

Running Head: AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

Inner City African American Female Adolescents: Investigating Perceptions of Womanhood and

Aggressive Behavior

Dissertation

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**Inner City African American Female Adolescents: Investigating Perceptions of  
Womanhood and Aggressive Behavior**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of womanhood among African American female adolescents, and whether or not their perceptions consisted of aggressive or violent behavior. Black Feminist Thought and Social Constructionism were theoretical perspectives used to frame this qualitative study. Six African American female adolescents from two different cities participated in this study. Data collection included a semi-structured interview with each participant separately, transcribing each interview, downloading transcribed data into a qualitative data analysis program, and combing data for themes. This study attempted to answer to primary questions: How do Inner City African American female adolescents view womanhood? How does aggressive or violent behavior play a role, or not, in African American adolescent perceptions of womanhood? Data analysis revealed several themes from participant's interviews: strength, responsibility, education, mom as role model, stereotypes, and finances. Limitations and implications for future research are also discussed.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

This study examines African American female adolescents who reside in inner cities. The focus of this study is African American female adolescent's perceptions of womanhood and whether or not these perceptions include aspects of aggression or violence. Chapter one provides an overview of the problem, challenges facing this specific adolescent population, and examines two theoretical frameworks: Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought. Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought provide a lens through which to study perceptions of womanhood among African American adolescent females. Chapter two discusses qualitative and quantitative studies focusing on inner city adolescents with special regards to gender and race. Chapter three provides the qualitative methodology used. Chapter 4 presents transcribed interview data for each participant along and the emerging themes, providing a Within-case analysis for each participant. Chapter 5 presents an Across Case-Analysis of emerged themes. In conclusion, Chapter 6 presents a discussion about findings as well as future research implications and concludes with a personal statement.

### **The Nature of the Problem**

Youths growing up in low-income inner –city neighborhoods are at substantial risk for initiating substance use, violent behavior, and sexual intercourse at early ages; these risk behaviors continue at comparatively high rates through adolescence (Bolland, Bryant, Lian, McCallum, Vazsonyi, & Barth, 2007, pg. 230).



African American adolescents living in low income inner city neighborhoods have a greater risk of being exposed to community violence, such as shootings and homicides, than other youth in America (Foster, Brooks-Gunn, & Martin, 2007; Viosin, 2007; Wilson, Woods, Emerson, & Donenberg, 2012). Violent behavior among inner city African American adolescent girls has been explored in research. (Hubert & Matthews, 2008; Ness, 2000; Jones, 2004, and Jones, 2009). Increased exposure to and participation in violence among this population of girls is currently one of the most understudied but rapidly growing issues facing African American female adolescents in inner city communities, according to researchers Jones (2009) and Wiess and Black (2002). As all-girl gangs and auxiliary gangs grow in membership and frequency, female homicide rates and female youth incarcerations also rise (Hubbert & Matthews, 2008).

Research indicates some African American adolescent girls living in inner cities face unwritten community rules or “codes” which promote violence (Jones, 2009). The “code” of inner city life for African American adolescent females consists of three components: (a) Reputation (b) Respect and (c) Retaliation (Jones, 2008). The integral part of the street “code” is respect for both female and male adolescents. In addition, respect has been linked to a coming of age into womanhood or manhood for inner city youth. Jones laments, “African American inner-city girls may have no manhood to defend; yet shared circumstances of inner-city life engender shared concerns for physical safety and survival” (2009 pg. 92).

Circumstances for many adolescent girls growing up in inner city environments can be characterized by high unemployment and crime rates, broken families and minimal educational opportunities (Blankfield, 2002). Visual pollution including decayed buildings, graffiti, and uncollected rubbish engender a loss of community spirit and some inhabitants become depressed (2002). African American female adolescents living in inner cities also face particular challenges

with regard to aggression and mental health. Researchers have indicated that youth's difficulties in controlling aggression are related to the development of mental health disorders, such as depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among this adolescent population (Mrug & Windle, 2010).

Mental health problems related to being exposed to violence appear to be growing among African American female adolescents (2010). Traumatic effects and aggressive behaviors related to violence exposure are common in communities where adolescents learn to gain community respect through physical aggression (Ness, 2010; Jones, 2009). Researchers use the term Potentially Traumatizing Events (PTEs) to describe effects of being exposed to violence among inner city children and early adolescents, which is paralleled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Difficulties with living in an inner city environment are salient, but more or equally poignant questions may need to be considered. Brown and Gourdine's (2001) study addressed the context of community violence among a sample of African American girls. Seventy-five African American girl's ages 12 to 19 years participated, and among them, 55% of participants reported having been suspended for fighting in school, 54% had close friends or relatives who had been killed violently, 40% reported being perpetrators of violent acts, and 34% had attacked or injured someone in the past year. However, little is known in literature regarding the reasons for their participation in violent activities. If, as Jones (2009) suggests, adolescent girls perceive being violent or aggressive as a part of becoming women in their community, then violent behavior among these girls would be expected. Investigations into African American female adolescent perceptions of womanhood have the potential to play an integral part in designing

preventive programming. Additionally, findings will likely add another dynamic to multicultural training for counselors.

Despite the potential benefit, little is currently known about the ways in which an identity of woman is currently constructed by inner city African American female youth. Striking knowledge gaps include: constructions of the social role or identity of being an African American woman in inner cities; girls' perceptions of becoming women in their communities; and, how social role or identity and perceptions of womanhood may relate to violent behaviors. A need for such research on African American females has been supported (Murray, 2011). Further, gender and identity development research from perspectives of African American females is limited, especially adolescent perspectives (2011).

Social construction of gender is influenced by a multitude of factors, such as personal experiences, media images, and perceptions of gender role orientation in society (Settles 2006). Identifying as a woman will have different definitions depending on which woman is being asked and how the woman's culture and race affects her perception of womanhood. Differing intersections of constructions of race and gender contribute to varying perceptions of womanhood. For example, Settles (2006) conducted a study on gender identity with (N=89) African American women. Participants identified more with being Black Women than being a woman or an African American separately.

Settles, Hyatt, and Buchanan (2008) noted that womanhood generally may be devalued in society and therefore influencing women's self perceptions negatively. Identity for African American women is an amalgamation of two identities being both a woman and an African American (2008). A combination of both devalued gender and racial identity for African

American women has been supported in the literature as associated with depression and other mental health challenges (2008). Although other identities are present for African American women related to age and social class, experiences of African American women in the United States may be unique in creating a heightened consciousness of African American females' racial and gender identities having combined (2006). Their experiences are unique in having both gender and minority racial identity from disempowered groups.

Bell (2004) examined myths stereotypes and realities of African American women, as reflecting on societal perceptions such as the promiscuous and vengeful Black Woman. Bell mentions multiple identity complexities when racism and sexism are combined. Citing incidents where Black women have been mistreated historically in Western Society, she states: "When a Black woman is hurt, wounded deeply inside, no one comforts her cry. She must protect her rights, and she must defend her dignity (Bell, 2004, p. 148)". Bell emphasizes that existing stereotypes of Black women include being overbearing, difficult to get along with, and emasculating (2004). Furthermore, Bell argues that African American women's strengths are distorted by mainstream culture in that when Black women show competence in a subject matter or overall strength, she is often perceived as controlling, as a manipulator, and as a hostile person (2004).

Finally, Bell (2004) not only mentions negative intergroup stereotypes of Black women, but she also laments about negative intragroup perceptions and stereotypes. Increases in Black women in higher education institutions are associated with positive perceptions related to being educated; however, intragroup group biases arise, such as being considered "uppity."

Today the term is used by Blacks to describe their feelings of frustration, envy, or even fear of abandonment when another Black person advances beyond the norm. To be labeled as uppity means a Black person believes that he or she is better than the Blacks with less education, rank or status. In the worst scenario, it can also imply that the Black person is behaving like a White person by not adhering to the socially ascribed status, roles, and norms traditionally associated with the Black community (Bell, 2004, p.153).

Intergroup and intragroup racism and sexism interplay as African American females establish gender and racial identities. With such complex dynamics in play during identity construction, African American girls are in need of counselors who are aware of these dynamics and potential youth development programs to support young girls during rapid gender identity development, which occurs during adolescent years.

According to CACREP standards, a nationwide accreditation for Counseling programs, counselors should be culturally competent. Multicultural courses and multicultural counseling textbooks such as Sue & Sue (2008) provide snapshots of different cultures and racial groups. African Americans are typically discussed in both classroom lectures and literature; however, the subset of African American females may not be discussed exclusively or with particular attention. With evidence of increasing violent incidents (Ness, 2004) and high incarceration rates among African American female adolescents in the United States (Hubert & Matthews, 2008), further examination of African American female's culture as associated with violent behavior may be useful in multicultural counseling training and clinical practice (Murray, 2011).

## **Social Constructionism**

Gergen (1985) describes social constructionism as processes by which people view the world, society and their place in the world. Historically it has been believed that what people describe in discourse is simply a reflection of what the world is; however, Gergen (1985) examines social constructionism which holds that people's discourse about the world is not a reflection of the world. Rather, the social constructionism paradigm presupposes that reality is found by further examining the discourses evolving in the processes and interchanges between people and society. Additionally, a person's view of society and their place in society is believed to be formed in the interchanges which occur between the world and self. Hollander and Gordon (2006) believe social constructionism has an influence in research due to emphasis on human agency. Having a fixed gender model discourages an individual's autonomy and is inherently threatening to someone who is a part of a disempowered group:

For example, the idea that gender is socially constructed is an appealing alternative to theories that rely on biological (and therefore assumed to be fixed and unchangeable) differences between women and men to explain gender inequality (Kennelly, Merz, and Lorber, 2001 as cited in Holland & Gordon, 2006, p. 184).

Powerful examples of Social Constructionism are found in Young (2004) entitled *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, where Young interviews several young men ages 18 to 25 in a Chicago low income housing development.

Regardless of my situation I know exactly who I am ... So if you have a lot of material things that you manufactured-that you made sure that you can only have-

doesn't make me no difference. I got life. I got a family now that I love. I'm a real person. I feel like I have emotions and I'm not scared to say it. I'm a black man in a white man's world. I don't have that fear you know. And it's *their* world, believe me (Young, 2004, p. 3)

When reading Young's introduction, Young makes it clear to readers that he is conducting a qualitative study to garner a rich perspective of the ways low income young African American males socially construct their world (2004). Furthermore, Young emphasizes the ways in which his interest in researching young African American men derives from his own upbringing in an urban environment similar to the community of the young men whose perspective he is researching. Young (2004) expounds upon how dynamic social constructions are amongst this population of men. Additionally, Young emphasizes the importance of demonstrating with research the individualized socially constructed world and how it is important for research to be able to show how every low income young African American male has their own socially constructed views of the world, how he fits into the world, and how society as a whole affects him.

McElwain, Grimes, and McVicker (2009) examined gender as a social construction in relation to female sexual identity. McElwain, Grimes, and McVicker mention sexuality as being constructed by one's society or culture, which indicates a variety of sexuality experiences or perceptions (2009). Issues are also raised in their research involving the social construction of only two sexualities (homosexual and heterosexual) by past researchers (2009). McElwain, Grimes, and McVicker (2009) do not argue using labels as a primary issue and do acknowledge how some may be comforted in being able to label their sexuality, but the researchers emphasize how even labels one give to his or herself are social constructions. For example due to social and

cultural influences, female sexuality is seen as more flexible than male sexuality (McElwain, Grimes, and McVicker, 2009). According to McElwain, Grimes, and McVicker (2009) women may interpret their experiences of affection with other women as not indicative of their sexual orientation but simply aspects of natural affection. As a result, the current western gender construction would not lead females to question their sexual identity in the same manner as males might (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977 as cited in Mc Elwain, Grimes, and McVikcer, 2009).

An individual's interpretation of the world, their place in the world, and the interchanges between the two is a critical concept in a social constructionist paradigm. Moreover, the intersections of gender, race, and socioeconomic status are identified as key factors in social constructionist literature. Researchers such as Young (2004) have conducted research attempting to examine the multifaceted way in which individuals construct their worldviews, when considering these essential factors. When conducting research using human participants, not considering influences of race, gender, and perceived social positions lacks a holistic perspective of human experiences. Considering perspectives of race, gender, and socioeconomic status has led to further studies with constructionist perspectives in social sciences research, and one paradigm which shares a constructionist perspective is the Black Feminist Perspective.

### **Black Feminist Perspectives and Perceptions of Black Womanhood**

Like other subordinate groups, African-American women not only have developed distinctive interpretations of Black women's oppression but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge itself (Collins, 1989, pg. 746)



Black feminist thought examines oppression, self-definition, and postulates that Black women have distinct experiences, which allows for their view of reality to differ from other groups (Collins, 1989). Furthermore, Black feminist thought emphasizes differences in how Black females experience the world, whether through work, relationships, communication, or communities, versus females from other groups (Collins, 1989).

Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, and Buchanan (2008), echo Black feminist sentiment in their study *Through the Lens of Race: Black and White Women's Perceptions of Womanhood*. Settles and colleagues mention the importance of intersections of race and gender and how said intersections allow for exclusive experiences in realms of interpersonal relationships, occupations, family, and domestic life (2008). Furthermore, Settles and colleagues identify differences in gender roles based upon race, and explore how gender role differences between Black and White women may affect their perceptions of womanhood (Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Collins (1989) notes, "African American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and Female (pg. 747)."

Having joint social positions, such as being Black and female, is also referred to in research as "ethgender" (Ransford & Miller, 1983) which describes the dynamic combination of ethnicity and gender. When considering the ethgender contexts of Black women, it is necessary to assess not only Black females perceptions on womanhood, but also how society views Black womanhood and the corresponding effects upon Black women.

How is Black womanhood socially constructed? Although very long ago, W.E.B. Du Bois expressed a similar sentiment regarding effects of social constructions of one's race in his

book *The Soul of Black folk* (1903). Du Bois refers to a second sight given to African Americans who struggled with a “double-consciousness” of being both a Negro and an American:

The Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,...It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self though the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body (Du Bois, 1903, p.12.)

In addition to struggles with perceptions of one’s race in relation to womanhood, as previously mentioned, female gender identity has a lower status throughout much of the world, affecting perceptions of womanhood across racial groups. However, when a combined race and gender is devalued, Black females face unique struggles (Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Black Feminist thought emphasizes the benefits for Black females creating new definitions of self, which validate perspectives of Black women (Collins, 1989).

Throughout United States history differing gender-role stereotypes between White and Black women have emerged. An idealized image of womanhood emphasizes being domestic, pure, modest, married, a mother, White and at least middle class (Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Countering the idealized image of “true womanhood” was to be a Black woman, typically characterized as being hypersexual and having animal-like behavior (Collins, 2000; West, 2004; as cited in Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Richardson (2009) in her

narrative on growing up an African American female quotes Collins (2004) in regards to this “true womanhood” standard:

All women engage an ideology that deems middle-class, heterosexual, White femininity as normative. In this context, Black femininity as a subordinated gender identity becomes constructed ... These benchmarks construct a discourse of a hegemonic (White) femininity that become a normative yardstick for all femininities in which Black women typically are relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy (Collins, 2004 p. 193 as cited in Richardson, 2009 p. 755.)

Idealized womanhood set White middle class women as the norm, and to contrast, stereotypes of Black females have persisted emphasizing notions that Black women were hypo-feminine and hypersexual individuals, which has led to differences in gender-roles between Black and White women in the United States for multiple generations (Bell, 2004; Collins, 2000; Fuller, 2004; West, 2004; as cited in Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Bell (2004) discusses her struggles with these stereotypes of Black women in her manuscript entitled *Myths, Stereotypes, and Realities of Black Women: A Personal Reflection*. Bell (2004) reflected on the public trial with Clarence Thomas and the stereotypes highlighted about the African American woman Anita Hill. Although age old stereotypes of Black females may continue, such as Jezebel or Mammy, perhaps the trend of aggression and violence among African American adolescent females is reflective of an emerging stereotype Black womanhood must contend with.

In order to better understand current issues related to Black female adolescents, research on their perceptions of womanhood may provide the basis for novel and culturally accurate education and intervention programs. As Black women have historically been stereotyped as

being hypo-feminine and counter to “true womanhood,” which emphasized being domestic, modest and pure (Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008), current generations may have developed different perceptions of “true womanhood,” and thus being aggressive or violent may be relevant to perception regarding respect in one’s community (2009).

This Chapter presented an overview of the problem facing African American female adolescents as well as described the research lens guiding study construction, which is made up of the theoretical frameworks Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought. Chapter Two includes a review of qualitative and quantitative studies providing further context such as considering race and gender when considering conducting a research study with this population. Chapter three will provide the research methodology used for this research study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will include a review of qualitative and quantitative studies related to African American adolescent females residing in inner cities. In addition, the research study will be introduced. .

Cooper, Guthrie, Brown, and Metzger (2011) postulate that investigating interactional, flexible, and socio- historically rooted gender role orientation may shed light on African American female adolescent psychological functioning and its relation to gender identity. Richards (2003), mentions that a pertinent premise of Black female literacies is the protection of people they love and to protect oneself. Advancing the understanding of African American adolescent girls’ social construction while using Black Feminist Thought to illuminate expressions of African American female voices, may offer insight related to aggressive behavior

among this population thus enlightening the development of culturally-informed prevention and intervention models.

Unpacking the research on young African American female adolescents in inner cities, with a distinct focus on the interaction of race, class, and gender factors involves studying perceptions of survival from childhood to young adulthood (Jones, 2009). During an interview for a qualitative study on African American girls in inner cities, a young woman reflecting on her childhood through young adulthood said, “It’s about being a survivor (Jones, 2009, p.91).” Ness (2010) also conducted a study focused on African American female youth violence. One of her participants mentions fighting being about image among Black girls in inner cities, and at only 14 years old she mentions the independence fighting brings (Ness, 2010).

Researchers such as Ness (2010) and Jones (2009) focus on violence and aggression among African American adolescent females. Authors question why African American female adolescents, specifically in inner cities, are fighting (Ness, 2010; Jones, 2009). Perhaps in order to examine why such a phenomena is occurring, examining perceptions of womanhood may provide insight, since rites of passage and gaining adult-like respect in one’s community have surfaced in research as potential reasons for fighting among this population of adolescents (Ness, 2010; Jones, 2009). Conceptualizations of African American womanhood consist of both gender and racial identity, which should be examined from multiple facets (Settles, 2006).

Settles (2006) conducted a mixed methods study in order to understand gender and racial identity of African American women. Participants (N=89) were graduate and undergraduate African American women recruited from mid -western universities. Although Settle’s (2006) participants were not young adolescents and were pursuing higher education, their insights

highlighted the salience of identifying as a Black woman and not being African American or female separately; moreover, aligning with Black Feminist Thought, African American women in higher education are key players in advancing research on African American females into mainstream educational settings and publications (Collins, 1989).

Participants were recruited via a Mid-Western university's mail and email system, and participant's average age was 23.62 years of age, with the youngest participants being 18 years of age (Settles, 2006). Demographic information was collected from each participant, which included if she was attending an HBCU, Historically Black College or University or a PWU, predominately white university (2006).

Participants' demographic information highlights potential importance of racial identity by mere school attendance. A Black female college student may choose not to solely identify as being a college student. As the amalgamation of two identities among African American female college students was discussed in Settles (2006), being a Black female college student is likely to be more significant for a student than identifying as a college student alone. As Black Feminist Thought postulates, African American women who pursue higher education and who are from any at-risk background may have a story to share, a story of identity, education, culture and perseverance (Collins, 1989).

Settles (2006) identified multiple themes when examining African American women's gender and racial identity. Using assessments including the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), the Black-Woman Identity Interference Scale, the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, The Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D), and also asking open ended questions to participants, yielded multiple themes (2006). Settles' (2006) research identified the

following themes of Black womanhood from the perspective of Black female participants:

1. Stereotyping 2. Personal esteem 3. Opportunities and resources, and 4. Discrimination and isolation from other people.

Although research on African American womanhood indicates several negative stereotypes of Black women throughout history, findings from this study highlighted another socio-historical factor contributing to constructions of Black Womanhood identity, which is confidence:

Black women have usually been portrayed as strong and independent. This gives me a lot of confidence in my ability, but sometimes it becomes a burden. I am independent and strong. But I'm not superwoman. So I guess it's both a reward and a difficulty. (27-year old graduate student at a PWU) (Settles, 2006, p. 595).

Researching African American gender and racial identity from a multifaceted, interactional framework helps to bring forth positive aspects. Even aspects of the street "Code" researched by Jones (2009) with African American female adolescents, has a positive aspect when considering multiple perspectives. Although Jones' participants may choose aggression as a means to gain respect in one's community, seeing respect as attainable for a female may be motivating to consider other options.

Results of Settle's (2006) study ultimately indicated Black women identified most with being a black woman versus being black or female exclusively (Settles, 2006). In addition when Black women were able to notice any "reward" or positive aspect of African American womanhood, such as the aforementioned confidence, those participants also reported having

higher self-esteem than participants who only acknowledged negative aspects of Black womanhood.

An interesting implication for future research emerged with the demographic data and identity results. Older participants reported their black identity as being less important than younger participants  $t(80) = 2.27, p < 0.05$ . Settles (2006) recommends future researchers address why some African American women see themselves first and foremost as a Black Woman before other identities. Building on Settles (2006) research, it seems salient to examine Black womanhood specifically from perspectives of young African American females, as their perspectives may differ from older African American women.

Settles (2006) study has even further implications for future research into the construction of the young African American female identity. For example, Settles (2006) mentions that it is salient to examine Black female gender and racial identities from a multifaceted approach. Using a framework incorporating Black Feminist thought and Social Constructionism can begin the multifaceted approach. In addition, Settles interviewed several young African American women; however, conducting a study with adolescent participants can provide a longitudinal view of their developing womanhood.

Settles (2006) also recommends further study related to socioeconomic status, age, and education, which was a primary limitation of Settles' study. Conducting a study incorporating African American female adolescents from a similar economic background and from the same area of residence can help to address limitations. Settles (2006) calls for more research on Black female identity. Voices of African American adolescent females specifically are heard infrequently in research (Cooper, Guthrie, Brown, & Metzger, 2011).



Cooper, Guthrie, Brown and Metzger (2011) conducted a quantitative study focusing on African American adolescent females. Daily hassles in the lives of African American female adolescents were researched in conjunction with gender role orientations and overall psychological functioning (2011). Participants (N= 103) consisted of African American females with a median age of (M= 15.50; SD=1.70) from a city in the mid-west of the United States. Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger (2011) were interested in frequent stressors which occur in lives of African American female adolescents and stressors in relationship to African American adolescent female gender role orientation.

Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger's (2011) research accentuates African American female's stressful experiences during adolescence may have impacts on their overall psychological development and thus are crucial for investigation. In addition, African American adolescent females are reported as having increased numbers of new diagnoses of HIV/AIDS, and in general face greater risk of being victims of homicide as well (Brown & Gourdine, 2001; DiClemente et al., 2004). African American female adolescents living in inner cities are often considered an at-risk population. Examining how their daily stressors affect their psychological functioning merits further investigation, according to Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger (2011).

The authors reported that risky behaviors among African American adolescent females are related to variations in gender construction among this group (Cooper, Guthrie, Brown, & Metzger, 2011). Furthermore, socio-historical factors have molded female African Americans towards gender roles emphasizing both male and female characteristics (Corneille et al. 2005; Binion, 1990; Harris, 1993; Harris, 1996; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998 as cited in Cooper & Guthrie, 2011). Those African American female adolescents who tend to express more masculine

gender roles are more likely to engage increasingly risky behaviors (Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger, 2011).

Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger (2011) hypothesized that African American females who had a more androgynous gender role would handle daily stressors better, having less depressive symptoms and anxiety and therefore participants would engage in risky activity less. However, having a masculine gender role was associated with more risky behaviors (Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger 2011). They hypothesized having a more androgynous gender role may provide a buffer for everyday stressors of this population of adolescents. To examine gender role orientation among African American female adolescents, multiple measures were used: the Daily Hassles Questionnaire (DHQ), the Children's Sex Role Inventory-Short Version (CSRI-S), the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), and a single item questionnaire assessing socioeconomic status.

Results indicated that daily challenges facing participants led to an increase in depression and anxiety; however, participants with greater female and androgynous identities had fewer bouts of depression and anxiety versus participants with a masculine identity. The authors concluded gender identity did impact psychological functioning of participants; however, contrary to their expectations, when African American adolescent females had a greater tendency towards a masculine gender role, participants had lower overall psychological functioning, more bouts of anxiety and depression (Cooper, Guthrie, Brown & Metzger, 2011).

The authors concluded that more research is needed to investigate the impact and type of daily challenges facing African American female adolescents. In addition, they acknowledge the plethora of research on the importance of ethnic identity for African American adolescent

females, but stress that more research is needed on effects of gender roles for African American adolescent females.

The authors noted a pertinent limitation to their study in that the results might be different if where participants lived was considered in collected demographic information. If Cooper, Guthrie, Brown and Metzger's (2011) participants were from an inner city exclusively, different results may have emerged. Examining perceptions of gender or womanhood from perspectives of African American female adolescents and adding participant residence as a factor, is needed.

Considering aspects of residence and African American female adolescents, researchers have discussed implications for adolescents who grow up in violent communities. McKelvey, Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley, Casey, Conners-Burrow, & Barrett (2011), researched adolescents who grew up in violent communities and the moderating factors of gender and family on participant's psychosocial development. McKelvey et al. (2011) studied (N=728) youth participants. The study considered internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression and externalizing problems such as risky behaviors and participating in community violence. Furthermore, this study examined community violence effects on childhood development, emphasizing the importance of gender and family.

Several studies including ethnic minority youth who reside in urban communities have examined effects of being exposed to community violence (Plybon and Kleiwer, 2001; Martinez and Richters, 1993; Gorman-Smith and Tolan, 1998). Externalizing behaviors among youth such as aggression and violent behaviors has been shown to have a relationship with youth who are exposed to community violence (Mckelvey et al., 2011). Mckelvey et al., (2011) questioned

if the impacts of community violence on psychological development were universal for all regardless of gender and family context. The authors hypothesized that being exposed to community violence and family conflicts would have negative impacts on youth participants. Most pertinently the researchers mentioned the gap in literature on specific effects of gender on youth who live in violent communities.

Community Violence data was gathered by providing a report to youth participant's parent or guardian assessing 3 components 1. Drug users/sellers 2. Delinquent gangs and Crime, assaults, and thefts (McKelvey et al., 2011). Questions were answered on a 3 point scale extending from "Not a problem" to a "Big Problem" (2011). Furthermore, youth participant externalizing behaviors was assessed using the Behavior Problems Index (BPI). McKelvey et al. (2011) found a main effect of gender and family conflict with participants. Female adolescent participants reported more anxiety and depression, and being exposed to community violence showed a relationship between exposure to community violence and depression and anxiety. In addition, even female adolescents who were from low conflict family environments were not protected from the impacts of community violence (2011). Although gender was found to be a moderating variable, a limit to McKelvey et al. (2011) research is including race as a variable. For African American female participants, it may be difficult to analyze effects of gender excluding race.

Zalot, Jones, Forehand, and Brody (2007) also included analyzing community violence and participant residence in their study similar to McKelvey et al. (2011). Their study further examined self-regulation and conduct problems among African American youth ages 7 to 15, from low economic families and communities. In addition, youth participants were from single mother households. Participants included both mother and child (N=277).

The authors mention the difficulties African American youth from low income communities face, including community violence and drug activity. They were also interested in further understanding conduct problems among this population of adolescents, as they are reported to get into legal trouble due to conduct problems more frequently than White adolescents (Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Peeples & Loeber, 1994; Tittle & Paternoster, 2000; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003 as cited in Zalot, Jones, Forehand, and Brody, 2007).

Youth who live in high crime low income communities are more likely to participate in violent or delinquent behaviors than youth from higher income households living in more economically advantaged communities (Zalot, Jones, Forehand, and Brody, 2007). Furthermore, neighborhood context can be a moderator for conduct problems for African American girls specifically and conduct problems tend to emerge more fervently in African American females around the age of puberty onset (Silverthorn & Frick, 1999; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003 as cited in Zalot, Jones, Forehand, and Brody, 2007).

Zalot, Jones, Forehand, and Brody (2007) examined participant's neighborhood perceptions as a moderator between self-regulation and conduct problems among African American youth ages 7 to 15. They hypothesized that African American youth would have conduct or self-regulation problems exacerbated by living in low income communities. Participants resided in low income communities in both urban and rural areas (2007). Forty nine Percent of participants resided in a rural area, 42 % of the mothers did not complete high school, and 38% of the mothers were not employed.

Using an exploratory analysis, this study assessed the three way interaction between Self-Regulation, Neighborhood Context, and Gender. Participants were given self-report

questionnaires administered in an interview format due to difficulties with literacy among the participants. Two interviews were administered. The first interview was a sociodemographic interview and the second a psychosocial interview. Participants were also compensated for completing the two interviews. Scales were developed with preliminary input from community and school leaders to ensure the scales were worded properly, and scales were developed through confirmatory analysis, only accepting items loadings .40 or greater.

Self-Regulation was measured by mother's reports on the Children's Self Control Scale, a 15 item assessment by Humphey (1982). The dependent variable was conduct problems, and the Aggression and Delinquency subscales from the Youth Form of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) were used to assess conduct issues. Because neighborhood context was the moderating variable, youth participants were asked to rank nine specific aspects of their environment regarding neighborhood risks: "(1) it is dirty, (2) it is noisy, (3) there are gangs, (4) there is physical fighting, (5) there are shootings and/or knifings, (6) there are people being killed, (7) there is drug use/dealing, (8) housing conditions are poor, and (9) it is too crowded; no privacy". (Zalot, Jones, Forehand, and Brody, 2007, p.11).

Results were generated using a regression analysis, resulting in a power of .80. Gender served as a moderator for Self-Regulation and Conduct Issues. Significant results appeared with girls (2007). Girls, who reported living in perceived high risk neighborhoods, reported participating in more aggressive activities.

A major implication for future research is the importance of the girl's perceptions of the neighborhood risk. The neighborhood risk perception was positively correlated to the girl's participation in aggressive behaviors. Further examination of African American girl's

perceptions of womanhood may glean more information about its relationship with aggressive behaviors.

Violent or aggressive behavior among inner city adolescents tends to focus on African American youth (Bolland, Bryant, Lian, McCallum, Vazonsyi, & Barth, 2007). Although African Americans represent a minority population in the United States, African Americans frequently comprise the majority population in inner city communities (Bolland, Byrant, Lian, McCallum, Vazonsyi, & Barth 2007). Bolland, Bryan, Lian, McCallum, Vazsonyi, and Barth (2007) examined African American, multi-racial, and Caucasian adolescents residing in inner cities. Bolland and fellow researchers conducted a longitudinal study focusing on youth from impoverished backgrounds (2007). Sampling adolescents from public housing as well as students receiving free or reduced lunch, Bolland and colleagues considered risky behaviors and hopelessness as dependent variables with race as an independent variable (2007).

In this study, hopelessness is described as a developmental construct, with a foundation of abilities to think about the future and to believe in a future (2007). Planning for the future is the developmental element that Bolland and colleagues mention as a common developmental task of adolescence (2007). However having low family income effects abilities among adolescents to think about their futures (Lamn et al. 1976; Nurmi, 1987; Trommsdorff et al. 1979, as cited in Bolland, Bryant, Lian, McCallum, Vazonsyi, & Barth, 2007). An important concept Bolland and colleagues mention, is researching race in context (2007). Bolland and colleagues examine effects of race in the context of low income inner city communities (2007).

Bolland, Bryan, Lian, McCallum, Vazsonyi & Barth compared risky behaviors among adolescents living in a low income housing development, and compared participants based on

race using the categories African American, Mixed Race, and Caucasian (2007). Two research questions were examined 1. What are the relative levels of risk behavior among African American, Caucasian, and mixed-race adolescents living in these neighborhoods? 2. How does race moderate the relationship between hopelessness and risk behavior among adolescents living in these neighborhoods (2007)? Bolland and fellow researchers used random selection to survey participants in a low income house development, surveying youth ages 10 to 18 (2007). Starting the longitudinal study N=1, 775 participants were surveyed in 1998, and by 2003 N=5, 985 participants were included in the study (2007). 55.9% of participants were surveyed repeatedly during the longitudinal study (2007). Bolland and colleagues surveyed participants in 6 waves, from 1998 to 2003 (2007). Participants completed a 294 structured question survey (2007).

During data analysis, Bolland, Bryant, Lian, McCallum, Vazsonyi, and Barth (2007) controlled for multiple variables: sense of community, warmth toward mother, religiosity, attitudes about the inevitability of violence, attitudes about the risk of substance abuse, attitudes about sexual immaturity, gender, age, and neighborhood. Dependent variables were risky behaviors falling into three behavioral domains, 1. Substance use 2. Violence 3. Sexuality (2007). Results showed high levels of risky behaviors among participants, high hopelessness (declined greatly between ages 12 and 13) (2007). Caucasian participants reported more substance use involving tobacco and alcohol than African American participants (6848) =5.09, adjusted  $p < 0.5$ , while Mixed Race respondents reported using marijuana the most (2007). No significant difference was found when examining race and sexual intercourse (2007). Finally hopelessness was positively correlated with all considered risk behaviors except fighting and carrying a weapon (2007). Overall Caucasian and Mixed Race Adolescents reported being more at risk in the low income inner city neighborhood.



Several limitations were presented in this study surrounding methodology. For example having a survey which has over 200 items can deter participants from completion and contribute to participant exhaustion during completion. Furthermore, the authors only asked racial identification once during the longitudinal study, which disregards potential changes in racial identity over time. Bolland and colleagues only assessed Gender, Age, and Neighborhood every year; however race is a demographic variable which should have been included in the yearly reassessment as well. Finally the authors mention a limitation to their methodology which they call “Loss to follow-up”. Only 4% of participants were in all 6 data collection waves. The greatest “Loss to follow-up” occurred during the first year of the study, 1998-1999.

It is also pertinent to note, the 2003 wave reported fighting significantly more than the earlier waves. Furthermore Bolland and the research team concluded it is salient to examine racial identity and protective factors for youth living in low income inner city communities, because they are a vulnerable population. Most interestingly, Bolland and colleagues suggest perhaps the Caucasian adolescent participants used more successful role models as a reference point garnered through popular media, which may have contributed to their increased risky behaviors when living in a low income neighborhood (2007). They hypothesized that perhaps Caucasian participants compared themselves to more successful people, and therefore were more frustrated with their place in society and subsequently participated in more at risk behaviors versus non Caucasian participants who compared themselves to less successful people. Bolland and colleagues hypothesis may inform prevention programs on protective factors for youth living in low income communities.

Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, and Author (2007) examined (N=7,829) 10<sup>th</sup> graders, who were participants in the Communities That Care Youth Survey. Fagan and fellow researchers

were interested in protective factors for girls and boys to help prevent future offending (2007).

Fagan and colleagues mention a key point, if the protective factors for girls and boys are different, than perhaps preventative programs should be gender specific (2007). Research questions addressed by Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, and Author (2007) include:

1. Are the same risk and protective factors associated with serious delinquency for males and females?
2. Does the strength of the association between risk and protective factors and serious delinquency vary by gender?
3. Do males and females report different levels of exposure to risk and protective factors in their families, school, and peer groups, and as individuals?
4. To what extent do gender differences in levels of exposure to risk and protective factors mediate the relationship between gender and serious delinquency (Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007, pg. 116).

Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur used the The Communities That Care Youth Survey which measures risk 30 different protective factors and risk factors, as well as delinquent behaviors and using substances (2007). Ultimately the researchers used 22 factors in the analysis, such as *Prosocial Opportunities*, *Attachment to Mom*, *Attachment to Dad*, *Rewards for Behavior*, *Family conflict*, *Academic Failure*, and *Low Commitment* (2007). Reliability coefficients were in the range of .66 to .91. Participants included (N=3,986) girls and (N=3,843) boys (2007).

Different than other studies mentioned in this proposal, 79.4% of participants self- reported Caucasian, 8.0% Hispanic, 4.1 % identified as African American 3.8 % identified as Other Ethnicity, 2.5 % Asian, and 2.2 % identified as Native American.

Results showed the 22 factors were all related to delinquency significantly for male and female participants (Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007). Boys were significantly more likely to report participating in delinquent behaviors. Using Chi-Square, no significant differences were found between male and female participants on 10 of the 22 factors related to risk or protective factors in relation to participants reported delinquency (2007). When addressing exposure to risk and protective factors, boys were significantly more exposed to risk factors and significantly less exposed to protective factors than female participants (2007). This appeared on 18 of the 22 factors (2007).

Overall boys reported more delinquent behaviors than girls, but Fagan and colleagues found the primary contributing factor was how much more boys were exposed to risk factors and how much less boys were exposed to protective factors than girls. However, as Fagan and colleagues note in discussing their study, prevention programs are needed for both genders as both male and female participants reported participating in delinquent behaviors (2007). Research on adolescent populations in relation to protective and risk factors for delinquency is needed to inform preventative programming (Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007).

Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal (2014) examined how adolescents make decisions and its relation to violence among youth. Hansen and colleagues created a partnership, which combined academics and a community organization, focusing on urban communities. Hansen and fellow researchers qualitatively examined decision making and its relationship with violence with high risk youth participants, who were a part of the partnering community organization. Participants who wanted to participate in the program were initially recruited through purposive sampling. Hansen et al. wanted to include youth who were interested in discussing violence in their communities in order to assist with prevention. Initial participants

were recruited through a program entitled Street Outreach Worker Program (SOWP). Mentoring and violence intervention was the program's focus. 30 participants enrolled in SOWP (N=26) were African American, (N=15) were female and (N=27) came from single parent households led by women (2014).

Primary methodology included having focus groups for participants with a 63% (n=19) retention rate (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, & Rosenthal, 2014). Focus group 1 topics revolved around participant's perceptions of origins of violence in their communities. Focus group 1 constructed a "problem tree" to conceptualize issues with violence amongst youth. Tree roots were causes and branches were effects. The treatment team concluded same gender groups would encourage non bias responding and more participation from each group member. Subsequent focus groups occurred every week for 90 minute sessions in July 2008 and August 2008; moreover, each group used the "problem tree" as a basis for discussion.

Furthermore, participants were trained to photograph potential sources of youth violence in their communities. Using digital cameras, participants would bring in photos to group each week, and leaders would select photos to share and facilitate discussion with the group. Specific guidelines were given to participants regarding who or what they may photograph. Guidelines were acquired from principles of community-based participatory research, and finalized by a research team (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014).

Data analysis was conducted by a team (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014). All transcripts from the focus groups were analyzed by the team

and by using qualitative software (ATLAS.ti 5.0) (2014). Both the team and software used coding to analyze focus group transcripts. Four themes were derived from data analysis.

#### Theme 1: Respect- youth participants pursued respect

If you go to [a] fashion school like Hill House [High School]...if you not fresh, I bet you by the next year you gonna try to [be]...I talking about a lot of people who are not fresh and stuff, they gonna try to get money. That's why everybody try to get money, 'cause they got to. (17 y/o male)

"It's harder because they [are] under peer pressure. They try to do so much to get their name known. (18 y/o male) (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014, p.25)

Participants sought out respect as a means of safety according to Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal (2014).

#### Theme 2: Personal Safety

He got his red flag in his pocket, everything. He's a true Blood. He'll sit on Congress Ave all day just waiting for somebody to walk by with a blue flag and fight...So, like, with him, he got all his respect ' cause you can sit in somebody else ['s] hood. You could sit in the Crip hood. Like without nothing going on... He got mad respect (16 y/o female) (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014, p. 26).

#### Theme 3: Risk to personal safety

It's just crazy. Why do have to go and kill somebody over something dumb, over stealing a bike or the drugs? Why do guns even have to invented? (19 y/o female)

See my friends who carry guns around be for protection for their life. Is not like they just carrying it just to have it [or] shoot and rob somebody, [it] is for their life. (19 y/o male)  
(Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014, p.26)

Theme 4: Expressing conflict and frustration trying to achieve respect in unsafe environments with limited opportunities

Cause it's like, it's like I used to be a knucklehead...you know what I'm saying? After, you know, I got shot... it makes you think differently, you know what I'm saying? Like this ain't really worth it! But to people that don't see that it's not worth it...they be out there every single day and still don't wake up to see this is embarrassing. I'm out here and I ain't gonna make it nowhere. Because believe it or not a lot of people...really really think the streets is life...And when you [are] caught up being around [them], it's just like you don't move, period. (18 y/o male) (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014, p. 27).

Overall participants considered violence as a side effect of gaining respect in and subsequently outside of one's community (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014). Hansen et al. considered not exploring gender as a part of their study. Hansen and colleagues mention needing more representations of female's perspectives. More female perspectives would strengthen their study and work with the aforementioned community and academic partnership (2014). Hansen et al. believe there are gender specific experiences in relation to violence; furthermore, having same gender groups promoted more open dialogue among female participants in their study (Hansen, Tinney, Asomugha, Barron, Rao, Curry, Lucas, and Rosenthal, 2014).

Several qualitative researchers have begun to research inner city African American adolescents, but more studies are needed from the perspectives of female participants exclusively (Cooper, Guthrie, Brown, & Metzger 2011). A number of qualitative studies are found examining womanhood only from perspectives of older African American women, including *Through The Lens of Race: Black and White Women's Perceptions of Womanhood* (Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008); *My ill literacy narrative: growing up Black, poor and a girl, in the hood* (Richardson, 2009); and *Myths, Stereotypes, and Realities of Black Women: A Personal Reflection* (Bell, 2004). However, only a handful of studies contain adolescent perspectives. A current gap in literature exists regarding perspectives of womanhood from current African American female adolescent participants. As noted previously, participant residence should be considered in research as well to explore how adolescent African American females in inner cities conceptualize becoming women in their communities.

### **Study Framework**

African American adolescent girls in inner cities face numerous challenges, and are a vulnerable at-risk population. Aggression and violence are reported as critical concerns that can inhibit academic trajectories through suspension and expulsion, and also create risk for injury and incarceration. The influence of gender roles, perceptions of Black womanhood, multiple socio- historical factors and possible interactional frameworks with this population have been cited as current gaps in literature.

Current quantitative literature offers a useful starting point for constructing a qualitative paradigm on this topic that is appropriate to the challenges which literature currently fails to fully address. Through the integration of a paradigm situated in social constructionism with a

perspective of Black feminism to guide interpretation, potential interactional processes currently underdeveloped in scholarly literature could be illuminated. Qualitative study with African American female adolescent participants in inner cities provides a framework for a rich investigation of possible motives for the construction of aggression or violent behavior in relation to their perceptions of womanhood. Research questions that address how African American female adolescents view womanhood and how aggressive stances and behavior may be related to an African American female adolescent's perception of womanhood offer insight into adolescent identity construction.

Social Constructionism and Black Feminist thought provides a helpful lens with which to view participant responses. Social Constructionist theory focuses on individual's perceptions of self in society and Black Feminist Thought highlights lived experiences of African American women. Further, the use of phenomenology as an epistemological foundation frames the integration of the social class into the discussion surrounding the experiences of African American adolescent girls and offers a voice for this population related to education and counseling.

This chapter included a review of qualitative and quantitative studies related to African American adolescent females. Aspects of gender and race are a primary focus. In addition a proposed research study was presented to conclude this chapter. Chapter three will include research methodology examining perceptions of womanhood among this population. Overall research design such as population, data collection, data analysis, instrumentation, ethical considerations and critique are presented in this chapter.



## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Chapter three describes research design and the qualitative method used in this study. Sampling, data collection and data analysis will be discussed as well as informed consent and study limitations.

### **Population and Sample**

African American adolescent females are this study's target population. Participants self-identified as an African American and female. In addition, participants lived in an urban environment, as described by the national census as having 50,000 people or more (United States Census Geography/Urban and Rural Classification, 2015). A convenience sample was collected from Hampton, Virginia and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. First recruitment contact was made through a community program facilitator. Participants who were adolescents, identified as female, and identified as Black or African American were recruited for the study. 3 days of interviews were conducted.

### **Data Collection**

#### Method

Semi structured interviews were conducted over a three day period. Upon entering the interview location, parents or guardians were given an informed consent form to complete before their child began the interview. The informed consent was given to the parents to read and I also read the informed consent out loud to the parents or guardians. In addition, I provided a period

after reading the informed consent to allow for questions from parents. I answered not only questions about the study, but also questions involving specific words or wording in the informed consent. Furthermore, a consent form to audio record interviews was given to parents/guardians and was also read aloud to parents as well. An additional time for questions was allowed after the consent to audio record was given. After the informed consent and consent to audio record was completed, a semi-structured interview began with each participant. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with a computer program, NVivo Qualitative Software installed on a laptop computer secured with a password.

### **Instrumentation**

Three instruments were used for this study. 1) Informed Consent Form 2) Audio Consent Form, and 3) Demographic Questionnaire 4) Researcher as Instrument

#### *Informed Consent (Appendix A)*

An informed consent form was administered to each parent/guardian. The informed consent provided information about the study including how to withdraw from the study and how the data was going to be used. In addition the informed consent, confidentiality was also discussed, participants' right to participate in the study, and participants' rights to anonymity.

#### *Audio Consent Form (Appendix A)*

An audio consent form was given to parents/guardians immediately following the administration of the informed consent. The audio consent form included information for parents/guardians to understand that each interview in the study was going to be audio recorded and turned into a transcript for analysis.

### *Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix A)*

A demographic questionnaire was administered to participants to collect demographic information specifically related to racial identity and gender identity. Age, race, education level, and residence, and socioeconomic status were included in the demographic questionnaire. Information garnered from the demographic questionnaire was included when reporting themes derived from participant interviews.

### **Research Design/Research Questions**

This study is a qualitative study using Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought as a lens for analysis. This study's purpose is to examine African American female adolescents, inner city resident's, perspectives of womanhood. Furthermore, this study examines if their perspectives of womanhood include aspects of aggression or violence. Specifically this study attempted to examine two questions:

#### **Research Questions**

1. How do Inner City African American female adolescents view womanhood?
2. How does aggressive or violent behavior play a role, or not, in African American adolescent perceptions of womanhood?

### **Data Analysis**

Each semi structured interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were directed to use alias names during the interview process; however, if participants accidentally used an individual's name, the names were removed from the transcript and replaced with Person A.

After interviews were recorded and transcribed, each transcript was downloaded into the Qualitative database entitled NVivo. NVivo allows for transcript coding, importing answers from Survey Monkey online questionnaire program, highlights themes, and can exchange information with SPSS Statistics program as well. After transcripts were analyzed in NVivo, themes were derived and results and conclusions are subsequently reported.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was submitted to the College of William & Mary Institutional Review Board (IRB), in the fall of 2015. Each consent form was thoroughly explained and read aloud to each participant and parent/guardian. Confidentiality and right to withdraw from the study was discussed with participants and parent/guardians. In addition, ample time up to 30 minutes was given for questions after consent forms were administered. Transcripts were completed anonymously, not including names. Each transcript was assigned a number. Participants received a certificate, concluding the study.

### **Informed Critique**

Limitations of this study included: generalizability, participant motivation for study completion, and location differences in participant residence. The study's population consists of a convenience sample. Although results may not generalize to all populations of adolescent females, this study's goal was not to generalize to all populations of adolescent girls but to examine this specific group of adolescents. Furthermore, although all participants may reside in

urban environments, but their experiences may be uniquely different based upon the specific place in which the participant resides. For example, two participants may live in the same city but neighborhood dynamics vary from one neighborhood to another and from one household to another.

Although this study includes limitations, this research emphasizes challenges this adolescent population faces and the great need to have more research studies examining this population. Moreover, this study may assist Counselors and Counselor Educators in how to provide more culturally informed services and programming for this adolescent population. Further research can also be done to expand generalizability of this study through replicating the study in other inner cities as well as expand the research to African American female adolescents in suburban and rural environments as well. Subsequent studies can also examine other at risk adolescent populations.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter one introduced challenges facing African American female adolescents in inner cities. Challenges presented in chapter one identified reasons for this population to be considered at risk, such as frequent incidents of community violence and neighborhoods with limited financial resources. Furthermore, chapter one presented Social Constructionism and Black Feminist theory as the combined theoretical lens which frames this study. Chapter two presented qualitative and quantitative studies examining at risk adolescent groups. Chapter three presented a research design and methodology for this study using semi-structured interviews and coding through the qualitative analysis program NVivo. Ethical considerations and critiques such as generalizability and study limitations were also discussed in chapter three.

In conclusion, this research study is a launching pad to provide more awareness in research to challenges facing this population. In addition, conducting this study can assist in providing more culturally informed counseling services and programming for adolescents. My intense hope is that this study will promote grant funding for programs geared towards empowering, educating, and counseling at risk adolescent populations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The previous chapter described using a qualitative research design exploring the social construction of womanhood using a black feminist lens with African American female adolescents with a particular interest in their construction of womanhood as it relates to aggressive behavior. In addition, a description of the semi-structured interviews was discussed along with the informed consent. One semi-structured interview was used for each participant assessing the research questions presented in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the participants, role of the researcher, and procedures were discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter articulates the findings of the semi-structured interviews for six participants. Themes derived from the transcribed semi-structured interviews are discussed and presented.

### Perceptions of Womanhood

Perceptions of womanhood among inner city African American adolescents were investigated using semi-structured interviews. Several themes emerged during the interviews such as participant's mothers as role models, pursuit of higher education, and having responsibilities. Furthermore, physical development and menstruation along with being a wife and mother was mentioned by participants as well. Participants also were considerably interested in my perspective, concerning both womanhood and higher education. This study includes notes regarding my experience as the researcher, which echoes the participants' interest in not only sharing their perspectives of a pending womanhood as an African American, but also wanted to know the opinion of what being an African American woman was like. Participants were interested in my own journey to womanhood and how I went through adolescence. Interestingly in this study participants seemed to not only acknowledge me, the researcher, as an instrument, but also seemed to view me as a resource.

### Aggressive Behavior

Considering aspects of aggressive behavior, the theme of strength emerged during the semi structured interviews. When discussing self, role-models, and their mothers, each participant mentioned strength being a significant part of being an African American woman. Strength was not mentioned in the form of aggression for each participant, but having physical, mental, and emotional strength was mentioned by the participants as a necessity for being an African American woman.

In addition to strength emerging as a dominant theme, participants also considered stereotypes when discussing aggressive behavior. Participants were concerned with defying stereotypes which they felt represented African American women as being violent; however, they did feel that their need to defend themselves or those close to them in either a physical or verbal confrontation was a necessity for being an African American woman. In this case, aggressive behavior was seen as a protective factor by participants for self and loved ones such as family members, but was not something that was sought out. Aggression was for protection of self and immediate family or close friends; moreover, aggression was not desired but required in extreme situations.

Finally, being sexually aggressive was a stereotype mentioned by participants. Participants felt that the greater society viewed African American women in a promiscuous fashion, and the participants were not pleased with this designation. They wanted to counter that stereotype as they began to grow into an African American woman. Participant 3 seemed most interested in countering the stereotype of African American women being seen as promiscuous by society as a whole. Participant 3 mentioned being seen as a “lady” and not as “ratched” or a



“baby mamma,” was of great interest to her. According to previously discussed research, stereotypes of African American women involving sexual promiscuity and aggression have been looming over the face of African American womanhood for an extensive amount of time (Bell, 2004).

### Composite Themes

Themes related to both Black Feminist Thought as well as Social Constructionism emerged during the semi-structured interviews. Participants were both aware and concerned of what they considered negative stereotypes about African American women in the greater society, but they also seemed to view education and financial success as a way to combat the negative social constructions. For example, Participant 4 was vastly interested in how she could improve her grades in middle school to increase her chances of going to college. Participant 1 wanted to combat how she believed she was taught to view womanhood overall, which involved being a wife, mother, and not having a demanding job. Participant 1 was nicknamed Future Lawyer in the data analysis. She discussed her entire plan to attaining higher education and becoming a lawyer. Participant 1 was determined to fight against the stereotypes that she perceived of womanhood, and to create her own definition.

Considering the researcher as instrument, I was truly excited to see the empowerment this study provided for participants. Having the ability to self-define and tell one's own story can have lasting effects, and it was my privilege to conduct this study. Several themes were identified in the semi-structured interviews, but the face of an empowered girl was something that themes, codes, and frequency distribution just could not capture. This study is a stepping stone. Black Feminist Thought emphasizes the need for African American women in the

academy to study and write about African American women (Collins, 1989; Bryson & Lawrence-Webb, 2000)). Having the ability to write about the perspectives of the next generation of African American women is an honor. Multiple themes emerged from the participants, which shed light on their perceptions of womanhood but also shed light on Black Feminist Thought and Social Constructionism.

Table 1

## Composite Themes

Strength	Mom as Role Model
Responsibility	Stereotypes
Education	Finances

## Description of Participants and Individual Interview Analysis

*Demographic Overview of Participants*

The table below presents the demographic characteristics of each participant

Table 2

## Participant Demographics

Participant #	Gender	Age	Race	Grade Level	School Name	School Location	Residing City	Household Income
1	Female	15	AA	10	Bethel High School	Hampton, VA	Hampton, VA	85,000
2	Female	15	AA	10	Phoebus	Hampton, VA	Hampton, VA	12,000
3	Female	13	AA	8	Andrews K-8	Hampton, VA	Hampton, VA	12,000
4	Female	15	AA	10	Potomac High School	Oxon Hill, MD	Washington, D.C.	60,000
5	Female	14	AA	10	Crossland	Clinton,	Washington,	90,000

					HS	MD	D.C.	
6	Female	13	AA	9	Washington Latin PCS	Washington, D.C.	Washington, D.C.	100,000

*(Note-Participant 5 turned 15 during study)*

#### Participant # 1: Future Lawyer

Participant 1 is a 15 year old African American female in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, who resides in Hampton, Virginia. Participant 1 was from a two parent household with an income of \$85,000 a year. She was given the nickname Future Lawyer due to her immense interest in the topic and her plan to attend law school and pass the bar. Participant 1 wanted to help people who were being poorly represented or mistreated in the legal system. She expressed concern for the legal representation of minorities in the United States. Future Lawyer was greatly interested in doing well in high school and attending college. She had selected the colleges that she would like to attend, as well as the law school that she would like to attend. Participant 1 was also adamant about passing the bar exam. She wanted to visit colleges, but had not done so. Participant 1 was highly motivated to attend college, but wanted guidance on how to get in to college. She knew that having good grades and test scores was essential, but she wanted more information.

The interview with Participant 1 was conducted at the New Horizons Family Counseling Center. Participant 1 was immensely excited and nervous to participate in the interview due to the interview location. Walking through the School of Education to the New Horizons Family Counseling Center was a highlight for both Participant 1 and her parent in attendance. Visiting William & Mary was the first of her campus visits.

Participant 1 seemed concerned with countering what she determined were more traditional views of womanhood. She also shared an immense respect for African American womanhood specifically, and wanted to give significant thought to her role models before

discussing them. Several themes emerged during her interview, but not surprisingly, Education was a significant theme to participant 1 and meaningful to her as well.

### *Themes*

The following themes emerged during her interview

Table 3

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
	Education	Responsibility	Countering Ideal Womanhood Standards	Human Rights	Accomplishments	Experience/ Maturity
Subtheme A	High School	Stop being a Child	Do as well as a guy	Equality	Marriage	Taken Seriously
Subtheme B	College	Struggles/Fear	Profession	Standing up for Injustice	Post Graduate Education	Voice Heard
Subtheme C	Law School	Bills	Not weak		Self-Made	Varying Life Experiences

*Education* Participant 1 discussed education multiple times throughout her interview such as “I believe that the steps for me to becoming a black woman would be first finishing off my high school education.” Participant 1 believed that having a strong education was a foundation for attaining her future goals. Attaining education post high school seemed as a beacon of light for Participant 1, a beacon leading to the majority of her future goals and dreams “I feel like once I get to college because I will be more so on the road.” Participant 1 was also able to articulate educational milestones to her future goals as well. She had already selected the colleges that she would like to attend

I will have graduated from the college of my dreams...I would love to be accepted into the university of Denver Harvard or Columbia to do law and to do some of my undergraduate classes.

When considering the Researcher as Instrument, I also made note during the interview with Participant 1, that she and her parent were elated to come to the William & Mary School of Education to participate in the research study. As we walked through the hallway to the New Horizons Family Counseling Center, Participant 1 and her parent expressed much gratitude for being able to visit the School of Education. In addition, the parent mentioned how this was the first time that Participant 1 was able to visit William & Mary. The aforementioned elation with visiting the School of Education, to participate in the interview, is crucial for Participant 1. When Participant 1 thinks of her future as an African American woman, she immediately mentions her accomplishments in higher education.

When envisioning herself ten years in the future, Participant 1 mentioned

I would have gotten my Masters and bachelor's degrees by now or maybe just my graduate bachelors because I'm planning on going into law school right after so I will probably just be finishing up law school doing some internships and really getting myself prepared to be a lawyer and I will have passed the bar so I can officially get that title as being a lawyer.

As Participant 1 is nicknamed "Future Lawyer," it is essential to note that she sees education as the key to the majority of her future goals. Before the interview began, Participant 1 had several questions for me about what Graduate School was, what my previous education was like, and if I had any recommendations for how she could prepare for college. When further

considering the Researcher as Instrument, it appears that not only was I seen as the interviewer for Participant 1, but I was also seen as a resource. As an instrument, I did assess that being my race and gender, and attending the College of William & Mary was of great interest to the participant and her parent. This was aspect was most noticeable among the participants who lived in closer proximity to the college. The university reputation preceded the interview. Visiting the School of Education is not limited to only select students, but it was evident that being able to visit the School of Education for the interview was seen as a gift by Participant 1 and her parent as well. As a researcher, I felt honored to present an opportunity to visit the college to Participant 1 and her parent.

*Responsibility* Participant 1 proceeded to describe the responsibilities of being an African American woman. Education was the foundation of her future plans:

I believe that the steps for me to becoming a black woman would be first finishing off my high school education. I feel like once I get to college because I will be more so on the road it requires a lot maturity a lot of responsibility and I need to be able to handle more task and more loads I need to be ready for the real world.

Moreover, she mentioned the progression of no longer being a child with childlike carelessness and progressing towards the stressors of adulthood such as:

As a child you don't really have to focus on much you go to school and that's basically all you have but womanhood is when you have to step up to the plate. You are in the real world.

The concept of “real world” and having to “step up to the plate” was mentioned by Participant 1 with almost a slight sense of drudgery. She mentioned hardships of adult life, when reflecting on her perception of African American womanhood:

You are dealing with the struggles of life you are dealing with bills or you are dealing with multiple stresses it can be anything anything that would give you more of a responsibility than just being a child and living with your parents not really working.

Participant 1 focused on adult roles during her interview as well, “You are maybe in college or you are a mother you are business woman you are dealing with life.” Paying bills and being employed were key components to womanhood for Participant 1, and she continued to tie her future plans to the first theme of education. Overall both having adult responsibilities through accomplishing her educational goals were connected to her finding her identity as an African American woman:

I feel like being able to buy my own car. my own house..normal things that you would have to do in everyday life paying bills..umm getting my first real job and completing my degrees would be along the way the road to finding myself as a person as a black female that would also play a role in me becoming a black woman me figuring out things that I like who I would want to be.

Ultimately Participant 1 viewed African American womanhood as an immense responsibility:

I feel like it is a higher responsibility and also feel like time is moving by very quickly and it’s not enough time for me to kind of you know stop and really pay attention to the surroundings it’s like you are going and you have to keep moving.

Along with education and professional goals, Participant believed that it was her responsibility as an African American woman to challenge what she viewed as the status quo of womanhood.

*Countering Ideal Womanhood Standards.* Participant 1 mentioned countering ideal womanhood standards or stereotypes as a part of her growing into an African American woman. Furthermore, when thinking of her role models, she appreciated women who she felt defied the status quo of what she believes society expects of women such as:

I really appreciate for women being strong and not kind of being the ideal standard of what people think women are supposed to do...well a lot of people think that a women is just supposed to stay at home cook clean you know kind of I guess just being a trophy wife somebody who doesn't really do anything and just let the man provide.

Participant 1 mentioned the expectations of men versus women during her interview. She wanted to defy what she deemed as the typical expectations of what a woman should do.

Participant 1 did not want to be type cast as a woman to participate in careers that she felt society reserved for men:

You know working women can have women be doctors women can be lawyers women can be judges women not just baking or you know teaching being an educator women can do those bigger jobs I guess you can say that men are more men are more seen to do more than women...I feel that a woman can be just as good you know.



Participant 1 admired women, who were viewed as strong throughout history. Women, who came from difficult backgrounds and defied expectations, inspired Participant 1. She describes her role model Maya Angelo in this way:

One of my role models is Maya Angelo I really like, I really loved her poetry. I kind of did a little bit of that myself and I really kind of looked up to her. She didn't grow up in the best circumstances but she made it she rose above she came up from I guess you can say the ashes and she became a very great person. She still remained humble through it all and she didn't allow her circumstances to define her but she grew from them and I really look up to that. It's something that I enjoy seeing in women, people who don't get defeated.

Not being defeated by difficult life circumstances or being weak was a critical aspect to Participant 1's view of womanhood. Furthermore, this perspective went hand in hand with protecting human rights. Participant 1 valued women being strong and defending other people:

You wouldn't if you saw somebody you know getting fought you would want to break it up you know you don't want to see anybody get hurt just because of the color of their skin you wouldn't choose to walk away.

*Human Rights.* Participant 1 was driven by education and professional goals, and she was also concerned with human rights and sexism. Participant 1 did not believe that women were viewed as equals. She mentioned:

I feel like women should also be treated as equally as a guy and not just not seen to be weak because she is a female but I mean I feel like we should be seen as equals. Of

course not in every scenario but you know. We should be seen as equal and not frail because women are very powerful.

In addition to women having equal rights as men, Participant 1 also discussed race relations and race based advocacy. When discussing African American women that she looked up to, Participant 1 mentioned she admired or looked up to: “Any Black woman who is for the rights of African Americans just because it is already hard enough to be African American.” Even though Participant 1 was only a 15 year old girl, she felt that it was difficult to be a member of assigned and ascribed race. Participant 1 spoke very highly of African American women, especially those who had overcome great challenges, but also still considered and advocated for the rights of other people : “ They stand up for basic human rights you know of people to be equal not just because they are white or black or something ... Stand up for the rights of other people. Allow us to be equal.” Standing up for human rights and equality was a prominent theme for Participant 1. Women being strong for both themselves and others are key markers in becoming a woman, along with attaining accomplishments.

*Accomplishments.* Participant 1 is extremely driven, and has her eye focused on a career in law in the future. Participant 1 did not speak about her current accomplishments, but she spoke clearly about what goals she would like to accomplishment in the future. Marriage and having children was a prominent goal for the Participant 1: “I would want to become (*a woman*) getting married of course having kids” For Participant 1, having getting married and having children represented a sense of family stability for her. Although I did not collect demographic information on the participant’s parent’s marital status, this participant was being a raised in a two parent home. Perhaps her focus on marriage and family was greatly influenced by her household and her

responses definitely provided valuable information for future research: "...and me having that family, getting married.. that family stability will kind of solidify it (*womanhood*) too."

When pondering her future plans and goals, Participant 1 expressed repeatedly a clear desire to be married and to have children. Even though she was very focused on her future education, and attaining her law degree, Participant 1 wanted to get married at or before she turned 25 years old: "Ten years from now I will probably be engaged or married because it has always been a hope of mine to get married young.... I will have graduated from the college of my dreams." Participant 1 equated her academic and professional accomplishments, marriage, and having children with having a happy life: "I'm going to be very self-made and determined uhmm married or engaged, happily living." Overall, accomplishing her goals were considered first priority. She had a general idea of the order with which she would like to accomplish her goals, such as graduating college, getting her law degree, passing the bar exam, and getting married during that timeframe as well. She was extremely driven, but also seemed nervous that she did not have enough information to accomplish all of her goals. Participant 1 had clear ideas of what she would like to do, and was extremely forward thinking for such a young person; however, being an accomplished African American woman seemed plausible but a large undertaking to Participant 1. She believed that womanhood was not merely a matter of age or accomplishments, but life experiences.

*Experience/Maturity.* Participant 1 discussed the importance of maturity and experience, when she described being an African American woman:

Also I would like to add that I feel that womanhood is also based on maturity and experience because you can be 42 and still act like a little girl so womanhood isn't

necessarily something that every female necessarily goes through it just depends on your circumstance.

Participant 1, similar to some of the other participants, did not regard age as a true marker for womanhood. When elaborating on her perceptions of womanhood, Participant 1 said: “Like you can be 13 and having to handle mature situations and you would already be on your way to womanhood.” Considering the researcher as instrument, I admittedly felt sad when I heard Participant 1 mention this topic. Unfortunately, I am aware of many young African American girls, who have to carry adult responsibilities on a daily basis. Several of these girls live in a sense of limbo. They are truly children at heart, but have expectations placed on them that one would traditionally expect of an adult, such as taking care of children, protecting family members, and providing monetarily for the household. Womanhood becomes a floating construct for some girls. Participant 1 expresses the aforementioned sentiment: “I believe that womanhood also depends on the person and what their circumstance is in life.”

According to Participant 1, girls’ experiences or circumstances in life dictate their maturity or womanhood. Unfortunately, some of their experiences are out of their control; therefore, I wonder how many girls feel forced into womanhood. Participant 1 mentioned her concerns with becoming an African American woman:

I’m also very fearful of or a little nervous about becoming a woman because I feel like it is a higher responsibility, and also feel like time is moving by very quickly and it’s not enough time for me to kind of, you know stop and really pay attention to the surroundings. It’s like you are going and you have to keep moving.

In summary, Participant 1, Future Lawyer was a delight to interview. She was extremely driven and focused on her future goals. I can still see the look on the face of her parent and Participant 1, while they walked through the college halls. It was as if one of her many accomplishments was coming true. Participant 1 always wanted to visit the College of William & Mary and never felt like she would have the opportunity. The day she came in for her interview, her face was lit with joy. It is almost difficult to describe the amount of gratitude she and her parents expressed when coming to the school. They all seemed truly elated.

Participant 1 looked forward to her future as an African American woman; however, she felt that struggles would be included in her arrival to womanhood. She also carried a strong value towards fighting for the rights of others. Participant 1 was smiling ear to ear when discussing her role models, such as Maya Angelou. Participant 1 admired people who had difficult upbringings and who not only managed to still be successful, but also fought for human rights.

In addition, Participant 1 valued being married and having children in the future. She had many plans laid out clearly such as attend college, attain her law degree, pass the bar exam, and somewhere during that time frame get married and have children. Participant 1 viewed womanhood not based on age, but life experiences. Having so many plans, it is understandable that Participant 1 was somewhat fearful of womanhood. She felt that it was coming along quickly, and she was not able to pause to seemingly catch a breath. Participant 1, Future Lawyer was driven, focused, and wanted desperately to attain higher education. Womanhood is going to be a stream of amazing experiences if the decision is left up to Participant 1.

As a researcher, Participant 1 was truly an inspiration to pursue my research further. During her interview, she mentioned wanting to become a woman so her voice could be heard.

Participant # 2

Participant 2 was a 15 year old African American female. She lived in Hampton, Virginia and was living in a transitional space with extended family members. Participant 2 had a household income of \$12,000. Participant 2 was not able to come to the college for the interview; therefore, I came to a public location in Hampton, where she and her mother suggested we meet. Participant 2 was attending high school in Hampton, Virginia, and was very involved with extracurricular activities. She was creative, and her participation in extracurricular activities seemed to motivate her in school. Although not living in her home, her father works in academia. She struggled with school slightly more than her siblings according to her mother; however, she was very talented in the arts. Participant 2 was the eldest of her siblings, and seemed very motivated and confident, especially in her extracurricular activities. In her school, she was actually the only female student participating in her primary art group.

Participant 2 spoke vividly about her concerns regarding stereotypes of African American women. She was adamant about refuting stereotypes or images of African American women that she felt was held by society at large. Participant 2 was very candid in her interview, but expressed concern about not disrespecting me as the researcher. It was important to reassure her that she could speak candidly, during the interview, and I valued her perspective.

Participant 2 was also interested in the strength and power of being an African American woman. She also described African American womanhood as having many challenges. Participant 2 was not an elaborate speaker, but she used words that spoke volumes during her interview.

*Themes*

The following themes and subthemes were present in the interview:

Table 4

	Theme 1	Theme 23	Theme 34
	Stereotypes	Responsibility	Strength
Subtheme A	Being looked down upon	Come of age	Difficulties in being an AA woman
Subtheme B	Bad attitude	Accountable	Power
Subtheme C	Sexually Promiscuous	Paying bills	Strong Mother

*Stereotypes.* Participant 2 appeared as the most timid of all the participants. She was very conscious of not saying words or statements that would offend me as the researcher. Reassuring throughout the interview that I would not be offended, and that I truly wanted to hear her perspective was critical throughout the interview. Participant 2 struggled with stereotypes she felt that the general public held of African American women and girls. She appeared embarrassed to even speak about the stereotypes; however, stereotypes were one of the first things she mentioned about being an African American woman. Participant 2 felt that it was difficult being an African American woman, and stereotypes held by general society was a major contribution to the difficulty.

As the researcher, I noticed it was difficult for Participant 2 to actually say who she thought was the general society. She would say words such as “others” or “everyone’s perspective”. I did not confirm if she was speaking about a particular race or class of people. Understanding that I was coming from a school with which she associated with being affluent and not predominately African American, I did not want her to think that I also held negative stereotypes of her as well.

Participant 2 described her perspective of the negative stereotypes of African American women that is held by society: “Everyone thinks down on African American women so you have to not succumb to everyone’s standard you want to better.” Participant 2 seemed to carry a lot of pressure to overcome and prove wrong what society feels about her and African American women. When observing her facial expressions, she seemed burdened with believing that it was her job to prove everyone wrong: “You want people to know that African American women aren’t just known for being ratched or baby mamas or stuff like that.” Unfortunately, she believed that everyone in society looked down upon African American women. As the researcher, it broke my heart to know that although very young, Participant 2 had little hope that anyone in society thought positively of her because of her race and gender. She described society as whole as: “Just downing just downing us in general.”

As mentioned previously, Participant 2 felt she should work hard to counter negative stereotypes, and she describes the way in which she was taught to do so:

People expect African American women to be raunchy. So me thinking the way that I think and the way that I was brought up to uphold yourself like a lady to prove someone’s standards wrong.

When asked to describe her perspective of the negative stereotypes, she expressed: “I don’t want to be disrespectful or say something that I shouldn’t say... (African American women’s stereotypes) like hoeish in a way or just lewd.” After reassuring Participant 2 that she could say her perspective, no matter what it was, she mentioned African American women being seen as sexually promiscuous or “hoe-ish” and lewd. She looked sad simply mentioning her perspective. Watching her look down at the table while saying the previous statement and subsequently



looking upwards to see my reaction was difficult to watch as the researcher. I understood that she did not want to insult me during the interview; however, I wanted to be sure that empowered her to tell her story, allow her voice to be heard.

*Responsibility.* Participant 2 also focused on aspects of adult responsibility, during her interview. Her concept of womanhood included taking on adult responsibilities, that as a child she was not expected to do. When discussing responsibility, Participant 2 mentioned concepts similar to that of rites of passage. She describes womanhood as follows: “Womanhood means to (slight pause) means to come of age and become responsible and start to realize that you are accountable for things that you do.” When Participant 2 spoke about responsibility, accountability, and overcoming stereotypes throughout her interview, I often wondered how being the eldest child and eldest daughter specifically affected her perceptions of womanhood.

Participant 2 also spoke about provision and being responsible with money. When asked to elaborate about her perception of womanhood she said: “Like if having a job and paying bills.. like you know that you are supposed to pay your bills instead of spending your money on something that is not really necessary.” She seemed conscious of not only being responsible for having conducting herself as a “lady” and overcoming stereotypes in society, as mentioned in the previous section. Participant 2 also thought about the responsibility of money, providing for oneself or family, and not being spending money irresponsibly. Along with considering fiscal responsibility, Participant 2 mentioned protecting others as well.

Participant 2 expressed being able to defend herself or others: “If someone says something or does something to offend me, I feel that I can say the right thing without causing any big destruction or ruckus.” Womanhood to Participant 2 consisted of the ability to defend

oneself or loved ones, but maintaining a certain level of composure. When discussing future self Participant 2 mentioned these character traits: “She (my future self) would be caring and observant and aware and wise...I think that I would be either a successful musician or a psychiatrist.” Participant 2 expressed her perception of being an African American woman, by having much responsibility and the process to becoming African American women centered around overcoming challenges and being fiscally responsible.

*Strength.*

Participant 2 spoke about African American womanhood as combating negative stereotypes, carrying responsibilities, and having overall strength. Being strong and overcoming negative or difficult circumstances, was a consistent theme while interviewing Participant 2. When asked about her perception of the process to becoming an African American woman, Participant 2 said: “I feel that it’s a process and what you have to go through to end up being powerful to really be an African American woman.” For Participant 2, developing into an African American woman meant growing into to someone who is powerful and strong. She was adamant when mentioning power and African American womanhood. Interestingly she says: power in relation to “really being an African American woman,” which may imply that to not be powerful as an African American woman somehow devalues their womanhood.

Further into the interview, Participant 2 describes her role model for African American womanhood: “My Mom because she is strong and she knows so much about a lot..so me wanting to be like her would .. make more sense.” As the researcher, I was not surprised, when Participant 2 mentioned that her Mother was her role model and the strength her Mother possessed. Furthermore, Participant 2 described her Mother’s knowledge. As mentioned

previously, when describing her future self, Participant 2 mentioned that she would be a wise woman. During this second interview, the value of directing future research towards womanhood and perceptions of Mothers' among African American girls became clear to me.

Before concluding Participant 2's interview, she asked me: "Do you think that it's hard to be an African American woman in the society that we have?" Participant 2 asked this question with the widest eyes and most interested tone in her voice. She truly wanted to know my perspective. Her voice sounded slightly concerned about what my answer would be, or perhaps what could be awaiting her in the near future. Interestingly enough, while I was trying to empower the participants helping their voices to be heard and their stories told, Participant 2 wanted to hear from me. Perhaps empowerment is a mutual process.

In summary, Participant 2 perceived African American womanhood as countering negative stereotypes regarding African American women by the greater society, being responsible such as paying bills and being accountable to others, and ultimately being powerful. She used few but powerful words, during her interview. She was concerned with not being disrespectful throughout her interview, but she also seemed to show a great concern for how she would be viewed as an African American woman in the near future. Participant 2 was artistic, and also showed several traits of being concerned and responsible as the eldest sibling. Although she was living in transitional housing, Participant 2 appeared very close with her siblings and Mother, who all accompanied her to the interview location. Finally when describing her Mom as her role model for African American womanhood, I could see an immense sentiment that seemed difficult for her to put words to. I too know how difficult it is to put into words how much you look up to a Mother, who you see as the strongest person you have ever met.

### Participant #3

Participant 3 was a 13 year old African girl from Hampton Virginia. She attended a local school encompassing both elementary and middle school grades. Participant 3 can also be referred to as the Golden Child. As a researcher, I use the term Golden Child to describe African American children or adolescents, who believe that it is their job and responsibility in life to “rescue” their family out of poverty or challenging situations. In my observation, the Golden Child is usually intellectually or academically gifted, he or she does well in school, and are often praised by family members for not only how well they do in school as children, but also how much they will accomplish, in the future. The Golden Child is not always the eldest child, throughout much of my work with youth, the Golden Child is typically a child who is second to the eldest, middle, or only child. Participant 3 was my final interview in Hampton, Virginia, and she left a lasting impression. She was extremely driven, and almost future focused to a fault.

Participant 3 was enthused to interview with me, because I attended the College of William & Mary. Participant 3 was living in transitional housing, and had a household income of \$12,000. On the way to the College of William & Mary, unfortunately Participant 3’s family had an emergency incident. Therefore, at her parent’s request, the interview was conducted in a public location in Hampton, Virginia. As the researcher, I truly wanted Participant 3 to be able to see the college, as her interest in seeing the university was beaming from her, throughout her interview.

Participant 3 seemed both excited and nervous, when beginning her interview. Her mother greeted me with much zeal, and expressed immense gratitude that I would interview her daughter. I was honored to meet with each family and participant; however, it seemed that

because I attended William & Mary, the parents and participants seemed honored that I would interview them. I knew that The College of William & Mary had an amazing reputation nationwide, but the reputation in Hampton, Virginia seemed astounding. Although less than an hour away, Participants and their families seemed to view the college as a fairytale land of sorts, filled with accomplished people and academic resources that they could only dream of.

Participant 3 wanted to know if her grades were good enough for college, and she was only in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She seemed so enthused to tell me how hard she worked in school, and wanted to know my feedback on her potential to attend college one day. She saw education as her key to a successful future, and I was truly humbled by how gracious she and her parent were. Simply having the opportunity to ask me about college appeared to mean so much to Participant 3. Her face lit up as she asked me about college. I was amazed, humbled, and slightly saddened. I knew she was not the only little girl who wanted to know about college and just have a glimmer of hope in the direction of education and a better life for her and her family. I wanted to hear their stories and share their perspectives with the academic world. I completely overlooked how much the participants and their families would want to hear from me.

Several themes emerged when interviewing Participant 3. She was very articulate for such a young girl, and also seemed to view womanhood from an immense view of being responsible for self and others as well as accomplishing goals academically and professionally.

### *Themes*

The following themes and sub themes were derived from the interview:

Table 5

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
	Accomplishments	Parents	Strength
Subtheme A	Goals	Mom's Influence	Womanhood is Strength
Subtheme B	Accomplishments of future self	Dad's Influence	Mom's Strength
Subtheme C	Academics	Overcoming family challenges	Overcoming Teasing/Having Better Attitude

*Accomplishments.* Participant 3 was an accomplished student, and had been thriving in school throughout her primary education. When asked about her perception of womanhood, Participant 3 proceeded to discuss goals. She began discussing her goals initially as it relates to gender equality as well.

Well woman were sent here to help men meet there goals, and I also think that woman should have their own goals. We should think about what is good for both parties instead of just one. I believe women make things better as a whole...that's what womanhood means to me.

When interviewing Participant 3, I was surprised by her aforementioned statement. She was only 13 years old, and I did not expect her to consider how she was able to help a man meet his goals, as part of her reason for existence.

Participant 3 proceeded to speak about her future self. When discussing steps to becoming a woman, she said:

Accomplishing things (academically and professionally) one right after another. Like elementary school was kind of a breeze for me, but when it got to like middle school, I

had to work harder. I still continue to accomplish what I set my mind to...Being the best I can be accomplishing everything I set to accomplish... doing the things that I want to accomplish and I mean doing it with exceedingness.

Consistently accomplishing her goals seemed to be a womanhood focal point for Participant 3. When asked about what types of things she would like to accomplish as an African American woman, she responded: "I want to get degrees in college, and I want graduate early from high school and college and I want to get a decent job, aspire to marriage." Participant 3 did not seem comfortable with only accomplishing goals as she grew older, but it seemed important for her to attain more and accomplish goals faster. For example, in her previous comment, Participant 3 was adamant about not just getting one college degree but multiple, and she wanted to graduate early as well.

When I referred to the "Golden Child," while introducing Participant 3, some of her goals for womanhood and the immense focus on accomplishing as much as possible as fast as possible, is related to my perception of the "Golden Child." Participant 3 spoke to her desire to want to achieve her goals not only for herself but to help her family:

I want to take care of them when they are old. I want be someone they can lean on, because I am leaning on them now...depending on them to help me go through my life, and I want to help them when they become dependent, when they need to depend on somebody. So, I want to and I just want to see them smile at me and say...you know you did a great job with your life. See them at my graduation at my graduation it's like it's one of my greatest accomplishment or goal.

Listening to Participant 3 describe her greatest goal, having her parents watch her graduate college was truly heart-warming. She displayed such exuberance and sentiment, when describing her graduation and hearing her parents say they are proud of her.

Participant 3 was very forward thinking: “I’m doing well so far in middle school. I’m in geometry... When you are freshman in college what kind of math would I be taking?” When envisioning herself at 23 years of age she said: “Successful, making at least 4 figures accomplishing more stuff than I am now, in a different place, even more mature, making better decisions.” She was already considering career paths and appeared distraught that she was undecided:

Actually I really couldn’t decide so..I thought I wanted to be a gynecologist because...

I’m actually still undecided...I’m just working hard now so it will be easier later, quicker, closer to success, easy road down.

I made note during her interview that Participant 3 seemed slightly nervous at the beginning of her interview. I reiterated that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions, but it seemed that she wanted to be sure she gave eloquent answers. Initially her answers were vaguer, but as interviewing continued, Participant 3 became more detailed and surprisingly emotional near the interview conclusion. Accomplishing goals was not only a personal aspiration but also served as a mode of self-defense:

Like I have very sensitive skin... when I first came to a new school I got a little bit made fun of, but I guess I had a goal to make people shut up. I’m going to show you that I’m smarter than you. I’m going to show you that I can accomplish more than you can, if you don’t put your mind to it. I’m going to make you shut up.



Participant 3 consistently described herself as an accomplished student. Defending herself in a new school setting was an accomplishment for her as well. Along with defending herself, having parental support was critical for Participant 3.

*Parents.* Participant 3 described close relationships with both of her parents. She said her mother was her role model, and was proud of how her mother overcame difficult circumstances:

My mother was able to go through so much and still be strong. My Dad cheated on her. She took it very hard but she didn't give up...I try not think about my Dad that way, because no matter how or what happens, how it happens, or what happens, you know he is my Daddy and he brought me into this life.

Participant 3 was the first participant to discuss her perception of womanhood being related to her father. She has a close relationship with him, and speaks with him on a daily basis. Even though her parents are no longer together, Participant 3 strives to continue an intimate relationship with her father:

He has taught us great lessons. He has apologized to me and our family and I just you know forgave him. Because it's not good to hold grudges you know what they say. It's like wishing the other person died, but you are the one drinking the poison. So, I mean nothing good comes out of hating someone, despising them or being bitter all your life. Because it's really only hurting you.

Participant 3 began to reflect on her relationship on her relationship with her parents:

My Dad and my Mom, when they were together, they always told me that I don't have any option but to be great in this world. My Dad he calls me every day before school. He tells me to do my best and be the best, and I take that to heart. Because I know that I want to make them proud.

She greatly desired to make her parents proud as an adolescent and as an adult. Participant 3's relationship with her parents played an integral part in her childhood development, and when she considers becoming a woman, much consideration and thought is given to her parents.

Participant 3 described the closest relationship with her father, compared with other participants. When considering future research, Participant 3's interview was most intriguing. Considering paternal or adult male influences in lives of African American adolescent girls may shed light on their perceptions of womanhood, and potentially influence whether they engage in violent or aggressive behavior.

Participant 3 also offered more discussion regarding how much she looked up to her mother's strength. When discussing her mother's recovery from the extramarital affair Participant 3 mentioned her Mom took things: "Very hard but she didn't give up..and she trust God a lot...I want to be able to do that, and I want to stop doubting God. Because I know he is capable to do anything." Having both mental and spiritual strength was important to Participant 3, and she credited much of her strength to learning from her Mother.

*Strength.* When asked about her perception of womanhood, Participant 3 immediately mentioned being strong: "Womanhood means to me, womanhood is a fulfillment of greatness, to womanhood is strong, I believe it is strong, you have to show a sense of strongness." While pondering the process of growing into a woman she said: "I guess I feel stronger about

myself...felt more beautiful.” In addition to feeling strong and subsequently more beautiful, Participant 3 associated strength and coping skills with womanhood:

Just be able to process stuff better , able to cope with stuff...able to understand things better, better attitude learning to learning how to umm not let anger show if something is wrong with me in front of other people.

Participant 3 was concerned about how she was viewed by others. She wanted to be strong and defend herself both as an adolescent and as a future woman. Moreover, Participant 3 believed that controlling her attitude was a form of strength.

When I have an attitude I display it. I just don't want that. I don't want that if someone is meeting me in person. I don't want someone to get the impression that that's me, because that's not me all the time .That's not me all the time.

She described how she perceived her attitude: “Low voice disrespectful eyes...uhmm the way I walk is just negative energy, you can tell it's just negative energy.”

Participant 3 proceeded to describe how she learned to be strong and composed from her mother: “She would even teach me how to not let stuff break me or she could still continue to teach me, and I want to be able to master that.” Furthermore, it was clear, when meeting her mother, Participant 3's mother thought very highly of her daughter as well. Their close relationship was evident. Participant 3 further discussed her mother's strength: “Now she doesn't let what other people say get her down. Like she continues to have a strong confident attitude, and is nice to everybody even if they did her wrong.”

Participant 3 also described her own strength, which she displayed with other students. She mentioned being teased, during her interview. Participant 3 was determined to not allow students to tease her. She describes her experience below:

I'm not going to let you keep talking about me. So by the time I went there in fourth grade and by the time fifth grade came nobody was making fun of me anymore nobody by sixth grade. I became popular in 8th grade. I'm at the top of the heap. I don't take advantage of it like any other person would or I do take advantage of it. I don't like gossip.. so If I'm around you and you are going to talk about gossip I will say hey let's change the subject like...did you see empire last night. Let's talk about something else. There is more to life than talking about other people. Like I'm pretty sure they are not worried about you. Change the subject...so I want to change people for the better.

Participant 3 wanted to defend herself from being teased, and she wanted to help other people: "I believe that women should be able to protect themselves against all odds, because everybody has flaws... I feel that you get through them... I guess stick through more pain." Being strong and defending self and others was a key aspect to how Participant 3 perceived African American womanhood.

In summary, during Participant 3's interview three themes emerged: accomplishments, parents, and strength. She was the middle child, but held an intense sense of responsibility to care for her parents in their later years. Participant 3 was an accomplished student, and believed that African American womanhood for her would include reaching one goal after another and subsequently making her parents proud. She strongly looked to her mother as a model for

strength, and expressed being strong as a key component to African American womanhood. Her relationship with her father also greatly influenced her self-perception. Having daily contact and encouragement from her father spurred her academic achievements. Finally Participant 3 valued defending herself and other people. She was strategic about gaining popularity and not allowing others to tease her, when beginning a new school.

In addition, she believed that African American womanhood was connected with coping skills and having endurance. She admired her mother's strength. Participant 3 can also be known as the "Golden Child," in this study. She represents children, typically from ethnic minority backgrounds, who feel that it is their job to attain as much as they possibly can academically and professionally, in order to help their parents and siblings. Although very young, she was extremely forward thinking. Participant 3 is smart, and has much potential to be a highly accomplished young woman in the future. However, as the researcher, I wanted so much for her not feel such adult responsibility at such a young age. I recognized that I wanted her to enjoy her childhood for as long as she possibly could.

#### Participant # 4

Participant 4 was the first participant in the Washington, D.C. area. She was 15 years old during the interview and in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Participant 4 had a household income of \$60,000. She was brought to her interview by her dance instructor, who stood in proxy of her mother. Her mother worked long hours and was not able to attend. The dance instructor seemed thrilled to stand in proxy of Participant 4. Participant 4 was an avid dancer. She appeared bashful when beginning the interview. However, once she began speaking about her future and becoming a dancer, she was all smiles and much more verbose. Although Participant 4 was 15 years old, she

was the smallest in stature of all the participants. Her stature is important to note, as my previous work with young girls has shown that having adult like stature or height and weight can be related to increased household responsibilities. She was also soft spoken and very cheerful throughout her interview.

Throughout her interview, Participant 4 focused on not being discouraged and having proper role models. Based on observation, her dance instructor was a positive role model for Participant 4, and was someone she looked up to. Also, Participant 4 was the only participant to not mention her mother during the interview. Prior to the interview she did however mention that she was proud of her mom and why her mom was not able to attend. The following themes and subthemes arose from interviewing Participant 4.

### *Themes*

Table 6

	Theme 1	Theme 2
	Role Models	Being Better
Subtheme A	Needing a role model to succeed in life	Countering negative comments
Subtheme B	Positive but stern Dance Instructors	Accomplishing Goals

*Role Models.* Participant 4 was a fervent believer in the power of a positive role model. When she was discussing her future as an African American woman, she emphasized the importance of role models in her future success:

I mean you can't do it by yourself so you are going to need a role model to do it umm you are going to need to ask other people questions of how they got to the lifestyle that they are in, things like that.

She proceeded to describe her role model for African American womanhood, a popular television dance instructor named Coach D:

My role model is from Bring It. Uhh Coach D, she is a role model because one, how the way she push her girls to succeed and do better. It's just like ok, if I keep watching the show its going to get me, help me to be where I want to be in my dance life.

Participant 4 was impressed with how much care Coach D took with her dancers, even though she has a stern television personality. Participant 4 wanted to have someone to push her to attain her future goals, to be the kind of dancer she aspired to be:

I say coach D because that's what I need. That type of person to push me so I can go further instead of doing what I know how to do and doing the basics of what I know how to do.

Participant 4 was exuberant, while speaking about her role model. She seemed inspired by the show and Coach D. Participant 4 wanted guidance. She wanted a role model to help her accomplish more in her future dance career, then she was able to attain on her own.

*Being Better.*

Participant 4 discussed her perception of womanhood from the lens of being a better person: "Womanhood means to me.. like to become a better person." She wanted to improve her academic performance and do well in the future professionally: "My steps to becoming a better woman is to get my grades right , graduate high school, go to college, find a career that I would

stick to.” She wanted to be successful in her future, and did not want to be discouraged by negative feedback from others. Participant 4 felt as if she had to combat negative feedback and obstacles hindering her success. Furthermore, she believed that obstacles needed to be overcome either mentally or physically in order to deal with the challenges waiting in womanhood and life:

You have to be positive in one ear and then if it get hard or people or obstacles start coming towards your way, then you have to get physical so it’s going to have to work both ways because nothing in life is going to be easy.

When asked about her perception of African American womanhood she said : “I’m not going to say that I’m scared it’s just.. but scared, that I’m going to make all the wrong mistakes to not get to my future.” Participant 4 did not want to make wrong decisions and not have a chance to be successful. She was fearful of making wrong decisions, especially concerning her career. Participant 4 was combatting discouragement:

Like I want to do... I want to be a dancer... so it’s like me being a dancer I could be might listen to other people ... say don’t be a dancer you might hurt yourself or you might do this and so I’m going to have all those obstacles it might mess my mind up. I’m gonna believe yeah I shouldn’t be a dance. I can get hurt...so it those type of actions that become towards me.

She wanted to accomplish her future goals in spite of negative discussions or criticisms from those close to her.

Envisioning herself as a 25 year old African American woman, Participant 4 mentions: “I think I will be somewhere that you know I want to be. Because, I think I’m doing the right things by serving these by serving girls to dance and everything things like that...I just need to go



farther.” Participant 4 envisions herself not only as a successful dancer in the future, but also as a dance instructor. She considered helping other girls achieve their dance dreams as a service to others, which would help her to have a good station in life. While discussing becoming a better person, Participant 4 once again mentioned her role model Coach D. She truly admired this television star, and constructed her perception of womanhood around Coach D’s television persona:

Everybody feels that Ms. D is the bad person.. but she is showing her girls how to go farther and succeed in life. Like one of the girls in the show just graduated and so now she is the co- coach for the team, and she is about to open her own studio. So it’s a lot that Ms. D done done to help the kids.

Participant 4 mentions how Coach D has a tough persona on the television; however, Participant noticed how much Coach D was able to help her dancers to become successful dancers and dance instructors.

In summary, Participant 4’s interview had two primary themes emerge; role models and being better. Participant 2 was the first to not mention her mother during the interview. She was focused predominately on her role model for African American womanhood, a dance instructor television personality named Coach D. Participant 4 felt she needed a role model to attain success in womanhood. She was fearful of growing up. Participant 4 envisioned herself as a professional dancer and dance instructor, in the future. Participant 4 was concerned with countering discouraging remarks regarding her future. She wanted to “go farther in life,” and saw herself helping other young dancers in the future.

Participant 5 was the second participant in the Washington, D.C. area. She was 14 years old and turned 15 within a week of the interview. Furthermore, she had a two parent household income of \$90,000. Participant 5 was being raised in a two parent household with her mother and father. She was the largest in stature of all the participants. Her interview was conducted at her church after a weekday event. Participant 5 spoke more about morals specifically than other participants. I wondered that if her interview was conducted in a different environment, her responses would contain the same language. However, she seemed comfortable with me interviewing her at her local church. Perhaps she felt we had the same spiritual or religious beliefs. Surprisingly, Participant 5 was the first participant to bring up menstruation as an aspect of womanhood. In addition, Participant 5 had both parents in attendance, which was the first of all the participants. She enjoyed after school activities, such as the arts. Participant 5 was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in a large local high school, and she was extremely soft spoken. Participant 5 was also interested in college life.

### *Themes*

The following themes and subthemes came from this interview:

Table 7

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
	Relationships	Knowing Self Limitations	Self-Defense
Subtheme A	Mom as role model	Hanging with right crowd	Respect
Subtheme B	God		Being Teased

*Relationships.* Participant 5 was focused on relationships during her interview. Similar to previous participants, Participant 5 began discussing her perception of womanhood as her perception relates to her mother: “I have a good relationship with my mom and I know she like... kind of shaped me to be the person that I am today.” She also described other close relationships that had an impact on how she viewed womanhood: “I think you should have a good relationship with the people around, your family God and that stuff.” Participant 5 seemed to get along well with the other children at her local church, where this interview was conducted. She laughed and joked with the other youth, and seemingly enjoyed their company.

Participant 5 also focused on relationships in terms of role models. She saw herself in the future, based upon having positive role models to give her proper direction. When asked about her perception of the steps to becoming a woman she mentioned: “I guess having a relationship with somebody to steer you in the right path to becoming a woman.” Furthermore, she began to describe her mother as her primary role model for womanhood:

My Mom is my big role model in my life. I say that because I notice that she has been through things in her life. I noticed that she has been through things in her life. I want to be not like her but have the same...not go through the same things, but be able to handle it like how she did, even if I were to go through something like that.

Participant 5 understood that her mother faced struggles in life. She did not want to experience the same struggles as her mother; however, she liked the way her mother carried herself through difficulties. Furthermore, if she were to face the same challenges, she would have the ability to handle tough situations in the same way her mother has handle difficult situations.

Participant 5 was also impressed with her mother's relationship with God. She felt that having a good relationship with God and working hard were critical aspects of womanhood: "Like so she (mother) has a good relationship with God. So knowing like prayer, having that guidance and not giving up...you know always working hard in her life." In addition to having positive relationships with others, Participant 5 emphasized knowing self and personal limitations.

*Knowing Self-Limitations.*

When asked about her perceptions of womanhood, she mentioned "knowing your limits...knowing what you can and cannot do." Participant 5 was much concerned with keeping her morals and not pushing limits or creating problems for herself by "going with the wrong crowd knowing that you can't do some of things that they are doing... so knowing like if they are doing something, knowing not to do it: Further discussing her morals and values she said: "I can say that I feel good about becoming a woman. I think I have the rite like blessings. I think I have good... I think have good morals growing up." In addition to her morals, Participant 5 held a strong conviction for being able to defend herself.

*Self-Defense.*

Participant 5 emphasized self-defense, during her interview. She felt that having respect for others and self was an important aspect of growing in to a woman. She believed that the process of growing into a woman involved: "Learning about yourself. Learning how to treat others, learning how to respect yourself respect others, respect the people around you." Furthermore, being able to defend herself was crucial for being a woman:

Yeah I think that it's (self-defense) a big part of it (womanhood). Umm I say that because You have to know yourself. You have to know what you can and cannot do... so I think self- defense is a big part of it (womanhood)...I think that it (self-defense) is a big part of it about becoming a woman.

When describing herself as a woman, in the future, Participant 5 said:

I see a very intelligent woman knowing what she wants to do with her life having a good mind set having the right people around her having a good education yeah that's about it...being able to defend myself, because I do have problems with that now. So in ten years, I hope that I will be better with that.

Participant 5 proceeded to describe how she would like to improve being able to verbally defend herself:

You know like when people say stuff you know, and I am not the person to say something back even when it is rude. I feel like I should you know, speak up for myself and I don't do that now. So I hope that I can or in the future I will be able to.

Her sentiment while speaking expressed a sense of being verbally bullied, but she did not know how to respond to bothersome statements. Womanhood for Participant 5 meant not only learning to respect others, but also defending herself and demanding respect from others as well. She did not feel that she was adequately able to defend herself currently, but she expected to be able to defend herself as African American woman somehow.

In summary, Participant 5 was most concerned with knowing her moral limitations, and being able to defend herself as a woman. She admired her mother as a role model, and saw her as

a blue print for African American womanhood. Overall, she valued relationships and expressed spiritual and religious components to womanhood as well. She mentioned that she initially thought womanhood was simply: “I used to think it just means like “becoming” a woman, “with which she was referred to menstruation. However, she further expressed her perception of womanhood has grown over time in a more complex way.

### Participant # 6

Participant 6 was the final participant in the Washington, D.C. area. She was 13 years old and attended a local public school. She lived in a two parent household with a dual income of \$100,000. Her mother and father lived in the household with her along with two other siblings. She was a middle child, and was also close with extended families. During the interview, she was living with extended family. Participant 6 was the most shy of the interviewees, but also one of the youngest. She seemed nervous during the interview, but was much supported by her parents, who were in attendance as well. The interview took place at the home of some of her relatives, shortly after a birthday party. She wanted to participate in the interview, but seemed slightly sluggish after enjoying festivities with her relatives. Participant 6 was also interested in sports and was doing athletic training with her father. Participant 6 seemed less concerned with considering womanhood, but was quite interested in human rights.

### *Themes*

The following themes and sub themes developed from the interview:

Table 8

	Theme 1	Theme 2
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	Growing Older	Human Rights
Subtheme A	Marriage and Children	Role Model
Subtheme B	Autonomy	Stick up for yourself

*Growing Older.* Participant 6 was very much a child at heart with child perspectives. It was refreshing to meet with her. She did not seem overly concerned with aspects of adulthood, and she also seemed protected by her close immediate and extended family. Her perception of becoming an African American woman, was simply put as “growing older” and being an adult. Participant 6 continued to say “It kind of makes me think about like getting married and stuff you know and having children like being an adult and stuff.” Womanhood sounded like a far off concept for Participant 6. She mentioned aspects of adult life, but was not considerably interested in discussing adult life. Participant 6 appeared to be a child, who was actually enjoying the luxuries of being a child. As the researcher, I wanted to hear her story and perceptions, but also did not want to push her to think about womanhood more in depth, as she did not seem comfortable speaking about womanhood beyond more broad comments for too long.

Participant 6 mentioned: “I think of like graduating school yeah...it’s like getting older... Yeah because most of the time you graduate at like 18 and like 18 is usually the age of an adult.” Womanhood to Participant 6, was simply getting older, and graduating. She did express having more autonomy, when she considered womanhood: “Well it’s makes me feel like I will be able to do what I want to do..Uhhh like older kinda.” Overall, getting older was her perspective of womanhood.

When considering who she would be at 23 years old, Participant 6 said: “I feel like I would be really smart.. like the older I would be means smarter....that’s what my dad always says...it’s true...I guess I would be like a good person.” Simply put, as a woman she would be able to do more, be smarter, and most of all “be older.” As the researcher, I could not help but appreciate her amazing innocence.

### *Human Rights.*

Although Participant 6 was protected by her close immediate and extended family, she was aware of human rights issues. When she spoke about her role model, she mentioned a young girl from the Disney channel, who apparently shares her views on human rights on Instagram:

I would have to say Zendayah just because ... she is like one of the only people that I know...she is like on television shows like for kids and stuff...she is really pro woman and pro black and stuff and its inspiring... most of the time if you saw her Instagram page, she would be like Black Lives Matter.

Participant 6 believed that defending oneself and others was important to being a woman: “You are supposed to be able to stick up for yourself all the time...as a woman or anyone in the world.”

In summary, Participant 6 was truly a child at heart. She was aware of issues going on the world, surprisingly through a Disney Channel actress. However, she viewed adult life as adult life, something that she would encounter when she “grew older” and “smarter.” She considered marriage and having children as an aspect of womanhood, and that all people should be able to defend themselves physically and mentally. When thinking of womanhood, she felt that she would be able to have autonomy and graduate high school. Participant 6 had a perception of



womanhood that was simple, and seemed to be much more interested in going to play with her siblings and extended family members. It was truly refreshing to see. However, I was slightly concerned about Participant 6. She seemed extremely protected by her immediate family, and somewhat naïve to challenges that she might face moving into adolescence. Furthermore, I wondered how her perspective was related to her birth order. Participant 6 is a middle child, and has an older sister, who is finishing high school. Although Participant 6 is currently in a protected position within her family, I am interested to know how things will change once the eldest sister is away at college or enters the job force. Participant 6 seemed mentally detached from considering aspects of womanhood. She was bashful throughout her interview. Perhaps thinking of aspects of womanhood seemed somewhat embarrassing for her, being thirteen years old. Interviewing Participant 6 shed light on future research ideas involving adolescent development and familial protection. Furthermore, investigating ethnicity and aspects of embarrassment, when discussing womanhood with young adolescents and pre-adolescents, may add a significant layer to literature surrounding adolescent females.

### Summary

This chapter described results of a within-case analysis of transcribed interviews with six African American adolescent participants, ranging from ages 13 to 15. Half of the participants were from Hampton, Virginia and half of the participants were from the Washington, D.C. area. Text descriptions were used for analysis of each participant's interview. In addition, tables were used for each case analysis to show themes and subthemes that emerged from the transcribed interviews. The findings relevance was also described briefly.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ACROSS CASE-ANALYSIS/COMPOSITE THEMES

The previous chapter discussed findings from a within-case analysis of six participant's semi-structured interviews. Themes and subthemes came forth from the interviews and were described in table and text form, using participant's own words. This chapter will discuss what was found in the cross case theme analysis. Themes discussed will be in the researcher's voice.

#### Analytical Procedure

Chapter three discusses the analytical procedure used for this cross-case analysis. Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought are the two theoretical frameworks used to guide this study. The across case analysis provides a description of overall themes, which emerged from participant's interviews. Themes and subthemes were derived through analyzing repeated words and statements used by participants, along with researcher feedback. Considering the research as instrument, adds in the moment perspective of the participant's interviews. Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought is the lens with which, participant's interviews were assessed. Composite themes are presented in Table 9. Composite themes and subthemes are presented in Table 10.

Table 9

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
Participants	Strength	Responsibility	Education	Mom as Role Model	Stereotypes	Finances
1	<i>I really appreciate for women being strong and not kind of being the ideal standard</i>	<i>Stop Being a child I need to be able to handle more tasks more load more responsibility</i>	<i>Finishing High School and going to college</i>	<i>Came up from the ashes</i>	<i>home cook clean you know kind of I guess just being a trophy wife</i>	<i>you are dealing with bills</i>
2	<i>being powerful. To really Be an AA Woman</i>	<i>become responsible and start to realize that you are...accountable for things that you do.</i>	<i>Successful musician or a psychiatrist</i>	<i>My Mom she is strong and she knows so much about a lot</i>	<i>everyone thinks down on African American women  ratched or baby mamas</i>	<i>having a job and paying bills</i>
3	<i>womanhood is strong women should be able to protect themselves against all odds stick through more pain</i>	<i>my brothers and sisters I want to take care of them when they are old (Parents)</i>	<i>I want to get degrees in college and I want graduate early from high school and college</i>	<i>My mother was able to go through so much and still be strong</i>	<i>woman were sent here to help men meet there goals</i>	<i>I want to get a decent job Successful making at least 4 figures</i>
4	<i>do what you gotta do in life to succeed</i>	<i>I'm doing the right things by serving these girls to dance (Teaching other young girls to dance/Future Dance Instructor)</i>	<i>Get my grades right , graduate high school, go to college</i>	<i>my role model is from Bring It. Coach D, she is a role model ...she push her girls to succeed</i>	<i>crazy like one of those crazy dance teachers that's on tv</i>	<i>to succeed find a career that I would stick to</i>
5	<i>able to defend myself I hope that I will be better with that</i>	<i>going with the wrong crowd knowing that you can't do some of things that they are doing</i>	<i>having a good education</i>	<i>I have a good relationship with my mom and I know she like kind of she shaped me to</i>		<i>always working hard</i>

				<i>be the person that I am today</i>		
6	<i>you are supposed to be able to stick up for yourself all the time...As a woman or anyone in the world</i>	<i>Getting Married Having Children</i>  <i>Most of the time if you saw her Instagram page she would be like Black Lives Matter</i>	<i>Graduating High School</i>	<i>Zendayah (Actress) she is really pro woman and pro black ... its inspiring</i>		<i>I always like Picture myself Living in an apartment (Having own apartment, in the future)</i>

Table 10

## Composite Themes

	<b>Theme 1 Strength</b>	<b>Theme 2 Responsibility</b>	<b>Theme 3 Education</b>	<b>Theme 4 Mom as Role Model</b>	<b>Theme 5 Stereotypes</b>	<b>Theme 6 Finances</b>
Sub Theme 1	Power	Self	Graduating High School	Overcoming Life's Challenges	Negative Stereotypes	Paying Bills
Sub Theme 2	Self-Defense	Family/Community	College/Post Graduate Education			
Sub Theme 3	Voice Heard	Advocacy				
Sub Theme 4	Overcoming Teasing					
Sub Theme 5	Endurance					

## Composite Structural Description

### *Composite Themes*

#### Theme 1 Strength

All six participants discussed some aspect of strength, during their interview. Two out of the six participants discussed strength, specifically women's needs to be strong, consistently throughout the majority of their interview. Strength is a composite theme constructed of all six participants within case themes along with five sub themes displayed in Table 10. Participants discussed five different aspects of strength (1) Power (2) Self-Defense (3) Voice Heard (4) Overcoming Teasing, and (5) Endurance. As Participant 3 stated, "Womanhood is strong." Furthermore, Participant 1 mentioned: "I really appreciate for women being strong and not being the ideal standard of what people think women are supposed to do."

*Power.* Participant 3 eloquently stated. "We should be seen as equal and not frail because women are very powerful!" Approximately half of the participants discussed aspects of power as it relates to strength, during their interview. Participant 3 said "I believe it is (womanhood) strong, you have to show a sense of strength Womanhood is a fulfillment of greatness." She furthered discussed women having equal power as men, "well woman were sent here to help men meet there goals, and I also think that woman should have their own goals...we should think about what is good for both parties instead of just one." Participant 1 mentioned "I get more freedom and maybe opportunity to maybe do some things that I feel I couldn't do as a child. Moreover, Participant 1 said how much she admired "African American women who actually decided to stand up for themselves and to really take control over their situation." Finally, Participant 2 mentioned "I feel that it's a process (womanhood) and what you have to go through

to end up being powerful,” when discussing her thoughts on the journey girls take towards womanhood.

*Self-Defense.* When discussing self-defense, several participants discussed the importance of women being able to defend themselves. Participant 3 said “I believe that women should be able to protect themselves.” Participant 1 mentioned how in her future as an African American woman, “it still may be hard being an African American woman to try to stand up for myself.” Furthermore, Participant 2 said “If someone says something or does something to offend me, I feel that I can say the right thing.” Participant 2’s goal was to defend herself by diffusing threatening situations verbally. On the other hand, Participant 4 mentioned, if it gets hard or people or obstacles start coming towards your way, then you have to get physical.” Participant 5 wanted to improve her ability to defend herself, “being able to defend myself, I do have problems with that now.” Surprisingly the youngest participant, Participant 6, concluded “you are supposed to be able to stick up for yourself all the time.”

*Voice Heard.* Black Feminist Thought emphasizes African American women in academia sharing stories and voices of African American women. However, while conducting this study, it was clear that there are some very young girls, who feel silenced and need their voices heard as well. When discussing becoming a woman, Participant 1 said, “people will take me more seriously (as a woman). I feel like I will be able to truly express my views and opinions.” She continued to discuss how “being a woman is still kind of hard to get your opinion across; it’s like talking in a loud room. It’s like nobody can hear.” Hearing her words was truly disheartening for me as the researcher and as a woman. However I was encouraged, when Participant 1 said, “I will continue to express those views and opinions.” Furthermore, when discussing her role model, Participant 6 mentioned “most of the time if you saw her Instagram page she would be

like, Black Lives Matter.” Having their voices heard by multitudes of people was important to these young girls.

*Overcoming Teasing.* Similar to self-defense, some of the participants specifically discussed aspects of overcoming teasing. Participant 3 said:

Everybody has flaws but I feel that I have get through them...when I first came to a new school I got a little bit made fun of, but I guess I had a goal to make people shut up... I’m not going to let you keep talking about me... by the time fifth grade came, nobody was making fun of me anymore.

Participant 5 described her experiences with teasing as well:

You know like when people say stuff, and I am not the person to say something back even when it is rude. I feel like I should speak up for myself, and I don’t do that now. So I hope that I can or in the future I will be able to Overall, overcoming teasing was important to some participants. Participant 5 hoped to improve her ability to overcome teasing, and Participant 3 felt confident in her progressive ability to overcome teasing.

*Endurance.* The endure theme was common through all of the interviews. Moreover, when discussing their role models, several participants admired their role models for their endurance abilities. Some participants had high expectations for how she should endure difficulties, even while being very young. Participant 3 said she should be able to, “stick through more pain, make better decisions, just be able to process stuff better.” In addition, she wanted to be, “able to cope with stuff... to understand things better.” Participant 3 saw her mother as her role model and mentioned, “she would even teach me how to not let stuff break me.”

Furthermore, Participant 1 described the endurance of her role model Maya Angelou:

I enjoy seeing in women people who don't get defeated. (Maya Angelou) she rose above, she came up from I guess you can say the ashes, and she became a very great person. She still remained humble through it all, and she didn't allow her circumstances to define her. She grew from them and I really look up to that.

Endurance was an aspect of strength that participants seemed to admire in their role models.

### Summary Interpretation

Strength was a unifying theme between all six Participants. When this research study first began, I was concerned with the growing violence among young African American female adolescents in inner cities. The hope was to see if there was a missing link in the literature, which might help to shed light on more effective programming for this population. I thought perhaps, research might consider their perceptions on womanhood, and if those perceptions included aggressive or violent behavior. With these participants, aggression or violence was not a dominant aspect of their views of African American womanhood, but Strength was a dominant theme throughout each interview. Strength was discussed in the interviews multiple ways such as: power, self-defense, having their voices heard, overcoming teasing, and endurance.

Participants also admired strength in their mothers and other role models. Each participant mentioned their role model having significant strength, such as overcoming severe life difficulties and advocating for others. Throughout my own life, I have heard the phrase, "strong Black woman." I wondered throughout the interviews, if how much this phrase circulated the world of these young girls. Strength was a dominant theme that not only stood on its own, but was also woven throughout the other themes as well, such as responsibility and mom as role model.



## Theme 2 Responsibility

Participants frequently described womanhood as having a greater sense of responsibility for their own well-being, the well-being of their family members and local community, as well as, a sense of responsibility to advocate for others. The sense of responsibility for others seemed to surpass their responsibilities to themselves. Participant 3 shared a touching sentiment regarding her parents:

I want to take care of them when they are old. I want be someone they can lean on, because I am leaning on them now, depending on them to help me go through my life. I want to help them when they become dependent, when they need to depend on somebody.

Participants described a sense of responsibility for others in a more in depth way than being responsible for self. When describing responsibility to self, the participants focused on financially providing for themselves, morals, and handling life stressors.

*Self.* Participant 6 described how she sees herself in the future, as a woman “I always picture myself living in an apartment by myself.” Participant 6 discussed how much she would like to have her own apartment, in the future. During the interview, she was living in transitional housing with extended family members. Participant 5 commented how her personal responsibility in, “learning how to respect yourself ... and having a relationship with somebody to steer you in the right path to becoming a woman.” Participant 5 valued having someone else to assist her in growing into womanhood; moreover, she was pleased with her own responsibility for her moral development, “I think I have good morals growing up.” Furthermore, Participant 5 mentioned, “You have to know yourself... You have to know what you can and cannot do.”

Continuing with the moral responsibility to self, Participant 3 said, “ I want to stop doubting God, because I know he is capable to do anything.” In addition to moral responsibility to self, Participant 2 felt that she had a moral responsibility to represent her gender and race in a favorable manner, according to her upbringing.

Participant 2, “I was brought up to uphold yourself like a lady.” Furthermore, Participant 1 mentioned:

Womanhood to me, is the time where you go stop being a child to a woman. It’s when you are caused to have responsibility. You are dealing with the struggles of life. You are dealing with bills or you are dealing with multiple stresses. It can be anything that would give you more of a responsibility than just being a child and living with your parents, not really working... I’m going to be very self- made.

*Family/Community* When envisioning her future, Participant 5 said, “I see a very intelligent woman knowing what she wants to do with her life, having a good mind set, having the right people around her.” Participant 4 mentioned:

You have to be positive. She (her role model) is showing her girls how to go farther and succeed in life. Like one of the girls, in the show just graduated, and so now she is the co-coach for the team, and she is about to open her own studio. So it’s a lot that Ms. D done to help the kids. ..I’m doing the right things (in her future) by serving these by serving girls (teaching them) to dance.

Several participants felt a sense of responsibility to not only have the “right” people around them, but also to help those in their communities, in ways that they have been helped. Participant 3 felt a responsibility to care for her siblings. She wanted to “become more mature

with school...and help my brothers and sisters.” In addition to expressing feeling responsible to care for her siblings, Participant 3 also discussed feeling responsible to protect others from her, “(I should) not let anger show, if something is wrong with me in front of other people.” In addition to their current families and communities, some participants described a responsibility to get married and have children, in the future. Participant 1 said, “getting married of course, having kids, I believe that is also the goal (of womanhood).”

*Advocacy.* The final aspect of responsibility participants discussed was advocacy. Participant 6 mentioned how much she liked her role-model because she was openly, “pro woman and pro Black.” Participant 3 described how she advocated for other students, “I don’t like gossip.. so If I’m around you and you are going to talk about gossip, I will say hey let’s change the subject...I want to change people for the better.” Participant 1 described her role models and their sense of responsibility to help advocate for others:

(I see as a role model) any Black woman who is for the rights of African Americans... if you saw somebody you know getting fought you would want to break it up. They (Role Models for African American Womanhood) stand up for basic human rights you know, people to be equal, not just because they are white or black or something. Stand up for the rights of other people. Allow us to be equal.”

### Summary Interpretation

Being responsible was a key component to womanhood for several participants. The majority of participants were concerned with being responsible for self, surrounding community members, as well as advocating for people in need. For such young girls, these participants considered human rights advocacy, helping to care for their parents and siblings, and providing a

household for themselves in adulthood. Being responsible for helping others, seemed more important to participants than being responsible for self. Their communal perspective was sprinkled throughout each interview, even with the youngest interviewees. For example, Participant 3 spoke of taking care of her parents, in the future, as an honor. Furthermore, Participant 4 aspired to become a dance instructor in order to help other young girls like herself. Considering Participant 4 was brought to the interview by her current dance instructor, in proxy of her mother, it seems that a communal perspective is being modeled for many of the participants.

Similar to the theme Strength and the “strong Black woman” motto, I wonder how often these girls have heard how important it is to “give back to your community.” Having grown up in an inner city myself, I remember how much the concept of giving back to one’s community was echoed both at home and school. These participants readily discussed how much they looked up to celebrities and family members, who advocated and assisted people in their local communities.

I reflect on my first experience in higher education, when someone asked me why I wanted to “give back to my community,” because they (the community) were not the reason why I was successful, I was. This particular student was greatly interested in why he heard so many African Americans use this phrase. I was astonished. I never attributed any of my successes as purely of my own doing, and I would feel bothered doing so. Speaking with this fellow graduate student about how much God, my family, friends, and teachers all helped me, in my educational pursuits, he was perplexed. Giving back to others was one of my core values. However my value was rooted in a communal framework, and I was unsure with how to operate in a more individualistic society. During this study, it was interesting to hear this same valued echoed by

another generation of young African American girls. Considering implications for the Counseling profession, communal foundations for youth programming, with this population, may be a necessity. In addition, I question how much cultural differences between communal and individualistic perspectives are broached in counseling sessions.

Overall, each participant expressed a sense of responsibility for herself as well as her family and extended community. Although very young, these girls seemed to happily carry a heavy burden of responsibility on their shoulders. African American womanhood was laden with responsibility, in the eyes of these participants.

### Theme 3 Education

Education was a primary component to womanhood for these participants. Graduating high school and entering college were ambitions for all of participants. Some of the participants had very precise plans for where they would like to attend college and complete their post graduate education, such as Participant 3:

I will have graduated from the college of my dreams. I actually have quite a few. I would love to be accepted into the University of Denver, Harvard or Columbia to do law... I'm planning on going into law school right after (her undergraduate studies).

Education was a unified thought throughout each interview, and was truly encouraging for me to hear as the researcher. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5 each had questions for me about college, as well as their parents. I spent an extensive amount of time speaking with each family about my education, and tried to answer as many questions as I could. However, conducting these interviews showed me as the researcher how much college focused youth programming is needed inner city schools and communities.

*Graduating High School.* Educational milestones, such as graduating was expressed by each Participant. During Participant 1's interview, she said "I believe that the steps for me becoming a Black woman would be first finishing off my high school education." For Participant 1, womanhood was marked with education. In addition, Participant 3 discussed her educational background as follows; "when it got to like middle school, I had to work harder... I still continue to accomplish what I set my mind to." She was determined to get a quality education during her middle and high school years, and was adamant about attending college. She was also preparing for the IB program, in her local school, which she desperately dreamed to be admitted to. Participant 3 went on to say, "I want to get degrees in college, and I want to graduate early from high school and college." Participant 3 wanted to make her parents proud, and she believed graduating high school and college would be the ultimate thank you to her family.

The concept of educational milestones and accomplishments for these girls was a communal perspective. Attaining a good job and being able to provide for themselves was a part of their dreams, but the largest emotional response was seen, when the participants spoke about how they could help their families and people in need, within their communities. Participant 3 shared this: "to see them (her parents) at my graduation...it's one of my greatest accomplishments (in the future)."

*College/Post Graduate Education.* Participant 3 asked what I would consider a loaded question, "What is it like in college... What is undergrad?" I could see the immense optimism in her face. She was beaming. I was happy to share with her positive experiences that I have had in college such as studying abroad and the wonderful people that I have been able to interact with; however, I know that there are challenges that she might face in the future. I did not have the heart to tell her of the difficulties she might face, the culture shock that might occur, and how

some people may not respond to her skin color and race in a way that she may not be prepared for. Currently, all of the participants, including Participant 3, attend schools in predominantly African American neighborhoods. These participants live in an academic cultural bubble.

They live in a world right now, where Black History Month is celebrated every year, their teachers, principals, and school counselors look like them, and economic differences are not extremely pronounced. I encouraged Participant 3 to continue to do well in school and look forward to college, but I knew there were potential challenges that she could not see coming. I do not think that people feel like an outsider, until someone lets you know that you are. My dream for these young participants is that they will know that the ivory towers are filled with a rainbow of people, and they can be a valuable ray. Participant 1 came beaming into her interview, as she walked the halls of the William & Mary School of Education. While in awe as she envisioned her future educational pursuits, she said; “completing my degrees would be along the way, the road to finding myself as a person, as a Black female”..

#### Summary Interpretation

In summary, education was a major theme for each participant; however, Participant 1 and Participant 3 spoke about education in great lengths. They were extremely optimistic about their educational pursuits. Participant 1 wants to become a lawyer. She mentioned how much she wanted to help people in need by becoming a lawyer. Participant 1 described being a civil rights lawyer, in the future, and she could not have been happier to have her interview at the college. In addition, Participant 3 was only 13 years old, and was already concerned about how her grades were impact college admission. She was ecstatic to ask me about college, during her interview. Participant 3 wanted to be able to take care of her parents and siblings, and felt an education

would help her to do so. Her dream was to make her parents proud, and to see them at her graduation. Education was a sense of hope for their futures and the future of others around them.

#### Theme 4 Mom as Role Model

All participants described their role models as being an older prominent African American female. Half of the participants mentioned that their mothers were role models in their life. In addition, four of the participants discussed how hard their mothers worked. The participants specifically noted how well their mothers were able to overcome significant life challenges. Modeling their mother's endurance seemed to be an important life skill, several of the participants hoped to achieve. What was surprising, when assessing why they admired their role models, 0% of participants said anything about happiness or joy in life. Although very young, these participants seemed to admire how their mothers were able to survive life and still accomplish goals, versus discussing any aspects of modeling how their mothers enjoyed life. When considering the theoretical frameworks surrounding this research, are these young girls socially constructing African American womanhood as mere survival? Furthermore, considering Black Feminist Thought, are African American female researchers discussing positive aspects of Black womanhood, and is it more difficult to discuss the positive aspects of African American womanhood than the negative?

*Overcoming Challenges.* When discussing her role model, Participant 2 mentioned her mother, "my Mom (is my role model) because she is strong, and she knows so much. In addition, Participant 3 said:

My mother was able to go through so much and still be strong... She would even teach me how to not let stuff break me... I want to be able to master that... she doesn't let what



other people say get her down , she continues to have a strong confident attitude and is nice to everybody, even if they did her wrong... she trust in God a lot.

It is important to note that participants often mentioned their mother's relationship with God and prayer as a means of dealing with difficult situations... Participant 3 was particularly hard on herself about her desire to trust God more, similar to her mother's faith. Participant 5 said:

My Mom is my big role model in my life. I say that because I notice that she has been through things in her life...I want to be not like her...but be able to handle it (struggles) like how she did, even if I were to go through something like that...she has a good relationship with God. So knowing like prayer, having that guidance and not giving up you know.

I noticed that the participants would often say that their mothers experienced great hardships, but only Participant 3 wanted to share about specific hardships. I could see the girl's admiration for their mothers, but also their intentionality to not share their family struggles in depth. I wondered how much of a sense of protection the participants felt over their mothers. Also, I must mention mother figures. Although half of the participants discussed their actual mothers as role models, Participant 4 was brought to the interview by an instructor in proxy of her mother, due to her mother's intense work schedule. Not only did Participant 4 seem to admire her own instructor, she described a television dance instructor as her role model. She wanted to encourage other young girls, by being an instructor herself, in the future.

## Summary Interpretation

Overall, the participants admired their mother's strength and abilities to overcome difficult life situations. I understand their sentiment. Completing these interviews allowed me to reflect on how much I admire my own Mom's strength. Not simply how she handled cancer treatment or even how she approached the end of her life, but how she approached life period; full of love, hope in God, love of family, and belief in positivity.

## Theme 5 Stereotypes

Two participants mentioned being concerned with negative stereotypes about African American women. Social media is a significant aspect of these participant's lives, and how African American women are portrayed in television shows, movies, and society in general, seemed to be of great concern for two participants. One additional participant seemed somewhat concerned about negative stereotypes about African American women, but more so in line with being seen as equal to men.

*Negative Stereotypes.* Participant 2 was the most concerned with fighting negative stereotypes about African American females. She made countering negative stereotypes about African American women a part of how she lived. Participant 2 said countering negative stereotypes of African American females, was a value from her upbringing:

Everyone thinks down on African American women. You want people to know that African American women aren't just known for being ratched or baby mamas or stuff like that. People expect African American women to be raunchy... like hoeish in a way or just lude... I was brought up to uphold yourself like a lady to prove someone's (society's) standards (for African American women) wrong.

Throughout the interview with Participant 2, she would say “you know” or “you know what I mean” often, as she gestured a head nod towards me, indicating a mutual understanding of what she was saying. I tried my best throughout her interview to maintain a neutral facial expression, but I also wanted her to know that she was being understood throughout the interview. Towards the end of her interview, she asked: “Do you think that it’s hard to be an African American woman in the society that we have?” I cringed slight on the inside, when I heard this question. I immediately pondered how to be honest while being extremely hopeful. Participant 2 was only 15 years old, and was already very much concerned with how society as a whole viewed her, because of her race. Furthermore, her interview brought up a future research topic surrounding African American female adolescents and their perceptions of womanhood, which is colorism. I believe that colorism and stereotypes in social media are close cousins.

Each of the participants had a range of skin complexions from a fare light tan to a deep dark brown. Participant 2 happened to have the darkest skin complexion out the participants, and I wondered if perhaps her complexion added to her awareness and sensitivity to negative stereotypes facing African American women. During my undergraduate studies, I actually wrote a paper on the differences in ways with which African American women were portrayed in television shows and movies, based upon skin color (light versus dark complexions). More often than not, if two African American women appeared in a movie or television show simultaneously, the actress with the darkest color was portrayed as loud, less educated, more promiscuous, and having a lower socioeconomic status, or as Participant 2 phrased it, “ raunchy and hoeish.”

During the first interview, Participant 1 expressed concerns about negative stereotypes about African American women as well. However, I think her concerns would be more

generalizable to concerns of females across races and ethnicities. Similar to Participant 3's concern about the belief she was taught being that "Well woman were sent here to help men meet there goals, and I also think that woman should have their own goals." Participant 1 was concerned about women being portrayed as professionally inferior to men. Participant 1 was bothered with particular ways women are portrayed such as, "women are just supposed to stay at home, cook, and clean (for a man)... being a trophy wife, somebody who doesn't really do anything and just let the man provide." She went on to say that women should not be portrayed as, "just baking... weak...or frail. Although Participant 1 was speaking about African American womanhood throughout her interview, I believe that her concerns are generalizable to women of a multitude of racial and cultural backgrounds.

#### Summary Interpretation

Overall, half of the participants discussed being troubled by inequity with how African American women are portrayed in social media and negative stereotypes continuing in society at large, about African American women. Participant 2 was most concerned with "lude" and promiscuous stereotypes, while Participant 1 and Participant 3 were troubled with how African American women were portrayed as unequal to men.

#### Theme 6 Finances

Financial aspects of womanhood were discussed briefly by three participants. The youngest participants discussed what things they would like to acquire in adulthood, such as having apartment or getting a job, but they did not mention actually paying for their livelihood. However, paying bills was one of the first aspects of womanhood the 15 year old participants mentioned.

*Paying Bills.* When asked about her perception of African American womanhood, Participant 1 immediately answered, “you are dealing with bills.” Participant 1 went on to describe how she would like to use finances in her future: “I feel like being able to buy my own car, my own house...normal things that you would have to do in everyday life, and paying bills.” Participant 1 discussed in depth her desire to become a lawyer. She discussed how she wanted to help people, who were not able to afford appropriate legal services. However, Participant 1 never discussed what she would like to gain financially from practicing law. Participant 1 immediately acquainted African American womanhood with “paying bills,” but interestingly enough did not mention how her future profession could help to provide for herself. Several participants had a communal approach to life. Their choices in careers and values were rooted in communal perspectives. Ultimately, paying bills was attached to womanhood in their thinking, but their major life choices seemed to revolve around ways in which to help, uplift, or represent well, other people, specifically African American people, and people with few financial resources.

Participant 2 described her perception of African American womanhood as follows: “like having a job and paying bills... like you are supposed to pay your bills instead of spending your money on something that is not really necessary.” Furthermore, Participant 4 strongly believed in receiving mentorship on how to establish herself financially and professionally: “you are going to need to ask other people questions of how they got to the lifestyle that they are in.” Participant 4 wanted to pursue a career as a dance instructor, in order to mentor younger girls in dancing, as she is being mentored now. Helping other girls as she has been helped, seemed to be one of greatest aspirations in her future adult life.

Financial obligations were a present reality to many of the older participants; therefore, paying bills was one of the first aspects of womanhood they mentioned. However, their

communal perspectives on their future career choices were deeply entrenched in their interviews. Each participant mentioned being able to purchase her own car and apartment in the future, but otherwise their future career goals were focused on helping others.

During their interviews, I noticed, when speaking about their futures, not one participant mentioned buying or living in a house. Thinking of the commonly portrayed “American Dream” on social media, having a house with a white picket fence, I was somewhat surprised that not one of the participants discussed a house. Considering cross cultural and economic differences in perspectives of womanhood is pertinent. I believe conducting a similar study across racial and economic groups may yield interestingly varied results. Is the “American Dream,” truly a dream that is shared by the majority of Americans? Is it too far from reality for some children to even consider dreaming about it?

### Summary

This chapter presented themes from a cross case analysis of six participants. Six themes emerged from the interviews: Strength, Responsibility, Education, and Mom as Role Model, Stereotypes, and Finances. The following and final chapter will discuss implications for future research and conclusions.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

The previous chapter presented results from six transcribed interviews with African American adolescent girls, ranging from ages 13 to 15. Each participant lived in an urban environment, with half of the participants from Hampton, Virginia and half of the participants from the Washington, D.C. area. Chapter four described a within-case analysis of the transcribed interviews. This chapter will discuss the purpose of the study, interview results in reference to the research questions and literature, discuss limitations, and discuss implications for future research, counselor education, and program development.

The purpose of this study was to examine African American female adolescents who reside in inner cities. The focus of this study is African American female adolescent's perceptions of womanhood and whether or not these perceptions include aspects of aggression or violence. Results from this study are not intended to be generalizable to all African American adolescent girls, but to tell the story of each girl. My purpose, as the research, was to empower each participant by giving them a platform to discuss their perceptions of African American womanhood. Social Constructionism and Black Feminist Thought provided a lens through which to study perceptions of womanhood among African American adolescent females.

The research questions guiding this study were:

3. How do Inner City African American female adolescents view womanhood?
4. How does aggressive or violent behavior play a role, or not, in African American adolescent perceptions of womanhood?

Additional questions the study examined were

1. Who are the participant's role models
2. What steps did participant's believe were involved in growing into a woman

The sample size for this study was small, but did however cover two different cities in the United States, Hampton Virginia, and Washington D.C. Participants were from varying family structures with diverse household incomes as well. Some of the participants came from single family households led by their mothers, while others came from two parent households consisting of a mother and a father. Half of the participants were living in some form of transitional housing, and all participants were enrolled in public schools. All participants identified as being Black or African American and female.

### Research Questions

*How do Inner City African American female adolescents view womanhood?*

Several themes emerged during this study, when examining how African American female adolescents from inner cities, perceived womanhood. Composite themes included: Strength, Education, Stereotypes, Responsibility, Mom as Role Model, and Finances. All participants mentioned an aspect of being strong as it relates to African American womanhood. When considering previous research and Black Feminist Thought specifically, African American woman's strength was not a surprising theme emerging from these interviews. What saddened me as a researcher was that each participant mentioned African American womanhood and some sense of struggle or challenges. Participants discussed human rights, equality for women, negative stereotypes, not having a voice, and the Black Lives Matters movement. Each participant, regardless of age, discussed struggles facing African American women. Participant 6



was the most childlike of all of the participants, and even she referenced human rights issues. When Ness (2004) began her research, entitled *Why Do Girls Fight*, who would have guessed that just over a decade later, the answer would, because their voices are not being heard. As one participant stated, she was “trying to speak in a noisy room.” I have studied *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, which expressed the same sentiment. I was truly hoping that today’s girls would feel differently. I wanted them to feel heard. As a recent article (2015) in *Ebony* magazine mentioned, focus has been given to African American boys for just reasons, but there are girls suffering silently. Who hears the cries of their sisters?

These young girls described African American womanhood with a sense of pride which carried a burden of struggle. Black Feminist Thought challenges me as an African American woman in academia to share my unique story, but who will share the stories of those who you are young or those who are afraid of the ivory tower ? My focus has been how to build a bridge between the academy and the community, and this study is only the beginning.

I want to emphasize that each story has its own inherent value and merit. Although participant data has been transcribed and combed for themes, I want each story to be individually valued.

Participant 2 struggled greatly with negative stereotypes she believed society had of African American women. She wanted to combat negative stereotypes with how she lived her life, as a “lady”, she would say. Participant had perceived African American womanhood and her social construction of self as negative and always striving to prove the general society wrong. This 15 year old girl was an amazing artist and exuberant eldest sibling. I wanted desperately for

her not to worry about how poorly society might see her in a few years, but how amazing she is and will be.

As previous research (Settles, 2006) has also noted, she did not separate her being African American from being female, it seemed impossible for her to do. Settles (2006) studied African American young women, who were attending either Historically Black Colleges or University (HBCU's) or Predominately White Institutions (PWI's). Settle's (2006) results showed that participants identified as being an African American woman, not African American or a woman separately. Participant knew this connection and some of the negative stereotypes she had seen and heard around her regarding African American women. She wanted to know if I thought it was hard being an African American woman today, because she thought it was. I struggled with answering Participant 2. I wanted to be honest, but I could not bring myself to shed any more negative light on the future of this very young girl. However, I knew that it could be only a few short years before she potentially confirmed her perceptions. She said society saw "African American women as raunchy...hoeish... baby's mamas." How she socially constructed African American womanhood was extremely daunting for such a young girl. I tried my best to shed positive light on great accomplishments of African American women throughout history and today, but I knew negative stereotypes do exist and could not bring myself to admit that to her.

African American womanhood being rooted in strength and responsibility was a common theme across participant's interviews. Participants felt the need to be strong to overcome personal obstacles, defend themselves, and take care of other family members. Participant 3 was also called the "Golden Child" during my analysis. She represented children, who feel a great need to do well academically and professionally in order to help provide for and take care of

their parents and siblings. Participant 3 felt a grave responsibility similar to Participant 2, except Participant 2 felt responsible to represent all African American females positively, and Participant 3 felt responsible for taking care of her parents and siblings, in the future. Participant 4 wanted to be a dance instructor, and she was adamant about being able to help other young female dancers in her future. Each of the aforementioned participants carried an immense sense of responsibility to take care of themselves and others. Participant 3 mentioned: “she needed to be able to take of her parents in the future, because she was depending on the now.”

Responsibility was the tip of the education iceberg. Each participant mentioned some aspect of education as it relates to African American womanhood. Graduating high school, attaining multiple college degrees, and graduating from law school are only a few of the educational aspirations held by the participants. Participant 3 saw education and having her parents watch her graduate college, as her ultimate goal in life. Participant 1 had her entire academic career mapped out from finishing high school, which college she would like to attend, completing law school, and passing the bar exam. She was extremely focused, and she could not have been happier to have her interview conducted at the College of William & Mary.

Participant 1 and 3 shared a common theme of education and professional accomplishments. Both girls were avid students. Participant 3 was only 13 years old, and was concerned that her grades may not be good enough for college. Womanhood to Participant 3 meant: “Accomplishing my goals one right after another.” Participant 1 focused on both meeting her academic and professional goals, while also “getting married young.” I was surprised that the two participants who were the most academically driven, were also focused on marriage and children within the next ten years.

Along with getting married and having children, each participant mentioned an aspect of fiscal responsibility. Several participants mentioned: “paying bills.” Paying bills, buying a car, renting an apartment, or making a salary was the totality of fiscal conversation among participants. Being successful was mentioned Participant 1, 3, and 4 predominately; however, each participant mentioned at least one statement about what they would like to accomplish or attain in the future. Participant 5 and 6 did not discuss fiscal responsibility extensively, but they were more focused on their human rights and being able defend themselves.

As mentioned first, the predominant theme concerning African American womanhood from African American adolescent girl participants, was strength. “Being able to stick up for others, being able to defend yourself, keeping others from saying the wrong things, shutting others up, and defending oneself mentally and physically, “ was not only a common theme throughout the interviews, but is a mere echo of the research conducted by Jones (2009) and Ness (2004). Jones’s study, *I was aggressive for the streets and pretty for pictures*, was such a reminder of the struggles this study’s participants faced. None of the participants wanted to engage in a physically altercation, but felt they needed to be able to defend themselves. From the most petite participant (Participant 4) to the largest participant (Participant 5), from the oldest to the youngest, each participant felt they should be able to defend themselves, and being an African American woman, meant to be strong in a variety of ways. Perhaps my participant’s answer to Ness (2004) *Why do girls fight?* is because they believe being an African American woman is to be strong.

*How does aggressive or violent behavior play a role, or not, in African American adolescent perceptions of womanhood?*

Participating in aggressive or violent behavior was not a key aspect of womanhood for these participants. However, being strong was. Even, the youngest participant (Participant 6) was felt that “everyone should know how to defend themselves.” Furthermore, being strong, overcoming obstacles, and facing challenges were key components to womanhood for the participants.

Ness ‘s (2004) participants mentioned avoiding victimization by being the aggressor and Jones’s (2009) girls mentioned having to address the street code surrounding around respect and retaliation; however, this study’s participants felt the need to be strong physically and mentally, and to defend self and others. These participants did not value being violent, but they surely valued being strong. As Participant 5 mentioned, being able to better defend herself was something she wanted to improve upon as a woman. Participant 3 discussed using her intellect and popularity to keep students from teasing her. Participant 6 felt that all women should be able to defend themselves, and Participant 2 believed it was her duty to be able to defend others and not cause a ruckus (or still be seen as a lady) while doing so.

### *Sub questions*

#### *1. Who are the participant’s role models?*

The million dollar question is who are these young girls looking up to as role models for womanhood. Although there were a variety of answers from poets such as Maya Angelou, Coach D a dance instructor reality television personality, to Zendaya a Disney Channel actress, the number answer was My Mom. Five out of six participants mentioned their mothers, during their interviews and two participants mentioned their fathers. All but one participant, who mentioned

African American womanhood meaning strength, mentioned their mothers as role models. The one exception mentioned Maya Angelou and her ability to overcome difficult circumstances and still be successful.

Moms were the primary role model for womanhood for these participants. Participant 3 began to cry, when describing challenges her mother was able to overcome. She was so proud of how her mother did not allow negative circumstances to alter her success or her personality. Participant 1 was enamored with the story of Maya Angelou, and how she came from such a difficult childhood to become a world renowned poet, author, and actress. Participant 2 was impressed with her Mom's strength as well. Participant 4 preceded her interview with describing how hard her mom had to work and how long her hours were. Participant 5 mentioned how her mom is not only her role model, but her mom is the reason that she is the girl she is today. She wants to be able to face challenges, in the way that her mother has. Participant 5 also wanted to mimic her mom's spirituality, by striving for a relationship with God like her mother, praying like her mother, and being an overall hard worker.

Mothers were the primary role models for these participants. Their concept of womanhood meaning strength was clearly related to their witnessing their mothers go through difficult life circumstances and still remain successful, gracious, and hard working. I imagined if the moms heard these interviews, no amount of a strong demeanor would hold back a single tear.

## *2. What steps did participant's believe were involved in growing into a woman*

Participant 5 was actually the only participant to mention menstruation as a step to becoming a woman. Education and professional endeavors were mentioned most frequently, and marriage and children were mentioned afterwards. Considering the abounding research on early

sexual experiences (Choby et al., 2012), I was surprised when not a single participant mentioned sexual debut as a step towards womanhood. Several participants carried adult responsibilities and burdens, but they did not mention sex. Perhaps the participants were not comfortable mentioning their perceptions of womanhood as it relates to sexual activities.

Participant 2 mentioned her concern about negative stereotypes facing African American women, which has been echoed by African American female researchers as well, such as Bell, (2004). Participant 2 mentioned combatting the negative stereotype that African American women are “hoeish” or “baby’s mamas.” I am not sure, if the participants were embarrassed, uncomfortable, or simply did not believe that sexual debut was a step to becoming a woman. Participant 1 mentioned maturity and circumstances being a key step in the process of growing into a woman. For example, she believed that a woman’s circumstances made her woman not her age. Therefore, someone could be a middle aged woman, according to Participant 1 and still not be a woman, because she has not faced certain circumstances. She never elaborated on circumstances passed the point of describing immense responsibility and challenges, but I do believe this is a good point to consider for future research. Also participants referred being a mother frequently and researching their different perspectives of someone who is a mother versus someone who is sexually active could yield useful findings.

Overall participants mentioned educational accomplishments, paying bills, defending others, overcoming challenges, and being responsible as steps to womanhood. Paying bills and taking on responsibilities were the two primary steps for becoming a woman, according to participants.

### *Limitations*

Primary limitations to this study include: a lack of generalizability, a restricted age range, and the participant were volunteers. These findings are truly one story at a time, which is why the analysis was an in-case analysis. The goal was to use Black Feminist Thought and Social Constructionism as a lens to view this study; however, the ultimate goal was to empower these young participants by giving them a platform to tell their stories, give their perspectives.

In addition, I wanted to use this study as a launching pad for more research on African American girls in inner cities, and also youth programming. I read countless articles describing challenges facing this population, but few answers or solutions. I believed that conducted this study would open the door for more research with this population, and shed light not only their current circumstances, but how they saw themselves in the future. Perhaps a glimpse of how they perceived their future selves would give some insight to why certain aggressive or violent behaviors happen between such young girls. These findings are not to be generalized, but I hope that these participant's perspectives will promote more research and youth programming, as well as, bring more insight to counselor education.

Another limitation was the restricted age range. Younger adolescent participants were easier to recruit, as many had fewer obligations. I did received feedback from 16 and 17 year olds, but they typically had jobs and other responsibilities outside of school that prevented them from participating. In my future research, I would like to recruit older participants as well. I believe that their insights may be quite different from their young counterparts, and they may give more in depth perspectives. The younger participants were concerned with not disrespecting me during the interview. I tried my best to reassure them that I was not easily offended and would not feel disrespected by their answers, but they were still quite nervous. In addition, I



reassured them that there was no right or wrong answer as well. Older participants may be less concerned about such matters.

Finally, the participants were volunteers. Each participant knew that they would receive a certificate for participating in the research study. Participants tend to be more motivated than other participants. Also the participants seemed excited to receive the certificates, which also affect their motivation to participate in the study. I believe their answers were honest, but I wonder how different the answers would be, if I did not have participants who were motivated to receive a certificate.

### *Implications*

#### *Future Research*

Findings from this research study lend themselves to an abundance of future research opportunities. Examining perceptions of strength and its relation to African American girl's perceptions of womanhood would be my first starting point. In addition, examining mothers as role models for African American girls would be a considerable research opportunity as well. Also I would replicate this study in another city, such as Baltimore, Maryland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, similar to Bell (2004), I would also examine stereotypes of African American women and their impacts on young African American girls. Bell conducted a personal reflection; however, I would want to interview African American girls nationally and from various economic backgrounds. Also, I would be interested to see how the impact of negative stereotypes of African American women affected girls who identified as bi-racial.

Related to impacts of negative stereotypes of African American womanhood on bi-racial adolescent girls, although a controversial and extremely sensitive topic in African American female academic research and documentaries, I believe researching impacts of colorism and perceptions of African American womanhood could be an outstanding series of articles. Moreover, developing youth programming for young girls, rooted in research, could be phenomenal.

Considering how many of these participants were extremely academically driven, and carried great responsibilities for self and family, I would consider doing an article series called, “The Golden Child.” This series would however not be restricted to girls. Finally, I would surely want to research how aspects of spirituality and religion impact perceptions of womanhood among African American girls. 3 of the participants had mothers who were regularly engaged in their local churches, and considering the history of churches in African American communities, lend itself easily to future research.

### *Counselor Education*

Multicultural competence in counselor education is a requirement for all CACREP accredited programs as well as many of the non- CACREP accredited programs as well. Popular multicultural text books address African Americans in a chapter selection; however, I do believe that girls and women of all races have a unique subculture. I have had fellow colleagues ask for advice on working with African American adolescent girls. More research and text books addressing unique issues of girls and women in relation to race, may serve counselor education well.

### *Program Development*

As mentioned previously, my goal is to connect the academy to the community. Because of this goal, I not only want to conduct research that academics can read, debate, and use. However, I would also truly enjoy developing youth programs, that are researched based. I am extremely interested in Community Action Research, and would love to have programs tailored to address needs of the girls living in the program's community.

In summary, there are a variety of directions for me to take this research. This study is a stepping stone to many others and hopefully future program development and grant funding. Limitations are a part of this study as in all studies; however, each limitation is addressed and can be altered easily for future research. My research can empower these young girls. I want to encourage them that they do not have to wait until womanhood for their voices to be heard. Not only their perspectives, but who they are as people matter. I reflect on the book *The Invisible Man*, I do not want to see a generation of girls continue to feel invisible and not heard. Black Feminist Theory, promotes African American women in academia to write about experiences of African American women, to tell our story to the world. I want to tell the story of these girls. I can be their megaphone in a noisy world.

#### *Personal Statement*

Interviewing these participants has been my honor. Every parent and child, who came to participate, met me with such excitement and gratitude. I was so grateful that they were able and willing to participate in my study. I wish my Mom could read this. For every girl that mentioned her mother as her role model, I had the same thought over and over again. My Mom loved helping young girls. Any friend that I have ever had, who had difficulties at home, in school, or just being in the street, my Mom would invite to our house. They could spend the night as long as their families would allow or needed them too, and she laughed with them, cried with them,

and gave them all sound advice and a listening ear. During her funeral, I had a line of girls sitting to my left, who were all impacted by my Mom. She never turned anyone away. They had to follow the house rules, but she would show all of them love.

I looked up to my Mom. Every bring your daughter to work day, my Mom had me and at least two of my friends in tow. She was the strongest woman I have ever known. When I walk across the stage, I'm praying that she will be smiling in heaven. I was the only daughter she raised, but not the only one she loved and cared for. This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom. I am so grateful to finish this dissertation, and to even have the opportunity to get my doctoral degree. It's hard to put my gratitude into words, but I can smile. I believe my Mom will too.

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## **Appendix A**

### **RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM**

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT**

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you. In this study your child will participate in a semi structured interview with a doctoral candidate from the College of William & Mary.

#### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Sometimes talking about personal perceptions may include some emotional discomfort. Your children do not have to talk about any subjects that they do not want to talk about, and they may leave the interview at any time and return back to you. If they become upset, I will be available to help them. In addition, I can give you names of counselors to contact so you can get additional help in dealing with these issues once you leave the study site.

#### **BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS**

Your child will receive a certificate acknowledging their participation in the research study. The information I learn from this study may help us design better youth programs for adolescents similar to your daughter.

#### **COSTS**

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in filling out questionnaire, informed consent, and the actual interview.

#### **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

Your children will not receive any compensation for their participation in the study.

#### **ALTERNATIVES**

There is no alternative to the interview. The alternative is to not participate.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Potentially identifiable information about you and your child will consist of the questionnaires that you complete and audiotapes of the interview. Data are collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by ID numbers, not names, and stored in protected lap-top. All personal identifying information will be kept in password protected files on a computer and these files will be deleted within one year. Your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely. Access to all data will be limited to the dissertation committee.

We will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes or by the College of William & Mary. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

We will not tell anyone the answers that you or your child gives us. But, if your child tells us that someone is hurting her or him, or that she might hurt herself or someone else, the law says that we have to let people in authority know so they can protect your child.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You and your child do not have to participate in this study. If your child chooses to participate, they may stop at any time without any penalty. They may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. Their decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of care, service or benefits to which you or they are otherwise entitled from any agency.

Your child's participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- the study staff thinks it necessary for your health or safety;
- you have not followed study instructions;
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

### **QUESTIONS**

In the future, you may have questions about your child's participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Deneen Miller  
Doctoral Candidate  
College of William & Mary  
[dmiller@email.wm.edu](mailto:dmiller@email.wm.edu)

Dr. Victoria Foster  
Professor  
College of William & Mary  
vafost@wm.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Dr. Victoria Foster  
Professor  
College of William & Mary  
vafost@wm.edu

## CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing for my child to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

---

Name of Child

---

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian  
(Printed)

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Parent or Legal Guardian Signature

---

Date

---

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent  
Discussion / Witness <sup>3</sup>  
(Printed)

---

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent  
Discussion / Witness

---

Date

---

Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)

---

Date <sup>4</sup>

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2015-09-26 AND EXPIRES ON 2016-09-26.

You are required to notify Dr. Ward, chair of the EDIRC, at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-L@wm.edu) and Dr. Ray McCoy, Chair of the PHSC at 757-221-2783(rwmcco@wm.edu) if any issues arise during this study.

### Audio Consent

I (print name) \_\_\_\_\_, am willingly volunteering to participate in this audio recorded semi structured interview. I the parent/guardian of (participant's name) \_\_\_\_\_ willingly and voluntarily give consent for my child to participate in this audio recorded semi-structured interview.

By giving consent to participate in this audio recorded semi-structured interview, I understand that I the participant am to participate in a 30 minute interview session with the researcher. I am also aware that this interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

In addition, I understand that my transcript may be provided to me by written request. I also understand that participating in this audio recorded semi-structured interview does not present any known risk to my physical or mental being.

Signature (Parent/Guardian) \_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signature (Participant) \_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2015-09-26 AND EXPIRES ON 2016-09-26.

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### Demographic Questionnaire

**Gender:** Male ( ) Female ( )

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Race:** (please only check one)

African American, Black ( )

Asian, Pacific Islander ( )

Latino, Hispanic ( )

White, Caucasian ( )

Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade Level**\_\_\_\_\_

**School Name**\_\_\_\_\_

**School Location**\_\_\_\_\_

**Which city do you reside?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your household income?** \_\_\_\_\_

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2015-09-26 AND EXPIRES ON 2016-09-26.

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