THE IMPACT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE AUTHORITY FIGURES WHO

TRANSITION INTO ROLE MODELS IN ADOLESCENTS' LIVES: AN

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the means by which the authority figures who regulate and structure adolescent lives transcend those functions to serve as role models, and thus perform a more nurturing role as providers of guidance and support. Nine adult African American males were interviewed regarding their retrospective understanding of the positive relationships they experienced with adults during their adolescence. Given the paucity of role model figures for Black youth, this study seeks to explore the attributes which facilitated such positive relationships and understand how those with unique obstacles toward obtaining a sense of achievement in adulthood might be able to access crucial additional sources of guidance. A qualitative analysis of the interview data was employed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Participants ranged in age from 18–56 years old and, due to their upbringing in low-income communities, were deemed to have been "at-risk" youth. Results of this study identified seven major themes facilitating an authority figure's transition into a role model: (a) traits the adolescent relates to or admires, (b) intentions of the connecting adult, (c) adult demonstrations of respect toward adolescents, (d) quality and quantity of interventions, (e) authority figure expectations, (f) role models who supply traits that are missing in parents, and (g) geographic relocations and transitional role models. Subjects offered additional insights into their adolescent and adult perspectives of peripheral, negative authority figures, their conception of themselves as role models, and characteristics they find pertinent to a role model identity. Implications for parents, schools, mental health providers, and adolescents are provided.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

It is common for young African American males to encounter an array of male authority figures throughout their adolescent years. The impact of such contact varies substantially depending on the function of the authority figure, the nature of the interaction between the adolescent and the authority figure, as well as the quality of the relationship. The interactions may prove vital for positive adolescent development when conditions are conducive to the creation of a more enriching role model relationship. Psychological research has explored the utility of role models in the lives of adolescents, and elucidation of the factors which allow for favorable interactions between adolescents and authority figures is essential in the promotion of effective role modeling for at-risk minority populations (Grant & Dieker, 2011). Yet, despite the immense need for role model relationships in the African American community, research studies exploring the elements that foster the perceptual transition of adults from authority figure to role model are notably lacking for this population.

Factors such as parents' expectations of male adolescents, coupled with the youth's perceptions of racial barriers, have been found to positively correlate with an adolescent's educational aspirations; however, it has been suggested that there is a dearth of positive role models for African American adolescents who can articulate and convey high academic expectations for them, a situation that prevails even in middle-class households (Wood, Kurtz-Costes, & Copping, 2011). For males in particular, lowered expectations communicated by the adults in their lives were associated with diminished attendance levels in college. These data suggest that having access to mentors of similar ethnicity who are equipped to motivate and encourage them may assist in neutralizing the

social deficits that perpetuate an epidemic of lower achievement and diminished self-concept among African American male adolescents (Wood et al., 2011).

Social supports also play an especially important role for African American male adolescents from low-income households. A study of at-risk, African American youth who excelled academically found that these adolescents' ability to access sources of social support, such as solid kinship networks, relational networks within the community and the utilization of schools as agents for their families, was integral to their continued educational attainment (Williams, 2012). Thus, the establishment of role models throughout adolescents' lives, particularly authority figures within multiple contexts such as schools and communities as well as in the household, may bolster their subsequent educational, professional and emotional development.

Some African American households, particularly lower income families, may be unable to offer viable role models (Yancy, Siegel, & McDaniel, 2002). In one study on African American teens, of those who were able to identify a role-model, only 7% named those in professional positions of authority over them, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers or clergyman; however, 34% identified individuals they had no direct contact with, such as athletes, singers, or actors (Yancy et al., 2002). In encouraging adolescents, particularly at-risk minority youths, to adopt the responsibility, diligence, honesty, compassion and professionalism necessary to foster a realistic and advantageous value system, it is essential to increase the availability of multidimensional role models in their immediate social scope and not leave them to look to one-dimensional, distant entertainment figures to perform this function. For this reason, it is of paramount importance that the factors which both promote and impair the ability of authority figures to become role models are evaluated.

2

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Early Theoretical Perspectives on Adolescence

The value of appropriate role models and the ways in which they influence receptive adolescents is a component of social learning theory expounded by Bandura (1969):

> Social-learning theory not only posits a different type of learning process, and a different set of controlling variables for identification, but also assumes a considerably more complex model of behavioral transmission. Identification, according to this view, is a continuous process in which new responses are acquired and existing repertoires of behavior are modified to some extent as a function of both direct and vicarious experiences with a wide variety of actual or symbolic modes, whose attitudes, values, and social responses are exemplified behaviorally, or in verbally coded forms.

In addition to his theory which requires the demonstrated behavior of an accessible individual, verbal instruction of a specific behavior, or symbolic behavior of a remote or fictional personality, Bandura (1977) emphasized the importance of *reciprocal determinism* to highlight the interplay between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental factors. He additionally identified four elements essential to successful modeling: *attention* to the individual/behavior being modeled, *retention* of the relevant behavior, *reproduction* of the observed behavior, and *motivation* to imitate the behavior (Bandura, 1977). Such factors are critical to distinguish why certain authority figures transition into role models, while other seemingly appropriate and invested authority figures fail to attain such status.

In 1959, Erikson outlined his theory on the stages of psychosocial development wherein human development occurred in eight distinct phases from birth until death. The three stages most pertinent to adolescence are stage four which occurs immediately prior to adolescence, typically within ages 5 through 12 (*industry vs. inferiority*), followed by stages five (*identity vs. role confusion*) and six (*intimacy vs. isolation*). During the industry vs. inferiority stage, people's sense of individuality and responsibility is being formulated as they become aware that their actions are followed by specific repercussions. They begin to notice cultural norms, and observe and act to adhere to moral codes. The types of messages conveyed to children during this time period are largely communicated by the adult figures who surround them. Additionally, in the fourth stage of development, children begin to recognize their individual abilities and skills, attributes which, over time, help to solidify a positive sense of self. Honing such interests during this period may operate to endow children with positive coping strategies which may be drawn on in later life to help them overcome social adversity.

The identity vs. role confusion stage is most directly associated with the adolescent phase (13-19 years of age). The hallmark of this time frame is the transition from childhood to adulthood as adolescents cement their self-conception and cultivate aspirations for the adults they wish to become (Erikson, 1959). The presence of purposeful role models at this point can be instrumental in providing a youth with a template for successful adulthood—one that helps them both to anticipate their life course confidently and combat environmental factors that threaten achieving their goals. During this stage, inconsistent societal messages become particularly confusing and can endanger the adolescent's newly established identity and convictions. The availability of stable, trustworthy models—specifically adults who provide consistency, yet flexibility,

in terms of the adolescent's needs—is essential to help combat the adolescent's sense of confusion.

For young adults in the sixth stage of Erikson's model, intimacy vs. isolation, an identity has been formed, but it is still vulnerable to the influence of others. The quest to attain close and valued interpersonal relationships becomes paramount, and the thwarting of this objective, in the form of social rejection, has particular salience. Close relationships developed in adolescence with role model figures can serve as a paradigm for later relationships. Although outside of the scope of adolescence, the seventh stage, generativity vs. stagnation, has implications for individuals, like participants in the current study, who wish to pass on purposeful messages to the succeeding generation and contribute to society in an important way. Many role model figures are identified with this stage as they are largely stable, able to understand and reflect on their life experiences clearly, and have attained a sense of utility and accomplishment in their lives. Role modeling can give this stage of life deeper meaning and nurture additional interpersonal connections.

Importance of Role Models

The significance of role models in the lives of children and adolescents has been clearly recognized. In one study with Black adolescents assessing the effect of natural mentor relationships, it was found that adolescents with a greater number of connected, supportive adults in their social networks and communities were more academically engaged, socially and psychologically (Hurd & Sellers, 2013). In particular, they found more intimate bonds occurred in long-lasting relationships (in excess of 5 years) where the parties engaged in activities together and met 2-5 times per week. Their findings established that the strength of the mentor-mentee relationship was the most salient

contributor to the developmental achievement of Black adolescents. Thus, determining the factors which facilitate the closeness of these interactions becomes of paramount importance.

Relational connectedness between adolescents and adults has been shown to moderate behavior and emotion in a study by Wang, Brinkwork, and Eccles (2013). In reviewing data on teenage students' interactions with teachers, it was demonstrated that when those relationships were positive, they could assuage negative earlier influences, including poor self-control, misconduct, depression, and contentious parental relationships.

One cannot isolate the position of teachers, however, from the larger context of the educational institution whose essential function in the role modeling context is to foster self-efficacy within a youth. In Usher and Pajares's study (2006), the authors utilized invitation theory (Purkey, 2000; Purkey & Novak, 1996) and Bandura's (1997) theory on self-efficacy to examine sources of self-efficacy in sixth graders of varying races. When analyzing the responses of African American students, they found that positive messages youth believe in regarding themselves and others (invitations), youth perception of aptitude in a particular area (mastery experience), and encouragement received by others (social persuasions) were the best predictors of self-efficacy. That Black students' development of self-efficacy emanates so significantly from social components gives further credence to the utility of adult figures serving as conduits of reinforcement.

Role models' behaviors have been found to impact African American adolescents in a number of respects. In a study by Hurd, Zimmerman, and Reischl (2011), it was determined that role model prosocial behavior influenced the adolescent's attitudes

toward aggressive acts and, thus, was indirectly correlated with a decrease in violent behavior. They also found that negative role model behavior likewise influenced the adolescent's attitudes toward such acts, and directly related to a rise in violence among adolescents. They additionally established that antisocial role model behavior had a greater impact on African American youths than prosocial role model behavior. This suggests those who undertake the positive modeling role face a greater challenge in communities where negative adult figures are ubiquitous and exert a more powerful influence. To counteract this reality, a more specific understanding of the efficacious components of role modeling is, therefore, of paramount importance.

The effect of negative nonparental figures on 659 African American ninth graders was analyzed in a study by Hurd, Zimmerman, and Xue (2009). The authors found that undesirable role models (as determined by specific deleterious behavioral features) were associated with an increase in adolescents' demonstrations of externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and substance use. More negative sentiments related to scholastic endeavors were also found. When nonparental adults were more productive, they had a protective effect on externalizing, internalizing, and substance use behaviors in adolescents.

In research conducted by Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000), the significance of mentoring relationships was assessed through the evaluation of 959 young adolescent applicants in a Big Brother/Big Sister program. The study found that when adolescents were mentored they evidenced a number of supplementary benefits, among them an improved relationship with their parents. In the academic setting, participants were additionally found to have fewer unexcused school absences and perceived improved competency. Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, and Noam (2006) conducted a qualitative

research study on the processes influencing mentor relationships. In delineating aspects of effective mentoring relationships, a number of factors served as moderators of mentoring effects, including relationship context, and personal, environmental, and situational components. In particular, they noted that mentor strategies of interaction will have varying effects, depending on the personality and background of the counseled youth. The framework they put forth is designed to enhance a youth's social and emotional development, improve cognitive function through activity and communication, and promote positive identity development. These outcomes were found to have mediating and moderating processes, such as the positive attachments youth formed prior to the mentor relationship and the longevity of the relationship (with a relationship duration of greater than a year being preferable). The quality of the mentoring relationships was distinguished by a strong, emotional, and trusting connection.

A study conducted by Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) of African American males in an urban environment found that the absence of a male role model amplified the negative effects of an adolescent's environment; while conversely, the presence of a male role model in the life of an adolescent ameliorated problem behavior. With evidence suggesting the benefits of role models in the lives of adolescents, understanding the position of the ubiquitous authority figures who hold the potential for becoming role models is central.

In a qualitative study by Richardson (2012), the impact of coaches on African American youth at risk for a plethora of issues common to inner-city communities was examined. He explored the under-investigated role of coaches, finding that they are vital in the lives of the youth they connect with, helping to reduce juvenile delinquency and facilitate positive outcomes. Richardson noted that coaches and mentors in the African

American community serve as social fathers, providing the supervision, guidance, support, information, encouragement, and socialization essential for adolescent progression toward adulthood.

It has been found that adults play a fundamental role in a male adolescent's socialization by creating a sense of flexibility in typically constricting templates of masculinity (Spencer, 2007). Additionally, it was found that when emotional connections were forged between male adolescents and adults, a host of benefits resulted, including the adolescent's ability to manage anger more effectively, his ability to seek support, and a willingness to express emotional vulnerability (Spencer, 2007). When adolescents perceptually designate an adult as a role model, they are making a statement regarding characteristics of that individual they find redeeming and, accordingly, wish to emulate (Pleiss & Feldhusen, 1995).

It is important to acknowledge that it may sometimes be difficult for adolescents to cultivate role model relationships with persons who are not family members or school personnel. This situation is further complicated by the reality that the role models who exist outside of family and educational institutions may be far from those society generally views as positive. For instance, gang members are powerful entities in many urban areas, serving as highly visible examples of material success, and may possess other attributes adolescents wish to emulate. Furthermore, studies have shown that, despite increased exposure to dangerous situations, inclusion in gangs often ameliorates the fear and anxiety experienced by those who feel threatened in their community (Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009).

Adolescents may also find an antithetical role model figure alluring, as a result of experiencing themselves removed from opportunity due to lower socioeconomic status,

or unable to fit in with the prevailing middle-class American cultural ideals. This dynamic can be explained by Merton's strain theory, a facet of subculture theory (Merton, 1938), which holds that the disparity of financial resources in society may encourage those who have considerably more difficulty achieving the standard model of success to accept the ideals of nonconformist and, often criminal, activities. The role models present in that subculture theoretical frame are also often adept at cultivating intimate, paternalistic relationships with their mentees. Although these relationships can be deleterious and differ from the adolescent/role model relationship exemplar which imparts values and skills that facilitate long-term, positive development, it is essential they not be ignored. Significant information related to the dynamics of these interactions can be helpful in understanding the qualities adolescents find most appealing in individuals to whom they ascribe role model status.

Role of Fathers and Family Members

As family members are often the most accessible sources of guidance for children, an in-depth look at the function they perform is critical. Instability in family composition can have repercussions for adolescents, particularly in instances where there are absentee fathers or inconsistency with the mother's choice of romantic partner/father figure. For instance, Bachman, Coley, and Carrano (2012), in researching the maternal partnership patterns of adolescents in low-income households, found that children in households with parents who were always married exhibited less delinquent behavior and fewer externalizing problems than those in alternate groups. Mothers of teens in homes where parents were cohabiting reported a greater incidence of internalizing problems. In households in which the mother's romantic partner had recently moved into the family's home, adolescents residing in the home were found to have higher levels of psychological

stress. Some of the proposed reasons for increased distress in families with less partner stability were financial precariousness and maternal stress; however, components such as continuity of the family routine and a consistently present father-like figure were protective factors.

Although the stability of a father figure can prove advantageous for an adolescent, research has shown that it is not essential that the father permanently reside in the household. This finding is of immense importance for African Americans, as such population has a greater proportion of nonresident fathering (Wu, 2008). Adamsons' and Johnson's (2013) meta-analysis indicated that the wellbeing of the child was not significantly impacted by the amount of contact a father had with his child nor with the extent of his financial contribution. Rather, the findings indicated that a child was more likely to flourish academically and behaviorally if a nonresident father was involved in positive, diverse and qualitatively substantial ways, particularly if the father and child engaged in activities together. If these gains can be observed with a biological parent living apart from his child, it can be deduced that a nonbiological relationship with comparable features may provide similarly beneficial results.

When a relationship between a Black adolescent male and his father exists, it is the central opportunity for the development of a secure, impactful mentor experience. In research conducted by Adamsons and Johnson (2013), the involvement of nonresident fathers proved to be strongly associated with the social wellbeing, academic achievement, and behavioral adjustment of children. Specifically, it was found that when fathers jointly engaged in activities appealing to their children, their bond was positive and productive. In addition, a positive relationship consisting of a variety of activities was also found to be beneficial. To sum up, Adamsons and Johnson found the quality of the interpersonal

relationship between the father and his child to be the most salient factor in a child's wellbeing, outweighing factors such as quantity of time spent together or the extent of financial contribution.

It is imperative to note that fathers are not the only familial, male role models available as a source of guidance. In one ethnographic study, Richardson (2009) explored the often overlooked role of uncles of African American adolescents and the important contributions they made in the lives of their nephews. Through qualitative examples, this study illustrated the ways in which a more peripheral relative can fulfill the fundamental requirements of a paternal figure in the event of father figure absence. Being able to identify and utilize alternate sources of adolescent support is mandatory for at-risk youth with fewer positive mentor prospects.

Adolescent View of Authority Figures

The way in which adolescents view authority figures can be instrumental in assessing the characteristics of authority figures that render them a source of support, instruction, nurturance, and validation. Adolescent perception of adults can be understood in the context of youth eliciting assistance from these figures in a time of need. In a study conducted by Aceves, Hinshaw, Mendoza-Denton, and Page-Gould (2010), the inclination of adolescents to utilize, versus fight against, teachers during peer conflicts was evaluated. In this study, minority adolescents attending schools in urban areas with high rates of peer conflict were supplied with vignettes designed to demonstrate how each student would utilize school authority figures. Adolescents who reported general and specific real-life instances of positive teacher encounters and conflict management were more likely to elicit adult support. Additionally, these students were less likely to respond to the situation with violent behaviors. Such research shows the value of adults

who exhibit positive interactional styles with teens and are able to understand their perspective.

Authority figures are sometimes faced with difficulty in earning the admiration or even basic respect of African American adolescents. This is especially true in the case of law enforcement. Studies of adolescent perceptions of police officers have found a general feeling of distrust. Furthermore, research has indicated that negative adolescent perceptions of the police positively correlate with their attitudes toward parents and teachers (Nihart, Lersch, Sellers, & Mieczkowski, 2005). Studies have also found that adverse feelings about law enforcement have been attributed to a misperception of the role of police in society (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, & Winfree, 2001; Webb & Marshall, 1995; Williams, 1999.)

It is important to note that many of the unfavorable opinions of police officers are a result of negative experiences adolescents, particularly those from minority groups, have had with them directly or have secondhand knowledge about. Such incidents include increased surveillance (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2000), unwarranted targeting of minority groups (Nagourney & Connelly, 2001), and everyday "microaggressions", i.e., pervasive impositions of suspicion and disrespect (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000). This history leaves a law enforcement officer with a great burden to overcome in order to become a role model for adolescents: he would need to counteract existing police-related schema before he could become an individual with whom an adolescent could identify. Unfortunately, there is virtually no training or guidance that would assist police officers with this difficult but vital undertaking. Understanding how comparable authority figures have been able to transform themselves

13

into role models could offer insight for police and could form the basis upon which culturally sensitive training approaches may be created and implemented.

In qualitative research conducted by Brunson and Weitzer (2009), the disparity between Black and White adolescent males in terms of their perceptions of the police was explored. Black males reported more accounts of unjustified stops and inequitable police behavior. Additionally, Black males did not perceive of police as serving in a protective role but, rather, as "bullies in uniform." Specific behaviors African American males cited as detrimental to their perception of police were pejorative comments made by law enforcement; their engaging in physical abuse, i.e., "police brutality"; and police corruption for the purpose of criminalizing, such as planting evidence. Despite these negative perceptions about law enforcement in general, Black males in this study did believe that police officers who perform their duties in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner do exist. For authority figures to become role models, it is fundamental that qualities deleterious to forming a connection are identified and, further, that these impediments, however severe, be eradicated.

Research on youth in New York City found that distrust and, in some instances, feelings of persecution, extended beyond police officers to include other authority figures, including security guards, retail store personnel, and educators (Fine, 2003). A feeling of alienation from adults was prevalent to the extent that, even in a crisis situation, it was unlikely that youth would seek help from police, teachers, counselors, ministers or priests, social workers, or security guards (Fine, 2003). Despite the ostensible disconnection from authority figures this study may suggest, many youth reported that they would seek assistance from their parents (Fine, 2003). Discerning those qualities of parents (who are also a subset of authority figures) that allow for more

14

substantive interpersonal relationships could be helpful in assessing their applicability to alternative authority figures found in schools and communities.

The style of communication that adolescents would be most receptive to in an authority figure could be most easily assessed through understanding the parenting styles youth prefer. In a study conducted by Trinkner, Cohn, Rebellon, and Van Gundy (2012), parental legitimacy was examined as a mediating factor between parenting style and an adolescent's progression toward deviant behavior. This research defined legitimacy as "a psychological property of an individual that leads others to perceive his or her authority as appropriate, proper and just (Tyler, 2006a, 2006b)." They continued to point out that:

> [W]ithin this framework, legitimacy perceptions have two primary components: the extent to which and individual trusts an authority and the extent to which he or she feels an obligation to obey the directives of that authority (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003).

Three parenting styles—authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive—were taken into account. According to Baumrind's (1971) classification of parenting styles, authoritarian parents are strict, demanding, and dictatorial. They do not respond to their children's emotional or cognitive viewpoint on matters. Authoritative parents are described as demanding, but willing to respond to the needs of their children as well. They provide their children with stability, while maintaining flexibility. Permissive parents have loose boundaries and often fail to enforce rules. They demand little of their children and over-accommodate their needs. In the Trinkner et al. study, it was found that parents with an authoritative approach to their children were more likely to be perceived as parentally legitimate. As discussed above, an adolescent's perception of parental legitimacy is negatively correlated with future adolescent delinquency. Thus, it

would be valuable to explore how an authoritative parental approach may be adapted for alternative authority figures. Additionally, a delineation of behaviors comprising each parental approach would be indicated.

Impact of Race on Adolescent Self and Social Perception

To understand the impact racial identity has on Black males in America, it is necessary to consider Cross's (1971) groundbreaking elucidation of the stages of Black racial identity development. According to Cross, African Americans typically encounter five stages in their understanding of their race and its sociological effects. Although these stages are distinctly ordered, a given individual may not experience them in a linear manner. The *pre-encounter* stage is described by Cross as the period when individuals are largely unaware of the social implications of their race. For children and adolescents who grow up in, and attend, predominantly Black communities and schools, this stage may often extend until they begin to function outside of such initial social sphere. For Black children and adolescents who grow up in predominantly White communities, this stage can be characterized by an idealization of White culture and a devaluation of Black culture.

The *encounter* stage then follows, which is characterized by a race-related experience that challenges an individual's understanding of ethnicity and his/her position in the world relative to it. For minorities, this stage often leads to feelings of vulnerability. The *immersion/emersion* stage consists of taking pride in one's racial background and seeking out same-race affiliations, often to the exclusion of other races. In the *internalization* stage, individuals develop a more solid and confident conception of their racial identity which allows them to begin re-engaging in relationships with a more heterogeneous racial population. Finally, the *internalization-commitment* stage signifies a

16

balance in the understanding of personal racial identity as well as the racial identity of others. In this stage, individuals actively seek and encourage social justice in matters of race and equity.

It has been found that racial identity is influenced in idiosyncratic ways by values held and the culture in which the individual is entrenched (Carter & Helms, 1987). The life cycle stage of an individual is an additional factor (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998; Jones, 1998). For instance, according to Cross et al. (1998), as individuals move through childhood, their attitudes toward issues of racial identity are largely reflective of the ideologies imparted by their parents. However, this changes during adolescence as they encounter situations that challenge their beliefs about racial identity. Having guidance through this stage can help an adolescent learn to negotiate the racial identity struggle and resolution process referred to by Parham (1992), as this conflict often reemerges and recycles through a lifetime.

Without adequate guidance, the pervasive racism within society may leave adolescents of color particularly susceptible to the negative appraisals of self and environment that can promote faulty decision-making. A study conducted by Gibbons, O'Hara, Stock, Gerrard, Weng, and Wills (2012) demonstrated the deleterious effects of racial discrimination on African American adolescents 10 to 18 years of age. They found that encountering discrimination reduced the self-control adolescents exercise, thereby attenuating their ability to resist injurious behaviors such as substance use.

Furthermore, racism in society is not merely an issue of overt racial offenses. It can also take the form of subtle, hegemonic factors or actions. According to Sue et al. (2007): "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile,

17

derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color." This often invisible construct may be even more harmful when recipients' immaturity makes them more malleable to its impact. "Microaggressions are detrimental to persons of color because they impair performance in a multitude of settings by sapping the psychic and spiritual energy of recipients and by creating inequities (Franklin, 2004; Sue, 2004)" (Sue et al., 2007). Guidance from an adult who can assist a youth in understanding, challenging, and channeling the feelings of anger related to instances of explicit and implicit racism is a critical factor in steering minority teens toward accomplishment.

In a research article, Allen (2012) examines the experiences of middle-class, African American families whose sons encounter microaggressive events at school. According to Allen, such microaggressions included derogatory comments related to intelligence, assumption of deviance, and differential treatment—all of which supersede the classroom and impact the school system as a whole. This inequity often led the fathers of some children to use the cultural wealth they acquired as leverage within the educational system. This study illuminates two significant facts: microaggressions are pervasive across social strata; and the importance of parental, in particular, paternal advocacy. Fathers in this study intervened on behalf of their sons to afford them greater prospects and equality—approaches that modeled for sons the power of tenacity, agency, and healthy entitlement.

Black male teens have the additional burden of having to contend with the ubiquity of stereotype threat, i.e., the internalization of negative cultural stereotypes associated with a race that, in turn, impact an individual's behavior or decisions (Steele & Aronson, 1995). It has been found that interventions from demographically relatable role model figures help to ameliorate the stress associated with group stereotype threat or, in

others words, the belief that an individual's actions will be a representation for an entire racial grouping. Stereotype threat can be a special burden for young Black males, who are often depicted in an unfavorable light. In a study conducted by Shapiro, Williams, and Hambarchyan (2013), role model interventions were not found to be as effective in terms of self-as-target stereotype threats or threats in which individuals believed they personally would be disparaged for adhering to a negative racial stereotype. However, self-affirmations, or an explicit focus on the redeeming qualities of self that individuate one from the undesirable categorizations of one's group, did prove effective (e.g., Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). It can be suggested that if an adult figure could affirm a youth's worth and subsequently encourage that youth to self-affirm, these two responses to stereotype threat may positively influence them (Shapiro et al., 2013).

A predominant issue Black males in American society face is that of "invisibility," a term that Franklin (2004) identifies as "an inner struggle with feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or recognized because of prejudice and racism." Adolescents are constantly under evaluation—in school, by parents, by peers, and even by themselves. When the negative, as opposed to positive, facets of their character are given focus, insecurity triggered by invisibility can develop. According to Franklin, this can adversely impact self-respect, interpretation of the intentions of others, and the ability to address personal weaknesses adequately.

Optimally, role models can assist youth in identifying, developing, and utilizing their abilities successfully to combat the societal effects of invisibility. Role models may also help teens to frame their disappointments in a manner that minimizes harmful consequences. For example, Franklin discussed how disappointment may initiate doubt regarding an individual's sense of control and efficacy, thereby perpetuating a

preoccupation with one's failure. Moreover, Franklin indicates that the inconsistency with which society responds to Black men engenders further disillusionment within this population. Accurate and consistent response and feedback from valued figures could help Black male youth gain a clearer perspective on their place in the social sphere and, in a personal context, develop a healthy sense of entitlement as they recognize that they can be "visible."

Adolescent understanding of the disparities Black males experience due to issues, such as lower incomes and pervasive violence in their communities, can also foster self-awareness, validate challenging experiences, and create a sense of support. In a study conducted by La Roche and Tawa (2011), an empowerment model was developed for urban Black and Latino adolescents in which communication and connection, through means of a psychotherapy group, was used to effect a positive change in the youths' psychological and sociological states. The stages of this program placed emphasis on (a) exploring issues and negative experiences and/or consequences the youth were confronting, (b) participants sharing stories relevant to their lives, and (c) promoting the sense of self-efficacy necessary for teens to embark upon creating change in their neighborhoods. Although these strategies were incorporated within a group treatment modality in which peers empower one another, they can be utilized by an authority figure functioning as a role model to assist a youth's emotional expression, reflection, and activation.

Research Questions

An authority figure is defined as "a person whose real or apparent authority over others inspires or demands obedience and emulation" (Dictionary.com, 2012). A role model is defined as "a person whose behavior, example, or success is or can be emulated

20

by others, especially by younger people" (Dictionary.com, 2012). Although the two classifications are not mutually exclusive, the distinctions are important and the terms are not used interchangeably in this study. Nonetheless, many potential role models initially appear in an adolescent's life as an authority figure (*i.e*., teacher, coach, police officer). Assessing the circumstances inherent in the transition from authority figure to role model may be crucial in understanding the most effective elements of the interaction. Questions posed by this study will include the following:

- Do adolescents have a tendency to view an authority figure negatively if such figure is also associated with an organization viewed negatively by the prevailing culture (i.e., police officers)?

- Do socially favorable figures, such as extended family members, church members or teachers, yield more positive adolescent reflections?

- Are some authority figures viewed negatively in part due to a reciprocal, contentious relationship, and can such animosity be ameliorated?

- In the case of socially acceptable figures, do frequency of interactions, proximity, and familiarity facilitate a more positive relationship?

- Does the level of nonpunitive concern and personal investment an authority figure demonstrates towards an adolescent serve to foster and strengthen positive perceptions of the relationship?

- Is the dynamic created by authority figures who demonstrate a nonjudgmental balance of structure (including rule adherence and consistent behavioral expectations), and nurturing (including nonjudgmental concern and nonthreatening communication) conducive to achieving role model status?

- Does the quality of interactions with authority figures, particularly interactions which lead to a perception of the elder as a role model, assist adolescents in feeling and acting in a more efficacious manner in adulthood?

Chapter III

Methodology

Qualitative Research

This study incorporates the use of qualitative research methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of subjects' recollections of adolescent experiences. Understanding how individuals make meaning of their experiences is a particular attribute of this approach, giving a nuanced voice to the subjects interviewed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Research by Gough and Madill (2012) explored the benefits of reflexive scientific approaches and found that the profundity of data gleaned through more subjective personal accounts is a vital resource in psychological science, adding context and dimension to the understanding of human experience. Such method was used in the present study to allow subjects to converse uninhibitedly about issues salient to their formation of role model figures and adult identity.

Participants

This study explored the adolescent perception of authority figures through retrospective adult reflections. The provision that participants be over the age of 18 allowed for an increased capacity for subjects to articulate their adolescent experience and the ability to evaluate the ways in which formative interactions have impacted their adult lives. Participants were male and ethnically identified as African American. The participants were also required to come from an "at-risk" population as determined by either or both of the following: (a) limited communication with a biological parent during childhood, and/or (b) growing up in a low-income household or community. The rationale for inclusion of this criterion was that this population would tend to have relatively less access to role model figures. Additionally, each participant was required

to have experienced at least one male, role-model relationship in his adolescence, either a biological relative or a male figure who assumed a "position of authority," but was not a biological relative. "Position of authority" was defined as (a) an individual directly responsible for enforcing rules and regulations in one or more aspects of the adolescent's life, or (b) an individual responsible for enforcing rules over a group or community in which the adolescent was a member.

Nine males were interviewed during this study. Of those interviewed, five of the males (55%) were between the ages of 18 and 29; two (22%) were between the ages of 30 and 39; one (11%) was between the ages of 40 and 49; and one (11%) was between the ages of 50 and 59. All participants completed, at a minimum, a high school education whether by means of a diploma or its equivalent. Three (33%) had attended some college, and two (22%) were college graduates. One participant had earned a Master's Degree. Eight (88%) of the participants were employed at the time of the interview.

In terms of marital status and familial composition, three (33%) of the participants were single, six (66%) were married or had been cohabiting for at least a year, and none was divorced. Of the five participants (55%) who stated they were fathers, one (11% of the entire sample) had a child under the age of 5; two (22% of the entire sample) had a child between the ages of 6 and 18, and two (22% of the entire sample) had adult children. Of these participants, four (44% of the entire sample) considered themselves to have a good relationship with their children. All subjects either currently reside with their children and interact with them daily, or had resided with them when their children were still minors. One participant (11% of the entire sample) acknowledged that he has limited communication with his children and rarely sees them. Four participants (44%) stated they did not have children of their own; however, one of these participants noted

that he has been the legal guardian of a family member's a ten-year old son for the past year and plans to continue to take care of the child for the foreseeable future.

Procedures

Participants were recruited by reaching out to local communities, community centers, churches and universities throughout the metropolitan New York/New Jersey area. The variability in outreach allowed for a more eclectic group of male African American participants. The sources contacted for referrals identified potential candidates who were then personally contacted and invited to be participants in this study. Additionally, limiting participants to at-risk, African American males residing within a relatively limited locale also ensured the internal validity of the research. For each candidate meeting the participation criteria, a semi-structured, open-ended interview was conducted. Standard questions were asked of every participant to ensure objectivity and reliability.

In this research study, a semi-structured interview, the Role Model Reflection Interview (RMRI) (see Appendix A), was utilized. Adult research subjects were asked questions pertaining to their adolescent perceptions of various authority figures they had encountered, as well as their experiences with figures formerly identified as role models. Potential subjects were provided with an informed consent form (see Appendix C), which explained all aspects of research participation, including the research purpose and procedures; the participation; risks and benefits of the research study; confidentiality; limits to confidentiality; and contact information for the Principal Investigator, Dissertation Chairperson, and the Rutgers Institutional Review Board.

Compensation consisted of a $15 gift card distributed at the conclusion of the interview. Subjects were informed that no compensation would be given in the event an

interview was not concluded.   Participants also received consent forms requesting

permission to audiotape the interview. The consent form stipulated that a subject's

participation was completely voluntary and that subjects could withdraw from

participation at any point during the interview process with no penalty.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using a qualitative, grounded theory approach (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008), a method by which the analysis of qualitative research data aids in the

construction of a theory aimed at initiating hypotheses for subsequent research. Corbin

and Strauss have illustrated that grounded theory can be used to analyze individual case

studies or to explicate larger social phenomena. Conceptualization of hypotheses will be

assessed for *fit*, or the match between concepts and presented experiences; *relevance*, the

area of primary concern for participants; *workability*, the explanation of the issue and

solutions; and *modifiability*, the ability for a developed theory to be modified given the

emergence of new data. Corbin and Strauss have additionally explained that qualitative

research allows one to gain a profound understanding of a research subject's personal

experiences which, in turn, reveal research variables that impact the larger culture (2008).

In grounded theory, a hypothesis is generated from an analysis of interview data.

This process is comprised of three distinct steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective

coding. In open coding, completed interviews are reviewed and categorically

conceptualized by the salient information that has emerged. This creates the groundwork

for data comprehension and additional coding processes. The second stage of coding,

axial coding, intersects with the initial coding phase as conceptual categories derived

during open coding are analyzed for similarities in content. These categories are then

refined and collapsed into broader, relevant classifications. In the third coding stage,

selective coding, central conceptual categories are formulated based on an entirety of the data and coding processes. In this study, data was divided into specific concepts, reviewed and given more nuanced categorizations, and ultimately divided into prominent themes encompassing the responses given by the interview participants.

Chapter IV

Results

The five central categories explored during each subject's interview included the household stability of the participant's childhood environments, the participant's adolescent perception of specified authority figures in the community, the participant's account of role-model relationships experienced in youth, and the participant's standpoint on his current position in life.[1]

Childhood Environments

All of the participants stated that they lived in a low-income community at some point during their childhood. Five (55%) subjects lived in more than one community during childhood and, of those who moved, two (22%) described the community transitioned to as safer, more affluent, or more pleasant. For instance, Travis described the first nine years of his life in Newark:

> We lived in a multifamily house, so it was noisy. We lived on the bottom floor
> and we had like rodents there, and we weren't really allowed to be outside past a
> certain time. My mom would be like, "Get in." We actually moved out because
> the cops came by and they kicked down the door, and it was the wrong door.
> They came by looking for drugs but it was actually the people next door.

His succeeding neighborhood, South Orange, was a significant contrast. Travis described it as "pretty safe." Gerard also experienced a contrast between the two communities in which he spent his childhood, particularly as it related to schools in the diverse areas in

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[1] For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, the names of all participants have been disguised.

which he grew up, stating, "[In New Brunswick], I mean, you have to wear your book bag a certain way, you got to wear your clothes a certain way, like these are the 'right' clothes to wear….It wasn't like that in North Brunswick."

For those who grew up in a strictly underprivileged community where there was no socioeconomic variance, a perilous environment was commonplace. Drew stated of his childhood neighborhood:

> If you're in your house and there's something going down, you don't really notice it unless you're in the thick of it. But then there are other neighborhoods where you walk down the street and you actively see it. I mean, you could hear gunshots if you stayed in the house, but other than that you wouldn't know. In general, you definitely get desensitized.

For Drew, as well as others in a similar situation, the idea of escaping such violence may be unimaginable. Consequently, adolescents may be more inclined to commit themselves to the chaotic environment, rather than consider ways to overcome it. Such a hegemonic bind may be lessened when alternate courses a youth is capable of taking in life are introduced by a respected source. Drew, however, reflected feeling an absence of such guidance in his childhood community:

> I guess people in my community—I hate to say this, but, in general, people see you and it looks like you're on a certain path, they kind of [are] like hands off, no type of intervention. They may complain and call the police, but nobody ever stopped to say, "How can I help you to get a job? How can I help you get from point A to point B?"

Of those interviewed, two subjects (22%) moved to either similar neighborhoods or communities that felt less secure. Terrence had such feelings about the neighborhood

he moved into at the age of 12: "I was shocked that people would look at me through their blinds when I went out to play. Probably because I [was] a young, Black adolescent and they were worried I was going to vandalize the neighborhood."

When asked about the structure of their households in childhood and adolescence, five (55%) grew up with a mother and father figure present in the household, three (33%) grew up with as single-parent mother in the household, and one participant (11%) was raised by an individual other than a parent (maternal grandmother). None of the participants was raised solely by his father. With respect to the relationship subjects had with their parents, four (44%) recalled having a positive relationship with their mothers. One (11%) had a contentious relationship with his mother, primarily due to the mother's absence throughout the majority of his childhood; and four (44%) expressed ambivalent feelings toward their mothers. When it came to feelings related to their fathers during adolescence, two (22%) recalled having positive relationships with their fathers; five (55%) had uncomfortable relationships with their fathers; and two (22%) described their relationships with their fathers as ambivalent, acknowledging relatively equal proportions of strength and weakness.

Of those who had a strained relationship with their fathers, four (44% of the entire sample) ascribed it to the limited or nonexistent interactions with their fathers while they were growing up. In musing over communications he had with his father, Drew discussed the first interaction he had with his paternal relatives. He met his grandfather for the first time when they were coincidentally in the same bar and a neighbor enlightened him by saying, "Oh, you see that man at the bar? That's your grandfather." Subsequent communication between the two was decidedly sparse and consisted mainly of their being "Facebook friends." In terms of Drew's relation with his father, he

remarked: "[My relationship with my father] is nonexistent. He literally gave me 50 dollars in my whole life. Literally. One time he gave 50 dollars." Eric also described the absentee nature of his father's involvement with him:

> My father, I met him [when] I think maybe I was about 15 or something like that. I didn't know him for like my whole life, you know. My family told me he basically went off about his own business…and didn't want to have kids at the time.

Terrence additionally commented on his the sporadic presence of his father and the lengthy absences of his stepfather. In regard to the latter he affirmed, "He was there, but at some points he was absent. He was there probably up until I was about four. But, later on, he disappeared for some time."

Of those who grew up and remained in low-income neighborhoods, five (55% of the entire sample) spoke of frequently observing acts of violence. Drew remarked, "You could walk down the street and actively see it…drug dealing, fighting, shooting, stabbing." Joe became aware of the inadequacies of his childhood community only after noticing the salient contrast recent efforts at rehabilitation have provided:

> I go back because I still have family there, and they're changing the city over, and a lot of buildings with a lot of drugs were infested all through there. So they tore all of those down, and they're starting to rebuild a whole lot of things. All the drug dealers, all the drug addicts and everything, they're pushing them out and bringing in the new. Because I think back then all there was, was a bar and a liquor store.

In terms of nonparental figures that resided in their homes, six (66%) of participants had at least one sibling who lived with them. Of these subjects, three (33%

of the entire sample) had older siblings they looked up to. Two (22%) of the participants

did not grow up with a sibling in the home. In terms of alternative family members in the

home (i.e., uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, stepparents, or family friends), two

(22%) of participants shared their household with such individuals for an extended period

of time (a year or more). Drew spoke of various family members transitioning through

his home and how this impacted household resources:

> When I was like 10-13, there were a bunch of different families and all of their
>
> kids. There was always food but, you know, when you have multiple families
>
> within one household, my mother, my aunt, my other aunt, everyone was like, "I
>
> bought this food, I bought that food."

In terms of household economic stability, three (33%) of the participants noticed a

substantial strain on financial resources as children which manifested as difficulty

accessing food in the home, not having appropriate clothing, and/or having to move often

due to their guardian's inability to maintain the payments on a residence. Drew related

the family's struggle with poverty as a function of his mother's employment history: "My

mother was unemployed for a long time.…She was making $6,500 a year. So that's why

things were difficult.…[We were] definitely [on] welfare." Joe also remarked on the

consequences of financial instability in his childhood household: "We moved around a

lot.…It might have been [due to] a financial problem where [my mother] couldn't handle

it by herself." Gerard mentioned the limitations of his economic status growing up, while

acknowledging the adequacy of what he was provided with:

> I always had somewhere to lay my head. I always had food. It may not have
>
> been the best food, but we had food. I had clothes. I didn't have the best clothes;

there were always others with better. So, you know, I didn't have it as good as some of the other kids, but I didn't have it as bad as some of the other kids.

Six (66%) of the participants did not recall evidence of any substantial, overt financial difficulty in their childhood homes.

Subjects disclosed they were often drawn toward adults who possessed characteristics missing in the parental figures residing within or outside their childhood home—a theme alluded to by eight (88%) of the participants. For instance, Joe spoke of a coworker he interacted with when he was 17 years old:

> He wasn't family, but he treated me like family. With me and my stepfather, it was more of him yelling at me. [The coworker] was the one that pulled me to the side, "Man, don't worry about that, you know, he means well. This is what we're trying to do." Because we were all helping each other, you know? And he was helping me with all that stuff my stepfather wouldn't help me with.

Joe further describes this relationship:

> We went out to dinner and things, and by me driving the truck with him, when I got off work, we hung out together, watched TV, and sports, and stuff like that. We [did] a lot of things together, things that I felt me and my stepfather should have done, I was doing with him. I looked up to him like he was my father.

Mitch expressed a similar contrast between two adult figures, in this case, his father and his uncle:

> [My uncle] is a different type of person, I mean [he and my father] are brothers, but they're almost the exact opposites. You know, my uncle, I've never known him to do drugs or do heavy drinking. He's a construction worker and he does his job and goes home. He's just a regular guy. But he sought to come and get me.

33

He sought to take me shopping if I needed new sneakers. If I needed a haircut, he'd take me to a barber. He kept me at least to the point where I was decent. He came to my house and walked me over to my grandmother and grandfather's house on the weekends, no matter what. That's the kind of person he was.

Eric reflected on the distrust he had for family members who were untruthful about his family composition: "I'm sitting here playing with this girl and I'm thinking, 'Oh, this is my friend,' when they're getting together like, 'Let's let brother and sister play together.' My sister knows. She's 8 or 9 years old, and she knows that I'm her brother, but I don't know." Eric then sought out a truthful, drama-free, and empathetic role model to confide in:

He wasn't like other males because he was calm. Males were aggressive, males were hard. He seemed much more maternal than other males it seemed, and he didn't seem like he was gay, or there was an effeminate nature, or anything like that. It was that he was just a calm man, which was like weird, and I mean, don't get me wrong, there were other males like the principal who were cool, but even he still seemed like he had that "man" way about him, you know what I mean, but this man just seemed so, like he wanted to hug you, whereas the principal seemed like, "Good job, I'll shake your hand, pat you on the back, maybe even give you a squeeze," but not hug.

As it relates to a lack of affection, Carl similarly stated:

My dad's perception of being a good parent was being a provider. His idea was "I provide for you and give you everything I could," but there was a sense of dysfunction in my family in the sense that, the way they grew up, my dad would like….He never said the words "I love you" because that wasn't how he grew up.

34

He didn't express that. His way of showing love was doing everything for us, but never saying it, and I didn't realize until later in life that, that is what was lacking in my life.

He also spoke of trying to alter this household dynamic:

As I got older, the thing that I lacked the most from them, I kind of turned it around and let them know in a way that I need this, so I kind of started doing it myself in reverse, by hugging them more and that kind of stuff, hoping I would get it back.

He stated the following of his failed strategy:

Their reactions, it wasn't what I wanted, but it was kind of, how can I say, not "hurtful" is the word, but "disappointed." I expected something else because I knew that it wasn't a scheme of any kind, and I expected them to say…start a more positive dialogue about what I was doing, why I was doing it, but that didn't happen. So I looked for answers through other people, It just so happens that I looked towards some people that really didn't have my best interests at hand.

Gerard commented on his relationship with his uncle:

It's like he was always there. He wanted to spend time with me and his kids like, "This is what I'm going to do first every day." [If Uncle T were not there], I think I would be lost. I might have turned to the streets or to drug dealing just to rebel against my dad because I felt like he wasn't there. He was too busy.

Participants frequently attributed a fundamentally helpful part of their adolescent development process to departing from childhood environments and experiencing new locations and mentors. Seven (77%) subjects acknowledged that a change in location

35

during childhood or teen years greatly influenced their conception of the world. For instance, Drew said of his first experience away from his community:

That was actually the first time I left Chicago, to go on a college tour. Before then, I literally never walked outside of my perimeter. I never thought of it, and then, uh, we went down south to different colleges and you saw…well, first off, it was warm as hell. It was warm, it wasn't violent, the people weren't locking car doors. We were used to locking everything. I've got to say the women were dressed half-naked. The guys were just kicking it. It felt like you have freedom.

Similarly, he commented on his relationship with an academic advisor he encountered in his new environment:

I was around him like every day, all day, because we'd be in class, working in the chemistry lab. I would even help him out on the weekends. He would, like, take [me and my friend] out to eat all the time. You know, it's cool because I got to learn a lot of things. You know, I got to be around a guy who cared, but you never really think about that in the moment.

Joe noted his transition was under less favorable circumstances—while he was incarcerated. He recalled seeking support in a spiritual guiding figure:

When they locked me up, I felt my whole world just came crumbling down. I had a headache bigger than this room, maybe the size of this building, I would wake up with it, go to sleep with it, and the only thing that comforted me, my mother said, "Open your Bible to Psalms 27 and Psalms 23 and read it. Leave it open under your pillow and go to sleep." Right there, I had a connection with God. Ever since then, he's still the man in my life.

Gerard spoke of the difference between two communities he grew up in:

36

Back then it was a lot more just African American kids, so to speak. That's all I know in New Brunswick, and then in North Brunswick, it was completely diverse, so it was like a culture shock to me. [In North Brunswick there was] no crime, there was no fighting in school, or anything like that. In New Brunswick you were prepared to fight like once or twice a week.

However, Eric experienced a childhood relocation far less favorable:

I mean, it was almost day and night….In Brooklyn, there were people yelling, and talking outside, and guys playing dice and drinking, and the drug addicts, and the shooting, and the screams….Crap like that was going on in Brooklyn, and in Queens it was quiet and when you woke up you heard the kids playing and the birds tweeting and stuff like that….It felt like, you know, like you just walked through the looking glass.

Similarly, Jason stated of his change of location in adolescence:

I used to be in North Brunswick, but, like my mom and them was down here. She lived in New Brunswick. Then I would come down here, and we would be like going to parties, you know like that type of thing. And then we moved to Hamilton, and I stopped playing with my same basketball team that I played with since I was in the third grade. I played professional basketball down there, then I stopped playing basketball. I fell out of love with the game cause I left my team, like my coach.

Mitch spoke of the difference between private and public school:

It felt different. It was just that freedom. It was that camaraderie with the people in my neighborhood, people that lived around the corner from me that I never knew growing up because I went to a private school. Once I got to meet these

people, I was like, "Oh, these guys are not so bad." I just got to know more about

my area, more about my block.

He went on to state:

[In public school] I had the freedom to cut class if you wanted to, go to class if

you wanted to, do whatever you wanted because the teachers really didn't care.

But that freshman year, it taught me that it was my choice. I could do it if I

wanted to or not, and I did good. I had a 3.9 [GPA] at the end of my freshman

year. It kind of carried me throughout the rest of my high school career. In

Catholic school, I gave minimal effort, if any.

Mitch also remembered:

I got along with everybody very swimmingly well very early. I never got the

freshman hazing, maybe because I looked a little older or because I wasn't in the

public schools, so people didn't know who I was. I was just the new kid, even to

the freshman class, so it was good.

Adolescents' Perceptions of Specified Authority Figures in the Community

Research participants were asked to reflect on their perception of various male

authority figures they encountered in their youth, specifically teachers, police officers,

notable community members, and older family members. When asked about their

adolescent perception of male teachers, four (44%) noted their interactions had been

mainly positive. Jason responded, "[My experience was] positive. I had a good history

teacher in the tenth grade, Mr. Walsh. That was my man." One (11%) considered his

interactions with teachers to be mostly negative. Four (44%) stated that their experiences

with male teachers were either mainly neutral or had limited applicability. For example,

Gerard said, "I don't recall ever having a male teacher in New Brunswick, like all of my

teachers were females." Gerard did go on to add that moving changed the situation: "[In North Brunswick], my English teacher was a cool guy."

Gerard also noted the impact of teachers often varied in conjunction with the financial stability of the surrounding community:

I think the New Brunswick teachers were like fed up with the behavior of the kids, like "You're just not getting it. You don't want to get it, so I'm going to go on and do something else." The North Brunswick teachers were like, there's still hope for you. Let's sit you down, and find out what's going wrong, and resolve it so you can move forward. So there was a little more patience.

Subjects were asked about their perception of male police officers as youths. Of the participants, two (22%) stated their interactions had been mainly positive. Joe viewed police officers in a particularly reverential manner given the mistreatment he faced in his home:

[Police were] positive because that's their job, they're police officers, to uphold the law. If you're doing wrong to bring you into the judge so you can get either punished, or, you know, they discipline you some kind of way. So I kind of looked up to them because they are more of a role model. You know, they're trying to protect people that are being abused like I was.

Four participants (44%) had considered their interactions mostly negative. In reflecting on his teenage years, Drew said of police: "I disliked them. I strongly disliked them….A lot of them felt racist. There were probably one or two black police officers…Most of them were Irish and they spoke to you like you weren't a human being." Gerard admitted to having ambivalence regarding the perception of police officers:

I never had an issue with police officers, because it was something I always

wanted to become, [and] it was a lot easier for me to respect police officers,

especially when I wasn't doing anything wrong. But, as I got older, I watched and

learned that every police officer in a position of authority doesn't have the best

interest of the community. So there have been some situations I have gotten

involved in with police officers. Because you feel you've got on a uniform and

got a gun that you're going to talk to me and disrespect me and say whatever you

want to me, and that's not going to happen. I stand up for myself as a man.

Three subjects (33%) stated that their experiences with police officers were either

mainly neutral or encompassed both positive and negative experiences. Eric noted:

There'd be a few officers who didn't seem like…bad. I mean, I had the PAL with

the Police Athletic League, with male and female police officers, and there were

always police out there who were like, "Look, kid, put it out," when you're

smoking your weed, or drinking your beer, "Pour it out." The difference between

the police officers was either you seem like you're here because your purpose is

to put me in and throw me in jail or, and it was rare, there was the person who

was, like, I'm protecting and serving everybody, and I don't want to see you go to

jail. I don't want to see you do poorly, you know, I just don't want to see you

doing illegal stuff, or being disrespectful to me as an officer. I just want your

respect.

Gerard also recognized that unlike his generally positive perception of police

officers, others expressed contrary opinions. In New Brunswick:

[Others in the community would say], "I hate the police," "'F' the police. They always picking on me." I mean, if you standing outside on the corner where people are known to sell drugs, like, what do you think is going to happen?

Participants were asked about their adolescent perception of male members of the community, whom the subjects identified as including neighbors, members of the church, family friends, and drug dealers. Five (55%) noted that those interactions had been mainly positive. (It should be emphasized that this refers to a personal perception, and is not a function of the example being set by such community members.) One (11%) considered their interactions mostly negative, three (33%) stated that their experience with male community members had been mainly neutral, and two (22%) found their contact with community members to be both positive and negative. In response to the more negative attributes, Travis reflected on members of his community in South Orange:

> I don't know. It was kind of an "everybody for themselves" environment. There were neighbors who would look out in South Orange, because they didn't want anything bad happening in their community. So you would always see them looking outside the blinds. But 9 times out of 10, they would be calling the cops on you, as opposed to if anything else was really going on. They weren't a support. They were a negative kind of…thing in the environment.

Although Mitch acknowledged the negative attributes of those involved in criminal acts in his community, he viewed them as individuals, thereby perceptually attenuating their otherwise menacing presentation:

> [My community] had a bad reputation, but I was familiar with the local drug dealers that were on the corner. I knew them as, "Hey, that's Antoine," or

41

whatever. He's my neighbor. I go to school with his little brother. They kind of looked out for me and said, "Okay, he's not the one to get involved in the drug culture."

Participants were asked about their adolescent perception of older male family members, a term encompassing biological and nonbiological individuals whom they identified as uncles, cousins, brothers, stepfathers, and grandparents. Five (55%) noted their interactions had been mainly positive. Among those who considered their interactions with male family members to be generally not constructive, Drew recalled an incident which transformed a tolerable relationship he had with one of his drug addicted uncles into yet another familial relationship he was forced to distance himself from:

> [I remember] the point when I first physically saw one of [my uncles] smoking crack, and we were actually riding in the car, and uh, I was driving, and maybe I was in high school. But we were driving, and he asked me to roll my window up, and I was like, "Okay, I'll roll my window up." Then he starts smoking crack, and so, yeah, we definitely had a disagreement. Any respect I had for him was out the window after that. It went up in smoke, so to speak.

All subjects (100%), even those with mostly positive community interactions, spoke of the negative impact of peripheral figures within their childhood homes, communities, or schools. Joe reported that his parental figures often ardently reinforced his aggressive behaviors as a youth:

> I couldn't take getting beatings, because my mother taught us she didn't run from a fight. She didn't care how many was out there, she did not run from a fight. So we was supposed to do the same. "Stand your ground. If you come home running from a fight, I'm a beat you and send you back out there." So that's two beatings

42

in a day, and I can't take that, because then I got to go to school, and people are like, "Oh, you got beat up by so and so." And then you got kids who live around your house like, "Oh his mom beat him." That's too much for a little kid of that age, so I somewhat started retaliating and I started fighting back. And when I started fighting back, it kind of separated me and my brother, because a lot of people that knew me and didn't know he was my brother. They were the one beating him up, and taking his lunch money. And when they found out that was my brother, then I had another problem.

Joe also described adverse household influences:

Imagine you go somewhere, out in public, and someone's calling, "Aw, you're stupid! Roar, roar, roar." What are you going to do? You shrink, you can't say nothing because that's my stepfather, what am I supposed to say? He can beat me and do whatever he wants. You know, call my mom, "Oh, he was bad, so I beat him." What is she going to say?

Eric spoke of how his community influenced his actions:

The criminal activity I got into wasn't because I thought it was cool or anything, or here were kids, and I was like, "Let me run with these kids." It was like, "Do I eat today or do I not eat?" I did what I had to do to survive. The first time I was trying to do some type of illegal activity [I was] all nervous, but actually, a few times after that, it's always hardest the first time, but then it becomes something that you're just used to, and I was like, "Okay, now how do I navigate this?"

Mitch correspondingly said:

There were some [drug dealers] I knew when I was young, maybe 13 or 12, who were encouraging, like, "Yeah, man go to school." You know cause I don't think

43

those guys ever did it as a glam thing or just to get the money. It was more of a,

uh, you had to…you had to survive somehow.

In terms of becoming entrenched in the criminal lifestyle of his environment, Carl divulged:

I was addicted to the lifestyle. I wasn't addicted to the drug use, the criminal

aspect of it. I was addicted to…wanted to find out what the hype of being in the

street was all about. I was addicted to that. I just wanted to be out there, to see

what goes on and, as a result of being out there, all the other elements came into

play. That's what lured me into that state of mind.

Drew's recollection echoed the pull of "the streets":

You wanted to be like [the drug dealers]. You know, cars and rims and trim, and

all those things. I had holes in my shoes, and I didn't get new shoes until my

cousin gave me shoes, so I saw them and I was like, "I'm trying to get down."

[Then] you see the violence. Somebody gets stomped out by 40 people. I mean, it

desensitizes you. After a while, you just go through the motions. I only joined so I

could sell drugs, and you had to be part of a gang to sell drugs. Truth of the

matter, I didn't like much the people in the gang.

Racial similarity between the adult role model and the adolescent was deemed to

be a critical connecting attribute for eight (88%) of participants, in particular because of

the shared status of being targeted by the negative societal perception of African

American males. Joe noted:

 [Teachers] are going to pick on you because you may be singled out [as] the only

Black in the class. It's a lot of things that come into play. And if you're not

disciplined, you'll fall for it, and they're going to look at you like you're the bad

guy. You get kicked out of school, and then who knows what would happen then?

Eric, because of his African American and Irish ethnicity, was able to offer a

unique perspective among participants. His memories of African American paternal

relatives contained some unfortunate negative perceptions:

I'd been around the White side of my family so long, but dudes on my father's

side were all like crazy. You know what I mean. They had been in jail. They had

done a lot of drugs. They had killed people. They were like…some of them were

like rapists. I mean, like crazy, crazy people. I was like, shoo, I hope I'm not like

them, because these people are like nuts.

Eric also described feeling a need to be conscious of how he represented himself as a

Black man, a concern conceivably influenced by his perception of his paternal relatives:

You have to be more personable, speak intelligently, and you have to bring your

voice up an octave even sometimes, or walk in a different way to be less

threatening. I remember being a teenager and how much I used to like having the

super, super deep voice, and then having to kind of like consciously bring my

voice up because I sounded too much like "intimidating black guy" to have a

super deep voice. Like I said, people that were…the Black males that I

met….Listen, if you weren't scared of those guys, something was wrong with

you. These were scary people.

There were also instances cited where racial similarity, rather than serving as a source of

pejorative stereotype, proved beneficial. For instance, Jason reflected:

The [school security guards], the ones that I knew, always kind of helped me out.

Caught me with some drugs before, [and] just took them, instead of like calling

my mom, locking me up, going to court. Saved me trouble. He was Black. He

would harass the White kids doing the harder drugs. He would harass them.

Five (55%) participants, however, identified individuals of a dissimilar race to be

significant role model figures for them. Jason remarked:

I had a good history teacher in the tenth grade, Mr. Walsh. That was my man. He

was cool. He knew how to grab interest, not just…because I went to a mixed high

school too. So you know, he knew how to bring in the Black kids, you know,

cause I was like a bad ass. I was bad [laughing]. But, yeah, he knew how to grab

our attention. He knew how to relate to us. He played basketball, too.

Mitch recalled a White teacher he encountered in childhood who maintained their contact

long afterwards:

I remember one of my music teachers, beloved music teacher. He was a White

guy. He liked rock music and taught at a school that was not in the hood. But we

were from the hood. But we still interacted with a lot of Caucasian kids, Spanish

kids, all different ethnicities. But he was a great teacher. I remember giving him a

little flack in the beginning. You know, a new face, new teacher. You know,

they're trying to teach and restore order, but I can remember instantly gravitating

toward him, like, you know, he's a cool dude. And he tried to help me so much,

outside of school. He gave me a guitar case, because I couldn't afford one. He

gave me private lessons at his residence when I was even in high school, after I

had left grammar school. He was giving me private lessons, charging other kids,

but wasn't charging my mom and me.

An authority figure's possession of characteristics seen as enviable by an

adolescent was expressed to be a priority by all nine (100%) participants. For example,

Drew spoke of a particularly positive role model, a teacher, he encountered . As this teacher held many attributes favored by the participant and other classmates, the process of bonding was more quickly facilitated:

My English teacher in high school, he was the first guy [teacher]….At my first high school, I never heard the word college. I didn't go to many, and went to his class. He was like a young, Black guy. He had to be like no older than 30, 31, and I remember he used to talk to me about college. He went to Jackson State, and he was talking about fraternities, and that was the first time I heard about fraternities or college from anybody. He was real cool. All the girls liked him because he was a nice-looking guy, real smooth.

Travis also spoke of a history teacher in similar terms:

[My history teacher] was just cool, a relaxed guy. He always came in a suit and tie though, but he was always polite. He was Black, and always seemed to care about the kids, about us. He never talked down to us. He was always on our level. It was cool that he was a male, It was a change of pace. I had nothing but female teachers growing up, so it was pretty cool. He had a good sense of humor, like he joked around, stuff that other female teachers just didn't do. He was a joker, and he joked a lot with the class. I felt like I could relate to him more.

When describing desirable traits in a male family member, Travis commented upon the well-admired physical presence of his father and noted the impression it had upon him as a child:

It's odd, because he's a loud guy and he could be an intimidating guy. He was a big guy, and he always wore muscle shirts and, like, army fatigues, and he had

47

like a bald, shaved head, with the goatee. All the kids were afraid of him, and it's

kind of like, I was a little proud of my dad.

Terrence spoke of the sense of admiration he experienced during his sporadic

encounters with his largely absentee father:

At the time I definitely felt that [my father] was the greatest person I ever knew. I

looked at him like, "Oh he's so smart, he must know everything. And he works so

hard, he must be rich." He was just so great because he would come and give me

a gift or two. Like that. He was over 6 feet tall, so imagine as a kid you look up to

this guy who's taller than everyone around you.

On the other hand, the deficiency of enviable traits in authority figures caused

teens to distance themselves from certain adults. In pondering his motivations for

persecuting a particular teacher encountered in grammar school, Mitch made a

comparison to a teacher he did respect:

[Mr. Drab] just didn't have that calmness about him as a teacher. He was like the

new teacher, still nervous, and I guess I just took advantage of that, and I didn't

mean to do that. I used to give him a hard time because he just didn't have a grasp

of, you know, keeping the kids in order. Mr. Kelly was at the Catholic school I

went to, and he was a pastor at the church, so I guess he demanded more respect

from everyone around him. In the end, I guess him being a pastor, and just seeing

people on a daily basis, I warmed up to him and he just seemed to know that I

wasn't a malicious person.

Gerard similarly mentioned a predilection toward being disrespectful of a teacher who

did not convey a sense of authority: "I had this one teacher, this White guy. We used to

48

treat him bad. We'd catch him by the bus and get some snowballs and throw them at him. He was just a random white guy, fat, bald, balding."

Qualities that seem attractive to adolescents may not be a function of positive characteristics. Drew's uncle provided him with attention which made it difficult for Drew to classify his negative behavior as harmful, despite it exposing him to a life of crime at an early age:

> He was always there. We would go out, like, we would walk to the corner store and get ice cream. Like all the little stuff. Like, thinking back on it now it was because he sold drugs. But I didn't know. I would just see all the gold chains, gold rings, um Mercedes Benz. It's, like, he's got money anytime I want to buy ice cream.

Five participants (55%) also described negative adult figures as possessing "a mystique" that made them alluring. Carl stated:

> My father's brother was always in jail, drank a lot, got into fights, brawls all the time, and he brought all this drama to the family unit. My father was the kind of person that was an enabler. He would always be the one bailing them out of jail, saying, "Oh, he made a mistake. My uncle would always be telling the stories about what he did, and trying to glorify it to make it look like, "Oh, it ain't really that bad." I liked it, and a part of me was kind of intrigued by his ability to do what he did. Like my father and the other brothers, they would always have things to say about him, and that kind of intrigued me. I'd be, like, "Why are they always talking about him, is he really that bad?" And I was always intrigued by this negative thing about him.

Gerard acknowledged the apparent benefits of a life of crime, but attributed his being able to resist to his father, an officer of the law:

I think if my dad wasn't a cop, I probably would have been a drug dealer. Like you see the money, you see the cars, you see women, you see going to buy whatever. It's very enticing, especially when you're at that age, high school, when you want to be the coolest kid. You want to have the best clothes.

Participants expressed an appreciation for authority figures who were able to utilize honesty, even when delivered coarsely, and direct instruction in a caring manner to guide adolescents toward a fruitful path. Specifically, eight (88%) recognized the benefit of such an approach. In reference to his uncle, Eric said.

He chose to spend time with me. Especially when I was a teenager and I was going through the most trouble he'd be like, "You know what, you're a real knucklehead. You're a smart kid, but you're stupid. You're being a jackass." And it never felt like he was telling me that, like, "You're stupid and you're a jackass." It felt like, "Damn it, can you go and get your shit together?"

The same participant remarked upon a unique police officer who possessed similar attributes:

I remember hopping the train once and officers popped out, and they caught me and my friend, and the guy pulled us outside, and they had us in the cuffs and everything, and he's talking to me, and I'm talking to the police officer, and my thing is that, thank God I could always speak to people. I talked to them and everything, and they asked me a couple of questions, and I would say yeah, yeah, and I was telling him, "I play football," and, you know, we started talking, and he had me out in front of the train station a good 20, 25 minutes standing there

talking and everything, and eventually he said, "You know, you don't seem like a bad kid or like a troublemaker. You seem like you did something dumb. I can't let you on the train, but I'll let you go."

In reference to a teacher, Jason related a similar anecdote of an adult authority figure's recognition of his positive qualities and abilities:

[He spoke with me] individually, most definitely. He knew I was smart, but I just wasn't trying. So he would like call on me and make me involved in the class. [After class] he'd be like, "Why the hell do you have a C in my class?" I liked him, so I didn't get defensive or anything.

Drew was another participant who was grateful for the persistent interest of an authority figure, his academic advisor:

He held me accountable, because there was definitely structure, and I wouldn't go to class because I was tired from the night before, and he would hold me accountable. If not for him, I definitely think my sense of accountability would have been greatly diminished.

Carl similarly related the following:

The principal was there all the way up to the day I graduated, and I remember he said to me, "You made it. There were times I didn't think you were going to make it, but you made it. I'm proud of you that you did, and now the real test is coming. What are you going to do now? I'm kind of concerned." Because at that point my peers were changing, and eventually I ended up going to prison. But the day I got out of prison, I ran into him again, and it was like we picked up right where we left off. Never once did he say, "I knew that was going to happen to you." It was more, "Well, how are you doing now? How can I help you?"

51

In the view of participants, honesty is an admired character trait in adults. Terrence spoke of the power of his grandfather's honest words:

He told me things about being black, as a young man, how things might change for me. He included those kinds of things for me even though I was kind of young, and I would say it definitely impacted me.

Subjects also discussed the difficulty of navigating life without explicit directives or honest appraisals, and the sense of confusion and ambiguity that ensued. Carl stated:

A lot of the men who were in my life at that time, their whole perception of getting through life was, "be a man" about everything, but not really giving you the details on how to be a man. There was a perception, you know, "Don't do what I do. Don't say that I did that." But I was looking and drawing conclusions about what being a man was, based on what I saw men in my life do. People tell kids, "Don't use drugs." What are they going to say? How do I not use drugs? How do you do it? I mean, are you going to put something in place that gives me something to do, so that I'm not using drugs?"

Gerard additionally expressed his difficulty in negotiating divergent life paths:

It's like, "Damn, I can get [material possessions] because look at how he's doing. Now, I see the weed that you're selling. If I just go sell this, I'm going to make this money, and I could get what I want." But then, on the other hand, like, you know, when you got your dad going out the door, and then you hear some of the stories about a kid who got arrested, or how much time somebody's getting, it's like, "Nah, I'll just wait. Let my parents take care of me until I have to figure it out myself."

Gerard and other participants also spoke of instances in which honest adult comments were not perceived as positive due to their unconstructive nature. He remembered:

I had my Vice Principal tell me, "You're not going to graduate." [I thought], "Yeah, I'm about to graduate and you're telling me I'm not going to finish?" So when I finished, and looking back on it now I wouldn't have done this, but me being young and stupid....When I got my diploma, she was one of the people on stage, and she put out her hand for a handshake, and I just walked past her, kept it moving, held my diploma up, and walked off stage.

Despite these negative experiences, other participants noted honest comments from adults which impelled them to reconsider and take accountability for their actions. Jason noted:

[Teachers] used to search me for stuff all the time, call me out of class, would check in your locker, tell you to take off your sneakers, and my thing was....Then I would have said, I hate him, and this and that, but, when I looked back, I was calling that. He was decent, because he actually helped me out. Like I was over my [allowed number of] lates to graduate for senior year. He knows I'm smart enough to graduate, and it wasn't not me being smart enough to graduate, it was me being irresponsible, being late, not really applying myself in class. I know he had my best interests at heart.

Account of the Role Model Relationships Experienced in Youth

When participants were asked to identify individuals who served a role model function in their youth, they identified male coaches, counselors, teachers, family members, and community members. Valued interactions were generally considered as

consisting of trips, errands performed, work- or school-related tasks, and recreation. Additionally, all subjects expressed the critical part communication played in their role model relationships. The topics they most often discussed with role models included sports, women, family issues, education, and future aspirations.

Research subjects were asked to consider whether or not the primary role model influence they identified was consistent with their idea of what most other males in similar categories (i.e., teachers, coaches, brothers) were like. All of the participants noted their role model figures stood out because they were perceived to be exemplary paradigms of adult male behavior and, therefore, exceeded expectations of preconceived authority figure templates.

The subjects were asked whether the community shared their impression and each noted that at least one of their role model figures was viewed favorably by the community. Carl illustrated the respect one of his role model figures had earned:

Everybody in the community liked him, because I think the community felt like

he was protecting their children from any of the hate crimes or things that police

do to minorities, and they would talk to him because they felt like he was their

eyes in government.

Two (22%) of the participants remarked that at least one of their role model figures was regarded in a negative fashion by the community.

Interviewees were additionally asked about the perception their guardians had of the role model figures they identified. Each noted that his guardian had a favorable impression of at least one of his role model figures, but two (22%) remarked that parents also thought negatively of at least one of their role model figures. For instance, Gerard

54

recalled his father's reaction to his spending time with an uncle often involved in criminal activity:

> Still, 'til this day my father doesn't like me hanging out with him. So my dad was always very protective like, "You know you don't really need to hang with him. Do not go with him." And now as an adult it's just, "Be careful. I know you're not doing anything, but be careful."

Subjects were asked whether the time spent with their role model figures was volitional in nature. All participants agreed that spending time with at least one of their mentors was their choice and viewed this as reciprocated. However, three (33%) noted that in the case of parental figures who were role models (fathers, stepfathers, or grandfathers), they had little control over the amount of time spent with these figures, despite the experience having been favorable.

The frequency with which participants interacted with their role model figures was discussed. Six (66%) of the participants stated the frequency of contact with at least one of their primary role models was more than two times per week; for two (22%), it was at least once a month; and for one (11%), it was less than every two months. Although all participants had at least one relationship of over a year's duration, they may have had additional transient role model relationships. In such relationships, the primary reasons for the termination of the association were: (a) the prearranged period of involvement ended (as in the case of many child/teacher associations), (b) relocation, or (c) a gradual dissipation of the relationship due to evolution of either the adolescent or the adult. Terrence described a particularly difficult separation from his grandfather due to the combination of his relocation and the personal issues that caused his grandfather to distance himself from the participant. He said of this relationship:

It dwindled until the point he was barely there, and he's no longer the major male

role model he used to be. It was one-sided. It was basically his decision. I figured

that's what adult do; they move apart. It was difficult to deal with at first, and I

did see it happening. But because there was nothing I could do about it, I just kind

of accepted it.

In response to the inquiry about whether or not the participants felt their lives

would be changed if not for the presence of their mentors, all of participants agreed that

absent at least one of their role models their lives would have been drastically different.

Mitch noted:

If not for [my role model], I don't think I'd be here. Without him, things would

have been a lot rougher, because my mom didn't have to worry about me having

clothes. He bought them for me. It gave me the confidence to walk around.

In one instance, a participant recognized that an authority figure he didn't connect

with as a child, his stepdad, still had a positive influence on his life. Terrence theorized:

It would have been different if he were not in it. I feel as though, maybe I

wouldn't have as strong of a backbone as I do now, because I did get kind of a

tough skin from dealing with him in my house. It was negative for me at the time,

but it led to a kind of positive result.

A number of factors were pointed to in identifying aspects that helped to cultivate

irreplaceable mentor relationships. Sports were identified by six (66%) of participants as

being a salient factor promoting connection. For example, in reflecting on his relationship

with his coach, Jason said, "We talked about everything. We spent a lot of time in his

van driving to PA, Asbury, you know, wherever we were playing basketball that week.

We spent a lot of time talking and stuff." However, one subject, Joe, described himself as

not gregarious, which made fostering connections challenging, irrespective of topic, whether with adults or peers:

> I didn't connect with anybody, or if I did, it was like starting to connect and then, boom, I'm gone again. I'm a laidback person. I wouldn't start anything, you know, even a conversation. I guess that's from my stepfather yelling at me so much, you know, putting it in my head that I'm no good, so instead of starting something, wait and just go with the flow.

Jason gave supplementary evidence of the advantage more gregarious adolescents have over those who are more reserved, and the ways in which they can connect with others and discover commonalities with greater ease. He commented on his youthful finesse: "I'd like to say, I'm charming, but I kind of like, would have relationships with my gym teacher and math [teacher]. I was always there in math, so my math teachers would love me. I'd say, 'How you doing, Mrs. Campion. I like the haircut!' you know?"

All participants found the positive motivations of adults to be crucial factors in relationship development. Eric was especially impressed by an uncle's gesture of support:

> When I was out in the street, he never told my aunt, but he turned around and gave me a hundred dollars and brought me over to the YMCA, paid my rent for a couple of weeks at the YMCA, and gave me money for my pocket.

Carl related an instance of a school official reaching out in a caring manner:

> [The principal] would say, "How are things at home?" Those kinds of questions, and I really didn't understand why he was asking me that. I guessed because he liked me, because he cared about me, but now, looking back, I see why he wanted to know if I was getting what I needed in my house. And he tried to fill that void of what I wasn't getting [as] discreetly as he could.

Travis spoke of parental self-sacrifice as proof of positive motivations. He said of his father:

> He was an accountant, and he worked at a firm, so he was always gone for the most part. But [when I was in] fourth grade, he actually stopped working at that firm and started his own business just so he could be home more. So he gave up a lot of money doing that.

All (100%) participants had experiences with adults in which they perceived the adult's intentions to be unfavorable. For instance, Eric said of his father:

> I was very excited, as a kid who had never spoken to his father before, and I had always wanted to meet my father, but like not like that….And here's the thing about people that I think bothers me about my mother and my father. When they wanted to become involved, it was strictly to clear their conscience, not because they felt like this was the right thing to do by their kid, but because, "I feel bad, and I don't want to feel as bad about this anymore. Let me make an effort to present myself to this person, so that this doesn't have to eat at my soul."

Mitch recalled an experience with his father which epitomized an adult's negative intentions:

> While I was in high school, he just appeared back in New Jersey. So he's around. I really don't know him as a person, and he's like, "Oh, let me try [your car] out. Let me take it around the corner real quick and see how it goes." And I'm like, "Okay." I'm getting the keys. I'm about to go with him, and he says, "What, am I a baby? I don't need you to come with me. I'll be right back." He was gone for three days [until] my grandfather happened to see two "fiends" in the car with him

and ran them off the road. Since then, it's just been…it's not like, I don't hate

him, it's just that I'm not hearing him.

Terrence disclosed how difficult it was to reconnect with a father who had not been

present in his life:

It was very much a struggle when he came back. It was hard to accept him as a

father figure. He tried to have conversations with me and I kind of just blew it off.

But because he would make a big deal about them, I was left less likely to listen,

and I just looked at it like he's trying to annoy me, bother me, and fill my head

with things I don't need.

In regards to members of the community, Gerard remembered interactions with

police officers who treated him disrespectfully until they became aware of Gerard's

athletic accomplishments:

For me it was kind of like, "You're going to run down on us, and when you find

out who we are, we were good kids, you're going to leave us alone. That doesn't

disregard the fact of why you approached us, you approached us because we're

three black males, then you find out we're the three black males in sports that play

for all North Brunswick athletics. We're winning your city championships, now

you want to fall back and leave us alone.

Jason also related an interaction with a police officer who was not treating him fairly:

There was one guy, he arrested me three times. Every time he would see me

outside, he would harass me. He'd be like, "Ah, come here, get on the wall,"

steady harassing me. [Then], I'm older and I would be in the area where things

would happen, but wasn't actually doing nothing at the time. I could be sitting on

the porch talking to a young lady, and they would come out there and embarrass

me. After the first arrest he would be like, "Bye-bye," or, "Hey, what's going on? Like a smart alec.

All participants acknowledged that being treated with respect was a necessary factor in a profitable adult/adolescent union. For instance, Joe remembered adults he worked with as a teen, and said:

I learned how to work independently from my uncle and a lot of his friends, because they looked at me as a friend, not a little kid, but as a friend. So if they saw me doing something wrong, they'd pull me to the side and say, "This is how you should do it. Don't do it like that. It will cause problems for yourself or someone else."

Carl remembered a teacher who extended himself considerably beyond their school interaction:

[I had] a gym teacher. You would see him in the community all the time. We'd be playing football. He'd get out of his car and start playing with us. Then he'd tell us, "Don't be late, don't eat no candy." [That relationship] carried on even until I was an adult.

Although the concept of mutual respect in adolescent/authority figure relationships was greatly valued, all participants were able to reflect upon interactions with adults in which they felt disrespected. Travis stated:

[Police officers] thought they could talk to you a certain way. They talked down to me, and I hate when people talk down to me. Even though I was a kid, I still demanded a certain level of respect, especially when I'm not doing anything wrong.

Antithetically, Travis also reflected upon a positive association he had with a

police officer. His detailed his remembrance of these interactions depict a relationship

far at odds from those discussed above:

I actually became real good friends with one officer, Mike. We actually still talk

right now. He's a sergeant or something, a high-ranking officer. He was pretty

cool. He talked to you like you're a person. Don't talk to me like I'm a dog. Even

if I'm doing something wrong, still don't talk to me like I'm an animal. [It's] just

the tone of how they address you.

Terrence spoke of feeling disrespected, in this instance by a teacher, whose traits

were in contrast with the preceding example:

I had this one teacher who hated me. He was just unnecessarily mean, and he

would call on me, and then not really give me enough time to answer the

question, or he just really did mean stuff. He took my game from me on a day

when we were supposed to have our games in class close to Christmas. It was

really just problematic. Then he went and said he lost it. It was crazy. I think he

thought I was more of a troublemaker, and really I wasn't. When I got in trouble,

it would be because other kids were trying to set me up for things. He developed

this negative image of me and then took it from there.

Nevertheless, Terrence was also able to recall a positive and respectful teacher/student

relationship:

He had an understanding of how to work with people who were younger. He

didn't just look at us and say, "Okay, you're the student, here's what you need to

know," and just shove information on us. He treated us like we were individuals.

He sat there. He had expectations and understanding. It was kind of like he was

more of a person than a robot teacher. He had an ability to assess a situation and either take it seriously, or make light of it. He basically had really good communication skills. When having a basic conversation with someone, he'd notice their facial expressions and pick up on that. The guy was really perceptive.

Jason discussed the incident that caused his loss of respect for a prominent role model figure, his father:

My dad ran around on my mom, typical. It put a barrier between me and my father. I was actually the one who caught him. You know I lost like a…you know, when you're a kid you look at your dad as like a superhero and I lost that.

All nine subjects (100%) made statements about the positive impact of qualitatively rewarding time with adult figures. Mitch noted:

My grandfather was always a person who gave a lot of encouragement. He was very much a positive person, happy that I was trying to do something other than be out in the street. He took me fishing, too, and we would sit and talk about life, just talk about me going to school, or trying to do something with myself. My father didn't go to college, my uncle didn't go. None of his kids went to college, so I was the first one to do it.

Regarding time spent with his grandfather, Terrence remembered:

We never really went out too much together. If anything, we were going on small drives to the store, places that were very local, kind of running errands. He always had me in conversation with him, and tried to get thoughts out of me. He wanted to know what I thought, and I think that was the biggest thing. My favorite thing he would do is, he would give me a riddle while we played chess. Most of the time I wouldn't guess the riddle, and I always lost at chess, but he'd

always encourage me to keep at it, even when I got upset. Even when it wasn't going well, he said I should always finish the game, you know, just keep at it. Try to think ahead and, eventually, I will just get better at it.

Jason spoke of quality time as in part also requiring the adult figure to go above the typical parameters of his role:

My basketball coach, he would do anything for us. He would pick us up and take us to games, pick us up and drop us off from practice. We went to the movies on Friday, and he'd be like, "I told you, if you need a ride home…." Coach would come get us. You know, he did the extra stuff, the extra step.

Travis also spoke of a teacher going above the call of duty:

He had a lot of magic tricks that he did, and while I was supposed to be in detention he would show me tricks. I [also] remember him running me down when I was supposed to be in detention. He saw me and ran me down the street, picked me up over his shoulders, and dragged me into the school.

Eric spoke of a lengthy relationship with his childhood caretaker whose hostility, made worse by the frequency of their interactions, was a hallmark of their relationship:

It was so powerfully overwhelming. He was so mean that I can't even remember.…I remember he would have his moments when he would have a beer in his hand and he would say something nice, but I could not tell you what that was. But the most defining memory, doing something in the kitchen, and he didn't like what I did or whatever, so he took his knuckle and he knocked me on the head with it, and it hurt like hell, and like a few minutes later my grandmother picked me up, and I remember I just started crying. I think my grandmother may

63

have believed a little bit, "He needs a man around him, he needs somebody who is going to kick his ass and be tough with him."

Gerard also spoke of an unfulfilling relationship with his dad:

I'm a mamma's boy. like still to this day. Me and my dad, we were always like close, but not close if that makes any sense. Like that was my dad. I had a lot of respect for him, but I feel like he wasn't there as much as I wanted him to be. Be at [my] sporting events, just supporting me. He was there, but he wasn't there as much as I felt he should have, like, "You were at the game for the first quarter, now you're gone. Mom, you're still here at the end of the game, and now you ask me what I want to eat after the game."

Carl spoke to the limitations of community figures to foster qualitatively impactful relationships:

Well, it's a different kind of support. It's the kind of support you get while you're there with them, and when you're not with them…like gym teachers. I was always like really good friends with them, but when I left them, the support system would be disconnected, because he wasn't in my neighborhood.

Travis explained how the substantive force of the relationship with his coach was enhanced by the fact that this individual was also his father:

Well, he was the coach. Not my coach, but everybody's coach. But then he would like stay with me later, and we did a lot of talking on the field that we didn't necessarily do at home. We did a lot of talking then, and, at first, there were some times when I was like, "Oh, why is my dad always here? Why is my dad always around?" until, when I was, I want to say in sixth grade, we had a conversation and he basically told me his dad wasn't there for him. He basically said his dad

64

never came to any of his ballgames. So, even at that young age, he kind of gave me a new perspective.

All nine subjects (100%) reflected on the importance of having a positive reception from adults who expected them to excel. For instance, Eric spoke of the lifelong impact his uncle's words had on him:

What he thought of me mattered, like, "I don't know what I'm doing out there, but you tell me what to do. I'm going to do it, and show you I'm worthy." You know what I mean, and I think that's where I learned [a] work ethic, because before that I had no idea, and I was always lazy. And that's how I am at work now, where you'll never, ever, question if I'm going to work hard.

Joe reflected on the moment he first impressed adults with his abilities and became the mascot of skilled truck driving:

Once [my stepfather] started teaching me how to drive the truck, I started driving one and he would drive one. So, I'm on my own now, and I'm what? 17, 18, driving a tractor trailer by myself. [Fellow drivers] used to look at me like, "Is someone else with you?" and I'm like, "No, I'm by myself." And they were like, "How can you go from state to state by yourself?"

Carl spoke also about how he derived a sense of accomplishment and encouragement from work, although his endeavor was engaging in a criminal lifestyle:

Just the idea of having a lot of money, being able to buy things, that looking back on, I realize I probably could have gotten from my dad, but I was trying to find my way and I was thinking, "I'm grown, I can get my own, and I can do this, and I can get money. I've got money in my pocket." But, you know, it really didn't

65

pan out for me that way. The consequences of those things were too severe and, you know, I didn't find that out until later.

Drew reminisced about the impact being perceived as an intelligent student had on him:

I got into an alternative school, and it actually started to work for me. I started over. I was still selling drugs, but I was on the Honor Roll, and, I guess, in school I was literally always one of the top students in the class, and people would be, like, "He'd be really smart if he tried and came to class," and it was really true. Then I went to school in the summer while I was selling drugs, and I got shot, and you pretty much only have to shoot me once for me to change my life. After that, I kept focusing on school.

Travis mentioned that his potential as a student was recognized by a teacher, and how this teacher's expectations influenced Travis's behavior:

I liked him. I think I was like one of his favorites. He always called on me, even when I had my head down. He definitely challenged me, and I appreciated that. He challenged me to excel, and I actually did really well in his class. It was one of only the few classes I actually did homework in. I didn't want to let him down, I guess.

Jason similarly noted the influence of a positive example:

I was already smart. I don't want to say smart, because I was doing dumb shit, but I was kind of maintaining a job and a car and bills and car insurance. I wasn't like my friends, living off of mom, trying to get girls. So, I was going to the club [with my brother and his friend], and that's when I had my drug money and we could

66

go, but that's when I would see [my friend's brother] in a different light, like he

had just as much money as me, and he's doing positive stuff, you know?

Travis remarked upon feeling distant from his father when a young child as a

result of his father's authoritarian approach. As Travis grew up, and his father became

less dictatorial, Travis began to feel closer to him:

He was always the strict guy, like he always expected the best of you. When I

was a little kid, I thought he was hard, like just one of the worst guys, so mean.

But when I got older, I realized that's not the way the relationship was. In high

school, our relationship changed because he really didn't have to discipline me as

much. So we got to bond, and now he's actually my best friend.

Standpoint on Current Position in Life

Participants were asked if they currently consider themselves to be role models.

All answered that they considered themselves role models in some capacity, and stated

that they perform that function for other young males in their communities, or their

families. Of those who are parents, all but one participant believed themselves to be or

have been a good role model to their children.

When asked about what being a role model constitutes for them, participants cited

the essential contributions to their modeling role as (a) open communication, (b) sharing

of one's experiences, (c) spending time with the adolescent, (d) showing physical and

verbal affection, and (e) steering them in a positive direction. Eric spoke of his desire to

help juveniles avoid the trouble he faced and, on fortuitous occasions, averted in youth.

He mentioned one of the topics he most often converses about relates to the manner in

which youth interact with the police or similar authority figures. He discloses to them

what worked well for him as a teen, and encourages them to be mindful of their self-

67

representation, saying, "I was able to talk myself out of situations. [I tell them] present yourself differently. If you paint a different picture of yourself, people see that picture, and you're going to get what you put out there."

Gerard spoke about considering himself to be a role model for every minor he comes into contact with, but also put forth the idea that he wishes to also remain a mentee, so that he might benefit from those with more experience and from whom he can garner support and direction:

> Every kid I come into contact with I'm a role model for, like even some of the adults who are younger than me. I mean I have role models that are like 32, 33. I'm 27 now. They're only a couple years older than me. But I like the way they live. I see the positive in them. I see what they do, and that motivates me to keep going and do what I do. I try to motivate and be a role model for every single person I come in contact with.

In discussing viewing themselves as role models, four (44%) of participants remarked on overcoming insecurities related to being a role model as they consciously combat or learn to accept the character traits within themselves they find incompatible with their idea of an adult exemplar. Joe identified his apprehension that his behavior was too similar to that of his father:

> I see him in me. What he used to do to me, I get to that point where I start lashing out at that person. Screaming and yelling and hollering, and I may put my hands on her, but I see him in me, and I get scared. I don't want to do what he [did] to us.

Mitch likewise indicated that he is reconciled to the reality that the negative traits he saw in his father are part of his nature:

68

I don't want to be anything like [my dad], but I know I am like him, I have traits, and I embrace the traits. My mother used to say, "Oh, you're nothing like him. Don't worry about that." And I said, "No, those things make me who I am."

All nine participants (100%) discussed the ways in which they utilize and make meaning of their role model position. Mitch stated:

I feel like I'm kind of a role model, but I'm not trying to be. I'm not going to shun the responsibility, but I'm also not looking for any acclaim or anything like that. But, definitely, when my little cousins call me from South Carolina or Atlanta, I'm giving them all the advice I can from my mistakes. I'm like, "If you're going to school, man, do it. Don't let nobody stop you."

Eric commented on his drive to be the role model of fatherhood for his children:

[My children] see me all the time. I'm not going to hang out or be with friends. I don't choose to be anywhere else. Even if I'm in the house and I'm maybe playing a video game, I'm there with them. I interact with them. I cook for them, and they know that, God forbid, if there's any problem, they have a problem outside or someone is messing around with them, Dad will go outside and do whatever it takes to protect them. I will do whatever I can in my power to provide a safe environment for them.

Drew shared a similar priority of being a good father: "I was always determined to be a good parent, because of how bad a parent [my father] was, or is. So, I didn't need to have a child to change my perception." He also reflected on his current motivations and ambitions:

When I did my internship, I was in a lab for eight hours a day on the eighth floor. I was the only Black person, and I pretty much did the same thing every day, and

69

I feel that I have more to offer than just to be in a lab for eight hours a day doing research. You know what I'm saying? I've always felt like what I really want to do in life is to make a difference. What I'm working on is to be an entrepreneur and have people retire from my business. I have no intentions to retire from somebody else's company, and what I have to do is to create a legacy totally contrary to the legacy that I was born into. It's all negativity, it's all failure. It's all using drugs, selling drugs, gangs, and shooting people. That won't be the legacy for me. My very first goal is to be a great parent.

Four participants (44%) also spoke of "full circle" moments in their lives in which reminders of their adolescent indiscretions directly converged with their developed adult selves. Jason recalled a case in point, an encounter with a police officer:

When I saw him last, actually, he waved. He stopped the car. He said, "So, what you been up to?" I was in college, taking community college classes, and I had like books and stuff. I showed him my ID for [the mentor program] where I worked, and I was, like, "See, I'm helping kids to change from the way I used to be." And he said, "That's what I'm talking about." You know, it was cool.

Carl articulated a similar transition:

I look back on who I was then, and what my state of mind was, and the influences I had, and I realize now that those things weren't really important. I know who I am now. I'm secure in that, and it doesn't matter if someone thinks I'm corny because I won't pick up a gun and go rob. I work a 9 to 5. I make a good living. It wasn't easy in the beginning, but I had that stick-to-itiveness that said, "If I stick to this, I can make something out of this."

In reflecting on attributes imperative to a constructive role model, the participants all verbalized the qualities they found to be central, or lacking, from their development growing up and the qualities they wish to project for current adolescents. Carl gave an example indicating his preference that males not reject more nurturing personas:

[The adolescents] are all homophobic. They don't want to hug another man because it's soft, "No, I ain't hugging no man. If there's a girl, I'll hug her," and I'll say, "Listen, come here. I'll give you a hug. Ain't nothing wrong with it." Because, reflecting back, that's what I wanted, and I know how important it is, and I let them feel that, and let them know that it's okay. It's okay to cry. It's okay to hug a man. It's okay to tell a man "I love you." It's okay. It don't make you any less of a man.

Jason expressed his belief that once you have earned the respect of an adolescent, you are in a better position to impart guidance:

When I was younger, I stopped having the respect level for my dad and, when I say not respecting him, I wasn't telling him "shut up" or anything like that. It's just that [his word] didn't mean too much to me. So maybe I sought [validation] in other places. I never used to believe it, how people would say, "Cause the dad's not there, he's off," but I'm like the dad to some of the kids [in the mentorship program], and they need to be checked.

Gerard described utilizing his role of guardianship to be a role model for the children he is raising:

They live with me, so they see my life inside out. So there's still certain things I have to do in my home to show these young boys how to become men, and that being a man isn't everything that you think it is. There's a lot more to being a

man than what you hear rappers talking about, or TV, or movies. There's a lot

more to it, [like] being affectionate, sitting down having conversations. We do

homework every night. While we're eating, we talk about how school was. My

eleven year old just told me he has a girlfriend, so you have to have conversations

about that. It's everything. That's what I felt like I was lacking growing up with

my dad, so I make sure I give my kids that time. Since those kids are in my

home, those are my kids. I'm definitely going to give them the time.

Travis, like many of the other participants, views respect as central to role-modeling:

I think a big part of it is being relatable and not being so alien that they don't see

they can become you. Like if I were a doctor or lawyer, or something, I'd want to

be so that they could see, this could be them. I don't want to put myself up on a

pedestal where they can't see themselves one day. I think a lot of it comes with

respect. Respecting who they are, just talking to them like they're people. Talking

to them in a way where we're kind of on a level playing field.

Chapter V

Discussion

Themes

Adult Reflections on Adolescent Experiences

    Traits related to or admired. The acquisition of a role model figure, although seemingly occurring in a random fashion, is often precipitated when adolescents become cognizant that the person being considered has similar qualities to their own or traits they find admirable. Adolescents initially view most authority figures as primarily punitive forces, a factor that complicates an ability to identify potentially similar interests. It also may be difficult to visualize utilizing disciplinary figures as role models. Correspondingly, authority figures may respond to adolescents viewing them as enforcers of discipline in kind, creating an additional barrier to the development of a more flexible and intimate bond.

    Conditions may exist in particular instances, however, that allow for the malleability of strict disciplinary conventions and may result in relationships that prove informative, stabilizing, and emotionally fruitful. Participants in this study related that authority figures and other adults, because of similar or complementary attributes they shared which propelled the relationship forward, could additionally be described as role models.

    Similarity of race was often cited as an important factor in the role model relationship. Black adolescents often perceive their race as a liability in conventional circumstances and institutions, like school. This theme of adolescent awareness that African American males are viewed in a negative fashion was remarked upon by Eric, a man of both African American and Irish ancestry who identified as African American. As

73

he was privy to role model figures reflective of each side of his lineage, he was acutely aware of the disparity in the perception of African American males. He recalled being more cognizant of his racial identity and sense of belonging than many other peers with whom he associated. He became hyperaware of the way he represented himself in an effort to distinguish himself from the Black male figures who were overaggressive and otherwise negatively perceived in the community. Being able to consider authority figures as role models or, more productively, having authority figures extend themselves beyond the limits of their scope of authority, may have served as a means for the participant to stabilize a positive sense of self as a Black male.

Participants occasionally mentioned convenient relationships with adults that originated as a result of racial similarity. In one particular situation illuminated by Jason, a school security guard became a well-liked entity because of his willingness to be selectively lenient, favoring—in a drastic departure from most school settings—Black students. The racial similarity created a space for Jason to feel special, supported, and viewed by another person as a three-dimensional individual for whom the rules could be more pliant. It should be noted, however, that despite the superficially positive nature of Jason's relationship with the guard, one must question the mixed messages regarding race, equality, and illicit behavior that formed the basis of the guard's conduct.

The desire youth have for adults to understand the concerns and fears they experience at home, in school, or in their communities was inherent in Jason's anecdote. Such a consideration is noteworthy and attention to how it can be conveyed in the most effective ways should be given. This is definitely an area for future research.

The accounts of this study's participants relating to issues of race requires consideration of the obligation of authority figures to recognize and facilitate a youth's

conception of his racial identity. In research on the development of ethnic identity in adolescence, it was found that school milieus with a racially diverse composition created increased group esteem related to race (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). It was suggested that such communal diversity accelerates the *encounter* phase of Cross's (1971) stages of black racial identity development model, as discussed above, which identified the five stages necessary for an African American's progression from self-loathing to self-love. It is important for adults to consider how such racial implications play out in an adolescent's life, and assist them in navigating such issues in an equitable manner.

Authority figures with immediately desirable character traits; i.e., those which adolescents seek to emulate naturally, can often bridge the gap between conveying authority and forming a deep connection with an adolescent, and thus permit the adult to impart values and present options to the adolescent that would not be as readily absorbed if presented by another adult figure. Drew was clear that the commonalities he shared with his teacher in terms of race, gender, and relative age gave the teacher's knowledge base credence. Additionally, this adult figure also possessed traits the young adult aspired to attain, such as attractiveness to the opposite sex and charm. It has been demonstrated that one of the ways in which adolescents form a positive self-perception and understanding of the possibilities available to them is through vicarious experience role modeling (Pajares, 2006). In this situation, the educator transformed a previously abstract and unconsidered notion—college—into one that was desirable, accessible, and eventually a reality.

Attributes Travis used in describing himself during the course of the interview, i.e., a Black male with a sense of humor and a love for history, were identified as

characteristics that made a particular teacher an important figure in his life. An additional likeness was his gender, a significant departure from the almost exclusively female teachers Travis had in the past. Travis was accustomed to experiencing. As Terrence considered the relationship he had with his often absentee father, he remarked that the intermittent reemergence of his paternal figure was a source of great excitement and pride that gave a tenuous relationship the illusion of positivity. Conversely, Gerard reminisced about a teacher who provoked an antithetical reaction based on his dissimilarity with the students, reflecting the tendency of adolescents to have less instinctive respect for adults lacking the traits typically admired. Although it is often impracticable for an adult to be a physically iconic presence for adolescents, internal composure, dignity, and strength are also seen as attractive and respectable features.

Mitch elaborated on perceiving instantly gratifying concessions from his uncle as validation of their friendship, and noted the confusion this created for him as he got older and was faced with paving his own life course. In contrast, Gerard noted that despite the consistency of his uncle's influence, he elected to shun criminality chiefly because his father was a police officer. Such an acknowledgment sends a powerful message about the lifestyle of a respected adult, in this case his father, and how strongly it shapes the trajectory of an adolescent. In Gerard's case, even though he would have preferred more quality in the interactions he shared with his father, it appears that his father's consistent presence, lawful conviction, and willingness to share factual information about the consequences of criminality, were enough to counteract the ostentatious and indulgent lifestyle his uncle presented as an option.

Sports, either through participation or as a spectator, opened the door of communication between many of the subjects as young men and the authority figures in

their lives. The connections between athlete and coach, or bonding through an affinity for specific sports teams, frequently led to substantial, lasting relationships. The deep value placed on the relationship then endowed adult figures with the credibility to broach more expansive topics with the adolescents.

Although sports is a ubiquitous and unintimidating entry point into social relationships, young men who neither have an ability and/or interest in this area still require connections with and support from male role models. An additional factor that may inhibit bonding over similarity of interests is that a reserved or shy adolescent may not be sufficiently comfortable in the company of adults to find common ground on which to initiate a relationship. Whether due to personality characteristics, social discomfort, or distrust evoked by dysfunctional familial circumstances, these youth are less likely to form a connection with an adult which has the potential to become a positive relationship and, thus, may fail to obtain much needed social support. Joe noted he had a more reserved interpersonal approach to both adults and children because his constant family relocation made him a perpetual "new kid" who did not fit in. Additionally, the negative responses he consistently received from the father figure in his household created apprehension regarding exposing himself socially to others.

More reticent adolescents may have a greater need to connect with adults, yet they often do not demonstrate the externalizing behaviors that encourage attention from adults. Joe offered the hypothetical approach of teachers noticing and drawing out shy students. He felt this would be useful in an academic setting for adolescents with a temperament like his. "[If a teacher] see[s] a kid and he's singled out from everybody else by himself, I may be in class, but my mind is not on it. You should be able to pick that person out of the class." Although more difficult than the converse, a proactive strategy of attentiveness

77

on the part of the adult would allow for interventions which bridge the gap in more introverted youth's lives.

Socially maladaptive behaviors in adults are often alluring character traits to adolescents. Participants verbalized that a certain unintentional mystique was often constructed around these individuals, a mystique which, ironically, was usually created by adults whose intentions were to dissuade a youth from similar choices. As Carl reminisced about associations with his uncle, he recounted details about how his family helped to sustain his sense of allure. This highlights two critical points: (a) the inconsistency between what adults are telling an adolescent is irresponsible behavior and the contradictory behaviors that seem to support such actions, and (b) the attention bestowed upon the object of derision which, for an adolescent may be perceived as a means of obtaining the visibility and concern that is inadequately available otherwise.

Intentions of the Connecting Adult. The impact of the advisements or support given to an adolescent from an adult was, for many participants, contingent upon the motivation or intentions the adult had in reaching out to them. The willingness of an adult to provide support, even in situations where assisting would be inconvenient, often was interpreted as a true test by the adolescent of his perceived importance to the adult figure. Eric's illustration of the significance of his relationship with his uncle was embodied by a troubling situation that Eric encountered when he was 17. His uncle chose to support him, despite an unwillingness to help on the part of his aunt. Eric acknowledged the sacrifices this relative made in Eric's best interests. Such support became a testament to their relationship.

Although the intentions of an adult may not be readily understood by an adolescent, there is typically a positive tone conveyed by adults when approaching a

78

youth with a genuine motivation of concern. Carl discussed his interaction with a school principal who was also an accessible community resource for him, and therefore a steady presence in his childhood. He expressed feeling somewhat perplexed at the time with questions posed by this figure to him. Nevertheless, he had a clear understanding of the benevolence associated with this individual's queries, although it took to adulthood before he could construe them accurately.

Intrinsic to childhood relationships with parents are typically expectations of self-sacrifice. Children typically fail to recognize parental altruism; however, when familiar household circumstances dramatically change, parental sacrifice may become more apparent. For example, Travis discussed a sacrifice he witnessed his father make in resigning from a high-profile professional position to spend more time with him. When adolescents perceive that adults are forging a relationship with them for reasons that are less honorable, however, it may impede the progression of such association and can prevent the transition from authority figure to role model. This can be true even in the case of parental figures.

Eric spoke of initial encounters with his father during his teen years. Since his father conveyed no paternal concern or respect for him, and offered nothing in the way of a stable presence in his life, the participant could only conclude that his father was seeking to absolve guilt regarding his absenteeism. The theme of reunions with an absentee father was additionally explored by Mitch who, at the age of 18, was forced to come to terms with a reemerging paternal figure and the less-than-noble intentions he exhibited, for example, stealing his car during their initial year of acquaintance. Terrence talked about failing to form a connection with his stepfather due to uncertainty regarding this father figure's sincerity and commitment.

Gerard also spoke of being distrustful of motivations with some otherwise amiable adults. Specifically, he was wary of initial instinctive negative police reactions based on his physical appearance and that of his friends, which resulted in an abrupt reversal upon officers learning of his status as a star athlete in his school district. In a similar vein, Jason remarked on interactions he had with a police officer frequently encountered during his teenage years. Despite the accustomed police confrontation his involvement in criminal activity subjected him to, the officer's caustic and antagonizing tone suggested that his intentions were at odds with the professionalism it was his responsibility to exercise in the community. In situations similar to this one, but especially in the case where no underlying criminal activity is present, the microaggressive reactions of certain police officers create an atmosphere of suspicion towards all police officers and may inadvertently plant a seed of internal doubt in the adolescent arising from racial vulnerability (Sue, 2004). Additionally, African American youth begin to feel that the individual attributes they possess are trumped and, thereby, devalued by the stereotypical perception others impose upon them—a concept referred to as the invisibility syndrome (Franklin, 1999). The invisibility syndrome can lead to negative repercussions, as an African American's view of his belongingness and worth in society becomes distorted. In essence, an adolescent's perception of most people's motivations may also suffer from distortion and preclude important mentor/mentee relationships from forming.

The ubiquity of microaggessive incidents in an adolescent's life can make it difficult for him to engage in deep and trusting relationships with male authority figures of the dominant race. Participants in this study, however, commented on having role models of different races and attributed an acknowledgment of the difference, without the

ascription of negative judgment, as fundamental to overcoming the racial disparity. Jason remarked upon a White role model who was willing to overlook pejorative racial stereotypes even while the participant was fully enacting them. Mitch also indicated the presence of an elementary school teacher whose desire to care for students was manifested through the amalgamation of several poignant elements, including racial acceptance, admired character traits, and willingness to exceed the conventional description of his duty toward the participant as a student.

Adult Demonstrations of Respect Towards Adolescents. Research subjects repeatedly spoke of their early communications with adults as, understandably, being defined by a prominent imbalance of power in which they were in the subordinate position. Despite the inequity inherent in a youth/authority figure relationship, however, it was clear that the manner in which power was asserted fundamentally affected the tone of the relationship, operating as an indicator to adolescents as to which adults could be trusted and which ones to avoid. "Respect" is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important, serious, etc., and should be treated in an appropriate way." Using this as a guide, it becomes clear what participants, in retrospect, sought from relationships with adults. It is also evidence that respect is not incompatible with a power differential.

Joe spoke admiringly of the way the adults who supervised him when he was a teenage employee efficiently balanced the objectives of both correction and respect. Although they undoubtedly functioned as superiors, their courteous treatment of him resulted in Joe likening the employer-employee relationship to a friendship. Demonstrations of respect can also take the form of adults taking time to acknowledge a teenager for purposes other than maintaining order or giving direction. Adults showing

their desire to be around youth in alternative circumstances, while integrating those interactions with more stereotypically authoritative adult responses, help to create a sense of trust in youth that grounds the integrity of a relationship.

Carl spoke about the value of having authority figures willing to engage with youth in multiple areas. While continuing to serve as disciplinarians, these adults also participated in more egalitarian activities, such as sports, with youth. Correspondingly, Mitch discussed a well-respected teacher who would relate to students on a level they could appreciate. The participant noted, "He was one of the few teachers that would actually put on shorts and stuff and go and play with us."

In spite of positive renditions of how respect was conveyed to them in their youth, a theme emerged when participants expressed instances in which they perceived a deficit of this value. Similarly to other subjects, Travis conversed about feeling entitled to respectful treatment from police officers, rather than the less than civil reactions he had become accustomed to expecting. Respect can also be conveyed in an adult's ability to acknowledge an adolescent's individuality, pay attention to the things that are important to them, and attempt to understand their side in difficult matters. Terrence reflected on a teacher who acknowledged the nuances of student situations, therefore exhibiting an air of mutual respect.

As important as an adult's demonstrations of respect toward adolescents are, however, the amount of respect an authority figure commands from an adolescent is also a vital factor. This provision of respect cannot be forced upon the youth. It has to be genuinely earned through overt or covert measures. As alluded to in themes highlighted throughout this study, respect can be acquired in a variety of ways; nevertheless, when an adolescent loses respect for a previously revered adult, it greatly alters the impact of that

individual on the life of the adolescent and, concomitantly, often limits the guidance he is willing to absorb.

Quality and quantity of interventions. Both the quality and the quantity of interventions were described as being exceedingly important to participants in adolescence. It was consistently noted that during the most valuable period of the relationships, there was stability in the amount of time the adolescent and adult spent together. In terms of quality, a relationship in which they engaged in activities that allowed them to feel validated, purposeful, and important was identified.

Joe contended with a constant barrage of verbal abuse from his stepfather during childhood which left him feeling isolated, inadequate, and misunderstood in virtually every context he found himself in. In contrast, Joe noted the positive relationship he had with his uncle, and how special the validation his uncle gave him was to him, as the following reflection makes clear: "[My uncle] really acknowledged, one of the few people in that moment who really acknowledged 'the way he's treating you is not right.' Even if he didn't overtly say it, in his actions he did."

The quality of interactions adolescents have with adults, at its best, gives the youth a sense of importance and a correlation between how substantial the experience is and how important they are to the specific individual. It has been shown that role models serve to increase a teen's interpersonal abilities (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). This enhancement of social skill is speculated to cultivate a sense of confidence in other social interactions (Kogan, Brody, & Chen, 2011; Rhodes et al., 2006). Mitch's description of his relationship with his grandfather, one that imparted an omnipresent sense of comfort and support, allowed Mitch to conceive of aspirations previously unattained within his family. Terrence also spoke of a pivotal relationship he had with his

83

grandfather, and outlined the key attributes that gave their time together such meaning. According to the participant, it wasn't the grandiosity of scale that defined their interactions, but intimacy, authenticity, and uniqueness.

Drew discussed his relationship with a high school teacher as it related to the cultivation of social skill and self-esteem: "He would keep me after class to talk to me, and he didn't talk to anyone else during that time. It felt special. We talked about college, probably talked about women too, me and my girlfriend." In this case, exclusivity and a sense of privilege regarding his treatment by this teacher added to the quality of the time they spent together. In addition, the opportunity to talk candidly to a respected adult about issues on the forefront of an adolescent's mind—issues not easily discussed with other adults—made the relationship Drew had with this teacher memorable.

Drew also described a relationship he had with his advisor as qualitatively rich. He emphasized the new experiences and opportunities for learning he encountered while with his advisor. He remembered trips his mentor took him on:

> Me and my roommate, it used to be just me, but I had a roommate, and he would
>
> take us both, and we did lots of chemistry presentations. So we went on trips
>
> together, like Washington D.C., New Orleans, Miami, Cleveland, lots of places.

It is important to notice that, as in Drew's account of a previous role model, the significance of exclusivity emerges in this quote as well. The unstated implication is that the times when he alone was invited on trips was somehow preferable, more special. Additionally intrinsic in the relationship mentioned is the substantial amount of time the participant was spending with his mentor, yet another factor contributing to the ability for a relationship to deepen (Hurd & Sellers, 2013).

Research has found that merely the passing of time in a respected adult's company is not enough to provide the benefits of a role model to youth instead, as has already been alluded to, it is the quality of the interpersonal relationship that is most vital (Gaylord-Harden, 2010). Jason identified a basketball coach as having had a particularly profound influence in his life, not only because of the amount of time they spent together but also due to his coach going over and above his job description in attending to Jason and his fellow teammates. This approach allowed Jason, and presumably other team members, to experience the coach in a capacity that extended beyond his job function, thereby solidifying the relationship in multiple respects. Furthermore, the assurance of security implicit in the coach's verbalizations added to the sense of trust adolescents were able to invest into the relationship.

A similar example of an adolescent gravitating toward an authority figure who responded to him in a manner that exceeded the anticipated bounds of his functions was also alluded to by Travis, who spoke of a well-liked high school vice principal who performed magic tricks and sought the participant out when he failed to attend school. The participant acknowledged his great appreciation of the eccentric measures this school official took to keep him on track, and confirmed that this relationship, forged in his adolescence, has been maintained into his adulthood. Research on fathers' interactions with their sons found that the relationships which moved beyond traditional father/son dynamic, and incorporated a range of activities performed together, proved to have the strongest effects (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013).

In considering the types of interactions that qualitatively and quantitatively prove efficacious, it is also imperative to give significant attention to the relationships that did not result in the transition of an authority figure to that of a role model. Eric described a

contentious relationship he had in childhood and early adolescence with a male caretaker who spent long periods of time with him when his guardian was working or otherwise occupied. Eric's family engaged the caretaker in the hopes that he would provide a strong role model function; however, the caretaker's domineering and often abusive form of authority made their time together qualitatively unbearable, thus having an adverse effect. This makes it apparent that if an authority figure is not one who can connect with a youth in a productive manner, it is at best a futile relationship and, at worst, an injurious one. The relationship mentioned above was qualitatively destructive—the extensive quantity of the interaction only multiplied its detrimental effects.

Interventions with an adolescent can also be unfulfilling when conducted in a manner less ostensibly destructive than the one illustrated above. Gerard spoke of having such a relationship with his father. While the father was not abusive and did not subject Gerard to any explicitly offensive behavior, implicit factors, more specifically, the disengagement or lack of attention to accomplishments or interests of Gerard, led to a relationship that felt less qualitatively satisfying in the subject's perspective.

Gerard's description indicated that even when a father is present in his son's life, the relationship can still lack the depth of substance essential for making an adolescent feel special and perceive himself to be worthwhile in the eyes of his parent. In contrast, Gerard was able to illustrate how the response of his mother differed and, as a result, validated him and strengthened their relationship. It is important for parents to consider that approaches to interaction that focus on expanding adolescents' self-worth, and affirming their status as uniquely worthwhile individuals will prove most valuable. Propinquity, on its own, is unlikely to generate an adequate relational experience for adolescents.

Quality of adult interventions with adolescents can also be affected by the limitations of authority positions. Carl commented on the importance of consistency in role model figures and found the ephemeral quality of many authority figures encountered to be an impediment. Additionally, the isolation of such figures' influence to a limited area of an adolescent's life and experiences was also regarded as being responsible for a youth's disengagement. This suggests that the efficacy of various potential role models is attenuated by the adolescent's compartmentalization of their modeling contributions.

Authority figures capable of transcending their primary functions by demonstrating the capacity to interact with an adolescent in a more eclectic and expansive fashion will be more successful in a migration from seemingly dictatorial figure to trusted adult confidant. Travis made this concept more salient in his discussions of the dual role his father played as both a paternal figure and his coach. In this instance, the quality of the relationship was strengthened, not only by the multiple functions Travis's father played, but by his father's willingness to reveal the rationale at the center of his parental motivation, i.e., being the kind of father he would have wanted for himself, thus expanding the realms of their interaction further.

The significance of unfettered honesty and explicit directives from adults. Participants consistently mentioned that the role models and authority figures they respected the most were those willing to tell them the unadulterated truth with the stipulation that the purpose was unveiling positive attributes being unutilized. Participants were receptive to constructive criticism from a trusted supportive adult, but were wary of "honesty" used as a pretext for shaming the adolescent. Eric reflected on his relationship with his uncle and the brutal honesty this individual employed, but indicated

that honesty and a direct manner of interaction on the part of an adult could make a positive contribution without a preexisting intimate relationship and could be accomplished by figures other than relatives. To illustrate, he referenced a memorable interaction he had with a police officer. It can be surmised that had this officer been available to the participant more frequently during the subject's adolescence, his influence might have left Eric with an even more impactful and indelible impression. The example given by Eric also brings to the forefront the advantages adolescents with an above-average social aptitude have. How those with lesser social skills might be afforded the opportunities available to the more gregarious must be investigated through further research.

Jason spoke of a similar experience in which an invested and well-respected teacher confronted him on his apathetic academic performance. Similar situations had been alluded to by other participants as well. For example, in speaking of his experience with a pivotal role model who served as his academic advisor during his initial years in college, participant Drew reflected on this authoritative figure's candor and ability to confront him about unproductive behavior in a manner that projected genuine concern. Carl also reflected the honesty and unconditional concern he received from a school principal who looked out for him throughout his formative years. For Terrence, the figure who offered transformative support was a relative. He recollected the wisdom his grandfather imparted when providing direction invaluable in preparing Terrence for life's challenges. In such instances, the frankness of the role model, coupled with the individuality of the interactions, constituted exchanges that would be long-remembered.

Subjects often conversed about their need to receive not only limitations and guidance in their youth, but also to receive precise directives regarding how they should

implement such commands. Carl spoke of the nebulous nature of advice given to him by adults and the confusion such ambiguity produced, whereas Gerard expressed having received an honest view of life from his father. In this case, his father's position as a police officer and his keenness to accurately share the perils of a criminal existence was vital to Gerard's choice to veer away from illicit activities, regardless of the grandeur it exuded. Sometimes an adult may speak in a manner that he considers honest, but which may be perceived as flawed, lacking in insight, or having been delivered in so pejorative a fashion as to be dissuasive. Gerard mentioned one such instance in which he was given a bleak forecast from a higher education professional. The pessimism inherent in the message, however, provoked a strong effort by Gerard to negate its legitimacy.

In a number of participant examples, the directness of adults contributed to the adolescent's willingness to take accountability for his actions or negligence. As a contrast, some subjects spoke of the more subtle messages conveyed to them as teenagers. In the case of some adult interventions, the good intentions of the authority figures were often missed at the time of adolescence but, with maturity, perceptions evolved. For instance, in recounting his history with the school principal, Jason was able to see that, although often hard on him, he also acknowledged Jason's potential. This example gives credence to the utility of straightforward interventions with adolescents to be motivating. In an example discussed above, describing how Jason was frequently targeted by a school official for inspections of his locker and clothing, the insinuations of these security check measures created a tone of distrust which likely fed the contentious dynamics the authority figure had with the teenager. Although, as an adult, Jason was capable of interpreting the concern underlying his principal's actions, the abhorrence he

felt as a teenager nevertheless prevented him from receiving support when he was most at risk.

It is important to acknowledge the fundamental differences in responses to various life events that will manifest in adolescence and adulthood. Research indicates there are two neurobiological systems charged with behavior regulation in adolescents, the *socioemotional* and *cognitive* systems (Casey et al., 2010; Steinberg, 2008). In adolescence, these systems develop disproportionately. The socioemotional system, which helps one to seek pleasure and avoid discomfort, forms more quickly. The cognitive system, which controls executive functioning tasks, like controlling impulses and affect, assessing the pros and cons of a circumstance accurately, and integrating the information of multiple sources in decision-making efforts, develops more slowly. This inconsistency results in a brain wired to seek pleasure, but not yet ready to weigh the consequences of actions accurately. This tendency makes the guidance of adults who can help adolescents assess consequences critical (Casey et al., 2010; Steinberg, 2008).

Travis also commented on the nature of his relationship with his father, whose strictness was a hallmark of Travis's formative years (although less so as Travis got older). Travis remarked upon having felt disconnected from his father, a reaction indicative of the difficulty adolescents may have in relationships that feel primarily punitive. Thus, a variety of role models, with varying authoritative responsibilities, is like to provide teens with the richest resources from which to obtain support.

Authority figure expectations and adolescent self-efficacy. Throughout this study, subjects routinely discussed relationships with adults that helped to reveal to the adolescent skills or talents he previously did not know he possessed. In part, these talents became evident as the adolescent sought to impress his role model. Eric related the

instance in which the concept of a work ethic was instilled by his uncle when they worked together. Similarly, Joe reflected on the pride he felt while excelling in his training as a truck driver. The accolades he received were magnified in significance as they were in such stark contrast with the pejorative verbalizations he frequently heard from his stepfather.

Research has shown that an individual's level of competency is often best assessed by confidence and conviction in an ability to perform successfully, rather than actual ability (Pajares, 2006). However, a belief in one's ability, even misguided, may encourage further efforts which would likely result, over time, in greater aptitude. Optimally, the feeling of autonomy as a result of recognition of ability, such as that acknowledged by Joe in his truck driving efforts, is earned through diligent training and successful performance in positive contexts. However, adolescents may concentrate on achievement in socially illegitimate ways, as these contexts may be viewed as more rewarding. The gains seem exponentially greater than would be attained through conventional means, and the effort involved less arduous. For example, Carl related the sense of accomplishment earning money from his adolescent exploits in criminal activity gave him. Creating a space for adolescents to feel a sense of accomplishment through positive endeavors can counteract their temptation to obtain a sense of independence through pernicious means.

When a respected teacher introduced Drew to the possibility of attending college, Drew's pride in his status as an intelligent college-bound student established a sense of self-efficacy. As the opportunity was put forth for him to choose a more promising and prosperous life trajectory, and the destructive effects of the alternative course became

salient, he funneled his energies into the abilities recognized by educators, the educational system as a whole, and eventually himself.

As discussed in the review of the literature, the correlation between academic achievement and self-efficacy is substantial (Pajares, 2006). An expansive number of elements contribute to the actualization of successful academic performance; however, self-efficacy has been found to be the most critical. This characteristic accounts for 25% of the variance when predicting positive educational outcomes, suggesting that prioritizing and aggressively fostering self-efficacy in adolescents is likely to have a substantial impact in their scholastic experiences.

Sometimes older figures on the periphery of an adolescent's life giving well intentioned advice can serve as subtle role models, with their contributions possibly remaining largely unacknowledged. Jason remarked upon having had such a person in his life, the friend of his brother. It was not until this model, who often attempted to lead Jason away from illegal activities, unintentionally challenged the utility of Jason's means of financially sustaining himself, that Jason considered an alternate way of life.

The power of role models to exhibit a lifestyle congruent with their advisements is an essential element of this illustration. Through the transmission of words he had heard into a visual realization, Jason was able to redefine his ideologies regarding self-efficacy and view it as obtainable through positive means. Another issue to consider in the previous example is the environment of the persuasive interchange. The role model figure was finally perceived as an individual worth listening to in a social milieu, where it was less likely that an adolescent would be alerted to erect defenses against conversations promoting prudence. It demonstrates how authority figure relationships can flourish and transition into role model relationships more readily when they are permitted to expand

beyond their expected confines. In this case, the expansion was in terms of environment, but such an extension of interactions could also include communication and subject matter discussed during activities engaged in together. In the discussion of the methods for transmitting a sense of self-efficacy to adolescents, a simple and poignant illustration was Terrence's grandfather's frequent reminder to him, "You have purpose."

Adolescents who sought out role models with traits missing in parents. The most valued attributes participants ascribed to positive authority figures functioning as role models were those that compensated for particular qualities absent from their parents. Mentees who provide a surrogate for traits missing in parents are often a safe haven for adolescents. They serve as a less punitive source of guidance, thus permitting teens to be more disclosing and expressive, and enabling them to derive more practical courses of action with better results (Rhodes, 2002). The discovery of an individual encompassing these traits often allowed adolescents to view the world, and their role within it, in a more accurate and favorable light. In Erikson's (1968) work in developmental psychology, he found the central task of a youth's transition into autonomy as being a reconciliation of identity, a process which involved disentangling one's genuine sense of self from those emanating from numerous alternative sources, primarily family members. Erikson noted that a healthful identity is acquired through identity exploration and commitment.

Exploration, however, may be hampered if a youth is exposed to only inaccurate adult representations or expectations. For this reason, adolescents may require sources of emotional guidance other than their parents. Joe described a defining experience working in a trucking company as a 17 year old. He remarked that the authority figure he interfaced served to counteract the negative appraisals consistently delivered by his

stepfather. Mitch expanded on this theme in his exploration of the dramatically different relationship he had with his father's brother from the one he had with his largely absentee father.

One participant, Eric, noted being a "sensitive" child who had been abandoned in early childhood by both his parents. Furthermore, the extended family members who raised him, in an effort to protect him from unpleasant truths and to contain family secrets, withheld pertinent information, for instance, the whereabouts of the mother who absconded, and the identity of his half-sister. According to Eric, in his family there was more than an amorphous air of distrust, the distrust was personalized: "I don't trust you." A legacy of this attitude was the difficulty he had in confiding with others and being able to accept a well-intentioned adult's advisements. Despite such formative experiences with adults, a guidance counselor at his school allowed him to revise his view of adults. The meetings with his guidance counselor, which occurred throughout his preteen and early teenage years, started out as a pretext for avoiding class. Eventually, however, those meetings became a refuge for Eric, where his concerns, for the first time in his life, were the focus. It also introduced him to an individual who presented himself in a manner markedly dissimilar from the other males he encountered: the counselor exemplified calmness, nurturance, and empathy. This example illuminates a number of issues confronting Black adolescent males upon meeting a potential role model at a remove from what is expected. In this instance, the warmth conveyed by the counselor led the participant to reflect on whether it was an attribute of the counselor's sexual orientation, possibly to gain an understanding of whether or not Eric himself could feasibly adopt similar traits while maintaining a sense of masculinity.

Traditional conceptualizations of African American identity include many of the aspects discussed by subjects, including being a stable provider, competitive, virile, and aggressive. Research by Hammond and Mattis (2005), however, found supplemental identifying traits of the African American male, which include a sense of connection with family, friends and themselves; the ability to make amends and learn from past situations through being active community participants; the ability to navigate through the stages of manhood; and the ability to predict and adequately handle threats. Emphasis on these lesser-focused-on realities could assist adolescents in understanding the magnitude of their worth as developing males, and attenuate the limiting self-perception they may have about what it means to be a man.

Eric also described formulating an understanding of the counselor in comparison to other men in the community ostensibly to ascertain the degree to which he was an anomaly as a male representative. Finally, evident in his description of the interaction is a desire for nurturance and sincerity, whether through demeanor, conversational content, or physical gestures. The participant mentioned that he continues to struggle, in moments of conflict, with his instinctive and decidedly male internal aggression. It can be hypothesized that the ability he has to detect his anger, and the discomfort it causes him, may come from his exposure to an antithetical male figure. The fact that the admired, yet unusual, sense of calmness demonstrated by his guidance counselor was not demonstrated by Eric's relatives or other community members, coupled with the relatively limited interactions Eric had with the counselor, did not enable Eric to incorporate fully into his emotional management those qualities he admired in the counselor. This would suggest that consistent, long-term involvement from a positive

authority figure could best influence an adolescent to integrate admired traits into his social skills repertoire.

The craving for a more nurturing style of male interaction Eric alluded to was also expressed by Carl, who recognized this more vulnerable characteristic, particularly as it relates to verbal nurturance, was often perceived by adults in his life as antithetical to the role of strength and financial provision associated with males. Carl, as a youth, challenged the emotional rigidity in his household and, in a reversal of roles, attempted to model the physical affection he wished to receive. His efforts were interpreted negatively by his parents. In this case and many others, the inability to obtain more covertly essential forms of support pushed the subject toward mentors. Although this figure also lacked an overt emotional expressiveness, the interaction allowed Carl a distraction from familial deficits.

It must be recognized that although male nurturance is less culturally familiar, it is not incompatible with alternative, stereotypically-validated male attributes. Carl discussed how he has changed the cultural landscape where displays of affection and emotionality are concerned by this revealing statement: "When my son was born, I made a vow that every day we would have to say, 'I love you.'" Gerard added to this theme in his discussion of his Uncle T. In contrast with his father, who, according to the participant, always conveyed a sense of urgency toward nonfamilial duties, saying, "I got to go," or "I have stuff to do," Uncle T made spending time with Gerard a priority. One participant commented on feeling more supported by authority figures other than his parents, as the fear of disciplinary reprisal was greatly diminished. He pointed out, "With my teachers and vice principal I could be much more open than I could be with my dad, because, like I said, they couldn't do too much to me, but my parents could."

96

Geographic relocations/impact of transitional role models. The theme of geographical relocations was frequently discussed by participants. In particular, subjects reflected on feelings of ambivalence that vacillated between a jarring cognizance of how dissimilar their environments were and anticipation and hopefulness about the opportunity for a fresh start. Whether their perspective on the change in location was viewed as positive or negative was contingent upon the support they were receiving in acclimating to a different social climate. The importance of role models through such transitions played a critical role in the degree to which they adapted to a new situation, a period of particular vulnerability for an adolescent. Therefore, the traits of a transitional role model that most effectively encourage a sense of belonging, purpose, and optimism in adolescents must be ascertained.

It has been posited that the social isolation of many inner city communities result in grave disadvantages for the residents (Wilson, 1987). Furthermore, American sociologist Wilson argued that, in an effort to create viable living situations, isolated communities may form a novel, accepting culture which often operates counter to the preexisting mainstream culture. For Drew, the mental stagnation manifested by his life in the relative fishbowl of an inner-city environment was lifted by a college tour he went on in late adolescence. Drew's experience of venturing beyond the strictures of social isolation and being released from the world that he was accustomed to illuminated the possibility of a novel and stimulating future in an expanded universe. Although an experience like this can be fortuitous, the navigation of the disparity between a former lifestyle and a new lifestyle can benefit in late adolescence from the guidance of a role model during the transitional period. Drew, as discussed above, described such a

97

transitional role model encountered while working in a chemistry lab when he was on the verge of young adulthood.

Religious figures have also been identified as transitional role models. Joe described how he quelled the fear and dejection he felt while incarcerated during his late teens and early adulthood by seeking solace from a higher power. In accordance with Joe's experience, spirituality in its various forms has been found to play a vital role in the lives of teens who subscribe to it. For instance, one research study found that daily spiritual experiences moderated the effects of community violence on African American teenagers (Shannon, Oakes, Scheers, Richardson, & Stills, 2013). Willing adolescents could benefit from increased contacts with spiritual leaders or adults who can share in these experiences with them. Such figures may also provide substantial role modeling source potential.

Some subjects talked about separating their time between two geographical locations. These locations often varied culturally, with one being more representative of an inner-city location, and the other being somewhat more suburban. In some instances, the vacillation between neighborhoods was done concurrently, with the adolescent choosing to live in one neighborhood and frequenting another. In other instances, the change in location was due to the relocation of his entire family, which compelled the adolescent to transition from one environment to another culturally unfamiliar environment. Gerard, as discussed above, related such experience when moving from New Brunswick to North Brunswick, New Jersey, in his fourth-grade school year.

For some, however, a geographical change may obscure areas of progress rather than broaden horizons. Eric spoke of his dichotomous experiences in Brooklyn and Queens, and reflected upon the lack of positive transitional role models available to

support him through geographic fluctuations, particularly as he encountered dangerous situations. In his case, a void in his life was created when he was detached from a pivotal role model (the coach), and an inclusive community of peers (the team). Furthermore, as no transitional role model was identified in his novel setting, he was obliged to navigate treacherous social terrain largely on his own. Jason further detailed his regret for having to break ties with those in his former community by saying: "If I would have never moved, I would have played basketball throughout high school. I, like, would have [gone] to college like everybody else on the team did."

Mitch described a geographical change in location in his elucidation of the brief transfer from a private elementary school to a public high school during his freshman year. Ironically, his inclusion in the public school milieu gave him a greater understanding of his community; nevertheless, he viewed this experience in a comparative manner as it related to his preconception of the community and who he wanted to be as a person. Similarly, the novelty inherent in his situation altered his viewpoint of academic endeavors, as he no longer equated freedom as a rationale for neglect but, rather, as a motivator. The transition introduced Mitch to a setting that encouraged him to hone organizational skills which fostered self-efficacy. In essence, the introduction of a new geographic setting encouraged introspection and a positive adaptation. The transitional models who facilitated this change were the minimally familiar members of his new community who gave him an immediate sense of acceptance.

Adult Perspective of Role Modeling

Adolescent and Adult Perspectives of Peripheral Negative Authority Figures Encountered in Youth. Participants noted receiving messages through adolescence

condoning behaviors that can be deemed as negative, such as actions that encourage aggression, materialism and criminality, and disregarding for the negative consequences of decidedly hedonistic or irresponsible behavior. These actions were typically reinforced in two manners, either by the observation of individuals, or communities as a whole, who were actively participating in and/or condoning the behavior; or through the belief that the negative behavior they were partaking in was their only option to provide themselves with the necessities of life—no alternative existed.

Joe's engaging in physical altercations was a routine occurrence in his life. He regarded this behavior as a necessary response to his family's constant changes of residence—his survival threatened with every change in environment they forced him to confront. Joe not only fought to assert his own position within his community, but fought to protect his siblings from neighborhood persecution as they were less apt to engage in physical confrontations on their own behalf. His demonstrations of aggression, ostensibly critical for the protection of himself and his family, were widely respected and expected in the community. Furthermore, adults in Joe's family fostered his belief in the need to fight and validated his ability and willingness towards confrontation. Fighting became the only way he could avoid a potentially violent situation at home. Consequently, alternatives to this behavior were never entertained.

It was evident when Joe related his mother's attitude about fighting and the negative consequences that awaited him at home if he refused to engage in such activity, as discussed above, that a constant negotiation of the costs and benefits of fighting in any given situation were considered without the benefit of adult figures functioning in a stabilizing or positive manner. Given Joe's seeming distaste for such altercations, it became a circumstance in which he inevitably suffered a loss, irrespective of his decision

to fight or to refrain. Moreover, in that particular situation, a sense of obligation toward his brother created further discord between himself and the peers whose respect he had recently, and aggressively, earned, leading to a cyclical pattern of social rejection, mandated aggression, and tentative community acceptance.

Eric also noted being involved in negative behaviors as an adolescent. In particular, abandonment by his parents, followed by the death of his primary caretaker (his grandmother) when he was 16 years old, ushered in an era of instability and chaos, culminating in a cycle of criminal activity. The subject spoke of his criminal activities as being borne of a lack of guidance and necessity. They quickly became a means of self-sustenance acceptable within his community. Similar explicit and implicit messages, whether created within families, as in the case of Joe, or communities, as in the case of Eric, create a bind for adolescents who crave an alternative to negative behaviors, but are concerned that further persecution may accompany an unorthodox way of functioning. The dissenting voice of a respected adult may serve to influence an adolescent to diverge from the entrenchment of a negative social pattern.

Mitch acknowledged having a clear choice regarding involvement in criminal activity in adolescence, but still reflected the theme of participating in illicit activity for survival as it related to others with a negative reputation for selling drugs. Despite the fact that such drug dealers were seen as typical representations of adult figures in the neighborhood, their advice to him discouraging his participation in criminal activity, in light of their own behavior, may have reinforced the concept that, when another choice is practical, alternate means of survival are preferable.

Although many of the research subjects spoke of criminal involvement deriving from necessity or survival, some disclosed less exigent lures towards illicit activities:

101

curiosity, a desire for a respected reputation on the streets, a need for the sense of belonging, and/or materialistic motivations. For example, Drew described his entrapment in negative cycles of behavior as initially emanating from a yearning to attain material possessions. Eventually, however, his behaviors were sustained more by familiarity and expectation and his original motives, such as than necessity or inclusion, became obscured. This adherence to the familiar can work in the opposing direction as well, and if respected adult figures are able to communicate a comparable allure in positive behavior, the resulting positive actions can become habit forming as well. The negative authority figures utilized varying approaches to sway the participations in their direction: some were outwardly amiable, and elicited the respect and admiration of adolescents; others bred resentful sentiments in the participants that still linger in adulthood.

Conception of Self as Role Model. As participants reflected on how role models shaped the way they currently interact with adolescents as adults, their struggle to tease apart both positive and negative lessons they have learned became apparent. Negative traits of authority figures have a more deleterious impact as participants often resist acknowledging those elements within themselves. Many, however, were able to reflect upon internal battles confronting facets of themselves reminiscent of often destructive influences encountered as adolescents. Joe described the difficulty of acknowledging temper flares which mirrored those of his stepfather. Mitch similarly discussed his concerns regarding personal negative attributes he has detected that remind him of those exhibited by his father. Even with that acknowledgment, he was able to identify positive messages he was able to impart to his younger relatives, such as to encourage them to pursue their education and to avoid his mistakes, that aided in his self-perception as a role-model figure, all the while claiming that he was not "trying to be" a role model.

Other participants were extremely committed to practicing behaviors in stark contrast to their fathers. Eric, who discussed his childhood history of abandonment, described his parental style of frequent interaction and provision of protection. Drew commented on his determination to act in opposition to his paternal example of absentee fatherhood by remaining engaged with his children.

For some, integral to choosing a course of action contrary to that which proved harmful to them, was the ability to recognize that even though negative traits may have been adopted, the choice was theirs to counteract or succumb to them. The desire to rise above the example set for them was expressed by Drew, whose aspiration of helping others encompassed not only a sense of obligation to at-risk youth, but also to the larger community. Jason spoke of his identity as a role model coming full circle, as discussed above, when he came into contact with the police officer who had arrested him on numerous occasions in youth and whom he often felt had unduly harassed him. Carl also discussed a "full circle" conceptualization of his life and role-model identity with the realization that he no longer chose to define his worth by the opinion of those who did not have his best interests in mind.

Characteristics Pertinent to Role Model Identity. For Carl, creating an environment for youth in which they can express a range of emotions, particularly more vulnerable ones, became a major focus. He articulated his quest to promote emotional connections in youth and the challenges he faces in relation to this endeavor. In relation to deficits experienced in his relationship with his father, Jason identified earning respect from adolescents, and using that respect to point out areas in need of change, to be an essential attribute of role modeling.

Gerard considered his approach to being a role model as providing guidance to children, peers, and any individual willing to utilize his support. Furthermore, his commitment to assisting others has manifested in his decision take custody of the children of a relative unable to care for them adequately. The eclectic sources he draws upon in order to fulfill the responsibility he has undertaken incorporate aspects of guidance he received and craved growing up, as well as recognition of the specific needs of the children in his care. He acknowledged that frequent associations with youth in his daily life may have been helpful in his quest to provide these children with the home life they deserve. He described his consistent interactions with them with regard to their educational, social, and familial lives.

The vital nature of earnest communication was cited by Travis as being an essential component of adult/adolescent relationships and gave as an example his experience as a camp counselor where he utilized, as its primary component, an approach that incorporated an ability to relate to youth.

Limitations of the Current Study

Since this study relied upon the adult perceptions of adolescent experiences, it can be expected that the recollections of authority figures may be influenced by life experiences occurring subsequently in adulthood and, therefore, may have lacked some of the authenticity of the adolescent experience. Additionally, the criteria for this research required participants to be able to identify role model figures in their lives which may have excluded the viewpoints of those unable to acquire similar guidance in youth, arguably the adolescents in gravest need of a mentor. Furthermore, Black male participants were uniformly cognizant of the inadequacy of role model figures for adolescents in the community, consequently, they may not have given full consideration

to the significance of negative adult figures who were influential during their adolescence. Additionally, because this study utilized a small networked sample of participants, caution must be exercised in making generalizations. It is important that similar research be replicated with a larger and more geographically diverse sample.

A final limitation of this study was the potential for researcher bias, as one investigator was responsible for creating the assessment instruments, conducting the interviews, and interpreting the data. Additionally, given the researcher's great interest and investment in the subject matter, her extensive involvement in this study's conceptualization, implementation, and analysis may have contributed to investigator bias and may have influenced the findings of this study.

Implications for Future Research

As this study was a retrospective one, gaining an understanding of adolescents' relationships with authority figures by replicating this study with an adolescent sample would capture more accurately the adolescent perspective and would be helpful in supplementing the findings of this study. Additionally, one of the salient aspects of this study illustrates that adolescents with a more socially amenable manner experience a smoother facilitation of interactions with adults. Thus, the ways in which more introverted or socially cautious adolescents in need of role models can acquire adult support also requires investigation.

Research on African American youth tends to focus on those exhibiting externalizing behaviors, possibly as a result of the tendency to focus on children who disrupt the academic structure, as opposed to those who internalize their difficulties. Consequently, those who abide by formal rules, but struggle internally, often go unnoticed. As reflected by subjects in this study, this practice is often isolating, leading

more reserved adolescents to feel they have few places to turn for mentorship. Further research on how introverted Black males in need of support can be identified and guided is of paramount importance.

Implications for Potential Role Models

Adolescents typically crave adult attention, interaction and support, although they seldom have the facility to reach out to an adult. This study hopefully will give authority figures interfacing with youth on a consistent basis the motivation to reach out to teens in their sphere, thus taking the onus off teens to form connections with adults who will give them the guidance necessary for evolution through a characteristically tumultuous life period. Additionally, if adults can become aware of the qualities most beneficial to a youth/authority figure connection, a wider breadth of social resources will become available to adolescents.

Implications for Families

Families can assist adolescents by consciously assessing the authority figures to whom their children are exposed, both positive and negative, and conversing with their teens about the importance of these relationships in their lives. In the event adolescents lack sufficient connections with positive figures, plans to involve them with programs or organizations which promote such relationships, particularly when they are identified with salient interests of adolescents', could be beneficial.

Consistency in an authority figure's availability is central to effectual role modeling. For this reason, the most logical candidates for role modeling are family members and, predictably, each subject identified at least one of their role model figures to be a family member. Because the temporary or long-term loss of such a figure is devastating to adolescents, when families encounter such situations, for example, due to

changes in residence or different life circumstances, or that an adolescent's relationship

with the figure has undergone a gradual or more abrupt distancing, reflection on how a

transitional role model can be utilized may be of critical importance. Transitional models

identified in this research include alternate family members, coaches, counselors, and

teachers. Religion, spirituality, religious figures, and other spiritual providers may also

serve this function: one participant even identified God as a powerful supportive entity in

his life.

Implications for Schools and Community Resources

It is of paramount importance for schools and community resources to recognize

the dearth of accessible, positive role model figures, particularly those of similar race to

the adolescent population, and to educate those in positions of authority how to engage

effectively with youth. Creating an atmosphere and culture conducive to understanding

the fundamental needs of adolescents will be essential to their ability to "widen the net"

beyond the usual role model candidates to include others who can impart values such as

professionalism, strength, responsibility, and achievement. This goal may require

reconstruction of the concept of authority, so that it functions less as a punitive and

subjugating force and more as a stabilizing influence, encouraging order and the

promotion of valuable skills within each adolescent. Additionally, because it can be

difficult for an adolescent to reach out to an adult for emotional and social support, the

establishment of opportunities for faculty and staff in schools to forge such connections

proactively must be more directly considered and employed.

Implications for Psychologists, Social Workers and School Counselors

Mental health professionals who work with adolescents can benefit from

understanding the motivations of those whom they treat. This would aid therapists and

counselors in connecting with youth more effectively, as well as give youth greater opportunities to identify individuals within their social sphere capable of acting as role model figures. It is additionally imperative for mental health workers to have full knowledge of the resources available to, and compatible with, students and adolescents, as accessing such resources can facilitate an youth's entry into supportive social environments. Furthermore, adults who provide mental health treatment to teens can assist in reframing or clarifying the often beneficent intentions guiding many of the authority figures in teens' lives, while simultaneously validating the adolescent's needs, so that a more accurate assessment of such adult's actions might be achieved. Optimally, if the themes within this study are incorporated into therapeutic relationships, a healthy template for adolescent interactions and relationships with adults can result.

Conclusions

Adolescents have found relationships with adults to have been beneficial when certain conditions were present. The transition of authority figures to role model figures was accomplished successfully with adults who had the following traits: they were easily related to due to similarity in interests, race or personal attributes; were perceived to have positive intentions; demonstrated respect; were invested in quality interactions; gave honest and direct advisements; had clear expectations of the adolescent; possessed traits missing in adolescents' parents; and/or introduced them to new environments or facilitated the adolescent's transition to a new environment. Subjects all identified themselves as role models to varying degrees and reflected upon necessary traits of adult mentees, including having a willingness to spend time with adolescents, set a positive example, remain relatable, have open communication, advise beneficially, show

affection, serve as a protector, help them realize their self-worth, and make it clear to

them what they stand to lose if an unproductive life course is chosen.

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Appendix A

Reflection on Role Models Interview

Semi-Structured Interview Template

What is your name?

What is your age?

What is your ethnicity?

1. Are you currently employed?

    a. What do you currently do for a living?

2. What is your highest level of education?

3. Are you married/divorced/separated/cohabiting?

    a. If yes, for how long.

    b. What does your spouse/significant other do for a living?

4. Do you have any children?

    a. If yes, how old are they?

    b. How would you characterize the relationship with your children?

    c. Do you live with them?

        i. How frequently are you able to see your children?

        ii. Are you satisfied with this frequency?

5. Where did you grow up?

    a. What was the community like?

    b. Were there concerns you had regarding your community?

    c. Were there support networks in your community?

6. Who was/were your primary caregiver(s) growing up?

119

a. What was your relationship like with this/these individual(s)?

7. What was your household like growing up?

   a. Would you consider it happy?

   b. Were there adequate financial resources?

   c. Did you have siblings?

   d. Were there extended family members in the household?

8. What was your relationship like with your biological father growing up?

   a. How often did you see him?

   b. What did types of things did you do when together?

   c. What is your current perception of your biological father?

9. In general, how did you feel about the following groups of male authority figures
   during your adolescence?

   A. Male Teachers

      i. Were these interactions mostly positive, negative or neutral? Why?

      ii. What was the community perception of these individuals?

      iii. What was your guardian's perception of these individuals?

   B. Male Police Officers

      i. Were these interactions mostly positive, negative or neutral? Why?

      ii. What was the community perception of these individuals?

      iii. What was your guardian's perception of these individuals?

   C. Male members of the community (i.e., neighbors, clergymen, gang members)

      i. Were these interactions mostly positive, negative or neutral? Why?

      ii. What was the community perception of these individuals?

      iii. What was your guardian's perception of these individuals?

    D. Older male family members

         i. Were these interactions mostly positive, negative or neutral? Why?

         ii. What was the community perception of these individuals?

         iii. What was your guardian's perception of these individuals?

    E. Male friends of the family (including any romantic partners of your guardian(s))

         i. Were these interactions mostly positive, negative or neutral? Why?

         ii. What was the community perception of these individuals?

         iii. What was your guardian's perception of these individuals?

10. Who were the specific male authority figures you saw on a consistent basis during adolescence?

    a. What was his relationship to you?

    b. Was the nature of that relationship positive or negative?

    c. What types of interactions did you have together?

    d. What subject matter did your communications consist of?

    e. Did he fit the perception you had of individuals in similar categories (i.e., teacher, family member, gang member)? In what ways was he similar/different?

    f. What was the community perception of this individual?

    g. What was your guardian's perception of this individual?

    h. How frequently were you in contact with him?

    i. For how long did you have contact with him?

         i. Was this contact voluntary?

         ii. How did this contact end?

j. Do you think your life be different in any way if this individual(s) were not present?

11. How did the relationship you had with nonbiological role model differ from the relationship you had with your father?

12. Has your perception of any of these authority figures changed for you since adolescence? How?

13. Do you consider yourself to be a role model?

a. If so, to whom are you a role-model?

b. What do you feel that title consists of?

14. How do you feel about the progress of your life so far, in terms of :

a. Financial Status

b. Social Status

c. Occupational satisfaction

15. Are you contented, discontented, etc.?

16. In what ways do you feel the presence of male authority figures in your adolescence have helped or hurt you?

17. What are your life goals?

What motivates you to achieve these goals?

Letter to Prospective Research Participants

The Impact of African American Male Authority Figures Who Transition into Role

Models in Adolescents' Lives

Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology
Rutgers University
152 Frelinghuysen
Piscataway, NJ 08854

Dear prospective research participant:

My name is Candace DeCaires-McCarthy and I am a Clinical Psychology

doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology

(GSAPP) at Rutgers University. Currently, I am working on my dissertation entitled

"The Impact of African American Male Authority Figures Who Transition into Role

Models in Adolescents' Lives."

Throughout my graduate training I have worked with adolescents and young

adults in a number of settings and therapeutic capacities. Of particular interest to me

were the relationships these individuals had with the authority figures in their lives and

the factors that fostered positive and enduring relationships between the two. There is a

need to gain understanding of this dynamic in order to begin affecting a change in the

ways authority figures communicate and relate to young juveniles.

To address this issue, I aim to interview appropriate research participants, such as

you, regarding their personal experiences with role models and authority figures to better

comprehend the factors which encourage and prohibit productive adult/adolescent

relationships. This interview can be conducted in a mutually convenient meeting place,

for instance a community center, a private office at Rutgers University or an alternative private area. You will receive a $15 gift certificate for participating in this study and participation is voluntary.

Information from the interviews conducted will be included in my dissertation; however, any identifying information about you, such as employment location, social affiliations or family membership, will be de-identified, disguised or withheld. Upon the study's completion, I will gladly discuss the findings with you if you wish.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me at 646-427-7901, or email me at candace.mccarthy@yahoo.com. Please leave your name and phone number, and I will respond as soon as possible. I look forward to speaking with you further.

Respectfully,

Candace DeCaires-McCarthy, Psy. M.
Clinical Psychology Doctoral Candidate
Email: candace.mccarthy@yahoo.com

Appendix C

Informed Consent Agreement

The Impact of African American Male Authority Figures Who Transition into Role Models in Adolescents' Lives

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Candace DeCaires-McCarthy, a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions or concerns, please address them with the investigator. You should be satisfied with the answers you receive prior to agreeing to take part in the study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the factors of adolescent/authority figure interactions that result in efficacious role modeling relationships amongst African American youths. This information will be used in the formulation of a dissertation and may eventually lead to the creation of training programs for those in positions of authority who work with youths.

Study Procedures:

This study will utilize a one-on-one, semi-structured interview format to interview African American males regarding their adolescent experiences of role models and authority figures. Interviews will vary in length taking anywhere between 90 minutes and 150 minutes. Only one interview will be required of each participant, although brief breaks will be permitted during the interview if requested. Upon completion of participant interviews, the researcher will assess all data for relevant themes.

Audio Taping:

Interviews will be audio taped as a requirement for participation in the study. These recordings will ensure responses are documented accurately and in their entirety.

Risks:

The interview may be time consuming and ask for personal information regarding your feelings and relationships, particularly as it pertains to past relationships. It is possible you will feel tired, or uncomfortable with particular questions. If this occurs, you can choose not to answer specific questions, ask for a break from the interview, or discontinue the interview process.

Benefits:

Positive benefits of participating in the study are that you make enjoy reflecting upon positive past relationships, particularly from an adult perspective. In addition, this research may be beneficial in creating an understanding of the methods of adult interactions that are most effective with at-risk adolescents. However, you may or may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

Compensation:

Upon the completion of the interview, you will receive a $15 gift certificate. Compensation will not be given to interviewees who have not concluded their interview.

Confidentiality:

This research is confidential. This means access to all records will be restricted to the principal investigator, members of the dissertation committee and the Rutgers Institutional Review Board. Additionally, all research data will be locked in a secure location. Your name will appear only on consent forms. These documents will be kept separate from other research records. When data is included in a dissertation, it will be

de-identified, and information regarding occupation, affiliations and familial memberships will be disguised or omitted. All study data will be kept for 3 years after the study has been closed, at which point the data will be destroyed.

Limits to Confidentiality:

Confidentiality may be compromised if the participant indicates the intent to harm himself or the intent to harm another individual. If such a situation occurs during the course of an interview, the interview will be concluded and the necessary medical and/or law enforcement authorities will be contacted.

Research Standards and Rights:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, YOU MAY WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANYTIME WITHOUT PENALTY. If you have any questions, concerns or comments regarding your participation in this study, you may contact the investigator or the investigator's dissertation chairperson at anytime at the addresses, telephone numbers or emails listed below:

> Candace DeCaires-McCarthy (Principal Investigator)
> Rutgers University, GSAPP
> 152 Frelinghuysen Road
> Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085
> Telephone: 646-427-7901
> Email: candace.mccarthy@yahoo.com
>
> Nancy Boyd-Franklin (Dissertation Chairperson)
> Rutgers University, GSAPP
> 152 Frelinghuysen Road
> Piscataway, NJ 08854-8085
> Telephone: 848-445-3924
> Email: boydfrank@aol.com

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a

copy of it for my files. By signing below, I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Video and Audio Taping Consent

Interviews will be audio taped as a requirement for participation in the study.

Recordings will be used to ensure information is accurately and thoroughly recorded.

These recordings (i.e. wav files, CDs) will be stored for 3 years after the study is

completed and then will be destroyed. The recordings will be stored in a secure location

and kept confidential.

Your signature on this form will grant the principal investigator permission to

record you during the interview in the above referenced study. The investigator will not

use recordings for any other reason than those stated in the consent form.

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Investigator (Print): _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____