A descriptive study of the coping techniques among African American children in the Mechanicsville community

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This study examined the coping techniques of African American children within an elementary academic setting to determine how western teaching styles effect the child's problem solving skills.

The study was based on an understanding that the educational system was created on a foundation of prejudice and that current teaching styles are not compatible with the innate learning styles of African American children.

A qualitative study was conducted to analyze the student generated responses to two case vignettes. Informal interviews were completed utilizing 15 African American 2nd and 3rd grade students participating in an Atlanta based after school program.

The researcher found that among the majority of the 2nd and 3rd grade students, there were overwhelming concerns with teacher and peer relations as opposed to concerns with teaching style.
The conclusions drawn from the study suggest that social relationships as opposed to teaching styles, play a major role in how African American children process and ultimately cope with various school related stressors. The results alluded to a need for social workers to further investigate the communal nature of African American children and the effects it may have on their cognitive processing.
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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF COPING TECHNIQUES AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE MECHANICSVILLE COMMUNITY

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
CONSUELA D. VINSON

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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ii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Analytical and Relational Cognitive Styles</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Letter to Study Participants</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Survey of Stressors</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. African American Children’s Coping Behaviors (Research Instrument)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. African American Children’s Coping Behaviors (Teacher Ratings)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Demographic Data by Gender</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotional Responses to Stressors by Gender</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Emotional Responses to Vignette One by Gender</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Behavioral Responses to Vignette One by Gender</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emotional Responses to Vignette Two by Gender</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Behavioral Responses to Vignette Two by Gender</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Observed Behavioral Frequencies and Percentages for Vignette One by Teachers</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Observed Behavioral Frequencies and Percentages for Vignette Two by Teachers</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to describe the coping techniques utilized by African American children. It is the author’s hope that this work will contribute to the literature on issues of stress and stress-related illness in the African American community, as well as African communities throughout the Diaspora. By looking at the coping techniques of African American children, social workers may be better equipped as professionals to create the most effective interventions for children in academic settings (reducing the rate of which African American children are referred to special education).

According to an article by Jane Knitzer and colleagues, "in too many instances children, particularly those with so-called learning disabilities or those who do not behave properly, are referred to special education too quickly."¹ In 1987, the Connecticut Department of Education found that African American students were more likely to be over identified as behaviorally or emotionally

disordered. In fact, it was found that Black children were identified at twice the rate of White children.

Research has found that once in special education tracts, children labeled with emotional and behavioral disorders rarely return to mainstream classrooms, often dropping out completely. In the state of Maine approximately 10% of all students who drop out of school had been identified as behaviorally disordered or emotionally disturbed, and two-thirds of the total population of dropouts had some kind of behavioral or emotional problem that had not been addressed.²

Some studies are showing that poverty and racism are playing a major role in the difficulties these children are experiencing in the school system. In some studies, it was found that almost 50% of students from low-income families are in classes for children with behavioral and emotional handicaps.³ Research focusing on interactions between African American children and school systems indicate that children enter academia having already learned ascribed patterns of behavior and value systems.⁴ Problems occur when the values and expectations of the school and child

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 105.

contradict the other. In situations such as these, how one perceives situations or behaviors may have a preponderous effect on the future of a child. Ultimately, it is one's perceptions that shape resultant behavioral manifestations.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to begin looking at the behaviors of African American children in the context of school related stress. It is the hope of the author that this effort will ignite discussion on the effects the school environment may have on the way a child processes information.

**Background**

In reports released by the Woodlawn Program of Assessment, Early Intervention, and Evaluation, it was mentioned that one in four African American children exhibited maladjustment in domains judged essential for academic achievement and social adjustment. Research in the areas of stress and coping for African American children tend to center around issues of family discord, environmental deprivation, poverty, and racial oppression. African American children rank high among at-risk

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5Ibid.

populations; however, epidemiological data on the rates of disturbances often are not separated by ethnicity, hence, it becomes difficult to determine the nature of problems affecting African American children most.7

Statement of Problem

In a study of school-aged African American children, the most frequently reported problems were overanxious disorder (9.9%), ADHD (6.2%), conduct disorder (5.5%), and oppositional disorders (5.7 - 9.9%).8 In the book Black Students: Psychosocial Issues and Academic Achievement, it was documented that there are high rates of learning disability and a functional literacy rate of 50% as compared to 10% for White Americans.9 These statistics vividly illustrate a deteriorating state of mental health among African American children that appears to be most prevalent in the academic arena. However, varying perception of normality may prove to be the greatest contributing factor.


8Ibid., 424.

Significance of Study

This study is of great significance in that there is minimal data on the coping strategies of African American children. This research effort seeks to describe coping techniques utilized by African American children. It is the author’s hope that this work will contribute to the literature on issues of stress, coping, and stress-related disease in African Americans. By looking at the coping techniques of the children, one may be better equipped as professionals to create the most effective interventions for stress-related disease and disorders.

Research Questions

There are three questions this study hopes to answer. The questions are as follows:

1. What are the stressors and coping techniques of African children in America in a predetermined situation?
2. What are the reasons children choose one technique over others?
3. Do the children view their choices as effective?

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Summary

This research will be broken down into six areas of discussion. Chapter Two will consist of a review of the literature concerning coping and the theoretical framework. It will also provide historical information concerning the experiences of Africans in America. Lastly, the chapter will take a look at the educational system's purpose and design, and how it effects African children in America.

Chapter Three will discuss the methodology for this research effort. It will provide information concerning the research design, a description of the setting, and the sample utilized. The chapter will also discuss the data collection methods, procedures, and a summary of the qualitative analysis.

Chapter Four will present the findings of the research. It will provide details on the responses from the vignettes and their rationale. The chapter will also provide visual representations of the data.

Chapter Five will provide a discussion of the findings of the research. It will discuss the strengths of the study as well as its limitations.

Chapter Six will provide the conclusion, implications for social work practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature suggests that children possess an array of learning styles (accommodator); however, the educational system tends to place greater value on a single western style as opposed to a combination of styles. Research goes on to show that such a limited spectrum can create academic and psychological difficulties (behavioral disorders) for children who may ascribe to less valued learning styles. This review will analyze the relationship between learning styles and coping techniques.

Learning Styles

Asa Hilliard wrote about group styles as described by various academic disciplines. He went on to explain that brain research references "left-brain" and "right-brain" behavioral patterns, psychologists speak of "analytic" and "relational" cognitive styles, anthropologists discuss "science" and "mirror image," and psychiatrists reference "obsessive compulsive" and "hysterical" behavioral styles.
Ultimately, the numerous titles seek to explain similar, and often exact concepts (ways of relating to the world).¹

Chi-Ching and Noi cited Hergenhahn who suggested that learning styles consisted of three behavior types: cognitive (information process), affective (attitudes or opinions), and physiological (environmental or biologically based).² They went on to discuss Kolb who identified two dimensions of cognitive learning which yield what he believed to be the four types of learning: concrete, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. When combined these dimensions yield four learning styles: the accommodator (concrete experience/active experimentation), the assimilator (abstract conceptualization/reflective observation), the converger (concrete experience/reflective observation), and the diverger (concrete experience/reflective observation).³

In Hilliard's *The Maroon Within Us*, he defined style as "consistency in the behavior of a person or a group that tends to be habitual."⁴ It is also his belief that style


³Ibid., 594.

differences between teachers and students and between students and the curriculum have been cited as the cause for low academic achievement among children of color. Hale-Benson also wrote that Black children experience difficulties in school due to their participation in a culture that differs from the culture that designed the educational system. Some research says that the school environment discriminates against boys in their early years by maintaining a "feminized" atmosphere which negates the importance of certain male hormonal conditions that create greater aggression, impatience, and restlessness.

Kugelmass suggested that labeling children is often an outcome of failed interaction between teacher and student. She went on to say that children sense the differential treatment they may receive and go so far as to act out more so. Ultimately she believed this behavior to be the end product of "complex interactions" occurring within the classroom.

Coping Styles

According to the Carson and Bittner article, coping is "a general term that refers to the behaviors an individual uses to meet personal needs and adapt to the

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 Berry and Asamen, *Black Students*, 84.


In terms of intelligence, the article "Voodoo or IQ: An Introduction to African Psychology" emotions have everything to do with one’s intellectual ability.10 Psychologist Oscar Barbin’s research took a look at how coping with "adverse circumstances" may provide a source of resilience for African American children. He went on to cite emotional regulation and self control as key components of coping. It is Barbin’s belief that emotions have the potential to disorganize behavior as well as regulate it.

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For this reason, he proposed that research on the experience and regulation of emotions can provide a framework by which to investigate and comprehend a number of developmental concerns of African American children (mood, conduct, etc.).

Hale wrote that feelings, affect, and cognitive processes arising from interpersonal relations may have important implications for Black people. Research has suggested that Blacks are very emotional people. Haskins and Butts believed that intellectual analysis disconnected from feelings leads to incomplete knowledge of the world.

"It is the concept of sensitivity which is of fundamental importance to human intelligence." African psychology's ontological position asserts that there is more to the world than meets our material eye. Many studies have found Black children are more feeling-oriented, people oriented, and more proficient at non-verbal communication than White children. These implications can have an impact on the way Black children process information and cope with stress.


12Janice Hale, Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Style (Brovo: Brigham Young University Press, 1982), 69.

13X, McGee, Nobels, and X, "Voodoo or IQ," 18.

14Hale, Black Children, 69.
In 1994, Carson and Bittner conducted a study on the effects of temperament on the coping abilities of school aged children. Their sample consisted of 60 third and fourth grade children; 98% were Caucasian and 3% were Mexican American (no African Americans). The study found that children who had difficult temperament were more vulnerable to major and minor life stress, hence at greater risk for developing emotional disturbance, behavior problems, or both. They also found that activity level (temperamental characteristics) may influence coping behavior both directly and indirectly. Their research suggests that children with behavioral patterns may be perceived by others as having higher risk for emotional or behavioral disorders due to predisposed temperament characteristics. This study, like many others, seems to determine problems as one of internal deficit. Also of importance is the fact that this study has contributed to literature while failing to include African Americans in the sample.

O'Brian, Margolin and John conducted a study on conflict coping and adjustment. Their sample consisted of 83 children, 75% were Caucasian, 23% were African American, and 12% were of mixed nationalities, or other ethnic minorities. This study revealed that of the children who

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15 Carson and Bittner, "Temperament and School-Aged Children's Coping Abilities and Responses to Stress," 300.
reported using approach coping strategies (problem focused) have higher levels of self-reported anxiety, hostility, and lower self-esteem. However, the children utilizing distancing coping strategies (emotion focused) reported experiencing less anxiety.\textsuperscript{16} It was also found that children who utilized help seeking techniques were perceived by their mothers to experience relatively low levels of internalizing behavior problems.

In a study by Sandler, Tein, and West, the four-dimensional structure of coping strategies (active coping, avoidance, distraction, and social support) were looked at.\textsuperscript{17} Their sample consisted of 258 children; 86% Anglo, 9% Hispanics, 2% African American, and 3% American Indian and other ethnic groups. They found that active coping strategies were positively correlated with the avoidance and support-seeking coping strategy. Avoidance coping was positively related to child depression, anxiety and conduct problems.

In a 1990 study by Causey and Dubow the development of a self-report coping measure for elementary school children was looked at. Their sample consisted of 481


fourth through sixth grade children; 411 White, 40 Black, 24 Hispanic and 4 other minority children. Their research found that the approach/avoidance conceptualization of coping aided in clarifying the ways in which the children coped.\textsuperscript{18} The approach technique (support seeking) included behavioral, cognitive, and emotional activities oriented towards stressors, where the avoidance technique (distancing) included behavioral, cognitive, and emotional activities away from the stress. This study was a first attempt to obtain independent ratings from children’s coping by peers. The study also found that children who used more internalized strategies experienced more anxiety. It also suggested that self-report measures of children’s coping may help to understand how children respond to various stressful situations in their lives.

Attar, Guerra, and Tolan conducted a 1992 study on neighborhood disadvantage (limited resources), stressful life events, and adjustment in urban elementary school children. Their sample consisted of 348 first through fourth grade African American (n=220) and Hispanic (n=164) children. They found that stressful life events in urban settings contribute significantly to childhood

aggression. They concluded that environment may be the most critical variable in the link between stress exposure and aggression in urban communities.

Under stress, children resort to a myriad of coping devices in efforts to maintain homeostasis or equilibrium. Helping children identify the physical and behavioral signs of stress is critical for teaching them how to effectively cope with stressors. Some psychologists have found that children have a more limited tolerance for frustration and for delaying gratification, and are seldom convinced by adult reasoning that rationalizes unpleasant experiences.

Observations of children in schools and clinics found that two basic dimensions active-passive and introversion-extroversion exist and distinguishes normal functioning from the kind of extreme behavior as seen in emotional adjustment reaction. Emotional adjustment reactions have thus been defined as "extreme patterns of


22Humphrey, Stress in Childhood, 48.

22Ibid., 52-54.
normal coping behavior adopted in response to stress." Clinical observations have also found that children showing such behavior patterns are most commonly seen in clinics, and may be useful as diagnostic classifications. This particular model yields four diagnostic categories: dependent, impulsive, passive-aggressive, and repressed. The dependent child tends to be passive and immature with regressive habits and childish mannerisms. He or she avoids taking initiative in social and educational situations. The impulsive child is easily excited, impulsive, and overactive. This child is also very aggressive and hostile, and subject to temper tantrums, violence and acting out behavior. If the activity of this child is focused, it may be turned toward authority figures or their peers. The passive-aggressive child tends to be an underachiever, who is obstinate, uncooperative, or overly compliant and agreeable. The latter personality type often fails to follow through on promises to complete assignments. The final personality type is the repressed child. This child is quiet, shy, moody, detached, often showing symptoms of anxiety and difficulty with decision making. The

24Ibid.
25Ibid.
26Ibid.
27Ibid.
children who exhibit the impulsive personality tend to be those singled out by teachers the most.

The ecological perspective suggests a greater importance in the "fit" between an individual and his environment.28 Kugelmass cited Wilson as noting that not only do individuals influence reality by their definitions of the situation, but that the setting generates standards for behavior.29 This suggests that there needs to be some consideration allotted to coping as a process that extends over time.30 Lazarus and Launier suggest that the ways in which people cope with stress are, perhaps, more important to the overall moral, social functioning, and health, as opposed to the frequency and severity of stress itself.31

In a review of the literature by Sandler, Tein, and West, it was found that "currently little consistency exists in the means by which to assess children's coping strategies." However, a number of coping techniques have been identified in the literature: problem-focused and emotion-focused (Compas, Malcarne, and Fondacaro, 1988), approach versus avoidance coping (Armistead et al., 1990). Sandler and associates found these techniques facilitate

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28Kugelmass, Behavior, Bias, and Handicaps, 14.
29Ibid.
30Garmezy and Rutter, Stress, Coping and Development in Children, 17.
31Ibid.
understanding of meaning; however, neither has been found appropriate for gauging the "empirical fit between conceptual dimensions and the data."

Other social scientists use exploratory factor analysis. This technique is utilized to identify possible factors that determine items representative of diverse coping strategies.32 Research has found this technique to lack "theoretical coherence" which creates difficulties in relational interpretations (Dise-Lewis, 1988; Kurdek and Sinclair, 1988).

Confirmatory factor analysis is a method that seeks to assess the empirical adequacy of alternative theoretically derived models for coping measurement. This method seeks to test numerous conceptually unique structures (problem-focused versus emotion-focused model and approach versus avoidance model). It was found that a four dimensional model provided the most adequate fit to the data with the areas of focus on active coping, avoidance, distraction, and social support.33

Discussions of African American children occur infrequently in the coping literature. Research efforts tend to center around issues of environmental violence. C. C. Bell suggested that African American children in the

32Sandler, Tein, and West, "Coping, Stress, and the Psychological Symptoms of Children of Divorce," 1744-1763.

33Ibid., 1745.
inner cities suffer from what she terms "survival fatigue," where "passivity, hopelessness and current and future helplessness result from exposure to chronic trauma and stress endemic to urban environments." Further research cites covictimization or the witnessing of violence to induce emotional, behavioral and cognitive changes in children.\(^3\)

Past research efforts have tended to frame the reality of African American children in the vein of victim. These studies paint a picture of children who are too stressed out to fight or take flight, or worse only being capable of exhibiting pathological coping behaviors. Little research has sought to key in on the strengths of their coping styles. In fact little research has emphasized the existence of any coping style for African American children other than aggression and depression.\(^3\)

To gain a more accurate understanding of the coping styles of African American children, it becomes imperative that one examine the history of its people.


\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Barbin and Solar, "Behavioral, Emotional, and Academic Adjustment in a National Probability Sample of African American Children," 443.
The African Experience

The origins of stressors for Africans in America have their roots in the global enslavement of their African ancestors. During the holocaust, some 20 to 40 million Africans were enslaved with some 50 to 60 million resultant deaths.36 Men, women, and children all suffered unspeakable atrocities. With the loss of family, freedom, culture, language, home, and spirit, resistance often ensued.

The harshness of the enslavement often enforced sanctions against Africans speaking their native tongue. Literacy was strictly forbidden and viewed as being indicative of a skill that contradicted the enslavement status quo.37 With the "so-called" emancipation of the enslaved, Africans quickly sought the previously denied education. Early Black schools had been established and supported primarily through the African descendants' own efforts.38 From 1833 to 1865, unknown to slave regimes, a Black school existed in Savannah, Georgia. This school was headed by a woman of African descent by the name of Dedveaux, who quickly expanded her plight during and

38Ibid., 7.
following the Civil War." Ultimately, the formally enslaved Africans contributed their time and money to ensure the existence and organized run of these institutions.

These Africans, with the assistance of Republican politicians, gained great influence in state governments and created a foundation for the public education system of the south. However, this struggle was framed in the context of "political and economic oppression." Ultimately, the movement was impeded by segregation and the redirection of public funds away from African schools. "As black southerners lost political and economic power, they lost substantial control of their educational institutions, especially in the public sector, and the shape and character of their education took a different turn."

During the 1880s and 1890s, the South witnessed the rise of the most racist political powers of its history. This emergence ushered in the widespread acceptance of rigid segregation laws designed to disenfranchise Black voters and

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39Ibid.
40Ibid., 8.
41Ibid., 3.
divert funding away from Black educational institutions and toward separate schools for Whites.45

The political climate led to a number of changes in curriculum standards, the emergence of IQ testing, and the ultimate appearance of labeling and tracking.46

Schools

The educational system within the United States plays a very important part in the socialization of African American children. In that respect, this system plays an active role in the contributions of stress to the African child. However, to truly understand the impact the educational system has on African children in America, its function must be understood from a historical perspective.

Black people are in a colonial relationship with Caucasian people, one that is perpetuated via political, economic and cultural exploitation.47 Lerone Bennett wrote that inferior education in ghetto schools handicaps Black workers in the labor market.48 In fact, according to Janice Hale, in:

a system of colonialism, the colonizer has a dual purpose of educating the colonized. The first . . . socialization into accepting the value system, history, and culture of the

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45Ibid.
46Ibid., 101.
47Hale, Black Children, 152-153.
48Ibid.
dominant society . . . second education for economic productivity . . . oppressed are treated like commodities imbued with skills . . . bought and sold on the labor market for the profit of the capitalists."

Carter G. Woodson, author of *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, believed that as the status of the Africans in America was fixed in a state of inferiority, so to was the educational curriculum which supported it. Woodson went on to explain that the training of "Negro" educators came from biased textbooks written by prejudiced authors, and as long as this practice remained, the minds of "Negroes" would be forever enslaved.50

Rosalie Cohen identified two dominant learning styles, the analytical and relational styles.51 Cohen went on to explain that schools tend to ascribe to the analytical approach. According to a summary compiled by Asa Hilliard, this approach tends to be stimulus centered and focused on formal properties with stable, long lasting meanings.52 The approach also looks for linear relationships, viewing the self in terms of status roles. Though this presentation is not representative of all of Hilliard's information

49Ibid., 154.


52Ibid., 32.
(refer to Appendix A), it is safe to infer that this approach is clearly Western in ideology.

When this Western ideology is not well developed in students, they may present as poor learners early on and worsen in higher levels.\(^{53}\) This cognitive style extends beyond how information is supposedly correctly processed, but also spills into the educational environment which demands behaviors associated with analytical ideology.\(^{54}\) Children failing to comply will almost certainly be labeled deviant and/or disruptive.\(^{55}\)

**African Children and Schools**

African children in America tend to ascribe to the relational style of cognition. According to Hilliard’s compiled summary, relational thinkers tend to be more global, straying away from linear relations. Relationships also tend to be functional, emphasis being placed on the unique. This cognitive difference tends to create a great deal of difficulty for African children in the American educational system. These children tend to be classified by pathology and deficits above and beyond those of White children.

\(^{53}\)Ibid., 31.

\(^{54}\)Ibid., 34.

\(^{55}\)Ibid.
A major component in the way African American children process information is their affective orientation. Studies have found Black people to be emotional in nature.\textsuperscript{56} Similar research with Black children has yielded information that they are more feeling-orientated, people-orientated, and more proficient in nonverbal communication than White children.\textsuperscript{57} A thorough understanding of the African American child's nature may shed light on the upsurge of emotional disorder in the Black community.

There are several diagnoses that continue to have restricted utility among African American children. These are conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and schizophrenia. There is also concern that there is an underdiagnosis of stress, affective disorders, and anxiety disorders. It, thus, becomes important to consider alternative explanatory factors.

Johnson found that there are a host of children who grow up with a myriad of coping resources. The resources tend to go untapped, due largely to an intolerance to rebellion and resistance to the status quo. What may actually be occurring within the school system is the expression of the African spirit. Just maybe African

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid.
children are expressing their desire to be themselves in an environment that fails to see the strengths and uniqueness of their culture.

How one perceives coping is important because maladaptive coping tends to become pathological. A host of problems associated with being African in America and poor, problems with internalizing, externalizing, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, problems related to diffused racial identity, self-esteem, and low academic achievement, may very well be subconscious coping strategies used to ensure the survival of African people.59

The internalizing and externalizing may simply be how one processes. The aggression or violence may be the expression of a need to defend their person. Impulsivity may be indicative of a reservoir of energy that is ready to be used for revolution, with ADHD resulting in the preoccupation of time and energy on seemingly insignificant agendas. Lastly, low academic achievement may simply be an inability to identify with material due to inaccuracy or inappropriateness. How these "problems" are viewed and dealt with depends on one's perceptions. Erriel Roberson said that "conscious resistance in a hostile environment of

59Barbin, "Coping and Resilience," 483.
oppression cannot be viewed as radical." An understanding of African culture and its people places one in the proper perspective by which to accurately approach the situation.

The incidence of serious emotional disturbance, as defined by the DSM-IV, among African American children is low however the rates of behavioral problems are extraordinarily high and remain so throughout childhood."\(^6^1\) Johnson proposes an alternative category of disturbance observed in African American children that gives a prominent role in the etiology of psychological disorders to trauma or distress, particularly distress resulting from negative racial encounters."\(^6^2\) Barbin and Loer presented data on behavioral and emotional symptoms based on a national probability sample of African American children. Symptoms associated with anxiety, conduct, and hyperactivity disorders were among the most frequently reported parental concerns. Girls had the highest risk for emotional disorder, and boys had the greatest risk for behavioral disorders. Older children were at greatest risk for


\(^{61}\)Barbin, "Emotional and Social Development of African American Children," 382.

\(^{62}\)Ibid., 386.
emotional behavioral disorders than were the younger children.  

**Conceptual Framework**

It is the author's belief that there is a great need for African clinicians to be more steadfast in their efforts to develop African-centered criteria by which to develop and enhance the potential of African children. In Dr. Francis Cress-Welsing's book *The Isis Papers*, she framed the plight of African people in these words:

> When the Black collective begins to understand that power is directly related not to money but to correct behavior pattern organization, behavior discipline, and behavior control on the part of the individual and the collective, the Black collective will be well on its way towards a new level of political understanding (power) and maturity. These attempts to evolve correct patterns of behavior under the specific circumstances of racism become the tactics and strategies in all areas of life activity to achieve the ultimate goal of liberation and justice.  

These words get to the very meat of the Black situation. To understand self is to liberate one's mind, empower one's being, and self determine one's reality. To understand cause and effect as it relates to the Black experience, is to move forward and positively alter one's condition.

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62 Ibid.

This study will be directed by the African-centered theoretical framework. Through this perspective, the author will view coping as an attempt to deal with and overcome oppression. In the case of the study’s subjects, oppression will center on the educational environment. The children’s own responses will be used in an effort to gain information from their own perspective, to determine why they respond the way they do. It is the author’s belief that currently, the coping techniques of Africans in America are reactionary. Hence, effective coping should be strategic in nature. To actualize this belief, African children in American must be knowledgeable of the biopsychosocial issues concerning stress, in efforts to harness and cultivate the strengths of the African mind, body, and spirit.

The author also believes that there is positive stress and there is negative stress. African people are the creators of their own conditions. It therefore becomes imperative that an understanding of their stressors and its history be reached so that the energy may be used strategically and effectively.

The end result of effective strategic coping is wholistic health. This is a condition of homeostasis, or balance where the mind, body and spirit are functioning at their maximum. As Africans in America define their conditions they thereby are defining their reality.
Statement of the Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study is Western teaching styles negatively impact the coping strategies of African children in America, with the independent variable being Western teaching styles and the dependent variable being coping strategies.

Definition of Terms

The terms utilized in this study have been defined as follows:

African-Centered: a perspective that places the moral, economic, political, and spiritual centerhood of African people on the African continent. It is also a perspective that sees Blacks as leaders in the interpretation of the Black Experience reality and must therefore take the responsibility of defining it within the framework of objective reality.


Black: a term used synonymously with African in America.

Coping: the behaviors an individual uses to meet personal needs and adapt to the demands of the environment.


"Clark Atlanta University, Clark Atlanta University Practicum Manual (Atlanta: Clark Atlanta University, 1997).
Stress: anything that causes a change in the body.

Wholistic Health: an approach to wellness that recognizes every aspect of the person interacting with the environment; placing emphasis on harmony with self, nature, and world.\(^6^6\)

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

This study is a replication of a study conducted by Creasy, Mitts, and Catanzaro entitled "Associations Among Daily Hassles, Coping and Behavior Problems in Nonreferred Kindergartners." The study sought to solicit coping responses from the children as opposed to providing options. It was the aim of this research effort to learn what the coping responses are to particular scenarios, and to gain an understanding as to the rationale and its effectiveness as determined by African children in America. The author made adjustments in the procedure, by including additional curriculum information to, and a rescripting of the vignettes.

Research Design

A one group posttest-only design was used for this study. In notational form, the design can be depicted as:

\[ X \rightarrow 0 \]

---

Where:

\[ X = \text{Independent variable (vignettes)} \]
\[ O = \text{Measurement of the dependent variable} \]

This design was exploratory in nature and provided a measure of what occurred when the children were asked to respond to the vignette. The design attempted to uncover possible generalizations and aid in developing additional hypothesis by which to further investigate coping phenomenon among African American children. Due to the small population size, the children were not randomly assigned.

Description of Setting

Project DUNBAAR (Developing Urban Needs By African American Resources) is a non-profit organization that offers free tutorial, afterschool services, extra-curricular and cultural enrichment. The program is sponsored by Wholistic Stress Control Institute (WSCI), a program that seeks to provide training and instruction in the areas of stress management for children. Project DUNBAAR is one of many programs that fall under the umbrella of WSCI.

Project DUNBAAR is located on the second floor of the Dunbar Community Center. This facility is located in the heart of the Mechanicsville community in Atlanta, Georgia. This area is comprised of the McDaniel-Glen housing community.
Sample

The population of focus for this study were African American children residing in the Mechanicsville community. The population that was accessible for this study were second and third grade children who are participants in the Project DUNBAAR Afterschool Program.

Human Subjects

The study participants ranged from 7 to 9 years of age and attended Dunbar Elementary School. The majority of the participants (60%) were male. All students have participated in the stress education curriculum created by WSCI.

The study was designed to ensure that no harm would come to any participant as a result of this study. Home visits were made in an effort to explain the study to parents and guardians and answer any questions they may have had.

Description of Instruments

In terms of the children's stressors, the author asked the children to provide a list of the activities or behaviors that they found stressful within the school environment and displayed by school officials. The children were then asked to place the stressors in one of three
emotions categories: sad, scared, mad. These categories were derived from the Stress and Feelings lesson from the stress education curriculum created by WSCI. Ultimately, this data was used comparatively to draw conclusions as to what academic factors may prove culturally deviant in the eyes of the students.

In terms of the children's coping, the author read two vignettes to children, who were then asked to explain how that scenario makes them feel. The children were then asked to list the behaviors or activities they would display in reaction to the scenario. The author asked the children to pick one coping technique they thought they would actually utilize, and explain what they hoped the technique would accomplish. Lastly, they were asked if they felt the technique would be effective. The children's coping responses were then coded in one of five coping categories: (1) seeking social support (telling a peer about the event), (2) self-reliance/problem solving (try to solve it alone), (3) distancing (saying I don't care), (4) internalizing (go off to be alone), and (5) externalizing (throw a pencil).

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3Creasy, Mitts, and Catanzaro, "Associations Among Daily Hassles, Coping and Behavior Problems in Nonreferred Kindergartners," 311-319.
Data Collection Procedures

The interviews were conducted on the last two Thursdays and Fridays in the month of January, 1998, beginning on the 22nd and ending on the 30th. The location for the interviews was in a conference room housed in the same building as Project DUNBAAR. Each interview lasted approximately 10 to 12 minutes.

The author interviewed each child individually. The author reviewed the concept of stress and the behavioral manifestations of stress. The child was asked to compile a list of all the activities or behaviors that take place in a school environment by a school official that he or she deems stressful. The child was then asked to place each stressor in a category determined by Wholistic Stress Control Institute, "Coping with Stress: A Stress Control Program for Children."

The child was then read two vignettes and asked to describe how he or she might cope with the scenarios. One vignette assessed self generated coping behaviors in response to difficulty with classwork. The other scenario involved being reprimanded for correcting a teacher when the child felt a teacher had not told the truth. The two scenarios were chosen to represent stressors that might occur in the educational environment.

'Trotter, Coping with Stress, 2.'
The child was then asked how these events would make them feel. The interviewee was then asked to tell all of the things he or she might do to make themselves feel better. The child was then asked which one he or she would actually do and what they thought the technique would accomplish. Lastly, the child was asked if they thought it would really be effective. The child’s coping responses were then coded in one of five coping categories: seeking social support (telling a peer about the event), self-reliance/problem solving (try to solve it alone), distancing (saying I don’t care), internalizing (go off to be alone), and externalizing (throw a pencil). The categories were based on and grouped by the children’s own language. Though the categories may seem repetitive, it is the expressive tools which are most important. In self determination, accurate definitions must stem from one’s own efforts. The quality of the content will be addressed accordingly.

To ensure that the responses for the coping techniques the children would actually use were valid, the author had a second or third grade teacher from Dunbar Elementary look at the responses and determine if they were indeed behaviors found within the school environment.

"Creasy, Mitts, and Catanzaro, "Associations Among Daily Hassles, Coping and Behavior Problems in Nonreferred Kindergartners," 311-319."
Statistical/Qualitative Analysis

Data collected from the students were analyzed by using the constant comparative method as described by Strauss\(^6\) and Strauss and Corbin.\(^7\) The analysis was iterative in nature, meaning there was a constant reassessment between data collection and analysis. This analysis began with the interviews of the children, with analysis based on comparisons between the other children. Common concepts were established through an open coding of student interviews, where issues were grounded on conceptual similarities. Tentative categories were developed and reviewed to determine the existence of conceptual distinctions from one another.

To assess the validity of the children's responses two teachers from Dunbar Elementary, one 2nd and one 3rd grade, reviewed the responses to determine if they were indeed behaviors found within the school environment. The teachers then rated the behaviors on a scale of "often," "sometimes," "seldom," and "never." These ratings were correlated using a Spearman's Rho analysis. The resulting correlation value was a low .44.

\(^6\) A. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientist* (New York: Cambridge University, 1989).

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Results

After obtaining permission slips from the parents of 24 children, only 15 participated in the actual study. This accounted for absentees and early departures on the days of interviewing. The sample consisted of six girls and nine boys, ten second graders and four third graders (see Table 1). Ten children lived with their mothers, 2 children lived with grandparents, and 2 children lived with their mother and father.
The research questions for this study sought to determine the children’s school-related stressors, their choice coping techniques, their rationale for choosing one over others, and their views on the effectiveness of their choices. The study showed that the children found strained peer relations to be most stressful and often lead to "mad" and "sad" emotional expressions (see Table 2). These experiences often lead to more physical techniques for
coping with their discomfort. The study also revealed that the children saw their coping techniques as effective in dealing with their stressors.

**TABLE 2**

**EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO STRESSORS BY GENDER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Mad</th>
<th>Scared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Related</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 (28.6%)</td>
<td>4 (57.1%)</td>
<td>1 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Related</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6 (30.0%)</td>
<td>12 (54.5%)</td>
<td>4 (18.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Related</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Related</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (males)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Related</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Related</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4 (40.0%)</td>
<td>4 (40.0%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Related</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (100.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Related</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (males)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ultimately, 46% of the children's stressors fell in the peer relations category, 5.8% fell in the academic category, 27% fell in the teacher related category, and 4% fell in the environmental category.

The second part of the analysis examined responses to the vignettes. The scenarios were designed to solicit
responses concerning the children's feelings, thought processes, and resultant behaviors. According to Vignette Number One, the girls said they felt made (33%), sad (50%), and then mad and sad (17%). The reason for their emotional expression for girls was: "I want to sit with classmates," "I have to stay away from my friends," "I can't sit with classmates," "I have to sit with her." For the boys, this emotional expression resulted from: "the teacher was being selfish," "I can't sit by my friends," "I want to sit by my friends," "I won't have anyone to talk to" (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Mad</th>
<th>Scared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4 (66.7%)</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8 (53.3%)</td>
<td>7 (46.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The actual behavioral responses the girls would exhibit were: look sad, throw food, "wrinkle face," say "I hate you" (see Table 4). Their reasons for displaying these responses were: a desire to sit with classmates, the teacher made the student mad, the student was "real mad." One student failed to provide a response. The boys said they would exhibit: laying down on the floor/covering face,
saying sorry, "act bad"/play a lot/jump on bean bags/throw clay dough, talk it out, won't listen/"puff up," run out of school, ask teacher "can I sit with class," no response given. Their reasons for displaying these responses were: "the teacher was mean," "the teacher was teaching a lesson the student was suppose to learn," "so the teacher will know that I am mad," "if you do anything else they'll suspend you," and a desire to sit with the class.

**TABLE 4**

**BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE ONE BY GENDER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Nonverbal</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 (30.0%)</td>
<td>3 (30.0%)</td>
<td>4 (40.0%)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3 (23.1%)</td>
<td>5 (38.5%)</td>
<td>5 (38.5%)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The girls hoped their behavioral responses would accomplish: the teacher sending them to the principal's office, making the teacher mad, the teacher calling their mother to come to school to get student. One child failed to provide a response. The boys hoped to accomplish: getting suspended, the teacher saying they could sit with the class (50%), making the teacher feel better, making the teacher mad, nothing. One child failed to provide a response. Three of the girls felt they would accomplish
their goal, two of the girls did not know, and for one of the girls the question was not applicable. Five of the boys felt they would accomplish their goal, three boys did not know, and two had no response at all.

According to Vignette Number Two, a majority of the girls' emotional responses were sad (66.7%) and mad (33.3%). Their rationales for their responses were: "she won't help me," "I don't know how to do it/she might give me an F," "I don't understand" (50%), "she's not gonna explain it to me again" (see Table 5). The boys' emotional responses were mad (62.5%), sad (25%), and scared (0%). Their rationale for the behavioral responses were: "he won't explain and that's what teachers are for," "I probably don't know how to do it," "I don't have any help and I'm gonna make a bad grade on my report card," "may write the wrong thing," and "I don't know how to do it" (33%).

### TABLE 5

**EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE TWO BY GENDER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sad ( )</th>
<th>Mad ( )</th>
<th>Scared ( )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 (25.0%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4 (66.7%)</td>
<td>2 (33.3%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6 (42.9%)</td>
<td>7 (50.0%)</td>
<td>1 (7.14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The behavioral responses the girls would actually exhibit were to look sad, tell the teacher she was sad, "wrinkle up face," "just sit and do anything or the ones I knew," "nothing," "I don't know." The behavioral responses the boys would actually exhibit were throw clay dough around classroom, cover up face, try to distract another student, "make a frown"/ask teacher to explain again, no response (56%).

**TABLE 6**

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE TWO BY GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Nonverbal</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 (20.0%)</td>
<td>4 (80.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2 (25.0%)</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The girls hoped their behavioral responses would accomplish: "the teacher putting me out of the classroom," and "making her angry so she would help." The boys hoped their behavioral responses would accomplish: "being put in the corner," "learning by himself," "being able to copy from another student," and "getting help from the teacher." Forty percent of the sample provided no response. Two of the girls felt their behaviors would accomplish their goal, one girl said it would not, and four girls provided no
response. Four boys said their behaviors would accomplish their goal and five boys made no response at all.

The third part of the analysis was that of the teacher ratings. Second and third grade teachers rated the behaviors on a scale of "often," "sometimes," "seldom," and "never," resulting in a correlation coefficient of .44. The ratings for the behaviors preferred for Vignette Number One revealed minimal agreement between the two teachers. Only two behaviors showed consistency among the teachers, excessive play (occurring often) and the covering of ears and placing head on desk (occurring seldomly). The second grade teacher's ratings tend to center on the high occurrence end, whereas the third grade teacher ratings were on the lower occurrence end.

**TABLE 7**

**OBSERVED BEHAVIORAL FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES FOR VIGNETTE ONE BY TEACHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>2nd Grade</th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>1 (25.0%)</td>
<td>3 (75.0%)</td>
<td>4 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>2 (100.0%)</td>
<td>2 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>5 (31.3%)</td>
<td>10 (62.5%)</td>
<td>16 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>6 (37.5%)</td>
<td>10 (62.5%)</td>
<td>16 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Vignette Number Two, there was also a minimal degree of agreement in the rating of the behavior occurrences. Once again, only two behaviors showed consistency among the teachers.

**TABLE 8**

**OBSERVED BEHAVIORAL FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES FOR VIGNETTE TWO BY TEACHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>2nd Grade</th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>1 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (66.7%)</td>
<td>3 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal</td>
<td>2 (50.0%)</td>
<td>2 (50.0%)</td>
<td>4 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>2 (50.0%)</td>
<td>2 (50.0%)</td>
<td>4 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>5 (45.5%)</td>
<td>6 (54.5%)</td>
<td>11 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They were verbal expression of sadness (never occurring) and the distraction of classmates (occurring sometimes). The teachers found none of the behaviors to occur frequently in their classrooms. Also of importance, they indicated that verbal expressions of feelings, of those provided, never occurred in their classrooms.

In summary, the study found that of the four diagnostic categories: dependent, impulsive, passive-aggressive, and repressed, 53% of the children interviewed provided responses that seemed characteristic of the impulsive personality type. In addition, from the responses
from both Vignettes it was found that 33% of the responses were of an aggressive nature (throwing objects, hostile verbal exchanges).

Of the four major coping models (active, avoidance, distraction, and social support), the majority of the children interviewed provided responses that would be considered avoidant in nature. Also, most of children's responses were behavioral in nature, and would thus be viewed as emotion-focused, indicative of poorer adjustment. However, the children’s responses also clearly show logical problem oriented approaches that sought to attain a particular goal (acting out to provoke the desired removal from the classroom).

The apparent emotion-focused orientation is viewed by the literature in a negative light; however, the emotional factors appears to be of great importance to the children. This point becomes clear when one pays close attention to the stressors the children provided at the beginning of the study. One hundred percent of the participants provided a response that mentioned an event that assaulted his or her feelings.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Previously, it was the author's belief that it was Western teaching styles, and classroom structure that created oppressive and stressful situations for African American children. However, this research effort found that the greatest areas of concern were of a social nature (picking, fighting, striking out, inconsistencies in treatment). In terms of the emotional responses to the stressors, the children indicated the categories of sad and mad to be those of frequent occurrence. Ultimately disrespect seemed to be the common element. This norm appears to play out in the school environment, and worse, the very structure seems to foster its communal demise rather than build or strengthen it.

The research also indicates a need to look closely at the importance of emotionality and the part it plays in the behavioral manifestations of African children. As Janice Hale-Benson indicated, the affective nature of African American children tends to color their actions. The categories of mad and sad were the most frequent emotional responses to their stressors. These emotional responses may require closer examination, particularly on how they affect
the children's cognitive process and problem solving ability.

Teacher/Student Relations

Understanding that children learn by example, it would also be appropriate to look further at the current behaviors being modeled for the children (parents, teachers, extended family). If these entities model inappropriate people skills African children will learn the same. It would then become important for Black people to give close scrutiny to themselves and their ways.

This study illustrates quite clearly the importance of the communal piece for the African child and the African community as a whole. This was recognized as the most pressing concern for the children. This tie is evident in the relationships played out between students and teachers. The children made mention of a number of instances where they were yelled at, hit, or, ultimately, disrespected by their teachers. This is an important piece for discussion. How the children feel about themselves is often shaped by how their environment treats them. If the children view their teachers as disrespectful their resultant actions are, in turn, disrespectful.

'Ole Black folk' use to always say "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It is important that African people begin to ask themselves, "Have I forgotten this truism?" One needs to begin looking at current means
of discipline and ask what impact does this current practice have on the ultimate outcome? In the Attar, Guerra, and Tolan study on neighborhood disadvantage, they found that the environment could be the most critical variable in the link between stress exposure and childhood aggression. The study’s findings suggest that there may be some validity to this claim. In addition the research by Gitter, Black and Mostofsky clearly state that Black children are more feeling oriented, hence to negate the importance of the child’s feelings (as the literature encourages) is to actively misinterpret the African child’s actions.

**Peer Relations**

How the children interact with the adults in the academic environment is, to some degree, brought to the realm of peer relations. From the initial response to school related stressors the children indicated clearly that they found inadequate peer relations to be most troubling to them. In fact every child who provided a response (100% of the sample) indicated at least one mention of poor peer relations as a stressor invoking a sad or mad emotional response.

**School Environment**

Two children cited the lights going out in the school environment as a source of stress for them. This was due largely to the insufficient number of windows the school
has. For this reason it would be important to view the academic environment as having an influence on the behavior of the children. It would hence be appropriate to look at the structure of the school buildings (the number of windows, amount of light, colors of walls) and how they may affect behavior.

In that same vein, it would be valid for one to want to rethink the size of current classrooms and restructure classroom so that the children can have an active role in helping classmates experiencing difficulties addressing communal needs. One of the children mentioned that their acting out behavior was purposeful in that their goal was to be sent to the principal’s office, because it was quiet there. This information is important in that it alludes to the possibilities that the environment indeed plays an important role in shaping the behaviors children exhibit in the classroom.

Ultimately, the findings illustrate very sophisticated problem solving from the children. The findings show that the children have a very clear grasp of cause and effect and the feasibility of environmental manipulation to achieve desired effects.

Study Limitations

The findings of this study must be reviewed with caution. The first limitation of the study concerned the structure of the design. The author utilized an XO design
where the children were interviewed and asked to provide responses that would later be rated by teachers. The procedure was very western in style (highly structured) and created a great deal of frustration in the children. In retrospect it becomes rather ridiculous to assume that one could gather desired answers by utilizing a style or instrument that is deemed counter-cultural and inappropriate by the standards of the guiding conceptual framework. In short, the current research used a tool, that was conceptually defined as oppressive in an attempt to gain insight on the potentially negative effects of western teaching styles on the oppressed.

Also the sample size was the most important limitation of the study. Initially, permission for participation was obtained for 24 children. During the course of the interviews, absentees or early dismissals led to the loss of 37% of the total sample. As a result, the study yielded no statistically significant findings.

The time of interview also posed a great problem for the study. Currently, the practice of recess has been removed from the school schedule, hence by the end of the day the children had been sitting at school for about eight hours. By the end of the day the children are highly excitable. The results may have been greatly impeded by the testing time, where the children may have had little patience for the interviews. This limitation was seen most
clearly in the responses from Vignette Two. In this instance, the majority of children failed to provide responses to questions. This may be due to the structure and length of interview, redundancy, lack of understanding, and difficulty with expression of feelings.
CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Learning what African children commonly do in stressful school-related situations allows one to look beyond the realms of deviancy and pathology to see the behaviors for what they are, reactions to stressful occurrences. More information in this area can aid professionals in better planning problem-solving curriculum by addressing the issues of cause and effect and consequences.

The author cannot emphasize enough the importance of understanding the multifaceted effects of oppression in the United States and throughout the Diaspora. Considering the pervasive occurrence, it is impossible to describe the behaviors in the school environment as having no effects from outside effecters (i.e., family, community, race). However, this research effort is designed to focus as closely as possible on school-related phenomenon, which is believed (by the author) to be totally influenced by White Supremacy ideology.

The findings from this study suggested that African American children may be more emotionally driven, in that they tend to exhibit behavior based on their feelings.
Children may need additional instruction on what their feelings are and how to express them. Most importantly, they may need more dialogue on what feelings are and how they may be experienced. It also becomes important to look at the relationships between emotions and their resultant behaviors, paying particular attention to the categories of "sad," "scared," and "mad."

Social workers could begin to look towards the development of information and support groups to explain the literature on Black students. The study implied that African American children are communal in nature, caring a great deal about their relationships with their peers. Social work practice with children could benefit from additional study on the social nature of Black children and how this component of their personality may be best utilized to achieve greater success in the academic environment.

The professional may also look at the importance of theoretical fit between the home and school environment. Children often exhibit behaviors that are acceptable in the home but rejected in the school. By engaging in dialogue with parents and educators, a common ground may be reached. Student expectations are another important focus. Social workers should actively work towards the realization of a strengths model perspective in the school system.

Parent Teacher Association involvement is another key area that can be used to introduce information on African
child development. These organizations can be vehicles for bringing African-centered speakers to the community. The organization can create additional parent/teacher cooperatives where home visits are scheduled or consistent dialogue is maintained between the parent, teacher, and the social worker. One might also want to involve the organization in looking more closely at current standards, realities, and possible outcomes of labeling. These meetings can become a time for interactions and the sharing of information as well as a time to create interventions based on the children's strengths. The social worker can also aid in creating school support groups and afterschool programs that center on teaching the children problem solving skills.

The social worker might also introduce areas of policy advocacy the school family. The professional could encourage the parents, teachers, and administration to look at current policies and how they affect their children (removal of recess from school program). The group can also organize lobbies on the local, state, and national levels. They may make visits to school board meetings and state legislative hearings and sessions.

The social worker may work to involve the greater community, by bringing representatives from the numerous National Black Associations to discuss implications for current research, new policy, and current information. By
being examples of community cooperatives, the children can internalize the principles of umoja (unity) and ujima (collective work and responsibility). These collaboratives will thereby empower the community and community representatives to engage in serious dialogue to come up with plans of action to better protect African children from harmful local, state, and national legislation.

The social worker may also work towards organizing support groups for the parents of labeled children. This group would give the parents a chance to unify and determine situational commonalities and chart appropriate plans of action. By sharing information the group is empowered to better advocate for the children.

It is the author’s hopes that this research will be but one of many that seek to analyze the thoughts, feelings, and actions of African children by the standards of Traditional African ideology. Hopefully these efforts will move African people closer to their original African identities and undying love for their ancestors, brothers, sisters, children, and home . . . Mother Africa.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research might want to look at the communal nature of African people and its current status. How teachers, students, parents, and social workers can create plans to remedy and strengthen communalism is also a necessary focus. It is the author’s suggestion that future
instruments return to the African source and look at traditional models of assessment and resolution.

Current teaching styles may need to be addressed. A large number of the children expressed dismay with the way their teachers treated them. These behaviors may be killing the spirits of African American children. Future studies might address current teaching techniques and children’s critiques of them.

Future research may also want to look at the perceptions of educators, particularly of those of African descent. The ratings of the second and third grade teachers revealed very little consistency. This may be due to developmental changes in the children or the individual expectations of the teachers. Future investigation might also want to ask about the consistencies and inconsistencies of the educator’s training and the realities of the classroom. One may also want to inquire about their sensitivities to the children’s feelings and emotions. Lastly, future studies may want to pay more attention to the behaviors found most frequently in classrooms and their emotional responses.

Conclusions

Knowledge of the problematic nature of areas may aid in tracking their occurrence in incidences preceding, during, and following a diagnosis. This knowledge will
better equip the clinician/professional to better plan interventions, class design, or curriculum.

By learning how these stressors make the children feel, in their own words, one gains a clearer picture of how African children process their experiences in the academic setting. Very little emphasis is placed on feelings/emotions in research. In fact analytical (Western) thought tends to view emotionality as pathological. By stepping outside of Western thought the African mind is thereby allowed to express itself without constraint. As one learns more about its emotions one begins to "know thy self." This knowledge is essential in understanding the connection between the mind, body, and spirit.

There is a massive need for healing in the African community. Black people must confront their "demons" and question the truth of their reality. That is, what is ideal and how can they attain it, and most importantly, where must change emanate? It is the social worker’s role to share the vision of their community and to become active change agents in this plight.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

ANALYTICAL AND RELATIONAL COGNITIVE STYLES¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As It Is In General (Analytical)</th>
<th>As It Could Be (Relational)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardization</td>
<td>Variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory for specific facts</td>
<td>Memory for essence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularity</td>
<td>Novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid order</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Normality&quot;</td>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences equal deficits</td>
<td>Sameness equals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preconceive</td>
<td>Improvise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>Approximate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atomistic</td>
<td>Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egocentric</td>
<td>Sociocentric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergent</td>
<td>Divergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meanings are universal</td>
<td>Meanings are contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Patterned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical</td>
<td>Humanistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unison</td>
<td>Individual in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deduction</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled</td>
<td>Targets of opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things focused</td>
<td>People focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Evolving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign oriented</td>
<td>Meaning oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Hilliard, 1976, 41,
APPENDIX B

LETTER TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS

To All Participants of this Study:

Greetings! I am a graduate student in the Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work. I am currently conducting a study on the coping techniques utilized by African American children residing in the Mechanicsville community for my masters thesis. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. All information that you provide will be kept confidential. No identification will be given. The study is designed to only solicit responses from the participants, hence no harm will come to any child.

The data obtained for this study will be analyzed solely for the purpose of completing my graduate thesis. The information requested in this study is important to the profession of social work, in that practitioners must have a thorough understanding of the behaviors of the children they are working with in efforts to improve the quality of services.

If you have any questions about this study, or if you are interested in the results of this study, don’t hesitate to contact me at (404) 727-9432.

Sincerely,

Consuela D. Vinson, MSW Student
Dr. Sarita Chukwuka, Thesis Advisor
Clark Atlanta University
School of Social Work

Yes, my child __________, can participate in this study.

No, my child, __________, cannot participate in this study.

________________________
Parent/Guardian’s Signature

63
OVERVIEW OF STUDY

The children will be seen one at a time. The author will review the concept of stress and the behavioral manifestations of stress. The child will be asked to compile a list of all the activities or behaviors that take place in a school environment by a school official that they deem stressful. The child will then be asked to place each stressor in a category determined by WSCI curriculum.

The child will then be read two vignettes and be asked to describe how they might cope with the scenarios. One vignette will assess self generated coping behaviors in response to difficulty with classwork. The other scenario will involve being reprimanded for correcting a teacher when the child felt a teacher had not told the truth. The order of the vignette presentation will be randomly determined. The two scenarios were chosen to represent stressors that might occur in the educational environment.

The child will then be asked how these events would make them feel. The interviewee will then be asked to tell all of the things he or she might do to make themselves feel better. The child would then be asked which one they would actually do and what they thought the technique would accomplish. Lastly, the child will be asked if they thought it would really be effective. The child’s coping responses
would then be coded in one of five coping categories: seeking social support (telling a peer about the event), self-reliance/problem solving (try to solve it alone), distancing (saying I don't care), internalizing (go off to be alone), and externalizing (throw a pencil).

To ensure that the responses for the coping techniques the children would actually use are valid, I will have a 2nd or 3rd grade teacher from Dunbar Elementary to look at the responses and determine if they were indeed behaviors found within the school environment.
**APPENDIX C**

**SURVEY OF STRESSORS**

Stress is anything that causes a change in your body. These changes usually come from different feelings we have like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAPPY</th>
<th>SAD</th>
<th>SCARED</th>
<th>MAD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Some signs of Stress are:

- nervousness
- sweating
- bad dreams
- headaches
- stomach ache
- fast heartbeat
- worrying
- fighting
- crying
- nail biting

What are some things that happen at school that make you feel sad, scared, or mad (stress)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRESSOR</th>
<th>FEELING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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APPENDIX D

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S COPING BEHAVIORS
(RESEARCH INSTRUMENT)

Directions: The following section seeks to solicit descriptive information about child coping behavior. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. All information is anonymous and confidential.

Demographic Information

1. Gender
   (1) Boy
   (2) Girl

2. Age
   (1) 7 years old
   (2) 8 years old
   (3) Other ____________________________________

3. Grade
   (1) 2nd Grade
   (2) 3rd Grade

4. Siblings
   (1) None
   (2) 1 brother/sister
   (3) 2 brother/sister
   (4) 3 brother/sister
   (5) Other brother ___ / sister ___

5. Parents/Guardians
   (1) Mother and Father
   (2) Mother
   (3) Father
   (4) Grandmother
   (5) Other ____________________________________
Directions: The following section includes two vignettes. Please read the vignettes in their entirety and answer the following questions. All responses are confidential.

Vignette 1: Being Reprimanded for Correcting Teacher

You are in class, and your teacher is teaching a lesson about animals. She says that elephants are the strongest animals in the world. You remember seeing a t.v. show that said bulls were the strongest animals in the world. You interrupt your teacher and tell her what the show on t.v. had said. She becomes angry and tells you that you are being rude and says you will have to sit with her and away from your friends during lunch.

a. How does this make you feel? (sad, mad, scared). Why?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

b. What things could you do to show that feeling and make yourself feel better?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
c. What one thing would you actually do to show your feeling and make yourself feel better? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

d. What do you hope it would accomplish?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

e. Do you think it would work? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Vignette 2: Difficulties With Classwork

Your teacher is explaining to you how to do a worksheet. She finished explaining how to do it and you still don’t understand. You asked your teacher to explain it a second time, but you still didn’t understand it. Your teacher tells you to try anyway.

a. How does this make you feel? (sad, mad, scared). Why?

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

b. What things could you do to show that feeling and make yourself feel better?

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________
c. What one thing would you actually do to show your feeling and make yourself feel better? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

d. What do you hope it would accomplish?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

e. Do you think it would work? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX E

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S COPING BEHAVIORS
(TEACHER RATINGS)

Instructions: This instrument seeks to solicit responses describing the occurrence of certain behaviors of African American children in response to particular stressors. Please read the following lists of behaviors and rate the behaviors based on the frequency of their occurrence in your classroom.

Situation 1: Being Reprimanded for Correcting Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. displaying sad expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. excessive play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. jumping around on furniture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. throwing objects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. displaying mad expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. saying &quot;I hate you&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. running out of classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. asking to sit with classmates during lunch</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. covering ears and putting head on desk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. saying I’m sorry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. laying on floor with face covered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Situation 2: Difficulty With Classwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. displaying sad expression</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. saying &quot;I’m sad&quot;</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. throwing objects</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. displaying mad expression</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. sitting and writing anything on worksheet</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. trying to distract classmates</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. asking teacher to explain again</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. saying &quot;you make me sick&quot;</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
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<td>![ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


