an analysis of Black racism, its prevalence, affects, as well as how the White community perceives racism. Such research would be a source of scientific information that would be useful in contributing to our understanding and appreciation of the complex dynamics associated with inter-racial interaction. This body of work would also be a source of empirical knowledge that should enhance our understanding of the critical psychosocial issues related to Black and White race relations (Brondolo, et al., 2009; Fanon, 1961; Rogers & Bowman, 2003; Tatum, 1997).

Finally, futures studies should also focus on the effects and policies regarding environmental racism. According to Toomey (2013), in the broadest sense, environmental racism and its corollary, environmental discrimination, is the process whereby environmental decisions, actions, and policies result in racial discrimination or the creation of racial advantages. She also notes that, it arises from the interaction of three factors: (1) prejudicial belief and behavior, (2) the personal and institutional power to enact policies and actions that reflect one's own prejudices, and (3) privilege, unfair advantages over others and the ability to promote one's group over another (Toomey,2013).

Toomey (2013) further argues that, the disproportionate health of African Americans relates to pollution from industrial plants that are usually located in their communities or within relatively short distances from where they live. In addressing the health issue of environmental racism, Jacqueline Patterson, Environmental and Climate Director of the NAACP stated that, an African American child is three times more likely to go into the emergency room for an asthma attack than a White child is, and twice as likely to die from an asthma attack than a White child. She also pointed out that the number of African American men and women, who suffered and died from lung cancers that lived in communities where pollution from industrial plants were located, were unusually high. These statistics clearly point to the need for additional research in environmental racism (Patterson, 2015; Toomey, 2013).

In the final analysis, the fight against White racism in America will continue to be a daunting task. However, there are reasons to be hopeful that the battle can be won. In this country, most Black and White Americans consider racism as unamerican and inconsistent with the ideology of Christianity. Consequently, it is viewed as taboo and leads to a desire to eliminate it from the main stream of society, however, this will prove to be a monumental undertaking in that racism is so

deeply ingrained in the culture of this nation. Eliminating racism from the social system will require steadfast patience and an unwavering commitment to racial justice, however, the fight will prove to be long and trying. Afterall, the Civil War was fought nearly two centuries ago and in America, racism still abounds; the good news is that it has declined and most Americans, both Black and White, considered it intolerable (Dubois; 1903; Kendall, 2003).

Institutional racism in American contributes immensely to the racial inequality experienced by African Americans, and it constitutes the greatest obstacle or impediment to their social well-being due, primarily, to its negative impact on the acquisition of essential economic resources. Frequently, many African American families are unable to meet their daily needs, especially those related to physical health, because they lack the necessary financial means. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that institutional racism is directly or indirectly, linked to the gap that exists between the natural death rate of Black and White Americans. Poverty is a killer; and there are more poor Black Americans than there are poor White Americans in the United States. But more important, no one in this country is poor because he or she is White; the same cannot be said of African Americans; and some studies suggest that White racism lies at the heart of the problem (Greene, 1998; Tatum, 1997).

Although institutional racism is related to many of the economic problems experienced by African American families, it is not the most problematic. Micro racism, manifested in the form of microaggressions, causes the greatest harm to the physical and mental health of African Americans. Granted, the lack of economic resources has a grave and devasting effect on the social well-being of Black families, however, it is the effects of psychological damage that is most devastating. To minimize or overlook the consequences of microaggressions, makes it extremely difficult to fully appreciate the magnitude of the mental anguish so common among African

Americans. For example, some scholars have noted that, the constant verbal and behavioral indignities, the negative prejudicial slights, and racial insults, communicate to Black Americans that because of the color of their skin, they are a special category of human beings and, therefore, not entitled to common courtesy or respect. What other degrading human experiences could possibly be more debilitating? White racism in America is still alive; but it's dying. THANK GOD! (Fanon, 1961; Greene, 1998; Sue et al., 2007).

Based on the findings of this study, most Black families did not harbor in their hearts negative feelings toward White Americans despite their daily experiences with racism, again, it should be noted that the research results cannot be generalized to the greater African American community. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the views of the participants in this study mirrors those of most other Black Americans due in large measure, to the influence of Black religiosity and spirituality, the foundation on which their views of social realty rest. Afterall, African Americans are the most religious group in the United States and this may explain, in part, why many still believe that there is good in the hearts of all men, including those whose racial abuse and oppression are motivated and justified by the misguided ideology of White racial superiority (Billingsley, 2003; Chaney, 2008; Marks & Chaney, 2006; Pew Forum U. S. Religious Survey, 2008).

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