A study of the social, economic, cultural and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SELF ESTEEM

CHALLENGES THAT INFLUENCE HOW AFRICAN-AMERICAN

YOUTH LEARN AND DEVELOP

Advisor: Robert W. Waymer, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated July 2010

This study examines the social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges that influences how African-American youth, between ages 12 and 17 years old, learn and develop in Metropolitan Atlanta. These youth were from a southeastern, urban Atlanta area, and they originally came from middle to low income backgrounds.

The research study participants were composed of a diverse population of youth. They were also between ages 12 and 17 years old. Survey questionnaires utilized a four point continuum Likert scale. It also included face to face interviews and observations by the researcher to insure appropriate instructions were understood. Additional research data, statistics, and media were used.

The findings of the study indicated that this population, though resilient, would better cope, learn, and develop under alternative circumstances as suggested.
A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SELF ESTEEM CHALLENGES THAT INFLUENCE HOW AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH LEARN AND DEVELOP

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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JULY 2010
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who gave me the possibility to complete this research. I want to first thank God for watching over me and blessing me through my entire education journey and as I continue to learn and grow. I want to thank my committee members at the Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University, Dr. Robert Waymer, Dr. Roslyn Harper-Arnold, and Dr. Richard Lyle.

I also want to thank Ms. Claudette Rivers-King, the Administrative Office Manager at the Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University, for all of her encouragement and assistance.

Of course, special thanks goes out to my former professors, mentors, and dean from The College of Health and Public Affairs at the University of Central Florida. They are: Dr. Cheryl Green – rest in peace; Dr. Barbara Turnage; Dr. Sophia Dziegielewski; and also Dean Melvin Rogers. All have greatly encouraged, mentored, and inspired me.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my family and friends for their support, encouragement, and understanding through this wonderfully challenging process. I am deeply indebted to my two favorite people in life—Tony and AQui’La—whom I cherish and love dearly.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important time for youth as they move into adulthood. It is a time of new learning, independence, increased responsibility, and transition (Peterson, 2002). The teenage years are a unique period of intense growth based on physical, psychological, moral, and intellectual development. It is understandable that this is also a time of confusion and serious change for many families (Peterson, 2002).

During this period, most teens attend middle school and high school. They cope with personal, family, and community issues. They are also faced with challenging and awkward experiences in their school environment (Bancroft & Reinisch, 1990). Teens experience hormonal changes which cause physical growth and changes in their bodies. They also experience emotional and psychological changes that become more prevalent through their actions and reactions, interests, practices and trends, thought processes, and beliefs (Bancroft & Reinisch, 1990).

African-American youth report they often receive negative attitudes, treatment, and opinions from adults. The youth claim that too many adults have the wrong perceptions of them. Despite the negativity, youth state they are usually energetic, thoughtful, creative and even silly, which is considered consistent with what is decent and normal for this period in their lives (Peterson, 2002).
Although it can be a period of conflict between parents, other authority figures and youth peers, the teen years are also a time to help young people grow into the distinct individuals. They will become opinionated and more individual as they mature into adulthood (Peterson, 2002).

During the period of maturation, teens experience what is known as the stages of adolescence or the stages of puberty. This pubescent developmental period consists of emotional and hormonal changes, which is also known as the age of maturity and it defines much of their youth (Bancroft & Reinisch, 1990).

Youth also begin to care more about what others think, particularly about them. They want to be accepted and liked by others. They often begin to separate from parents and identify more with friends, entertainers and public figures. They may even become self conscious or anxious about their body image, such as, being too tall, too short, too fat, too thin, etc. (Bancroft & Reinisch, 1990).

Generally youth tend to seek out their own identity and acceptance through various forms and experiences. Some of those identified forms are organized activity groups and social cliques, sexuality and sexual curiosity, hobbies and interests, and independent alone time (Martin, 1996).

This is a time when increased responsibilities are required from youth which is often due to personal needs, the home environment, academic requirements, and other activities. It is a time of adolescent transitioning due to aging, moving into a higher educational environment, social maturity expectations, and emotional, and physical developmental changes (Martin, 1996).
Middle school and high school aged African-American youth often experience additional challenges due to a number of historically oppressive issues. These issues include racial, class, gender, ethnic, biological, social, economic, healthcare, familial, cultural, educational, and self esteem challenges (Nelson, 2001).

Racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination and deprivation often become a standard construct in the African-American community. Urban and low income African-American youth are often standard targets of disenfranchisement and discrimination shearly on the basis of their race and social standing (Nelson, 2001).

Many of the progressive urban youth programs which were active and progressive in the 1970s through the 1990s are no longer available for urban African-American youth seeking various opportunities and assistance. Before and after school programs and community mentoring programs were also very few in number (Halpern, 1995).

Some of those progressive programs were Summer Employment Opportunities and Work Programs, Opportunities Industrial Center (OIC), and paid skills training programs such as administrative office work, mail clerk, janitorial, maintenance, and other low paying positions. However, regardless of how low the pay, these were opportunities for urban youth to be productive and earn money (Halpern, 1995).

These inner city and urban programs not only offered local African-American youth paid employment opportunities, quality skills and trades, and an introduction to career building, but they also offered healthy options to teen pregnancy, illegal drug usage, and other criminal activities by boosting positive self esteem (Halpern, 1995).

The National Urban League reported that prominent minority agencies and professional African Americans were hired to manage these urban programs. It was
important to have these agencies manage them so proper issuance, funding, skills training, and community development took place. The agencies were also to ensure youth motivation and successful minority hiring (Halpern, 1995).

Through the experiences of paid skills training programs, low income inner city youth were able to have positive and motivating experiences. They were able to learn skills, earn a pay check, build networks, broaden their knowledge, and increase their responsibilities. The youth were also less likely to get into trouble or to be unproductive (Halpern, 1995).

Often times, these experiences were motivating factors that elevated youth to a world beyond their own limitations. These motivating factors increased their knowledge base and better prepared them for life after high school. The motivating factors were to enable them to dream bigger dreams with endless possibilities (Halpern, 1995).

The teens who participated in these urban programs were often financially able to enjoy fun activities such as going to amusement parks, to the movies, and skating. They were able to purchase shoes and clothing, school supplies, feel a sense of achievement, and develop healthy self esteem and pride (Halpern, 1995).

Generally noted, within the African Diaspora, is that positive youth development is essential to maintaining healthy communities throughout. As a standard foundation, there are five core areas of goal achievements that healthy development and positive activities support. These developments positively impact young people in developing self esteem, cultural awareness, intellectual ability, physical fitness, and community (Davies, 2004).
Since the onset of the recession, in what was reported to have begun between 2005 and 2007, African-American youth have had a resurgence of some of the oppressive struggles of the past (Chossudovsky, Gavin, & Gavin, 2010). The historical struggles from the past were in addition to the challenges that they already cope with. Algernon Austin, a director at the Economic Policy Institute eloquently stated that when white America is in a recession Black America is experiencing a major economic depression (Chossudovsky, Gavin, & Gavin, 2010).

Some of the oppressive struggles were high rates of layoff and overwhelming unemployment for African Americans. Unfair bank and lending practices specifically targeted at low income and African Americans have gravely diminished African-American communities has increased the lack of affordable housing. Additional housing problems were also increased by gentrification programs and homelessness (Chossudovsky, Gavin, & Gavin, 2010).

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, African Americans, especially those living in urban areas, have rated at the top of the national health crisis tier. African Americans continue to face many health disparities due to lack of opportunities, resources, and fair and equal treatment. They are often denied comparable health care due to racism and discrimination, not provided by employers, high costs, and unavailability of services (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2009).

The national health care crisis has left astronomical numbers of Americans from various backgrounds without health insurance or health care. The results lead into
growing poor health conditions and even death especially among young African Americans (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2009).

Middle and high school dropouts, and failing school systems, cause increase hardships and challenges for African-American youth. More underlying issues stem from diminished resources; lack of support and failure of urban school systems; and closures of community centers (Chossudovsky, Gavin, & Gavin, 2010).

Despite their struggles, history has proven that African Americans are a strong, resilient, and determined people. When appropriate resources, equality, and other opportunities to excel are available, African Americans tend to be more enthusiastic and confident about reaching their ultimate goals (Nelson, 2001).

The study population included a diverse demography of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. The research centered on African-American youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years old (Martin, 1996). This is the stage when most youth initially experience a level of major independence and maturity. This is also a very vulnerable stage where these youth are exposed to more life experience which changes their views and increases their knowledge of global, community, and personal issues (Martin, 2005). It is a stage when a different understanding of the world is realized; competitions become more emotionally personal; sexuality and acceptance are elicited; and physicality, emotionality, and spirituality are often questioned, challenged or clash with beliefs and misbeliefs due to personal and public influences (Martin, 2005).

Some of the daily frustrating and biased realizations that African-American youth experience are the limited and negative images of other African Americans in the media. These media forms that inundate society include TV, radio, movies, books, magazines,
videos, music, computer-generated media, etc. (Rome, 2004). These images have an adverse effect on the African-American youth because they prevent positive, progressive outlooks and promote hopelessness. These negative images also promote violence, racial tension, economic disparities, stereotypes, and cause a social class divide (Rome, 2004).

African-American youth often struggle with healthy ways of coping with daily stressors due to limited resources. They also face unfair challenges of being misguided toward educational and career opportunities that would keep them on a continuous path of productivity and progress (Rome, 2004).

It is important to recognize that African-American youth are conscious to the continual reminders of their nonacceptance through both subtle and blatantly obvious things in their environment. These exclusionary reminders come in the forms of media, employment opportunities, self image, housing, health care, educational opportunities, fair and equal justice systems, certain organizations and social opportunities, and access to quality and affordable materials, goods, and services (Halpern, 1995).

Typically, nonacceptance impacts African-American youth more than other races because they already face distinct exclusions based solely on their race. Even further, African Americans make up the largest American population of the imprisoned, impoverished, unemployed, and neglected (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006).

The additional rejections stem from environment, social class, appearance, communication skills, gender and even body image. There is a national pattern of lack of quality value and unimportance of African Americans through many institutional systems, such as media, health care, economical, religious, state and federal, social, educational, judicial, political, environmental, etc. (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006).
The biased and racist disparities against African-American youth not only hurt them emotionally and socially, but it also hinders them in other areas such as quality education, employment and career progression, fair legal treatment and adjudication, and other equal opportunity and civil rights entitlements (Halpern, 1995). By failing to acknowledge that bias continues to exist against African Americans, negative effects will continue to be passed down to African-American youth generation after generation. Resistance and a state of denial on this issue have been a problem for far too long (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006).

Nationally, reports and studies have clearly documented that federal and state officials have chosen to ignore the issues. They merely blamed the overrepresentation of incarcerated African Americans on poverty and high crime rates. Officials justify this by stating that poor neighborhoods are heavily populated by African Americans (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006). African Americans have heavily populated poor neighborhoods due to racial, employment, housing, class, and cultural discrimination. Government officials have also continually failed to take meaningful action to address inequities, disparities, and disenfranchisement having a grand effect on African-American youth (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006).

This study focused on four main variables surrounding the previous issues discussed. These variables are social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges which influence how African-American youth learn and develop. This should add insight to youth coping, progress, and evaluation of their influences (Nelson, 2001).

Historically, research studies have shown that African Americans remain the highest oppressed and disenfranchised group of people in the United States.
Unfortunately, this has been an historical ailment in American history from the onset of slavery forward (Blackmon, 2009).

American youth in general are over exposed to sex, substance abuse, and violence. African-American youth living in urban areas often experience increased over exposure of sex, substance abuse, and violence and this often turns into self-destructive behaviors due to lack of appropriate initiatives. The youth often act out or retaliate out of frustration, anger, and fear (Blackmon, 2009). Despite the increased understanding of the general consequences of exposure to violence important questions remain unanswered regarding the relationship between the types of exposure and the emotional adjustment and psychopathologic characteristics of youth (Blackmon, 2009).

Certain distress symptoms such as intrusive thoughts, feelings of arousal, and stressful experiences and triggers contribute to the types of exposure to violence, and/or certain psychosocial or demographic factors. Also, the impact of repeated violent encounters, rather than just a single episode, may greatly influence youth’s outlook on the effects or perceptions of being either a victim or a witness to violence (Blackmon, 2009).

Some of the youth give up or feel locked into a hopeless life style. The youth who struggle with destructive behaviors often end up failing in school, caught up in legal problems, or dead from drugs, alcohol, or violence (Blackmon, 2009). African-American youth who have good support systems and employ discipline often become successful. Those who have skills, talent, and a good education also may find a way to achieve success (Blackmon, 2009).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was formalized due to the many decades of suffering, abuse, and disenfranchised African Americans. It began as an effort to finally
end a very long legacy of oppression against African-American people that began before the founding of the nation (Grofman, 2000). Other minority groups suffered under the ugliness of racism and discrimination as well, such as Latinos and Native Americans. They, too, would benefit from the hard work of the Civil Rights Movement (Grofman, 2000).

The Civil Rights Movement was organized and fought by a grassroots group of people. They unified and formed a fundamental foundation for fairness, justice, and equality. This would be the start of a movement (Grofman, 2000). The Civil Rights Movement was generated in order to stop the pain and abuse of people of color and to protect women and children from discrimination. It was so brilliantly crafted that it has been applied to a wide variety of rules, laws, policies, and practices (Grofman, 2000).

Instituting civil rights greatly reduced social injustices and created laws that would legally stop, hinder, or prevent racial discrimination, denying equal rights in gender, religion, and employment, and unfair educational practices (Grofman, 2000). The Civil Rights Movement and the changing of laws, rules and policies opened up places of public access and accommodations for minorities. African Americans in particular were finally going to experience freedom, justice, and liberty like never before (Grofman, 2000).

The basis of the movement was so minority groups in American would be afforded the same liberties and justices that whites received. Though African Americans continue to struggle for equal rights progress is moving forward (Grofman, 2000). Overall, African Americans fought a long fight for their freedom. Though the fight
continues, they were on the road to becoming an integral and respected part of America’s mainstream society (Grofman, 2000).

Sadly, with an all white government running the country, government officials at all levels were resistant in enforcing the Civil Rights Act. In fact, the majority of whites throughout the nation had little interest in prioritizing equality concerns of African Americans (Grofman, 2000). Many of the state and federal politicians and other government officials resisted acknowledging a need for change of power. However, eventually, basic stipulations within the Civil Rights Act were put into practice and applied in some areas in the public sector (Grofman, 2000).

Practices of equality began to be observed in such areas as education, employment, housing, health care, disabled or handicapped persons, sexual and gender preferences, etc. However, equality and discrimination remain a major social struggle in America today (Grofman, 2000). Meanwhile, civil rights legislation failed to be widely enforced accordingly. The findings have proven that certain events and issues have actually triggered efforts to turn back the civil rights clock even further. This is evidenced by the failure of education systems, judicial systems, employment opportunities, affordable housing, and health care for African Americans (Grofman, 2000).

Sadly, civil rights issues remain a serious unfinished business of America. An abundance of discrimination practices continue to be observed in employment, housing, education, health care, and the political arena where many African Americans still do not enjoy equality with other Americans (Grofman, 2000). Although African Americans have made great strides forward, there is still much more to be accomplished. The 2007
Recession brought on increased discrimination practices as well (Ratner, 2008). Various reports revealed discrimination in lending practices, home ownership, employment, education, health care, etc. These disparities have greatly affected and damaged progress in the African-American community (Ratner, 2008).

Civil rights laws were not addressed or adhered to as they should have been. This caused a continuum of discrimination practices especially during a time when America was in a financial crisis (Grofman, 2000). Civil rights and equal justice for all Americans remains to be the unfinished business of America. Resistance to practice civil right laws has greatly impacted African-American youth (Grofman, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Over the past several years, America has suffered a relatively high number of serious crisis issues; The Katrina storms, 911, gas and petroleum costs, foreclosures, Wall Street Crash, Enron, California fires, recession, unemployment, increase in homelessness, poor healthcare, and failing schools systems – just to name a few (Harris & Graham, 2007). These crises have seriously impacted the daily lives of African-American youth. Specifically noted are the social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges that they face every day (Harris & Graham, 2007).

African-American youth are also influenced by a variety of social and environmental elements that may or may not positively help them cope. These influences are both positive and negative (Harris & Graham, 2007).
African-American youth have been flooded with various challenges that have prompted some to unite. On the other hand a large number have struggled to make measurable progress only to be limited in prosperity (Halpern, 1995).

Social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges need to be evaluated to measure their impact and influence. Also, their influences—good and bad—and how they are coping should be assessed and evaluated (Halpern, 1995).

Failures in the African-American community are a reflection of a historically European crafted grand scheme based on power and control. The grand scheme system has been an ongoing unfair distribution of power and continued disenfranchisement and discrimination by the majority in power. These discrimination practices have a long and damaging history on the African-American community (Herb, 2002).

Unfortunately African-American youth far too often receive much of the fallout leaving them left out and without. They often are left to cope and struggle through social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges in environments and situations that often appear to be hopeless and at least limited. This construct only increases oppression and even depression even more when combined with the stages of adolescence (Herb, 2002).

The environmental and situational issues that these youth cope with often require strong personal and community resources. These supports are needed to assist them in directing priorities and reaching long term goals. They must also be self motivated and driven to overcome and to achieve success (Herb, 2002).

However, many of these youth are lacking or limited in having supportive resources and services. Countless numbers of African-American youth come from low
income, single parent households that are headed by women, which can also add to daily stressors and challenges (Halpern, 1995).

Many of these African-American youth reside in neighborhoods that are absent or depleted of even basic needs, such as desirable and affordable housing; top notch, progressive educational institutions; affordable and healthy grocery stores; and safe streets and recreation areas. Lucrative employment and career opportunities were unfounded or minimal (Halpern, 1995).

These neighborhoods also lack greatly needed emergency services, such as medical treatment centers to include dental and mental health services, emergency medical technicians (EMT), firefighting facilities, and adequate police and safety officers. This not only proves limited resources and lack of employment opportunities but it also places the community at increased risk (Ginwright, 2009).

In 2009 during the recession crisis, Metropolitan Atlanta government officials stated that cutbacks and lack of state funds caused emergency services to be shut down. During that time local police departments as well as local fire stations were either closed down completely or lost needed personnel (Isidore, 2009).

Research studies show that when African-American youth are specifically placed at higher risk they become fearful and angry, lose respect for authority, and gain a sense of cynicism. However, despite the broad array of hardships they face, when these young people have effective resources and are mentored and supported by caring adults they can be guided and empowered to confront their challenges, take control of their lives, and become productive, effective, and successful (Ginwright, 2009).
From the Middle Passage forward African-American communities have been deeply and largely affected by racist and discriminatory practices throughout the nation. Though the Civil Rights Movement accomplished a lot to rid all communities of discrimination and injustices, many disparities remain prevalent (Grofman, 2000).

These discriminatory practices consist of, but are not limited to, gentrification, unfair housing and property discrimination, employment discrimination, education crisis, legal injustices, limited access to greatly needed resources and services, and other discriminatory practices. This is very discouraging for young African Americans desiring progress (Ginwright, 2009).

Culturally, African-American youth learn different rules for communicating with adults through facial expressions, body language, spoken language, and physical gestures. They also learn respect, values, and their worth based on environmental influences (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

Too often African-American youth suffer the negative impacts through the intentional and limited resources. Defective legal practices at all levels of government also interfere with progress (Herb, 2002).

A national point of contention has involved various illegal and immoral acts that explicitly focus on divisive tactics against African-American youth. Such tactics include depleted education and career opportunities for these youth (Herb, 2002).

Examples of these tactics are centered in racism, corrupt voting strategies, the 2008 recession, severe unemployment, corrupt banking and lending, and the national housing foreclosure crises. Lack of federal emergency care and poor health care are also major concerns (Herb, 2002).
As poor government practices were instituted, they continued to destroy and remove greatly needed resources within the African-American community -- resources that African-American youth needed for successful progress, such as increased educational and employment opportunities (Herb, 2002). Therefore, when resources dwindled or diminished, so did youth achievement and success rates of young African-American youth. When youth are hindered by limited resources, it affects the entire community (Herb, 2002).

Sadly, the defective practices and lack of needed resources have hurt the African-American youth population. They have faced even more disadvantages from the astronomical school drop out rates and joblessness, often leaving them feeling helpless and frustrated (http://www.gadoe.org/enewsletter.aspx, 2008).

In 2009, the state of Georgia Department of Education reported the 2008 high school graduates as the highest drop out rate in the nation. Georgia’s graduation rate jumped to more than 75 percent, the highest level ever. The state’s final graduation rate for 2008 was 75.4 percent, an increase of more than three points from last year (http://www.gadoe.org/enewsletter.aspx, 2008).

The high unemployment rate of high school graduates can create the perception that a diploma is of little value and may even encourage dropping out of school. This is because even those students who graduate, struggle for decent employment opportunities as well (Orfield, 2004).

The truth is that African-American youth who drop out of school are less employable due to lack of education, access to resources, and racial disparities. In fact they are more likely to struggle financially, to be involved in criminal activity, or become
teenaged, single parents. Additionally, they further increase the African-American youth unemployment rate (Orfield, 2004).

Research studies have found that young adults with no or low educational and skill levels are more likely to live in poverty and to receive government assistance. High school dropouts are likely to stay on public assistance longer than those with at least a high school diploma due to fewer employable attributes (Orfield, 2004).

Urban African-American youth often struggle with this issues due to various obstacles that they face. Some of the obstacles are inflicted due to classism, racism, sexism, and sexual preference issues as well as other discriminatory and disenfranchising challenges (Orfield, 2004).

Duly noted, African-American and Hispanic youth are the highest rated school drop out groups. For African-American youth to have an incomplete education and high unemployment rate they are subjected to even more challenges (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

These challenges equal not only learning and development problems, but they also have social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges to cope with. All overshadowed by the global recession (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

European empowerment and control in America have engineered such deceptive tactics as targeting, disenfranchisement, denial, and destruction of African-American progress and empowerment. These actions were often crafted and generated by the United States government (Blackmon, 2009).

Disenfranchisement was done to prevent African Americans from overcoming hardships and abuse. Successful progress was especially hindered in such areas as formal
education, owning property, owning prosperous businesses, and learning and developing (Blackmon, 2009).

With the onset of the 2007 recession, African-American youth again became one of the highest rated deprived populations. The rise in school dropouts, criminal activities, teen pregnancies, and deaths began to become a standard report of the daily news media (Chossudovsky, Gavin, & Gavin, 2010).

These issues and maladies impacted how African-American youth cope, learn, and develop with daily issues. It also highlighted social trends and influences affecting youth (Chossudovsky, Gavin, & Gavin, 2010).

For the past several years, African-American youth have had increasingly high levels of middle school and high school drop out rates. They have had increased levels of private and public stressors and coping challenges which were exacerbated by the national economic recession which launched into a global financial crisis (Ahlers, 2009).

Throughout history, African-American communities were hit hard by poverty. They faced discrimination and limitations that excluded them from equality and progress. These discriminatory practices only caused matters to worsen for African-American youth (Ahlers, 2009).

This economic crisis was reported as the worse economic recession in the history of the United States to date. Though final costs and recovery numbers were unpredictable with no definite cut off date analysts and government officials reported matters would get worse before they got better (Ahlers, 2009).

Failed financial systems, lack of affordable housing, employment losses, national disasters, and wars caused hardships and serious loss. Although the recession had
affected all communities in some way, according to the National Census Bureau, it largely affected African Americans and Latinos between the ages of 16 through 24 at 18.1 percent, nearly double the national average (Ratner, 2009). This population of African Americans and Latinos between ages 16 through 24 was affected by the large amount of failed educational opportunities, lack of community resources, and lack of employment opportunities (Ratner, 2008).

This is not an equal opportunity recession since it is hurting the weakest populations such as the low income minorities. The Nation Article entitled Generation Recession reveals that less than half of all people ages 16 to 24 are employed on a regular basis (Ratner, 2009). This is the highest unemployment rate for this demographic since 1948. Equally it is certainly the highest unemployment for African Americans. In 1948 the government began keeping track of employment activities (Ratner, 2008).

In early October 2009, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that young African Americans between the ages of 16 and 19 had an unemployment rate of 40.7 percent. This percentage rate was nearly twice the rate of the national average for other Americans. In turn housing foreclosures, crime, violence, and loss of health care increased, (Ratner, 2008).

Researchers reported that while young Latinos of the same age are unemployed at a rate of nearly 30 percent; young African Americans were unemployed at a rate even higher and often ranging nearly 30 percent higher (Ratner, 2008). Both ratings were measured drastically higher than the 23 percent unemployment rates reported by their white peers. Whites were by large found to be employed, working in higher paid and
better positions, receiving more benefits, and provided allowances and resources that were denied or limited to African Americans (Ratner, 2008).

The racial disparities were even more dramatic among the unemployed 20 to 24 year olds. While young white workers in their early twenties had an unemployment rate of 13.1 percent, their African-American compatriots were unemployed at the rate of 27.1 percent, more than twice as high (Ratner, 2008).

Generally, youth become vulnerable to various risks, influences, and beliefs. Youth are often influenced and get involved in both positive and negative behaviors and activities as a part of their learning and development process (Nelson, 2001). When misguided or neglected, they often become involved in problematic behaviors such as, struggling with anger and/or depression, disengaging academically, and drop out of school particularly in middle school and high school (Nelson, 2001).

Youth need effective, consistent caring, and supportive attention in order to develop and maintain healthy learning and development practices. They need attentive and loving supervision, protection, discipline, guidance, and security to encourage healthy strategies and positive coping practices. Without their basic survival needs being met, youth struggle to survive (Nelson, 2001).

With limited or no available supports in place, youth often feel helpless, hopeless, or hindered. Without effective supervision and guidance the recipe for healthy learning and development becomes strained and may become defective (Nelson, 2001).

When neglect and negativity occurs youth may react negatively due to frustration and lack of resources. They often act out their frustrations particularly when struggling or having difficulty coping with other issues (Nelson, 2001).
The lack of appropriate tools for development and learning is reflective of the challenges that influence how African-American youth cope. These challenges include coping with social, economical, cultural, and self esteem challenges while they learn and develop into (Nelson, 2001).

Not only were African-American adults suffering in the midst of the national financial crisis, but African-American children were gravely affected and have struggled as well. In the midst of crisis children tend to behave in ways that are reflective of their parents struggles and worries (Nelson, 2001).

According to Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs motivational model without first having basic survival needs being met such as food and water, clothing, shelter, security, a livable environment, good health, learning and development is at risk (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004).

Therefore, when other external and internal needs are absent, methods of coping become further stressed and may even diminish self esteem and trust. When youth experience overwhelming stress, they are often negatively influenced and essentially act out in negative manners (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004).

Legal institutions and the justice system are widely noted for failing African-American youth. Examples of this failure are such nationally known cases as Genarlow Wilson, Jena Six, and the Florida boot camp death of Martin Lee Anderson (Obama, 2007).

Education systems are failing with such demonstrated examples as the denial for accreditation for the Clayton County School System in Georgia. There were also
numerous closures of community recreation centers, community outreach services, and before and after school programs (Clark, 2010).

The American government system was originally organized on a foundation of greed and selfishness. Laws and rules were devised and implemented by Europeans for Europeans by setting the perimeters for them to obtain power, prestige, and privilege. These rules and laws were intentionally devised to prevent and regulate African-American and other minority development and gainful success through harsh and abusive treatment with scrutinized and managed attainment and containment particularly when it comes to obtaining and maintaining wealth and power (Clark, 2010).

So, in many ways, the government has failed to implement and enforce fair social, legal, health care, economic, educational, and other public and private systems in turn intentionally leaving African Americans remaining a disenfranchised people. This has become a plague that has blanketed generations of African Americans (Scott, 2003).

A number of youth programs including before and after school programs have down-sized or closed limiting wrestles children in need of positive and supervised activities. Medical and mental health programs that once provided free and sliding scale treatment programs have closed (King, Jr., Wheeler, Fernandez, & Schillinger, 2006).

Substance abuse treatment programs and shelter programs have closed in large numbers. Summer hire, mentoring, and internship programs have all closed due to lack of funding, grants, and scholarships. According to the Guttmacher Institute (2006), teen pregnancy was once again on the rise in the African-American community (Centers for Disease Control, 2009).
A 2006 report by the U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity reported that Black women ages 15–19 are the most populated teen pregnancy group nationwide (Guttmacher Institute, 2006). By January 2009, the National Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention released a report stating that the national teen pregnancy rates have risen for the first time in 15 years, particularly in the Southern states (Centers for Disease Control, 2009).

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2009) criminal activity and senseless murders are often prevalent in the overwhelmed, underserved, and disenfranchised African-American community. This is largely due to lack of resources, neglect by government officials and local agencies, and intentional efforts to exclude positive productivity and growth within the African-American community.

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Child Welfare Act of 1983, and the Brown vs. the Board of Education Supreme Court decision were essential entities of developing and enforcing policies and programs for the empowerment of African Americans and other minorities (Grofman, 2000). Civil Rights laws were established and instituted in order to obtain fair conditions for African-American youth in order to improve their educational opportunities, establish equal opportunities, and their overall living conditions (Grofman, 2000).

In Metropolitan Atlanta legislatures, politicians, and community members questioned why African-American youth have the highest school dropout rates, the highest incarceration rates, and the highest poverty rates. This matter seems to have no established clear cut fix and no known solution (Ginzberg, 1994).
Having at least a high school diploma is a critical step toward avoiding poverty. A college degree is a prerequisite for a well-paying job. The costs of dropping out of high school are significant (Ginzberg, 1994). Dropout rates have increased over time, especially for young African-American men. They find it almost impossible to earn an adequate income to take care of themselves and their families (Ginzberg, 1994).

When the Obama Administration addressed the national agenda regarding school dropout crisis, they began working on preventive measures. The agenda was implemented and focused on the dropout rates during the middle school years (Ginzberg, 1994). The Administration also began reforming the No Child Left Behind law. Changes were directed due to the failures of several school systems across the nation (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009).

The Obama Administration was informed that, especially due to the state of the economy, youth were facing other personal and societal challenges. The national recession had greatly impacted particularly Hispanic and African-American youth’s coping abilities and some of the obstacles to achieving success (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009).

In order to better assess and understand how African-American youth in the Metropolitan Atlanta are coping with challenges while learning and developing, this research reviewed and evaluated four main variables from the stated issues within this demographic (Nelson, 2001). The variables studied were social challenges, economic challenges, cultural challenges, and self esteem challenges that influence how this population learns and develops. African-American youth across class lines often face racial disparities such as oppression and disenfranchisement (Harris & Graham, 2007).
Though they are the President and America’s first family, the Obama family, too, has been subjected to many racist attacks. However, African-American youth in urban areas have increased disparate challenges and issues than do Caucasian youth (Harris & Graham, 2007). Various research and studies have continuously shown that, historically, African Americans remain the highest oppressed and disenfranchised group of people in the United States. African-American youth are a large part of this group (Nelson, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study seeks to understand the social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth, between ages 12 and 17 years old, learn and development. This research was accomplished to gain more insight and understanding of this population during a period when they were coping with stressful challenges during adolescence (Ahlers, 2009).

In addition to physical growth changes, they were experiencing psychological growth. They were also experiencing environmental and social challenges. It was a time of crisis when all of America was experiencing what some titled as the worst recession ever (Ahlers, 2009).

The research study was designed to explain the influences that four variables—social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges—have on the learning and development processes of African Americans. Elements of influences affecting the youth are also reviewed in this study (Harris & Graham 2007).

The study also examines how social and environmental influences affect African-American youth’s learning and developing. The information provided will
suggest recommendations and it will contribute to other research methods and models (Harris & Graham, 2007).

The research study will also add to existing research studies, assessments and evaluations concerning academic education, development, skills learning, practicum, and social approaches of African-American youth. It is important to evaluate how African-American youth learn and develop in complex societies while coping with complex situations (Harris & Graham, 2007).

Many teaching strategies and mandates, as well as the No Child Left Behind Act, rate schools systems and students on their academic progress. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports are a federally mandated system used to measure year to year student academic achievement on statewide tests and assessments (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).

However, the basis of this study was not only focused on the academic achievements of African-American youth. This research assesses the learning and development process of African-American youth between the ages of 12 through 17 years old (Jenkins, 2003).

Additionally, there are four variables which consist of the coping challenges which were social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges. The epistemological approach was the author's blueprint for this research study while investigating the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge surrounding specific variables that influence youth challenges (Jenkins, 2003).

Though academic progress and achievements according to course material or grade point averages are important contributions to youth success, the actual course
grades were not the focus for this research. Excelling socially, economically, culturally, and having good self esteem as well as academically is also important for African-American youth development (Orfield, 2004).

African-American youth are in great need of better long term opportunities. Increased methods of keeping African-American youth in schools and keeping the youth engaged in a manner of achieving success is by far imperative to avoiding the dropout crisis but the focus cannot merely be on the academic aspect (Orfield, 2004).

Instead, this research study was accomplished to focus on and evaluate the four previously mentioned variables that influence how African-American youth and how they sustain and successfully get through their growth and challenges. Resolving these matters may encourage and influence African-American youth to stay in school and complete their education in spite of trials and tribulations. It may also encourage paths for them to become productive members of society and overcome and defeat social and private struggles so that they will be healthy and successful (Harris & Graham, 2007).

This study also reviewed the support systems that were made available to these youth at a very meaningful developmental period in their lives. Full knowledge and understanding of the national recession which officially began in 2007 were also consciously noted as it had a strong impact on African-American youth (Ahlers, 2009).

Data obtained from this research include the demographic of youth participants, educational data, community programs, various research data and other media. Surveys, reports, and personal interviews were also sources of information collected to support findings. The survey used was designed for this research (Creswell, 2003).
Another objective of this research was to determine whether a relationship exists between African-American youth’s positive and negative coping challenges and how it affects their learning and development. The coping challenges include social, economics, cultural, and self esteem challenges (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004).

Social and environmental influences are impressive and often popular to youth. The effects of socialization of attitudes, victimization by racial disenfranchisement, the lack of interest in education and environmental health, and progressive development are important points to be discussed (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004).

The research study was accomplished in order to establish a model for understanding how African-American youth within the select demographic cope while learning and developing. The learning and development may be either formal or informal.

Additionally, it was important to gain insight and understanding of what influences positive and negative behaviors of African-American youth within this demographic. Influences may be any number of things that grabs the youth’s attention whether positive or negative in nature (Ginwright, 2009).

An assessment of such influential relationships within the context of community socialization practices. This may be valuable in developing and implementing youth target programs (Harris & Graham, 2007).

The research also discusses the implications of racial socialization messages in learning, development, education and other alternative programs directed at African-
American youth. Particularly those living in urban settings will be evaluated to contribute to this research (Harris & Graham, 2007).

Research Questions

The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?
2. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and self esteem challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?
3. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?
4. Is there a statistical relationship between the cultural challenges and self esteem challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses for the study are as follows:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?
2. There is no statistically significant relationship between the economic challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?
3. There is no statistically significant relationship between the cultural challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?
4. There is no statistically significant relationship between the cultural challenges and self esteem challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was to identify, evaluate, and compare the development and learning styles, as well as, the coping style preferences of young African-American youth between the ages of 12 through 17. Measures of perceptual learning modalities were obtained from a sample population of 40 middle school age African-American youth (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

The statistically measured sample population consisted of 20 males and 20 females. Participants were randomly selected from a pool identified as inner city, African-American youth and some family and support members, within a particular age group, and location (Cresswell, 2008).

The basis of the study was not to focus on only the academic achievements and formal educational success of the youth participants. African-American youth and their peers were surveyed to evaluate how they perceive African-American youth values. The primary purpose was to evaluate and focus on the elements that not only influence African-American youth but to also understand how certain challenges affect their learning and development.

The concentration is meant to promote positive programs and actions to encourage African-American youth to stay in school and complete their education, to become productive members of society, and overcome and defeat social and private
struggles so that they will be successful. There were no other specifications or demographics to include or to measure.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of presenting this review of the literature was to provide a scholarly foundation and to show an established need for the study. This chapter is a review of some of the previous and current literature (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

It relates to recent efforts to understand the learning and development process of urban African-American youth as they cope with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges. These youth are often directly and indirectly impacted by these challenges (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

It is important to address these matters in order to better long term opportunities for African-American youth. The review covers learning and development processes; social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges that African-American youth often struggle with (Harris & Graham, 2007).

The research study reviews social disparities and high rates of school dropouts and how it affects African-American youth development and success. Different learning styles are reviewed and discussed to explain how culturally youth learn and develop differently. All of these disparities impact urban education and overall progress. Other disparities are the lack of availability of familial and community supports, racial attitudes, identity acceptance, and possible alternative solutions (Halpern, 1995).
The research also briefly covers the historical involvement of the Civil Rights Movement to include the Civil Right Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Child Welfare Act of 1983, and the Brown vs. the Board of Education Supreme Court ruling in 1954. These were some of the primary sources in mandating laws and laying the foundation for equal rights, protection and education rights for African Americans (Morris, 1956).

In 1954, the Brown vs. the Board of Education Supreme Court ruling ended the previous ruling in the Plessy vs. Ferguson separate but equal case. Finally, under the law, African Americans were finally to receive education equality without segregation (Spencer, 2006). However, there was no deadline date set to ensure all schools and education institutions would honor the ruling and end segregation. Therefore, the results of this legal victory would contain even more challenges for social change (Spencer, 2006).

Though the ruling was in favor of equal education, it did not end segregation and other discriminatory issues and practices. Segregation in public places, equal employment, fair housing, and other such disparities continued (Spencer, 2006). In spite of the ruling, many African-American youth continued to endure racists and tortuous daily treatment from whites. In schools white teachers, students, and faculty alike would continue harassing and abusing African-American youth (Kunjufu, 1989). This type of daily maltreatment took the form of both psychological and physical abuse. With youth learning and developing already being a challenge, the maltreatment made it worse (Kunjufu, 1989).
Though the extent of racist actions and segregation are reduced in the education arena today, the formal education process in schools continues to be a struggle. Many African-American youth become discouraged by frustrations in the education system and quit. The Committee on Education and Labor reported that nationally 7000 high school students per day drop out (Committee on Education & Labor, 2009).

Some educators still remain prejudice and maintain misconceptions regarding African-American youth. Sometimes when adults make decisions for them, it causes these youth to rebel due to personal struggles and challenges where they feel limited and untrusted (Kunjufu, 1989).

The Civil Right Act of 1964 was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson to end segregation in public. This was something that the Brown vs. the Board of Education did not do (Morris, 1956). Prior to that law enforcement and law makers would use pleas of private services or private property in order to freely practice discrimination. This law also addressed employment discrimination and soon after the Equal Employment Commission was created (Grofman, 2000).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also prevented segregated schools from receiving federal funds. Additionally companies and business requesting federal funding were denied if they were caught practicing segregation (Morris, 1956). Denying companies and businesses federal funding if they were caught discriminating began to make small social and economic changes. These efforts were focused on expanding equality, though they did not always work due to the resistance by some public and private businesses (Grofman, 2000).
On April 11, 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Signing this law allowed for federal and state funds to be provided for primary and secondary schools and education programs (Icon Group International, 2009). This act is also a somewhat controversial education act because over the years it has had numerous changes and revisions, to include the current No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The government has reauthorized the Act every five years since its enactment (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004).

Some of the perks of this act are that it can enhance professional development, supplement instructional materials, provide resources to support educational programs, and promote parental involvement. However many parents, teachers, administrators, and other public managers believe that this act is causing more problems for students and educators than it is helping (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004).

The ESEA was implemented as a means to combat the war on poverty. It was eventually revised and superseded by the NCLBA. The NCLBA was reported to have been enacted as a means to improve educational opportunities for low income students (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004). Some of the problems with the NCLBA are that schools are required to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) criterion but they are not given proper and effective guidance or materials. There is also no established national curriculum as it is forbidden (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer, Wood, 2004).

The NCLBA also angers some parents and youth because it allows military recruiters access to 11th and 12th grade students’ names, addresses, and telephone listings when they request. Many parents and students dislike this practice because they feel that
the government is excluding their parental rights and their privacy (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004).

This type of practice defies the Privacy Act because it allows for private information on students who are mostly minors to be given out without parental permission. It fails to take such ambitious actions to lead students to college or other secondary education opportunities (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004). Even further, the military recruiters often have direct physical access to these youth. They not only show up at the schools, but they also make numerous phone calls to the parents and show up at their homes (Meier, Kohn, Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004).

The Child Welfare Act of 1983 was enacted in order to enforce protection of children. The act defines a child as a person 18 years old and under. Child welfare laws were meant to protect this vulnerable population (Stein, 2007). According to the Child Welfare Act all children have the right to protection and to a good general growing environment. This means that children too have rights should be treated equally. They should have good nutrition and health, a safe and caring environment, good education opportunities, and the right to a productive and prosperous life (Packman & Hall, 1999).

African-American Youth

The African-American youth discussed in this study include those youth from African descent. This includes those who also identify themselves as Black (Oyserman, Daphna & Harrison, 2009). According to the Institute for Social Research on Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan, Black identity involves two major components
which are connectedness and heritage. Many of the components are generally common globally (Oyserman, Daphna & Harrison, 2009).

Awareness of one’s history and heritage has long been a missing piece in the African-American community. African-American youth are empowered when they are able to conceptualize themselves in terms of a sense of connectedness with the Black community and their heritage (Oyserman, Daphna & Harrison, 2009). The connectedness component is the common experience, knowledge, and related interests and understandings. The heritage component is the ethnic, racial, physical, and historical identity (Oyserman, Daphna & Harrison, 2009).

Youth participants in this research were from an urban area in the state of Georgia. Measures of perceptual development and learning modalities were obtained from a sample population of 108 middle and high school aged urban youth consisting of males and females. Both males and females, ages ranged from 12 through 17 years old (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

The male and female youth participants who were randomly selected from a pool identified as a diverse population of Southeastern, urban American youth. They were the studied sample within a particular age group and location. These were the identified youth who were coping with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges. These four variables were important in establishing an understanding of how they impacted the learning and development processes of African-American youth (Spencer, 2006).
Learning Processes of African-American Youth

The learning process is the process of acquiring and gaining growth, knowledge, and understanding, or skill. An even broader definition of learning is described as any permanent change in behavior that occurs as a result of a practice or an experience (Willis & Hodson, 1999). The learning process makes what we teach our children even more important. It has the potential to have a lasting effect on youths' perceptions and behaviors. Youth years or maturation years are an important growth and developmental period (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

Youth now have a character base. They tend to develop extensively as individuals during this time. They become more influenced and more independent (Willis & Hodson, 1999). Most youth have preferred learning styles. This means that they normally possess particular learning styles or learning practices which they use to develop certain skills. Learning styles are characteristic attributes consisting of cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors (Keefe & Miller, 1997).

This research study explains characteristics of African-American youth learning elements. It is observed through the processes of modeling and demonstrating, physical conditioning and hands on, observation and imitation, influence and inspiration, and belief and experience (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995).

These elements were used to serve as relatively stable indicators of how the learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. These basic characteristics of Afrocentric learning stem from the Afrocentric paradigm, in particular, the concept that it takes a village to raise a child (Davis, 2008).
Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena (Molefi, 2003). In terms of actions and behaviors, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that Blackness itself is a trope of ethics. So to be Black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial domination (Molefi, 2003). The Afrocentric paradigm is important to note in order to understand basic characteristics of African-American youth. It serves clarity to understanding the history of how African Americans are viewed based on research and history (Molefi, 2003).

Cognitive characteristics are the comprehension and perceptive areas of the learning process. Affective learning is a domain of learning that is concerned with the acquisition of desired perceptions by the student (Blackmon, 2009). It is that part of student learning objectives that requires the acquisition of perceptions in the students (e.g., self confidence, responsibility, respect, dependability, and personal relations). And finally, the physiological behaviors are based on all behaviors produced and controlled by the brain (Blackmon, 2009).

Different regions of the brain are responsible for different functions and behaviors. The brain controls the entire physical and psychological functions of the body (Blackmon, 2009). The brain is affected by genetics, nutrition, and myriad environmental factors. The study of the physiological bases of behavior is biological
and/or physiological psychology. Most studies in this field relate to the function of neurotransmitters and neurons (Dictionary.com, 2009).

Many American youth have learning needs that require special educational processes. African-American youth challenged with special learning needs tend to feel increased burden and stress (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995). These educational needs are often diagnosed as some type of physical, medical, or psychological disorder. The consequences of being diagnosed with a learning disability often leaves African-American youth burdened with public and private struggles (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995).

When educators are challenged by teaching youth with learning disabilities, the educators know that they are required to make certain provisions. These provisions must be effective in order to address the learning process and to be successful. Success is determined by the assessment, diagnoses, the treatment process, the support systems, and the knowledge and ability of the educators (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995).

Researchers have reported inaccuracies in assessing and diagnosing African American youth. Outcomes of these inaccuracies have been revealed in over medicating or medicating children when they should not be medicated; placing youth in special education classes when should have been in the mainstream or regular classrooms; and ineffective treatment and teaching methodologies (Gadsden & Wagner, 1995).

On the other hand, African-American youth have reported feeling ignored and misdirected. They claim that they feel a lack of trust for authority figures that make determinations and decision concerning their well being (Gadsden & Wagner, 1995). They also claim to have felt that their educational goals lack physical education, arts,
career guidance and mentoring. They recognize that their learning process is also greatly impacted by school leadership, teachers and administrators, as well as politicians (Gadsden & Wagner, 1995).

The youth also reported that their expressions have often been misinterpreted by racial stereotypes and as having bad or criminal type behaviors. They were disappointed because discrimination and racial stereotypes not only affected their emotional being, but it greatly impacted social and economic power and development (Rome, 2004).

Evidence of stereotypical discrimination is demonstrated in employment opportunities and career progression, home ownership and fair housing, lending and investment opportunities, advanced education, and health care. Even though many of these African-American youth have received some type of state assistance, it has not alleviated poverty. Some of the youth actually reported feeling targeted due to their racial and economic status (Rome, 2004).

Some of the youth have reported that some of their frustrations can and sometimes do lead to misbehavior due to what they feel are limited alternatives and options. The youth also voiced that despite much of the progress that they have made and the positive things that they have accomplished they are still discounted and stereotyped (Rome, 2004).

The mainstream media has often focused on the negative actions and downfalls of African-American youth. Much of the negativity and failures in the African-American community stemmed from unfair distribution of power and resources (Rome, 2004). Throughout history African-American youth have been denied good quality health care. If people are not healthy, their learning and development may suffer. They have also
been denied good quality, progressive academic education and other learning opportunities (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995).

Without the proper formal and informal learning people may not thrive or achieve goals. This type of deprivation actually diminished productivity of learning and developing in African-American communities, and it further depletes hope and negatively affects society (Gadsen & Wagner, 1995). It has also prevented significant prosperity of African-American youth and it has hindered their learning and development. Therefore, it was necessary to obtain and evaluate the learning process of this population of African-American youth by studying their learning styles (Willis & Hodson, 1999).

African-American youth often reported that their learning increased when they were able to perceive or connect real life situations with what they were being taught inside and outside of the classroom. These real life stories and real life connections often came from family members, celebrities, the media, community persons, historical heroes and heroines, artists, and from other youth (Gadsden & Wagner, 1995).

Youth center workers and volunteers, tutoring programs, mentoring and internship programs, free clinics and health care centers have all been beneficial in helping build the lives of African-American youth. Applying knowledge learned in the classroom environment along with real life experiences to the development of creative interventions has also helped youth (Gadsden & Wagner, 1995).

Research points to six prominent factors in African-American youth development. These prominent factors are family, community and neighbor, social and economic status, spirituality, culture, and educational influence (Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, &
Keith, 2003). All of these factors are relative to how these youth interpret and understand love, resilience, trust, acceptance, modeling, mentoring, creativity, truth, failure, success, and other relevant components important for long term success (Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003).

Development Processes of African-American Youth

Understanding the learning and development processes of African-American youth is an important fraction in assisting them to achieve productivity and success. Child and youth development includes social, physical, educational, and emotional (Mayle, 2000). There are several areas of development that affect African-American youth particularly during their teen years. Some of those major areas of development are experienced during the growth stage known as adolescence. It is also called the age of maturity (Mayle, 2000).

The adolescence transition period sometimes brings tumultuous physical, social, and emotional changes. Adolescence begins with the onset of puberty and extends to adulthood usually spanning the years between 12 and 20 years old. Puberty is the period during which the reproductive system matures, a process characterized by a marked increase in sex hormones (Kroger, 2006).

The puberty period varies among male and female youth. This is because some children develop at different rates of maturity than others. Females often tend to develop at a faster rate than males. Puberty is also a time of building of one’s individual identity (Kroger, 2006). The physical development in African-American youth occurs in various growth spurts as well. Girls often develop faster than boys (Kroger, 2006). These
changes occur during adolescence as these young people mature into adulthood. Unless there are developmental, medical, or physical disorders, they grow several inches taller and they either gain or lose weight (Kroger, 2006). Their faces change in proportion, the genitals and secondary sex characteristics develop even if they sometimes appear underdeveloped. Muscles develop, body fat shifts to different locations, and they lose or gain fat and girth as they develop through puberty. Often hair growth, hair texture, and hair color change or increase (Kroger, 2006).

Youth normally develop an increased level of emotional and comprehensive maturity. Also, body odors develop, males often experience deepened voices, and females experience menstrual cycles (Baily & McCafferty, 2004).

Another developmental learning process of African-American youth is that they often learn harsh realities of not being accepted, being excluded, and being limited in their abilities to obtain or achieve access, resources, and goals primarily due to social, racial, and other disenfranchising efforts (Harris & Graham, 2007). African-American youth often find it very difficult, if not challenging, to always be judged through a European social construct or structural lens. This type of judgment is a set up for failure because racism remains a social ailment (Kete, 2003).

Though African Americans and Europeans share humanistic similarities, historically, African Americans have by far struggled more often. They have separate needs when assimilating into the American European culture (Woodson, 1933). They are not fairly judged or equally compared. Often whites rate, judge, demand, and propose that African Americans fully align themselves with white standards without regard to the natural differences (Woodson, 1933).
African Americans operate within an Afrocentric cosmology. The Afrocentric paradigm is based on the conscious knowledge and respect for the diverse African culture. However African Americans have been negated for their Afrocentricism (Schiele, 2000). This is demonstrated when African Americans are publicly and privately demeaned. African Americans have been excluded or made insignificant objects throughout history (Woodson, 1933).

The media often falsely and negatively portrays African Americans, which negatively impacts the broader public. Even religions and history have excluded African Americans from their teachings and pages (Woodson, 1933). This type of demeaning treatment and lack of understanding from whites can provoke frustration and anger in African Americans. African Americans often feel negatively misinterpreted by whites (Woodson, 1933).

Coping Challenges of African-American Youth

Coping challenges for African Americans are historically very extensive. They include but are not limited to methods of spiritual practice, medication, verbal expressiveness, addictions, exercise, etc. (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). African-American youth continue to have serious coping challenges due to a number of historical, racial, social and environmental challenges (Scott, 2003).

There are a variety of number of challenging and disparaging issues including social, social structural constructs, racial and class discrimination (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). Economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges greatly impact the coping abilities of African-American youth. When these youth are productive and healthy then they are
positively impacted. However when they are facing such challenges as homelessness, lack of education, unemployment, poor health, and other disparities then they are negatively impacted (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995).

Living in a society where many are quick to label and condemn continues to be a source of pain for African Americans. Newer generations of African-American youth continue to experience discrimination and deal with coping challenges (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). However, historically, it is noted that African Americans’ coping strategies have allowed them to survive and prosper despite an overwhelming amount of hardships and adversities. Research studies of negative and positive coping styles are needed for future studies (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995).

An evaluation for future research and learning needs to be accomplished for the purpose of providing more positive community support and unification. African American youth face challenges, yet have limited resources and it becomes a community issue in need of support (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). This paper will focus on the four identified challenges and the coping strategies involved in dealing these challenges while also pointing out the strengths of African-American youth participants. Attention will be given to alternative methods of interpreting behaviors previously mislabeled as ineffective (Scott, 2003).

An Afrocentric perspective will be introduced as a variable to consider when discussing strategies of coping challenges. This will be done in order to provide researchers needed information in the continued exploration of African-American youth experiencing coping challenges (Scott, 2003).
Coping with racial challenges is difficult because African Americans have a long history of suffering racial oppression in America. African-American youth continue to be the recipients of racial oppression and discrimination by being wrongfully judged based on their color and ethnicity (West, 2001). They are often negatively viewed by other races and nationalities because of the color of their skin. There is also intra-racial discrimination (West, 2001).

Negative stereotypes of African Americans have been deeply ingrained in European American culture from the Middle Passage forward. Africans had no choice when they were first forcibly brought to America in chains (Blackmon, 2009). The stereotypes serve an essential purpose in maintaining white power. This structure is meant to control and to degrade Africans and African Americans (McGee, Davis, Brisbane, Collins, Nuriddin, Irving, & Divers 2001). Whites justified European enslavement of Africans with the use of their supreme power. It caused great divide and destruction to African unity and the African Diaspora (McGee, Davis, Brisbane, Collins, Nuriddin, Irving, & Divers 2001).

Coping with racism and stereotype challenges is difficult because African-American youth remain targets of this blatant ignorance. The youth are often automatically discriminated against (West, 2001). One of the largest sources of perpetuated acts of racism against African-American youth today is racism in the media. Stereotyping in television, written media, and movies has significantly kept racism alive through more sophisticated means (Rome, 2004).

The media uses such vehicles and delivery services as divisive and racial advertisement, images, and disparaging depictions. Other sources of sharing racially
charged media are computer and internet websites, degrading music, written media, electronic communication devices, such as cell phone text, photo imaging, video conferencing, facsimile, Skype and Twitter (Rome, 2004). Mass media has a strong influence on the way the public perceives African-American communities and influences how society measures or judges social norms. Youth especially form their understanding of society while being bombarded with media messages that, unfortunately, do not always reflect reality (Rome, 2004).

Images from these mediums constantly bombard African-American youth with negative and unrealistic portrayals of true or positive African-American life. Media images too often deny the existence of African Americans in a true American society and depict the youth in a very derogatory manner (Rome, 2004). These types of continuous negative images and depictions are often deceptive and convincing to those youth who believe them. These images may be especially convincing to those individuals who already perceive African-American youth are nothing but dangerous, lazy, nonproductive members of society (Joyrich, 2009).

Another coping issue is when African-American youth are negatively targeted and mistreated by entities such as law enforcement and the justice system. African-American youth are often denied respect and fair treatment throughout communities (Joyrich, 2009). African-American youth are often denied quality education and needed educational supplies and materials. They are often denied government assistance (Joyrich, 2009). They are denied viable employment, healthcare, and affordable housing; denied quality nutrients, and products specific to African-American needs. Youth experience lack of quality community supports and
mentoring programs as well (Joyrich, 2009). All of these maladies and disparities stem from the long heartbreaking history that has marred the African-American community. The results are hurt, pain, disrespect, distrust, continuous social struggles, anger, and overwhelming injustices (West, 2001).

African-American youth must receive positive influences and changes in order to become enlightened and to make progress and to excel. Fair and equal treatment must also be received (West, 2001). Some of the laws, policies, covert and overt treatment of African Americans overall have changed because of the Civil Rights Movement. However, many of the ideologies and social structures as well as beliefs about African Americans have only become more modern and sophisticated (Grofman, 2000).

There were some Americans who thought that racism has ended especially since the election of President Barrack Obama. However racism and even slavery continues in many pockets of the nation and throughout the world and it even still exists in certain pockets in America (Jones & King, III, 2009). Likewise, the media has commercialized a façade that racism in America has ended citing the election of President Obama. However, on the other end of that spectrum were the racist deliveries from the media that bombards the public nationwide and abroad (Jones & King, III, 2009).

Social Challenges

African-American youth face many social challenges. For the purpose of this study, social challenges are referred to as those certain societal demands and trends that challenge or undermine humanness (Day, 2000). They cause unwarranted and unnecessary stress, create social hardships, or promote division among individuals and
groups. These youth expressed experiencing feelings of isolation, segregation and separation, racism, ignorance, feelings of being singled out or ignored, and unhealthy relationship issues (Halpern, 1995).

These youth express experiencing feelings of isolation, segregation, anger, depression, and separation. Some of their social challenges are pelted with racism, ignorance, feelings of being singled out or ignored and unhealthy relationship issues (Halpern, 1995). Socializing is an important part of adolescent growth for African-American youth. It is a formative part of their development and learning processes (Halpern, 1995). Socializing is a way for these youth to express themselves and to gain insight about themselves and others. Youth are able to obtain and build relationships and social networks (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Youth are further able to adapt to extended community members and associates, to gain support systems, and to surround themselves with sources of protection. This is a time when youth may gain new independence and confidence or experience self esteem frustrations (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Speaking of extended community members, African-American youth have often been a part of an extended family. This paradigm is from an old African proverb better known as it takes a village to raise a child (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Urban African-American youth have joined such extended family collectives as church groups, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, YWCA, organized sports teams, and other social groups. These collective groups often offer a safe place for youth, counseling and guidance, donations, academic support, skills training, and i: allows the youth to grow
and develop in a healthy environment and work on goal achievement (http://www.bgcma.org, 2009).

African-American urban youth gain a sense of acceptance, belonging, worthiness, empowerment and knowledge of their unique and rich African history. These youth gain a sense of self pride, confidence, dignity, and unity which some recognize as a high sense of self esteem (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). However, from an Afrocentric perspective, European theories of self esteem are different from the self actualized personal self Afrocentric paradigm within the African Diaspora. The Afrocentric self is derived from accepted, loving, and motivated membership within the African community (Nobles, 1991).

Socializing helps these youth to express themselves within their peer groups in ways that they may resist in other environments. African-American youth often first seek love, guidance, acceptance, approval, and support within their homes and communities (Nobles, 1991). Reciprocation is imperative for their healthy development and knowledge of good socializing strategies. Often when youth are turned away, ignored or treated poorly they resort to poor decision making and misguided thinking (Nobles, 1991).

A frustrating part of socializing for African-American youth is that it is also a time when they are bombarded with discrimination. They learn more about the world, other racial groups and, personalities. However, they also experience racism, gender issues and sexuality, strained relationships, decision struggles experience, and other forms of discrimination (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).
This is especially important to remember because individual behaviors do not exist in a vacuum. Youth usually reveal their personalities while in their individual social context (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004). This also means that youth involvement, emotional well being, and educational performance are ultimately developed and maintained within his or her peer networks. The peer network also includes family, and educational influences. If any negative individual behavior changes are desired, preventive interventions must occur within the youths’ social involvement (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004).

Some of the primary components of change would begin with new and better resources. Such resources include positive social networks, social supports, and the social learning processes (Aronson, Wilson, Pratkanis, & Akert, 2004). In the context of the Afrocentric paradigm, when African-American youth become socialized they become more creative, aware and in tune with their environment. Even as their individualized self increases, they continue to seek direction and guidance through various sources (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

There are at least two underlying variables that affect the socializing process—the sociological and psychological processes. The psychological process occurs within the individual and includes perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, and emotions (Day, 2000). Sociological processes occur primarily within the peer group. These processes include a characterization of how the group members respond to their peers and their environment (Eggert, 1987; Eggert, Seyl, & Nicholas, 1990).

The influence of the group is known primarily due to observed differences between individuals when they are alone and when they are in a group. There are things
that individuals will do in a group, but will not do when they are alone (Eggert, 1987; Eggert, Seyl, & Nicholas, 1990).

Many of these youth reported that they socialize in formal and informal groups. They often socialize in school, at church or within church fellowship groups, shopping, attending parties, talking on the phone, on the computer, or at a central hang out spot (Oyserman & Harrison, 2009). Minor activities they claimed to have engaged in were gossiping, playing sports and games, doing activities within their family and extended family units, and with their friends in their neighborhoods. Some reported having jobs where they socialized with coworkers during and outside of work (Oyserman & Harrison, 2009).

The youth also reported being involved in leisure individual activities. These were activities such as watching TV or videos, reading, playing video games, eating, resting, homework, electronically communicating, etc. (Oyserman & Harrison, 2009). On the other hand some of the youth admitted to more questionable behaviors and activities. These were activities such as trying illegal or control substances, smoking cigarettes, engaging in sexual activities, bullying, teen pregnancy fighting, and hanging with the wrong crowd, and other overly aggressive and risky behaviors (Oyserman & Harrison, 2009).

Certain social trends and demographic patterns continually influence the increased rates of crime and victimization of African-American youth. Some of these trends include unemployment or underemployment, limited education, crime, poverty, single parent families, teen pregnancies, child care, formal and informal adoptions, foster care, child abuse, illness, and poor housing patterns (Day, 2000).
Changes in the expansions of urban areas creates increases in child poverty and the homelessness problem beyond the crisis that already exist. This only exacerbates problems with access to greatly needed resources (Day, 2000). Greatly needed resources include healthcare to address issues such as teen pregnancy, HIV/Aids, affordable pharmaceuticals, and treatment clinics. Problems with restricted accessibility to career opportunities and education, and reductions in services for families in need, have all been found to affect the number and composition of those social trends of African-American youth (Hill & Billingsley, 1993).

These trends also affect youth who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Early on in the 21st century launched the onset of the next worse financial crisis since the Great Depression in of the 1930s (Hill & Billingsley, 1993). Several events contributed to the financial crisis including the 911 tragedy, the Katrina Storms, the gasoline crisis, the Iraqi War, and the housing foreclosure crisis. These crisis forced Americans to continue to face many longstanding social challenges (Marable & Clarke, 2008).

While the aforementioned were some of the larger scaled national crisis, they have sent an astonishing shock wave that greatly affected many oppressed African-American youth who are already dealing with adversities. These youth often struggle with poverty, racism, broken families, and other social challenges that prevent or delay them in attaining high level, life sustainable goals (Ginwright, 2009).

There is a great lack of social and preventive programs to support these youth and assist in guiding them in the right direction. Sadly, this type of suffering leads to intra-racial conflicts and results in destruction as well (Ginwright, 2009). There are also
personal challenges these youth experience that over flow into social challenges. Some of the personal challenges are immediate health needs, identity, familial, psychological, self esteem, and nutrition issues (Ginwright, 2009).

All of this is important to understand because African-American youth remain one of the most disenfranchised groups in America. This disenfranchisement appears to be a perpetual syndrome in the African-American community (U.S. Census Report on Housing, Poverty, Healthcare, & Employment, 2009).

During the adolescence stages group belonging becomes a central theme for all youth. Youth often gather in social groups looked upon as cliques and extended family. Social development among African-American youth is important to their growth as well as their social and overall progress as well (Newman & Newman, 1999; Poston, 1990). It contributed insight to both positive and negative influences of how African-American youth socialize through networks, relationships, skills and educational opportunities, community involvement, and familial influences. Racial pride, solidarity and support for the Civil Rights Movement are important parts of the socialization experience (Morris, 1956).

Only in recent decades have African Americans begun to openly and increasingly identify with their African roots in a more informed manner due to technology, better educational opportunities, and travel. Much of the open public recognition and appreciation came about due to a shift in public recognition (Billingsley, 1992). African-American youth received more exposure to true African history, positive public role models, artists and music. African-American families united in support of the Presidential election (Billingsley, 1992).
African-American influence is important to the African Diaspora in America. Some families even want their children to learn an African language, and a social consciousness for the people of Africa has developed (Billingsley, 1992). Some react to their environment by reducing efforts to get ahead. Others respond to work collectively with other group members to make the system more open to opportunities for advancement (Neighbors, et al., 1996).

Social networks among African-American youth, particularly those in urban areas, end to establish their fundamental and basic characteristics. They gain friendships and associations with community memberships, academic education, as well as other learning opportunities (Patillo-McCoy, 2000). They develop ideologies within their environment and the world around them. Various information sharing in formal and informal social groups, such as schools, churches, job facilities, sports teams, and after-school activities programs are all advantageous to youth maturity and development (Patillo-McCoy, 2000).

It has generally been assumed that African-American youth in urban, inner city, or low income communities do not participate in civic activities and that they have a lack of political awareness. This generalization is unfounded as evidence by events such as the Civil Rights Movements, as well as the Jena Six case, the Genarlow Wilson case, and the President Obama campaign and election (Patillo-McCoy, 2000). In fact, African-American youth have begun to re-engage in many different organized groups and civic activities and in larger numbers. The political and economic train wreck left by the Bush administration sent out a message of urgency to the African-American community to get involved (Patillo-McCoy, 2000).
These social movements and organized activities included community organizing, developing petitions and even expressing social and political ideas. African-American youth participated in organized activities through music, dance, videos, internet supports, advertisements, and spoken word (Patillo-McCoy, 2000). African-American youth participated in the research because they saw influential images of themselves and the potential positive and negative aspects of their future. They were motivated to stand up for just and worthy causes that would have great impacts on their lives and the future of America but they also expressed feelings of worry and disappointments (Danziger & Lin, 2000).

The social challenges studied in this research found that the youth were particularly affected by three specific social issues. The three primary issues were with their feelings of isolation, feeling that they were heard when they had something to convey, and they expressed concerns about segregation and racism.

Some of the youth felt that they could often hold conversations with their friends about and family members about their concerns but that they did not feel that they were taken seriously. They also stated that their friends and family members were often limited in what they could assist with when it came to resolving more important problems.

They stated that on the other hand many of their concerns that dealt with larger scaled issues regarding their future and livelihood were overlooked unless a major problem resulted and a powerful representative(s) became involved. The youth expressed that they often felt ignored or overlooked by adults who were in charge of making life decisions for them.
The researcher discovered that the youth were well informed and aware of much of the social issues that had caused social and environmental problems that affected their daily lives as well as the issues that lead up to the recession. When asked what they felt would help resolve some of their social issues the youth stated that they needed more mentoring programs and access to better opportunities such as better education programs, career training, and productive ways to make good money.

**Economic Challenges**

Economic challenges are those issues and situations which cause hindrances or slowdowns in the ability to obtain desired or needed goods and services. In recent years, economic challenges for African-American youth have increased due to the national recession (DiNitto, 2000). African-American youth have been set back and limited by racial disparities that cripple or diminish economic opportunities for them. African Americans are the population at the bottom of the economic power structure (Murray, 2004).

According to Hwesu Murray (2004), African Americans comprise more than 12 percent of the American population but only earn less than 1 percent of the American gross domestic product. This disparity gravely affects the African-American community (Murray, 2004). The recession has worsened and already damaged struggle for African Americans. Several of the issues that worsened were the lack of affordable housing, homelessness, gentrification, teen pregnancies, poverty, unemployment and limited employment opportunities (Conrad, 2005).
There were also hardships in the social service systems. There was loss of funding, over representation in the foster care and social service systems, lack of subsidized housing, lack of quality health care and poor nutrition (Conrad, 2005). One of the major problems with neglecting low income, urban youth who are struggling too economically is that there is a tendency to gain goods and services by any means possible in order to survive. This may even include youth gaining goods and services through illegal practices to include violence and delinquency (United States Department of Justice, 2010).

African-American youth need positive role models and supervised activities to help them prosper. Active positive involvement will prevent lack of positive and available role models, broken families, limited support systems, criminal activities, worry and depression (Conrad, 2005). Recent research reported a rise in over representation in the prison system, and lack of formal education for African-American youth. Since their arrival—centuries ago—African Americans have greatly contributed to the American economy but the economic return has not been reciprocated nor has it been fairly distributed across racial, gender, or class demographics (Conrad, 2005).

In 2007, when reports hit the air waves that the nation was in a recession and seemingly spiraling into a depression, thousands of African-American families were gravely affected. This recession was not an equal opportunity victimizer (Ratner, 2008). According to the Economic Policy Institute (2009), four southern cities make the list as the most impoverished American cities. These cities include: Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Albany, Georgia; Macon, Georgia; and Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Per capita, in
these cities, incomes are between $18,000 and $23,000, but the bottom 20% are bringing in between $7,500 and $8,500 per year.

The recession definitely worsened inequalities in the economy for most communities as the unemployment soared. Nationally unemployment was twice as high for African Americans as it was for whites. Also, a July 2009 Georgia Department of Labor report stated that the impact of the economic downturn results from December 2007 through May 2009 showed the number of Georgia’s African Americans who were collecting unemployment increased from 16,120 to 33,197 percent (DOL.gov, 2009).

During the same timeframe, while white males were reported as having an increase from 16,581 to 51,562 amounting to a 211 percent increase. Keep in mind that these numbers include only the reported amount of documented males who were collecting not the ones who were not accounted for (DOL.gov, 2009). Unemployment also greatly affects those who cannot collect unemployment because their benefits have run out or they are not eligible. Therefore, the actual unemployment stats are not accurate (DOL.gov, 2009).

There were people who were homeless, relocated, and unaccounted for regarding accountability. Those individuals were not collecting unemployment benefits and the actual unemployment rates were likely much higher (DOL.gov, 2009). Of course, the high rates of the economy hard hit the African-American community and African-American youth were grossly affected as well due to diminished daily needs. These youth reported that they had experienced fewer positive activities to engage in due to the recession (DOL.gov).
Youth reported that negative influences excelled due to economic problems such as layoffs, foreclosures, gas prices, health issues, heightened food prices, education fees, lack of employment opportunities, family struggles, etc. There was also an overwhelming increase in usage of food stamps and community food banks (DOL.gov, 2009). Youth stated that their families were directly impacted by these challenges and set backs. Additionally, this time of crises had impacted family stressors that caused family members to relocate, to become homeless, or to even separate or divorce (Isidore, 2009).

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs reported that homelessness skyrocketed as a result of the economy and dishonest lending and banking practices. A recent Georgia Point in Time Study stated that service providers were serving record numbers of homeless people and that more than 75,000 individuals were experiencing homelessness in 2008 (Georgia Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

They found that more than 60 percent of the homeless population resided in households with minor children and most were homeless for the first time in their lives. Homelessness was not just a Metro Atlanta problem, but it extended across the entire state of Georgia to homeless families and individuals in all 159 counties (GA Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

The poor economy had catapulted many of the African-American families into poverty. For research participants and their families who were already struggling in poverty, they stated that their struggles often seemed even more frustrating and hopeless (Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, Inc., 2009; Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2009).
African-American youth were hit hard by the effects of foreclosures, lay offs, cut
backs, diminished education funds, school closures, youth center closures, and other
business closures, etc. In January 2009, more than 2,000 individuals in 23 Georgia
counties were reported as either homeless or displaced in motels or on friends’ sofas
(Georgia Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

Of those 600 individuals, around 30 percent were children under the age of 18.
The Georgia Department of Education, which also tracks displaced students housing
status, reported that in the 2007-2008 school years there were 22,888 homeless school
children in Georgia’s public schools (Georgia Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

The evidence showed that these young people experience struggles, hardships,
and vulnerabilities. Sometimes vulnerabilities turn into inappropriate and aggressive
behaviors such as teen truancy, pregnancy, fight, stealing, etc. (Georgia Coalition for the
Homeless, 2009). Males and females alike often became promiscuous in search of
attempts to fill emotional voids and losses. Some of the voids and losses include feelings
of abandonment, wanting to be accepted, searching for love, and wanting gifts and
services (DiNitto, 1999).

Vulnerabilities also stemmed increases in poor recreational behaviors such as
delinquency, underage alcohol consumption, and illegal drug usage. As an increase in
poor recreational practices took place, teens often sought out opportunities for relief and
distressing while making money and employment opportunities dwindled (Van Pelt &
Hancock, 2008).

Rage, criminal activities, and violence became a major method of releasing anger.
The endemic nature of this violence and the exposure to community violence experienced
by many youth, especially those residing in inner city neighborhoods, has been well reported and recorded (DiNitto, 1999). The exposure of African-American youth to community violence has been associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Much of this violence stems from actions which include triggers which were consistent of recurrent and intrusive thoughts and restricted or blunted affect (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

African-American youth often experience anxiety, depression, aggression, social withdrawal and avoidance, or compensatory behaviors that affect academic performance and social functioning as a result. African-American youth living in poverty especially experience increased feelings of distress and PTSD (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). The effects of continuous exposure to violence may be additive, it may increase the likelihood of developmental harm, and it may promote maladaptive behaviors. When responding to exposure to violence, maladaptive behaviors may also function as psychological protective strategies of coping such as emotional numbing, addiction, criminal activities, violence, and hypervigilance (DiNitto, 1999).

These psychological effects may result in loss of interest in daily functioning, the ability to concentrate on school work and education, ignoring or over reacting to painful distracters, and physical and psychological health issues. Often destructive behaviors become common place (DiNitto, 1999).

When appropriate prevention and intervention measures fail to take place, not only the youth but also those around them suffer disparities and damages. The outcome of this neglect may have long term pathologic consequences (DiNitto, 1999). When children worry about problems in their communities and homes and if they are deprived
of basic needs then concentration and education may become stressful and unimportant.

In August 2009 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that the African-American community had been especially hard hit with excessively high rates of unemployment now at 16.5 percent nationwide, more than 5 percent above the overall figure (DOL.gov, 2009).

The unemployment rate for whites was 7 percent. This means that employment and other positive productive activities for African-American youth were no longer available causing even greater pressure on this population (DOL.gov, 2009). The recession has had a broad-based chain reaction. It not only affects those who belong in the working class or the generation involved in labor (Ahlers, 2009).

Children and the youth were affected by the economic recession and poverty. The depression and frustration that came along with the economic strain sometimes triggered youth to behave in an age appropriate manner (Ahlers, 2009).

Their behaviors were often altered whenever they were generously tasked with additional responsibilities. Responsibilities such as taking care family members, assisting with various household chores and errands, and regularly attending school and keeping up academically are often considered standard Afrocentricisms (Nobles, 1991).

Yet, often, to obtain economic survival, youth find themselves having to work to contribute to the family. Youth often helped pay bills and feed their families, hustled to obtain necessities for basic survival needs, and attempted to maintain a social life which were additional stressors (Freeman & Holzer, 1986).

According to the United Nations World Youth Report, youth from ages 18 to 24 are 18 percent of the world population. These youth were also 25 percent of the working
class population (Youth and the United Nation, 2009). However, youth are two to three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. The situation was particularly critical for young women, who suffer higher rates of unemployment than are young men in the majority of economies (Youth and the United Nations, 2009).

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), most young people who enter the workforce with limited prospects, limited resources and information, and underdeveloped and inadequate education, end up unfulfilled and in low paying jobs (ILO.com, 2009). This is because they lack viable education, experience, and skills. Further, without viable education they had high probability of facing unemployment whether it was short term or long term intermittent spells of unemployment and low wage jobs (ILO.com).

In a national report African-American youth living in poverty stated that they often felt discriminated against specifically because they were poor and Black. They were often refused employment, respect, access, advancement and opportunities, fair treatment, discriminated against because of their social and economic status, and missed out on other opportunities (ILO.com).

Society’s perspective about the link between poverty and crime generally singles out poor and low income African-American and Hispanic youth. This perspective is a misconception because although crime is often committed by some who are impoverished, all of those who are poor do not commit crimes (Day, 2000).

In reality, numerous media and research reports have revealed that some of America’s wealthiest individuals and some of the once top fortune 500 companies had some of the most villainous and sophisticated criminals known. Living in poverty can
often be the root of victimization when dealing with an unjust justice system where poor people are often further victimized (Williams, Kjonstad, & Peter, 2004). However, wealthy people are able to afford the financial costs legal representation to maneuver them out of legal constraints and demands. Other misconceptions include assessments that people of color are automatically more likely to commit crime because of the color of their skin rather than their surroundings and upbringing (Williams, Kjonstad, & Peter, 2004).

Many of these misconceptions may lead to adverse effects of racism and bigotry. Anger and frustration can be sparked if there is conflict between the haves and the have nots (Williams, Kjonstad, & Peter, 2004). Understanding and solving the root of the problem between poverty and crime may be to first look at other variables such as environmental influences and constraints. Social structures, personal and individual beliefs, and classifications of crime are all influences of the economy as well (Williams, Kjonstad, & Peter, 2004). When these issues are addressed, and new implementations and changes are made, African-American youth may have better opportunities. Further research may encourage everyone to take pride in their neighborhoods and become productive participants in their communities (Short, 1997).

Equal opportunities must be prevalent and obtainable by all. This may begin by engaging in equal distribution of goods and services and provide more equality and fairness in the work force for all Americans (Short, 1997). The economic challenges studied in this research found that the youth were particularly affected by three specific economic issues. The three primary issues were with their perspective on whether there
was currently more poverty than before, whether their parents had money to spend, and whether they felt unemployment was a real problem.

The youth expressed that though poverty had been a big problem throughout history, they felt that it had never been as bad during their life time until current. They assessed that poverty had grown to such astronomical levels, it resulted in a global crisis and a national recession. Most of the youth agreed that their parents had much less money to spend due to layoffs, unemployment, and the recession. They also agreed that their parents discussed cutting back on leisure spending due to the cost of living and fear of current and future financial challenges or possibilities.

All of the youth agreed whether they or family members were employed or not that unemployment was a real problem. They stated that they had studied the national unemployment rates in school as well as learned about it in the media since it had either directly or indirectly affected their families.

Cultural Challenges

Cultural challenges are the demanding, derogatory, or negative perspectives and reactions to the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group such as the youth culture, the drug culture, and the hip hop culture. Culture attributes or indications from an Afrocentric perspective for African-American youth have a strong foundation in development or improvement of the mind by education or training (Kitwana, 2003).

Research participants explained that they mostly experience cultural challenges from generational communications and understandings (older vs. young) and also other
African-American youth tend to create trends that define current popular culture such as in fashion, music, lyrics, slang, art, writings, and other current styles (Smitherman, 1999). The development or improvement of the mind by education or training foundation stems from the African term Maat. The Maat is the universal principal that governs balance and order (Amen, 2003). The Maat is the African Kamitic teachings that govern and influence people lives. It includes spiritual, educational, community, family, nutritional, physical and other teachings to behold a life of prosperity and continuing the circle of Maat teachings. The Maat holds to seven cardinal virtues which are truth, justice, compassion, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order. These virtues are to be used and practiced daily in every aspect of rearing children in the African Diaspora (Amen, 2003).

African-American youth face cultural challenges that many researchers believe stem from their being brutalized and stolen from not only their families but from their continents, placed in extreme anguish and forcefully taken to another country, and gravely suffering through centuries of slavery. Even after the passage of the Thirteen Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865, when legal slavery ended, African Americans continued to suffer torturous white resistance (Asante, 2007).

African Americans still deal with racism on a daily basis. Urban African-American youth experience additional setbacks that have hindered them from steady, gainful empowerment that has caused another problem (Asante, 2007). These youth exhibit problematic behaviors based on psychosocial factors. Some of these behaviors exhibit such as negative influences as poor self esteem, lack of problem solving competence, dysfunctional family functioning (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).
African Americans have historically maintained strong spirituality and religious practices often centered on the Maat belief system of truth, balance, order, law, morality, and justice. Maat standards and practices are beneficial to rearing African-American children as well (Amen, 2003).

The Afrocentric practices and spiritual connections have remained prominent in the African-American community because spirituality plays an important role on meditation and healing. Though ritualistic and religious practices vary, the ultimate goal is that one gains faith and salvation through belief in The Higher Being (Canda & Furman, 1999).

In African traditional life, spirituality is the foundation of one’s being. A believer’s destiny is bound up in spiritual pursuits from the time he is born until the time he dies (Canda & Furman, 1999). Cultural challenges for African-American youth are different and often worse than those challenges of other races in America due to inequality. Much of the disenfranchisement is formed out of racism, stereotypes, and fear (Nobles, 1985).

The fact that African Americans continue to fight for justice, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness remains an ongoing cultural struggle. For African-American youth to be established they must have equal rights and feel culturally sound (Nobles, 1985). Although the Civil Rights Movement forced laws to change and greatly improved the lives of not only African Americans but all Americans, there is still much more work to be done to dissolve racism and discrimination. Unfortunately the inequalities and ignorant ideologies and practices continue to prevail in many individuals, institutions, and communities across the nation (Sugrue, 2009).
The twenty-first century cultural challenges that African-American youth face consist of a variety of past and present challenges. These are challenges that include dealing with racism and societal stereotypes, developing healthy means to handle the results of feelings of anger and distress, and establishing a strong identity that gives life meaning and the ability to withstand stress (Wilson & Stith 1998).

Too often, racial and ethnic disparities in mental health are not understood by many practitioners and others in the mental health and medical field. Lots of cultural differences that are standard behaviors for African-American youth are misdiagnosed and regarded as misbehaviors and mental illnesses (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

This is not to say that all Black or African-American youth behave in the same manner. However most African-American youth have experienced common themes or have had similar experiences (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Some practitioners fail to consider environmental, historical, and other discriminatory pressures and realities that African-American youth face daily. Incorrect medical and mental health diagnoses and treatment tend to give practitioners a cookie cutter style of labeling, diagnosing, and treating clients (Hollar, 2001).

Therapists need to understand the impact of racism today as well as the legacy of the slavery experience. The strictly European and cookie cutter types of treatment further exacerbate the problems and issues, and make cultural and historical awareness too easily ignored by treatment agents (Hollar, 2001). Therapeutic bias is often based on speculations, assumptions, and community intolerance toward African-American youth. When the European treatment models are applied to Africana and minority individuals with mental illness clients are often met with cookie cutter treatments (Snowden, 2003).
Some of the most reported cultural challenges that African-American youth experience are racial discrimination, lack of education, acculturation, identity issues, assimilation, employment opportunities, roles and responsibilities, and establishing healthy relationships (Joseph, 1995). Additional discriminations include: misunderstanding of cultural history, values, and differences; feeling ignored or invisible; trust issues; single parented and broken familial ties; stereotypes and stigmas; career survival development; health and treatment disparities, including sex education; and the overrepresentation of African-American youth in the justice system (Joseph, 1995).

There are several other social issues which African-American youth cope with which often causes rifts, frustrations, and other interruptions and setbacks. They all impact the social development and self-esteem of youth as well (Hollar, 2001). As previously mentioned, too often, racial and ethnic disparities in mental health are not readily understood and therefore too easily ignored by treatment agents. Therapists and others whom are closely involved in the African-American community need to understand the impact of racism today as well as the legacy of the slavery experience (Hollar, 2001).

Unfortunately, all of the work that the Civil Rights Movement has accomplished thus far still has not changed the ignorant ideologies and practices of all Americans. Inequality continues to prevail in many individuals, institutions, and communities across the nation (Kitwana, 2003).

Daily challenges facing African-American youth include dealing with racism and societal stereotypes, drugs and alcohol, promiscuity, finishing school, pregnancy
prevention and healthy means of coping. All of these greatly impact and influence the economic power in the African-American community (Wilson & Stith 1998).

It is also important to handle the results of feelings of anger and distress. More meaningful and constructive is to establish a strong identity that gives life meaning and the ability to withstand stress (Wilson & Stith 1998).

The cultural challenges studied in this research found that the youth were particularly affected by three specific cultural issues. The three primary issues were with their feelings of whether they thought that people look down on African Americans, whether they believed that education was as important as it was before, and if they believed that a hip hop lifestyle was currently the most important thing to young people.

By far, the majority of the youth agreed that people do look down on African Americans in a negative manner. They stated that the negative views of African Americans resulted from disenfranchisement, stereotypes, discrimination, and racism. The youth expressed that they felt education was important to them, but they often feel duped by the education system due to the poor leadership. They also expressed that they felt that there was no guarantee that an extensive education would guarantee them a prosperous career.

The researcher also discovered that the youth considered the hip hop lifestyle to be more than music and entertainment. They expressed that the hip hop lifestyle as important because it represents a social movement. The hip hop lifestyle represents a movement that is like many other movements. It came along as a way for young people to be creative, expressive, productive, inclusive, stand up for social causes, brings people
together, breaks down barriers, make jobs and money, become educated, and fight injustices.

People often frown on hip hop because they tend to largely associate hip hop only with thuggish mannerisms such as gangster rap, gang banging, drugs, and other criminal activity. However, hip hop has addressed issues that many of the previous movements addressed such as equality, civil rights, freedom to express, creating jobs and careers, and promoting effective communications.

Many of the hip hop moguls such as Fifty Cent, TI, Russell Simmons, Rev Run from Run DMC, Missy Elliott, Sean Diddy Combs, Wyclef Jean, Snoop Dog, Jermaine Dupree, Queen LaTifah, MC Lyte, etc. These artists and more have all made millions of dollars, given back to numerous communities, are taking care of their families, have launched several major international businesses, and have provided insight on the road to becoming successful.

Some of the artists came from nearby communities and grew up with similar backgrounds. Many of them have multi-faceted careers outside of being a hip hop artist. Their hip hop lifestyle also includes tv, movies and theater, author, philanthropist, ambassador, and spokesperson.

**Self Esteem Challenges**

The dictionary describes self esteem as a realistic respect for or favorable impression of oneself; self respect. The dictionary further describes self esteem as having an inordinately or exaggeratedly favorable impression of oneself (dictionary.com, 2009). Self esteem issues are often challenges with which people often tussle, due to
various growth, learning, self image, social status, and disenfranchisement. Good, positive self esteem is valuable to the spirit and character of African-American youth because it promotes their drive and motivation (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Good self esteem is important for African-American youth. High self esteem motivates the youth and helps them have a sense of pride, maintain good coping skills, and have determination (Scott, 1997). Healthy self esteem gives one the courage to try new things and the power to believe in oneself. Self esteem is also important for African-American youth as it leads to empowerment, respect, and it encourages motivation even when youth make mistakes (Scott, 1997).

When youth have good self esteem and self respect, they usually respect other youth and adults. This helps to avoid destructive behaviors and aggressive conflict with others (Scott, 1997). An interesting observation about African-American youth is documented in a book titled Social Work with Multicultural Youth by Diane De Anda. De Anda stated that often Black youth perceive themselves as outside of the American society and not a part of it (De Anda, 2003).

De Anda’s observation supports the notion that African-American youth are marginalized. As part of the group process it is important to focus on encouraging the African-American adolescent self esteem (De Anda, 2003). For centuries, African-American youth have struggled with issues of self esteem stemming from slavery. From a young age, Africans in America were reduced to being brutally and fatally treated and reduced to inhumaness by whites (De Anda, 2003).

During slavery very extreme measures of physical and psychological assaults were thrust on African-American youth. These extreme measures of abuse were used as
methods and means of forced control through constant isolation, limitation, fear, and threats (De Anda, 2003). African-American youth living in slavery were not authorized to attend school and receive formal education. They were not allowed freedom and liberty nor did they have human rights or civil rights (De Anda, 2003).

Slaves did not have human rights because they were not recognized as humans only property. They were prevented from social travel, interacting with other youth to build relationships and alliances, and any type of freedom and liberty (De Anda, 2003). They were often referred to and called painful and ugly names to further destroy any type of character, self pride, or hope. Enslaved African-American youth were forced to work long, hard hours under all types of conditions while facing the daily abuses they suffered (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

The horrific images of slavery continue to emotionally and mentally haunt African-American youth today as they continue to be stunted by the discrimination. Therefore, healthy self esteem among the African-American youth was often found to be low or minimal (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Throughout the decades the African-American community has made great strides to fight against injustices and to overcome many of these adversities and they continue to fight today. Although African-American youth have many opportunities and many more privileges than those early Africans, who had extremely limited human rights, they still identify with those bonds from slavery and those who suffered in the Civil Rights Movement (Morris, 1956). However, issues of self esteem should be approached by instilling self respect, self value, and respect for ones community. Families and
communities should jointly encourage and support these youth by effectively guiding them toward positive goals and trust (Scott, 1997).

It is imperative to expose the African-American to positive role models who have made significant contributions to community. It is also important to provide mentoring, instruction, and guidance to demonstrate how to be successful (Scott, 1997). Several of the youth and the other participants in this research reported that even though they were raised in a loving environment at home, were involved in organized religion, were good students, were not trouble makers in the community, were being rewarded and praised for their successful accomplishments, they still faced daily acts of racism, rejection, and discrimination (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Additionally, they still felt that they were living in a world that did not see them as intellectual, worthy, respectful, trusting, attractive or even equal to other nationalities, especially to whites. The testimonies and emotions of their stereotypical experiences were evidence of their being a by-product of the past and a threat to the future (Scott, 1997).

According to Daryl Michael Scott (1997), these types of self esteem challenges greatly damage what he calls the Black psyche. African Americans often straddle between the two separate worlds of Black and white. Scott’s studies of the Black psyche explored the effects of the fear and hate that African Americans experience. Scott also wrote about the damaging results of hate and fear being central problems affecting the self esteem of African-American youth (Scott, 1997).

Through research and direct interviews, the objective was to identify the coping skills which enabled African-American youth to survive, excel, and succeed
while dealing with and overcoming these challenges. The next step was then to contrast and compare these experiences, characteristics, and strategies with today’s youth from a sample population (Sells, 2004).

This information about the effects and influences of African-American youth coping with cultural challenges may contribute to increased knowledge and understanding of the challenges and behaviors. The information may benefit practitioners, educators, and future researchers alike (Sells, 2004).

The self esteem challenges studied in this research found that the youth were particularly affected by three specific self esteem issues. The three primary issues are: Do young people believe it is important for young people to have self respect?; Do they believe that young people use illegal substances to boost their image?; and Is what they believe about themselves important for others to know?

Most of the youth agreed that it was important for them to have self respect. They believed that self respect builds and maintains their stability and confidence. Many of the youth agreed that using illegal drugs was a means to escape reality and worries, fit in with peers, and to boost image for those who behave in insecure and immature manners. The youth also emphasized that illegal drugs were used to cope with living in poor and depressed environments, as well as a source of income. The youth expressed that, though a positive self esteem is good to have, they are not often focused on self esteem. Their focus was on survival and getting through the day.
Theoretical Framework

Recent research has consistently reported that persistently higher rates of poverty, brought on by the recession. In the past ten years there have been numerous global and national disasters that have greatly affected the African-American community. They have increased the detrimental effects on African-American youth more than other racial youth populations (Halpern, 1995).

The learning and development processes of African-American youth who are coping with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges were also greatly impacted by the high poverty rates. Their emotional functioning, transitory, or physical problems that were brought on by poverty only caused greater feelings of hopelessness and disparity (Scott, 2003).

These disparities often lead to unconscionable predicaments ending in the more physical or harsher side of poverty. Poverty is an issue that affects thousands of African-American youth (Halpern, 1995). Living in poverty often means surviving under very inhumane conditions means broken communities, families, and individuals ravished by intentional rejection, negative targeting, segregation, hatred, and social injustices. African-American youth who experienced both types of poverty generally progressed significantly less than those who had never previously experienced poverty (Halpern, 1995).

Still, the effects of stereotyping, self esteem, and discrimination on the psychological well being generally continued to be a source of contention and controversy because it is often overlooked by those in power. Those in power only
wish to hide and/or ignore the bad images of the impoverished communities in America (Giroux, 1998).

The current representation of African-American youth needs to be prioritized as an instrumental and valued element of the broader struggle. Concentrated efforts should be to provide, protect, and empower these youth (Giroux, 1998).

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the child centered learning and development theory by combining Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, Miller, 2003). The study also utilized the concepts of Afrocentricism, Black Feminist Thought, and the Maat model was also utilized. The Maat model was important in framing the Afrocentric perceptions of the research study (Amen, 2003).

The demographics of this study examined the coping, learning, and development processes of African-American youth between twelve and seventeen years old who are coping with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges. Jean Piaget’s Personality Theory and Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory were also used as part of the research design (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003).

It was equally important to incorporate Janice Hale’s model on Learning While Black Theory; and Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. Hale’s Learning While Black research was a great asset in providing culturally relative demographic information (Ellis, Abrams, & Abrams, 2008).

Another Afrocentric model used was by Letha A. See. Her perspective on African-American human behavior in the social environment lends great insight to
this dichotomy of African-American youth development (Ellis, Abrams, & Abrams, 2008).

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky was a Russian lawyer who, after becoming a teacher, became interested in childhood behaviors and eventually became a psychologist. He was born in 1896 and died in 1934 but was one of the earliest scientists who did this type of research on child development (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003).

In addition to becoming a lawyer he also later studied linguistics and philosophy before becoming involved in psychological research. Vygotsky conducted extensive research and studies based on cognitive developmental theories and ideologies of human behaviors (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1977).

His primary focus was on the relationships between language and thinking. Vygotsky Social Development Theory research focused on how children resolve problems that exceed their level of development because he believed that child development is determined by the social interaction and collaborative problem solving process (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1977).

This assessment encouraged him to create the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) Theory. The ZPD Theory means that the child mimics or imitates the adult’s behaviors and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance. It also suggests that the activities included in the ZPD reflect the cultural background of the learner (Meira & Lerman, 2001).

Jean Piaget was another theorist whose work was significant to this research. His Cognitive Development Theory and his Personality Theory are also reflected in
this research study. Piaget was born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland in 1896. He began his professional career as a biologist, became a professor of medieval literature with a special interest in local history, and continued his career by achieving a Doctorate in Science. Even though he was reared by both of his parents, he reportedly thought that his mother was somewhat eccentric (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1977).

Piaget felt that his relationship with his parents and his mother’s eccentric behavior was what lead him to take on an interest in psychology. Not only was Piaget focused on children and child development, but he was additionally influential in bringing women into experimental psychology as a part of the intellectual psychology aspect which he heavily researched (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1977).

Jean Piaget became one of the most influential researchers in the area of human developmental psychology during the 20th century. Two of his most distinguished and respected works are Personality Theory and his Stages of Cognitive Development Theory (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1977).

Personalities are what make us unique and individual. Piaget’s Personality Theory explained the concept of the cognitive structure center of his theory. According to Piaget cognitive structures such as schemas are patterns of physical or mental actions that underlie specific acts of intelligence and correspond to stages of child development (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1977).

This personality theory is then broken down into Jean Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory made up of four primary cognitive structures which are the development stages identified as schemas, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).
Piaget viewed schema as both a category of knowledge and the process of obtaining that knowledge. He simply viewed learning and developing as experiences that happen and information gained from it. This new information is used to modify, add to, or change previously existing schemas (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

For example children may have a first time experience or observation while having very limited life experience. He or she may believe that a one time experience or observation is how this particular person, object, situation, topic, or event is each time a child may have a schema about a dog.

If the child’s sole experience has been with only small dogs of a certain breed, then the child might believe that all dogs are small and of this same breed until the learning experience is different (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

At a later time the same child may experience a very similar situation but receives new information that will inform her or him that there is a thought or comprehension modification. This new information therefore influences and changes his/her learning and development based on either the reality or perception of the experience (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

The process of taking new information into previously existing schemas is known as assimilation. Assimilation is somewhat subjective because experience or information often fits in differently with preexisting beliefs. In the example, seeing a dog and labeling it dog is an example of assimilating the animal into the child’s dog schema (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

The process of changing or altering existing schemas in light of new information is known as accommodation. Accommodation involves altering existing
schemas or ideas as a result of new information or new experiences (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

New schemas may also be developed during this process. Piaget used the term equilibration to describe the process of how children try to strike a balance between assimilation and accommodation (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

So according to Piaget, the developing child basically starts out with a blank canvas known as schema. As children progress through the stages of cognitive development, it is important to maintain a balance between applying previous knowledge called assimilation (Ginsburg & Opper, 1987).

The changing behavior turns into new knowledge known as accommodation. Equilibration helps explain how children are able to move from one stage of thought into the next (Ault, 1977). Theorist Albert Bandura was born in 1925, in a small town in northern Canada. As a young man he received a bachelor degree in Psychology from the University of British Columbia. A few years later he received his PhD from the University of Iowa where he was influenced by behaviorist tradition and learning theories (Ault, 1977).

By 1953, he became a professor at Stanford University where he collaborated with his first graduate student, Richard Walters, and in 1959 they wrote their first book titled Adolescent Aggression. In 1973, Bandura became president of the American Psychological Association (APA) and received the APA’s Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions in 1980 (Ault, 1977).

Albert Bandura was another historical Social Learning Theorist. Bandura implemented the Social Learning Theory (SLT). The social learning theory
emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. The original theory was called the Social Interaction Theory by Jean Gabriel Tarde, a French sociologist (1843-1904) (Tarde, 1940).

Tarde's work provided that social interaction occurred through four main stages of limitation which were close contact, imitation of superiors, understanding of concepts, and role model behavior. It also consists of three parts: observing, imitating, and reinforcements (Tarde, 1940).

Bandura concluded that the process of learning would be difficult and even hazardous if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to make decisions without knowing what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned through instruction, observation, and modeling (Tarde, 1940). This coded information serves as a guide for action. Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Tarde, 1940).

The component processes underlying observational learning are: (1) Attention, including modeled events (distinctiveness, affective valence, complexity, prevalence, functional value) and observer characteristics (sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual set, past reinforcement); (2) Retention, including symbolic coding, cognitive organization, symbolic rehearsal, motor rehearsal; (3) Motor Reproduction, including physical capabilities, self observation of reproduction, accuracy of feedback; and (4) Motivation, including external, vicarious and self reinforcement (Bandura, 1976).
Janice Ellen Hale obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Elementary Education from Spelman College, a Masters degree in Religious Education from the Interdenominational Theological Center with a major in Christian Education, a Ph.D. degree in Early Childhood Education from Georgia State University, and was an assistant and Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia. She also made great contributions to research understanding the learning styles of African-American youth (Hall, Lindzey, & Campbell, 1977).

Dr. Hale’s contributions to educational issues of African-American children played a significant role in this research. She spent many years researching, teaching, development and direct involvement working with African-American youth provided broad insight into the learning and development of African-American youth. She examined the influence of culture on the learning styles of African-American children (Hale, Bailey & Franklin, 2001).

Janice Hale’s Model on Learning While Black highlights factors involved in the learning process of African-American youth which includes the relationship between the racial profiling of law enforcement with educational assumptions. These educational assumptions place African-American children at a predetermined disadvantage in many schools where they face low expectations and indifference by educators and school administrators. This was pointed out in her book written in 2001 titled, Learning While Black (Hale, Bailey & Franklin, 2001).

Much like Dr. Hale, Dr. Letha A. (Lee) See also studied and researched complex human behaviors and problems faced by African Americans from an
Afrocentric perspective. Dr. See taught at the University of Georgia’s School of Social Work, Bryn Mawr College, Atlanta University, and the University of Arkansas after receiving her degrees of Education Management, Master of Social Work, and a Ph.D. (Hale, Bailey, & Franklin, 2001).

Dr. See’s focus was centered on the human behavior theory and the African-American experience in the social environment. Her research included studying the stress and behaviors resulting from belonging to the armed services, and other behavior stemming from progression through the life cycle, the self esteem and identity issues of biracial children, violence in the criminal justice system, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, individual and group behaviors, the strength and resilience of the black family, the stresses and problems affecting children, and the significant problem of the effect of colorism (Hale, Bailey, Franklin, 2001).

Janice Hale’s research studies and findings greatly contributed to this research study. Her book titled Human Behavior in the Social Environment from an African-American Perspective highlighted and addressed factual accounts of how African-American youth face much more different challenges and inequalities which provoke limitations and negative interpretations of behaviors and views of African-American youth (Hale, Bailey & Franklin, 2001). These negatives and inaccuracies result in a cycle of the oppressors oppressing the oppressed, and the positive coping and adaptive strengths, as well as the resiliency, of the oppressed are dismissed (See, 2007).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III presents the methods and procedures that were used in conducting the research study. The following components are described in the chapters of this document: research design; description of the site; sample and population; instrumentation; treatment of data; and limitation of the study (Cresswell, 2003).

Research Design

A mixed method research design was employed in conducting the study. Quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. This research study was designed to examine the different facets of how African-American youth participants in Metropolitan Atlanta, between the ages of 12 and 17 years old, learn and develop while coping with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges. The research design allowed the analysis of the demographics to render important developmental information about the participants. This research design also provided the poignant findings and statistical explanation of how learning and development influences coping challenges.
Description of the Site

The research study was conducted in Atlanta Georgia. Metro Atlanta is the largest, and one of the fastest growing, urban cities in the state of Georgia. All participants were provided surveys at a local community service center. Surveys were used to obtain information from participants and to evaluate individual as well as collective group dynamics of coping, learning, and developing (Cresswell, 2003).

The community service center at this location was selected due to the select population who often use this facility and the convenience of travel and accessibility for the research participants. Input was obtained from parents and guardians involved in the primary participants—who were the youth—lives, as well as the volunteers and employees who are employed at this facility (Cresswell, 2003).

All participants were accessible, cooperative, and eager to participate in the research study. Participants were open about discussions and rendered many questions as well as additional input about their life experiences. There were no additional site descriptors (Cresswell, 2003).

Sample and Population

The targeted population for this research study was composed of African-American youth, between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. The basis for this study was to find out how youth cope and learn, and also to assess what actions are possible to assist youth in obtaining success through education, health, positive engagements, and other support systems (Cresswell, 2003).
Additional information was obtained from various media, data, and other published collections. There were approximately 46 male and 63 female youth participants selected utilizing a nonprobability convenience sampling from the selected Atlanta site for this study. There were approximately one or two participants who unintentionally or intentionally failed to identify their gender either (Cresswell, 2003).

Instrumentation

The research study required that a survey questionnaire be developed for the youth participants’ responses. The title of the survey questionnaire was *A Study of Social, Economic, Cultural, and Self Esteem Challenges that Influence How African-American Youth Learn and Develop*.

The survey questionnaire consists of 24 questions divided into three separate sections. Section I focused on the demographic information. Section II focused on how strongly one agreed or disagreed with the influences of social challenges and economic challenges. Section III focused on how strongly one agreed or disagreed with the influences of cultural challenges, self esteem challenges, and learning and development.

The topics of the survey questionnaire specifically address issues regarding coping with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges and learning and development influences.
Treatment of Data

Statistical treatment of the data employed descriptive statistics, which included measures of central tendency, frequency distribution, univariate and bivariate analysis. The test statistics for the study were phi and chi square. Frequency distribution was used to analyze each of the variables of the study in order to summarize the basic measurements. A frequency distribution of independent variables was used to develop a demographic profile and to gain insights above the respondent of the study.

Cross tabulations were utilized to demonstrate the statistical relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. Cross tabulations were conducted between the social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop.

Of the two test statistics that were employed, the first test was Phi (Φ) which is a symmetric measurement of association that is used to demonstrate the strength of relationship between two or more variables (Abu-Bader, 2006). The following are the values associated with Phi (Φ):

- .00 to .24 “no relationship”
- .25 to .49 “weak relationship”
- .50 to .74 “moderate relationship”
- .75 to 1.99 “strong relationship”

The second statistical test that was employed in the research study was chi square. Chi square (\( p = \)) was used to test whether there was a significant statistical significance at the .05 level of probability among the variables in the study.
Limitations of the Study

There were four basic limitations in this research study. The first limitation was that this was a study of a population of youth from only one section of the country. The second limitation was the original facility where a portion of the research was to be completed had to be changed at the last minute frustrating some of the participants. The third limitation was the limited number of comparative studies and the answers provided in the surveyed research questionnaires may not all be accurate due to interpretation or evasive response intent. The fourth limitation was that the research does not elaborate on the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school and does not discuss learning based on ethnicity, religion, or culture.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the research study. It describes and explains the learning and development processes of African-American youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years old who are coping with social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges (Hill-Collins, 1990; Reinharz, 1992). The findings are organized into three sections: demographic data, research questions, and hypotheses.

Demographics Data

This section provides the profile of the study participants. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the following variables: gender, age, ethnicity, grade level, parents education, where I live (type of residential domicile), family attends church, family votes in elections, family goes on vacation, feeling isolated, paying attention when youth speak, racism, parents have less money, unemployment, condescendence toward African Americans, education importance, hip hop lifestyle, self respect, illegal drug use, importance of self belief, parents visit school, parents help with homework, and family help with problems.
The targeted population for the research study consisted of a diverse population of youth, ages 12 through 17 years old from an urban Metropolitan Atlanta area. Also, a total of 108 youth participated in the research.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12-13yrs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>14-15yrs</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17yrs</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18yrs up</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where I Live</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment/Condo</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family goes to Church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family votes in Elections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family goes on Vacations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the participants were African-American females who were between ages 16 and 17 years old, and who are in the 9th and 10th grades. Also, the majority of the participants’ parent’s had obtained a college degree and resided in a house.

There was no mention of when parents received their college degree, i.e. whether they received their degree right after high school or some time later. There also was no mention of what type of degree the parent(s) received or if the parents were employed in the career field coinciding with their degree.

Even though the survey questionnaire results showed that 62.7 percent of the participants lived in houses and 37.3 percent of the participants lived in apartments or
condos, the discussions revealed more specific information. Some of the participants stated that the house that they were living in was owned by their parents; some stated that they lived in a rental; some stated that the home they were living in was in foreclosure; and some of the participants stated that they were living in a home with others whom they were residing with.

Participants expressed that recession, housing crisis, and unemployment crisis all contributed harshly to their problems at home and at school. They stated that many of the academic and other entertaining and educational programs at school have either been limited or terminated altogether due to lack of funding and political interruptions. Participants stated that the economy had hard hit their families adding various stressors and complications.

Table 2
Social Challenges (N = 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIMES: At times I feel very isolated from other people</td>
<td>26 24.1</td>
<td>82 75.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PAYMUCH: People don’t pay much attention to what I say| 62 57.4  | 46 42.6 |
RACISM: We don’t have segregation but there is still racism| 3 2.8    | 105 97.2 |

Table 2 provides the responses to social challenges. When participants were asked if they felt very isolated from other people 24.1 percent stated that they did not
feel isolated from other people while 75.9 percent of them strongly agreed that they did.

During the interviews, those participants who did not feel isolated from others stated that they felt fortunate to have a good level of stability with great families and support systems. They stated that they did however experience periods of frustration, rivalry, and wanting to be left alone.

During the interviews, participants were also asked why the majority of them feel isolated from other people. Many of the participants responded that they experienced a variety of isolation challenges.

Isolation challenges ranged anywhere from sadness to frustration to worry while experiencing already challenging conditions of puberty. Emotional stressors and feelings of isolation only became even more challenging due to the fallout from the recession.

Participants stated that they and their families were hard hit and greatly impacted by the loss of teachers being terminated, loss of school and education programs, high unemployment rates, struggles with family finances and health care issues, loss of community programs and activities, and foreclosures.

They had also experienced the jarring effects of increased prices for goods and services, such as food, public transportation, and gas. Participants stated that all of these issues directly impacted them and that they often felt that many of the adults in power and in control did not care about their needs or their future.

When participants were asked to rate the statement that people don’t pay much attention to what I say, 42.6 percent agreed and 57.4 disagreed. During the
interview discussions some participants stated that they often resisted expressing themselves and in a very talkative or intimate manner outside of their inner circle because they felt resistant to chance trust or that the felt that it was not necessary since they had their own system of support which included friends and family.

However, many of the participants stated that they were outspoken and uninhibited individuals and felt that they often had things to express in various environments. They proudly stated how they participated in several public activities, such as public speaking engagements, sports activities, church and spiritual events, singing and other entertaining activities, and communicating with the public as a part of their daily employment tasks.

Some participants stated that they felt that people did not pay much attention to what they had to say when it was important and that they felt ignored. Some expressed that at times they were not often taken seriously because of their gender or race.

The final social challenge variable to be rated was whether or not the participants believed that we don't have segregation but there is still racism. An overwhelming 97.2 percent strongly agreed while only 2.8 percent disagreed.

There was no one ethnic group, gender, age group, grade level, or economic status where all believed or did not believe that racism still remained prevalent. Broadly, across the board most of the participants agreed that racism was still a big problem.

During further interview discussions, participants first opened up about how proud they were that America finally has its first African-American president,
President Barack Hussein Obama. Participants stated that, on the other hand, many cases of racism seemed to have shown itself even more intensely and even deadly.

Participants spoke of how the Genarlow Wilson case, Jena Six case, and the complete disrespect and racially charged hatred toward President Obama negatively influenced and affected them. They stated that these events showed America and the rest of the world just how alive and thriving racism in America still remains.

Many of the participants did discuss their concerns about segregation as well. They stated that segregation may not be as prevalent as in previous decades, but that practices of racism had also included gentrifying communities.

Gentrifying urban communities often pushes African Americans and other minorities out and into other poorer areas while generally whites and upper class people move in. Participants expressed that they are aware that gentrification often results in social, cultural, and economic changes as well.

Table 3

Economic Challenges (N = 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POVERTY: There is more poverty today than before</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONEY: My parents have less money to spend on things</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEM: Unemployment is a real problem today</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>99.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 3, there were three concentrated economic challenges concerning poverty, money, and unemployment problems. Participants agreed that there is more poverty today than before. While 88.9 percent strongly agreed that there is more poverty, 11.1 percent disagree.

When the participants were asked to elaborate on why they believed there was more poverty today than before the majority of them discussed three main concerns. Many of the participants stated that poverty affected them either directly or indirectly.

The first concern was that the extreme amount of foreclosures and housing crisis in the Metropolitan Atlanta area. They stated that the area Atlanta already has a very large population of homeless people in need of housing.

The second concern that was discussed was the very high unemployment rate not only in the state of Georgia but also across the nation. Many of the participants stated that unemployment had affected their families or several families in their communities.

The participants stated that the third concern they had regarding poverty was the lack of available employment opportunities and other resources and that they believed this leads to criminal activities. They stated that often young people feel ignored, angry, and desperate when they lack positive opportunities and resources.
Table 4

Cultural Challenges (N = 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEOPLE: People look down on African Americans</td>
<td>5  4.6</td>
<td>103 95.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCAT: Education is not important for young people</td>
<td>38 35.2</td>
<td>70 64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIPHOP: Hip hop life style is the most important</td>
<td>28 25.9</td>
<td>80 74.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 addresses the cultural challenges of how the participants perceived if people look down on African Americans. Most of the participants became very passionately opinionated about this part of the questionnaire.

As you can see 95.4 percent of the participants strongly agreed that people do look down on African Americans while a mere 4.6 percent of the participants disagreed. Again, the participants discussed the examples of racism and the elevated levels of hate and hate crimes that were reported over the past few years.

Table 4 displays that 35.2 percent of the participants agreed that education is not important for young people and 64.8 percent disagreed. While most of the youth stated that they like attending school and achieving a formal education, some said that they were less enthusiastic about school.

When the participants were asked to describe how they felt about their education process their answers were mixed. Some of the participants stated they
had become underwhelmed because of lack of incentives and disappearance of positive influences that once encouraged them to be excited about attending school.

Participants claimed that too many of the extracurricular activities and program that they were once involved in had either become limited or terminated altogether. Participants stated that school had once been a safe haven where one could learn, grow, and develop friendships.

They believe that in more recent years, it had become a political arena where there are conflict, frustration, and diminished or limited needed programs, materials and supplies for the teachers and students. Participants stated that they realize that a large number of students are dropping out of school because they either lose faith or give up or they feel helpless in their academic and personal lives.

The third variable in Table 4 questions whether the participants believed that the hip hop lifestyle is the most important thing to young people. A total of 74.1 percent of the participants strongly agreed that the hip hop lifestyle is very important to young people while 25.9 disagreed. When asked why a hip hop lifestyle is important or young people the youth provided very insightful explanations.

The first thing that was explained was that a hip hop lifestyle does not mean a life style of a thug who only listens to hip hop music. According to the participants a hip hop lifestyle includes a variety of art, social consciousness, cultural support systems, entertainment, knowledge, unlimited opportunities, and being part of a positive movement and collective.
When asked what most people living a hip hop lifestyle do on a regular basis the participants provided a basic response. They first clarified that the hip hop lifestyle is not be equated or compared to a gang lifestyle.

Further they stated that though some live their hip hop lifestyles including rough language or entertainment they however do a number of positive and healthy things that spread positive messages. These positive messages empower the hip hop community and the community at large.

Participants state that many in the hip hop community own their own business and offer employment opportunities. Many are involved in professions such as sports, education, government, health care, designing, music, dance, etc.

The participants stated that most professionals in the hip hop community do well financially and in their careers. Participants stated that hip hop professionals tended to be very successful. They also stated that the hip hop community offers a lot to the economy and they referred to artist and business pros such as Russell Simmons, Kimora Simmons, and Sean Diddy Combs.
Table 5

Self Esteem Challenges (N = 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YOUNG: It’s important for young people to have self respect</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRUGS: Young people use illegal drugs to boost their image</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELIEVE: What I believe about myself is important to others</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, Table 5 displays the results for self esteem challenges. Three variables used to rate self esteem cover self respect, illegal drugs and image boost, and beliefs about one’s self.

The first statement asks participants to rate if they believe that it is important for young people to have self respect. The calculation shows that 88.0 percent of the participants agreed that it is important for young people to have self respect while 12.0 disagreed.

Participants were asked how they viewed the self respect. All of the participants stated that they viewed self respect as an important life factor.

However, some of the participants stated that they believed that it was difficult to focus on self respect, pride, and dignity when one feels greatly disadvantaged. They stated that being disadvantaged can often cause one to put aside self respect, dignity, and pride and advance into survival mode.
Participants emphasized that especially since the start of the recession many of their resources, services, and recreational activities had either diminished or become very limited. They also added that low income and poor minorities are often disadvantaged and therefore self respect becomes secondary to survival.

Table 5 also poses the question if young people use illegal drugs to boost their image. The participants responded that 65.7 percent agreed with this statement and 34.3 percent disagreed.

When the participants were asked what their thoughts were about young people’s use of illegal drugs to boost their image. Participants claimed that although illegal drug use did often involve a false sense of image boost, there were often several reasons that young people used illegal drugs.

They stated that some young people used illegal drugs to cope with or mask their problems, due to peer pressure, out of curiosity, because of an addiction problem, attempt to self destruct, etc. Some of the participants stated that they did not agree that illegal drug usage helped to boost young people’s self image.

The last variable regarding self esteem challenges asked participants to rate the statement concerning what they believed about themselves is important to others. A total of 57.4 percent agreed with this statement and 42.6 percent disagreed.

Participants explained that they did believe it was important for others to know what they believed about themselves. To them it was primarily important when it came to others attempting to disrespect them.

They felt that it was necessary to explain their importance during disputes, in competitions, in school, and when they were applying for employment. Others stated
that they were not really concerned about what other people thought of them because it was not something that they often though about.

Some of the participants expressed that they were interested in what others thought about them when they were either interested in dating someone else, attempting to acquire friendships, or joining a group.

Table 6
Learn and Develop (N = 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL: My parents visit my school</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELPME: My parents help me with my homework</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY: My family helps me when I have problems</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 demonstrates certain aspects that influence learning and developing. These influences focus on personal supports.

The first statement assesses whether the parents visit the participants’ school. As shown in the frequency distribution 64.5 percent of participants agree while 35.5 disagree. The majority of the participants stated that they agreed with this statement because their parents did often visit their school.

The participants having engaged parents who did visit their schools agreed that they not only visited their schools out of academic concerns but they also visited
for other school meetings and events. Some such meetings and events included theater activities, fundraisers, school elections, PTA gatherings, open houses, school board meetings, plays, assemblies, sports competitions, and graduation.

The participants expressed their general appreciation of feeling supported, protected, and encouraged when their parents and family members support their academic progress and other aspirations, efforts, and endeavors.

Overall participants agreed that they fared better academically and socially when their parents participated in and attended their school activities. Most participants agreed that they were pleased to know their parents cared and to have them involved.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Relationship between social challenges and economic challenges

RQ 1. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

H 1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?
Table 7

Social Challenges by Economic Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Challenges</th>
<th>Social Challenges</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Φ = .431  df = 1  p = .000

Table 7 is a crosstabulation of social challenges by economic challenges. It shows the association of social challenges with economic challenges of the respondents and indicates whether or not there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

As shown in Table 7, there was a weak association between the two variables (Φ = .431) as indicated by phi. When the chi square statistical test for significance was applied, the null hypothesis was not rejected (p = .000). This test indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables at the .05 level of probability.

Relationship between social challenges and self esteem challenges

RQ 2. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and self esteem challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?
H2. There is no statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and self esteem challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?

Table 8 is a crosstabulation of social challenges by self esteem challenges. It shows the association of social challenges with self esteem challenges of the respondents and indicates whether or not there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

Table 8

Social Challenges by Self Esteem Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Challenges</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem Challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Φ = .150  df = 1  p = .119

As shown in Table 8, there was no relationship between the two variables (Φ = .150) as indicated by phi. When the chi square statistical test for significance was applied, the null hypothesis was rejected (p = .119) indicating that there was not a
statistically significant relationship between the two variables at the .05 level of probability.

**Relationship between social challenges and cultural challenges**

RQ3. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?

H3. There is no statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?

Table 9 is a crosstabulation of social challenges by cultural challenges. It shows the association of social challenges with cultural challenges of the respondents and indicates whether or not there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

Table 9

Social Challenges by Cultural Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Challenges</th>
<th>Social Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \Phi = .279 \quad df = 1 \quad p = .004 \]
As shown in Table 9, there was a weak association between the two variables ($\Phi = .279$) as indicated by phi. When the chi square statistical test for significance was applied, the null hypothesis was not rejected ($p = .004$) indicating that there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables at the .05 level of probability.

**Relationship between self esteem challenges and cultural challenges**

RQ 4. Is there a statistical relationship between the self esteem challenges and cultural challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?

H 4. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self esteem challenges and cultural challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop?

Table 10 is a crosstabulation of self esteem challenges by cultural challenges. It shows the association of self esteem challenges with cultural challenges of the respondents. It indicates whether there was a statistically significant relationship.
As shown in Table 10, there was no relationship between the two variables ($\Phi = .159$) as indicated by phi. When the chi square statistical test for significance was applied, the null hypothesis was not rejected ($p = .099$) indicating that there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables at the .05 level of probability.

In sum, the phi test for association indicated that there was a weak to no relationship between the variables. There was a statically significant relationship between self esteem challenges and cultural challenges ($p = .000$) and social challenges and self esteem challenges ($p = .004$).
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study was designed to answer the four questions concerning the statistically significant relationships between social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges of African-American youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years old and whether it influences how they learn and develop.

The effects of what significantly influenced this demographic of youth was based on the four variables asserted. Studying this demographic provided valuable information based on the staggering and disturbing reports of African-American youth middle school and high school dropouts.

African-American youth continue to face very high rates of racism, discrimination, unemployment, poor education, poverty, dangerous environmental conditions, poor health conditions and health care, crime and legal problems, poor resource and access problems, teen parenting, single parent households, incarcerations, violence and murder rates. This information was reported by the U.S. Department of Education, U. S. Justice Department, U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

There are certain situational conditions that appeared to be associated with an increase in youth challenges. For example, incidents of juvenile violence occur more
frequently in certain locations and at certain times. Further, the existence of gangs in a community may influence the level of and be a significant factor in the motivation for committing violent crimes verses nonviolent crimes.

Research Question 1. Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

In order to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges of African-American youth and how they learn and develop six facets were analyzed. The six facets were feelings of isolation, attention paid to what youth have to say, segregation and racism, poverty, parents having money to spend, and unemployment problems.

Social challenges were based on a statistical calculation of three facets to include feelings of isolation, attention paid to what youth have to say, and segregation and racism. Economic challenges were based on a statistical calculation of three facets to include poverty, parents having money to spend, unemployment problems.

The statistical relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges were calculated using all six of the facets. In order to determine the true value or correlational values (1 thru 4) from the measurement scale for all six of the facets for social and economic challenges, the facets were calculated by using all six of the facets divided by the sum total of the set of figures by the number of figures.
Of the 108 respondents interviewed and surveyed the majority of (75.9%) of the respondents indicated that they did believe there was a statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges that influence how African-American youth learned and developed. The minority (24.1%) of the respondents stated that they did not believe that there was a statistically significant relationship.

The statistical measurement of phi (Φ) was used in order to test the relationship between the social challenges and economic challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop. As indicated there was a weak relationship (Φ = .431) between the two variables. Therefore, the statistical relationship between the social challenges and economical challenges was weak.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistical relationship between the self esteem challenges and social challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

The six facets used to measure the statistical relationship between the self esteem challenges and social challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop are isolation, attention, racism, poverty, money, and unemployment.

The majority (75.9%) of research respondents indicated that they did believe there was a statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth learned and
developed. The minority (24.1%) of the respondents stated that they did not believe that there was a statistically significant relationship.

The statistical measurement of phi (Φ) was used in order to test the relationship between the social challenges and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop. As indicated there was a strong relationship (Φ = .150) between the two variables.

Research Question 3: Is there a statistical relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges and of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

There were six facets used to measure the social challenges and cultural challenges. These facets were isolation, attention, racism, people look down on African Americans, education importance, and importance of self belief.

The majority (75.9%) of research respondents indicated that they did believe there was a statistically significant relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges that influence how African-American youth learned and developed. The minority (24.1%) of the respondents stated that they did not believe that there was a statistically significant relationship.

The statistical measurement of phi (Φ) was used in order to test the relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop. As indicated there was a strong relationship (Φ = .150) between the two variables.
Research Question 4: Is there a statistical relationship between the cultural challenge and self esteem challenges of African-American youth that influence how they learn and develop?

The six facets used to measure the self esteem and cultural challenges were self respect, image, belief about self, people look down on African Americans, education importance, and hip hop life style.

The majority (59.3%) of research respondents indicated that they did believe there was a statistically significant relationship between the self esteem challenges and cultural challenges that influence how African-American youth learned and developed. The minority (40.7%) of the respondents stated that they did not believe that there was a statistically significant relationship.

The statistical measurement of phi ($\Phi$) was used in order to test the relationship between the social challenges and cultural challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop. As indicated there was a strong relationship ($\Phi = .159$) between the two variables.

Studies concerning the social, economic, cultural, and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth between ages 12 and 17 years old learn and develop are limited in analyzing and resolving matters especially for those urban youth. Even prior to the recession, which was officially announced in December 2007, African-American youth and families were experiencing various crisis such as failing school systems, national disasters and loss with very slow recovery, unemployment, poor health care, high dropout rates, expensive petroleum rates,
heightened criminal activities, unfair justice and legal problems, teen pregnancy, gentrification, racism, and other disenfranchising problems.

As a result of the findings of this study the researcher recommends the following:

1. Research should continue in order to provide better educational, employment, counseling, and mentoring programs to support and guide African-American youth.

2. Research should continue in order to provide educators, legal systems, health care systems, social services, and human services systems with an increased insight and better understanding.

3. Policy makers should use research and other sources of quality reporting to change policies and laws, implement best practices, and provide needed funds, resources, and programs.

4. Alternative education programs should be devised to meet the needs of youth requiring alternative arrangements, i.e., weekend and evening schools, skills training, progressive employment opportunities, free scholarship programs, early internship training and mentoring programs, community unification and safe neighborhood programs.

5. Social workers, human services personnel, and government officials should advocate for these disenfranchised youth so that all communities make progress.

6. Social workers, human services personnel, and government officials should become greatly involved in improving neighborhoods and environments to
improve conditions where African-American children reside to eradicate health and living disparities.
APPENDIX A

Letter to Dr. Richard Lyle

Ms. Cindi Ogden
P. O. Box 92753
Atlanta, GA 30314

Dr. Richard Lyle
Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work
Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, GA 30314

RE: Dissertation

Dear Dr. Lyle,

I am submitting this letter to you regarding certain details of my dissertation process. As you are aware, my dissertation demographic includes youth ages 12 through 17 years old. I spoke with the parents and youth about the research and I showed them a copy of the survey questionnaire. The parents agreed to have their youth participate in the research as long as it remains anonymous.

The anonymity they agreed to would allow the parents to give the survey questionnaires to their children/youth participants to complete. The youth and parents would also have the opportunity to participate in the discussion portion in order to provide clarity, feedback, and further input. However, the parents do not wish to provide a release, assent, or consent letter/form because, as they stated, it would not provide anonymity. Submitting a release, assent, or consent letter/form would require the parents to provide vital, identifiable information voiding anonymity.

I am informing you of this process because, though the subjects of this research are considered minors they are participating under the supervision and permission of their parents.

Respectfully,

Ms. Cindi Ogden, MSW
Doctoral candidate
APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

A Study of Social, Economic, Cultural and Self Esteem Challenges that Influence how African-American Youth Learn and Develop

Section I: Demographic Information

Instructions: Place a mark (x) next to the appropriate item. Choose only one answer for each question.

1. My gender: 1) ______ Male 2) ______ Female

2. My age group: 1) ______ 12-13 yrs 2) ______ 14-15 yrs 3) ______ 16-17 yrs 4) ______ 18 yrs up

3. My ethnicity: 1) ______ African American 2) ______ Caucasian 3) ______ Hispanic 4) ______ Asian 5) ______ Other

4. My grade level: 1) ______ 7-8 grade 2) ______ 9-10 grade 3) ______ 11-12 grade

5. My parents education: 1) ______ High School 2) ______ College 3) ______ HS Drop Out

6. Where I live: 1) ______ Apartment/Condo 2) ______ House

7. My family goes to church: 1) ______ No 2) ______ Yes

8. My family votes in elections: 1) ______ No 2) ______ Yes

9. My family goes on vacations: 1) ______ No 2) ______ Yes

Section II: How much do you agree with the following statements?

Instructions: The following statements are designed to get your opinion about the social, economic, cultural and self esteem challenges that influence how African-American youth learn and develop. Write the appropriate number in the blank beside each statement.

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

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(continued)

Social Challenges

_____ 10. At times I feel very isolated from other people

_____ 11. People don't pay much attention to what I have to say

_____ 12. We don't have segregation however there is still racism

Economic Challenges

_____ 13. There is more poverty today than before

_____ 14. My parents have less money to spend on things

_____ 15. Unemployment is a real problem today

Section II: How much do you agree with the following statements?

Instructions: The following statements are designed to get your opinion about social, economic, cultural and self esteem challenges of African-American youth that influence how they develop. Write the appropriate number in the blank beside each statement.

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

Cultural Challenges

_____ 16. People look down on African Americans

_____ 17. Education is not as important today as it was before

_____ 18. Hip-hop life style is the most important thing for young people today

Self Esteem Challenges

_____ 19. It is important for young people to have self respect

_____ 20. Young people use illegal drugs today to boost their image

_____ 21. What I believe about myself is important for others to know
APPENDIX B

(continued)

Learn and Develop

22. My parents visit my school
23. My parents help me with my homework
24. My family helps me when I have problems

Thank you very much for your cooperation
APPENDIX C

SPSS PROGRAM

TITLE 'SOCIAL ECONOMIC CULTURAL AND SELF ESTEEM CHALLENGES'.
SUBTITLE 'CINDI OGDEN'.

DATA LIST FIXED/
ID 1-3
GENDER 4
AGEGRP 5
ETHNIC 6
GRADE 7
PARENTS 8
ILIVE 9
CHURCH 10
ELECT 11
VACATE 12
TIMES 13
PAYMUCH 14
RACISM 15
POVERTY 16
MONEY 17
PROBLEM 18
PEOPLE 19
EDUCAT 20
HIPHOP 21
YOUNG 22
DRUGS 23
BELIEVE 24
SCHOOL 25
HELPME 26
FAMILY 27.

VARIABLE LABELS
ID 'Case Number'
GENDER 'Q1 My gender'
AGEGRP 'Q2 My Age Group'
ETHNIC 'Q3 My Ethnicity'
APPENDIX C

(continued)

GRADE 'Q4 My grade level'
PARENTS 'Q5 My parents education'
ILIVE 'Q6 Where I live'
CHURCH 'Q7 My family goes to church'
ELECT 'Q8 My family votes in elections'
VACATE 'Q9 My family goes on vacations'
TIMES 'Q10 At times I feel very isolated from other people'
PAYMUCH 'Q11 People dont pay much attention to what I have to say'
RACISM 'Q12 We dont have segregation however there is still racism'
POVERTY 'Q13 There is more poverty today than before'
MONEY 'Q14 My parents have less money to spend on things'
PROBLEM 'Q15 Unemployment is a real problem today'
PEOPLE 'Q16 People look down on African Americans'
EDUCAT 'Q17 Education is not an important thing for young people today'
HIPHOP 'Q18 HIP-hop lifestyle is the most important thing for young people today'
YOUNG 'Q19 It is important for young people to have self respect'
DRUGS 'Q20 Young people use illegal drugs today to boost their image'
BELIEVE 'Q21 What I believe about myself is important for other to know'
SCHOOL 'Q22 My parents visit my school'
HELPME 'Q23 My parents help me with my homework'
FAMILY 'Q24 My family helps me when I have problems'.

VALUE LABELS
GENDER
1 'Male'
2 'Female'

AGEGRP
1 '12-13yrs'
2 '14-15yrs'
3 '16-17yrs'
4 '18yrs up'/

ETHNIC
1 'African American'
2 'Caucasian'
3 'Hispanic'
4 'Asian'
5 'Other'/

GRADE
1 '7-8 grade'
2 '9-10 grade'
APPENDIX C

(continued)

3 '11-12 grade'/
PARENTS
1 'High School'
2 'College'
3 'Dropout'/
ILIVE
1 'Apartment-Condo'
2 'House'/
CHURCH
1 'No'
2 'Yes'/
ELECT
1 'No'
2 'Yes'/
VACATE
1 'No'
2 'Yes'/
TIMES
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/
PAYMUCH
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/
RACISM
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/
POVERTY
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/
MONEY
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
APPENDIX C

(continued)

3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

PROBLEM
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

PEOPLE
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

EDUCAT
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

HIPHOP
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

YOUNG
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

DRUGS
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

BELIEVE
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/

SCHOOL
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
APPENDIX C

(continued)

4 'Strongly Agree'/
HELPME
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'/
FAMILY
1 'Strongly Disagree'
2 'Disagree'
3 'Agree'
4 'Strongly Agree'./

RECODE TIMES PAYMUCH RACISM POVERTY MONEY PROBLEM (1 THRU 2.99=2) (3 THRU 4.99=3).
RECODE PEOPLE EDUCAT HIPHOP YOUNG DRUGS BELIEVE (1 THRU 2.99=2) (3 THRU 4.99=3).
RECODE SCHOOL HELPME FAMILY (1 THRU 2.99=2) (3 THRU 4.99=3).

MISSING VALUES
GENDER AGEGRP ETHNIC GRADE PARENTS ILIVE CHURCH ELECT VACATE TIMES PAYMUCH RACISM POVERTY MONEY PROBLEM PEOPLE EDUCAT HIPHOP YOUNG DRUGS BELIEVE SCHOOL HELPME FAMILY (0).

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APPENDIX C

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APPENDIX C

(continued)

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FREQUENCIES
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