

THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY ON THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG ADULT
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES RAISED WITH A STEPPARENT

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I would first like to give thanks and honor to my Heavenly Father for blessing me with the ability, determination, and strength to make it through. I am nothing without you!

To my family and friends who have encouraged, loved, and supported me every step of the way...even when I didn't willingly except it.

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ABSTRACT

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In this investigation, survey questions from the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 were analyzed to determine the degree to which religiosity and well-being were related for African American males raised in either a stepparent household or a traditional household. Only survey questions that were responded to by African American males in the age range of 18 to 29 years of age were analyzed. Because of the very low sample sizes of African American males between the ages of 18 and 29 in each of the four waves, data were examined across the four survey waves, rather than separately for each survey wave.

With respect to the first research hypothesis, “Religiosity is significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to African American males raised in a traditional nuclear household,” the results of the statistical analysis did not support this hypothesis. Regarding the second research hypothesis, “Religiosity will significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were in their youth,” results were supportive of this hypothesis. Concerning the third research hypothesis, “Emotional Wellbeing will be significantly higher among young adult

African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to African American males with lower levels of religiosity," results of the statistical analyses were not supportive of this hypothesis.

Based upon the results of this investigation, being raised in a stepparent household for African American males appeared to be unrelated to their religiosity being higher than their counterparts who were raised in a traditional household and unrelated to their wellbeing. Results were supportive, however, of a connection between African American males raised in a stepparent household and their degree of religiosity increasing over time.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The once routine husband and wife household is now being replaced by a new cultural worldview (Witte, 2015) with today's family widely representing "foster parenting, multicultural households, grandparents raising their grandchildren, same sex parenthood, blended households, transgender parenting, and surrogacy" (Lantz, 2012, p. 2). Even with these different family structures steadily increasing in numbers in the United States, a substantial number of families all over the world represent stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). Stepfamilies make up a wide trajectory of the family structures in the United States.

In the United States today, approximately four out of every 10 families are stepfamilies (Parker, 2011). According to Schramm and Adler-Baeder (2012), stepfamilies are not only very common but also very complex in both their structure and in how they function. Stepfamilies, in general, tend to face multiple challenges such as negotiating parental roles, decision making, and the sharing of parenting responsibilities between two sets of parents (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). Consequently, these challenges can become extremely strenuous and in-turn can lead to the dissolution of the marriage.

Research has shown that more than 75% of American households are commonly labeled "non-intact families" (Lantz, 2012, p. 2). This means that more than half of

American households are made up of a different family structure. According to Copen, Daniels, Vespa, and Mosher (2012), approximately 30% of children in the US will spend a period of time living in a stepfamily before they reach adulthood. However, culturally, many still consider the “nuclear family and marriage for life” as the norm (Miran, 2017, p. 332).

One of the most unfortunate issues with studying African Americans and family structure is the limited recent data available. The majority of the information is completely dated. Visher and Visher (2003) noted that the blended family type has become the normative family because more blended families exist than any other family type. Demographic trends in the past decades have led to an increased likelihood for both adults and children to spend part of their lives in a stepfamily (Papernow, 2013). According to Gonzales (2009), blended families are often formed through a remarriage, with most remarriages occurring due to a loss through either the death of a spouse or divorce (Scharman & Scharman, 2006). However, due to the rising rates of unmarried cohabiting parents, stepfamilies are increasingly preceded by neither divorce nor death (Papernow, 2018).

With nearly two-thirds of divorced women remarrying and three-fourths of divorced men remarrying (Dupuis, 2007), and approximately 65% of those individuals bringing children into the remarriage (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004), it is essential that these families receive the necessary support. In understanding the difficulties that many of these family's face, researchers may be able to provide further

insight into why many children report remarriage as being more stressful than divorce (Ahrons, 2006). Divorce and remarriage affect every household differently. Therefore, it is especially important for those who work with this population to understand some of the issues they may face.

Many children in the US live in an intact household, but even more live in a variety of family structures as their parents often repartner over the course of their childhood (Johnston, Cavanagh & Crosnoe, 2020). Afifi, Granger, Joseph, Denes & Aldeis (2015) note that children's social development can be shaped and directly effected as a result of experiencing their parents enter and exit marriages and relationships, setting the stage for their adult lives. A child's exposure to various family structures and family structure changes may lead to young adult relationships that are less likely to develop a stable foundation for the future (Johnston et al., 2020).

On the other hand, within the African American culture, previous research has revealed that African Americans were the least likely to marry and when they did, they did so later in life (Dixon, 2008). More recently, research has revealed that this trend continues to hold true with the decline in Black couples choosing to marry at all (Lovelace, 2016). However, despite the decline in marriage of African American couples, most African Americans symbolically view marriage in a positive light (Chaney, Stamps-Mitchell & Barker, 2014). This can be an important factor in the life of the young adult African American.

Young adulthood is a time in which many people marry and start families of their own (Arnett, 2000). It is important to understand how emerging from and/or transitioning into a stepfamily can affect every individual within the family dynamic. Within the African American culture, young adulthood may be accompanied by an increased exposure to racial and ethnic diversity (Brittian et al., 2015), making the transition all the more difficult. Emerging evidence continues to reveal that racial discrimination is a prominent source of psychosocial stress that has a major effect on the African American young man's emotional well-being (Williams & Mohammed, 2013).

In addition to those life stressful events, stressful events such as divorce, death, and remarriage has also been linked to increase the risk of a wide range of mental health problems during childhood into adulthood (Melhem, Walker, Moritz, & Brent, 2008). Mental health issues can lead to a range of issues such as depression, loneliness, and low self-worth. Stressful life events can have major negative effects on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals (Lesniak, Rudman, Rector, & Elkin, 2006).

Although psychological distress is thought to play an important role in the health status of ethnic minority groups and individuals of low economic status, psychological distress is also noted to have a greater effect on women than men (Lesniak et al., 2006; Matud, Bethencourt, & Ibañez, 2014). This can provide a false belief that men do not experience an elevated level of distress to stressful life events. There is not a one size fits all solution to dealing with life changing events; however, through research a better understanding can be obtained of the processes that some individuals experience.

Throughout history, religion has played a major role within the African American culture. Researchers have long shown that on average, Blacks report high levels of prayer, Bible study, and many other types of private religious involvement (Molock & Barksdale, 2013; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Schwadel & Smith, 2005). Other researchers have established the presence of a positive relationship between religiosity and improved mental and physical health outcomes (Holt, Clark, Wang, Williams, & Schulz, 2015; Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001). As researchers have documented that African Americans tend to have higher levels of religious involvement than European Americans, researchers have also generally supported the fact that African American females have higher levels of religiosity than African American males (Lesniak et al., 2006). This can provide another false belief that men do not typically use religious coping strategies to help cope with stressful life events.

Pargament, Koenig, & Perez (2000) show that religious coping has been associated with individuals' adjustment to major life stressors. More contemporary research has conceptualized these religious coping skills as either positive or negative in dimension (Pargament, Falb, Ano, & Wachholtz, 2013). This religious relationship can be extremely important to the young adult African American male who is trying to carve his own path through life.

Statement of the Problem

The current literature on stepfamilies poses several limitations such as “small sample sizes, strong reliance on archival data, ambiguous results, and a tendency to apply

commonly used family therapy techniques without always giving full consideration to their applicability with step families" (Gonzales, 2009, p. 150). Few clinical programs are available that offer training in therapy with stepfamily relationships (Papernow, 2013). Limited published literature is available in which researchers have addressed the effects and outcomes of adjustment issues on adolescents who were raised with stepparents and are now young adults who are currently attempting to live a life of their own outside of their family household. By conducting more in-depth research on how to serve these individuals better, particularly focusing on the experiences of the African American male, I believe professionals can assist in strengthening the family dynamics and possibly avoid a negative repeat cycle within the family unit.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not religiosity has an effect on the emotional well-being of young adult African American males who were raised with in a stepfamily. Also examined in this study was whether or not a statistically significant difference was present between those young adult African American males raised with a stepparent and those individuals who were raised with both of their biological parents. This researcher's intent was to determine whether religiosity's influence on emotional well-being was a more dominant factor for those young adult males who were raised with a stepparent.

For the African American male, dealing with issues such as his emotional well-being can bring about additional challenges while trying to function in a stepfamily

(Shafer, Jensen, & Holmes, 2017). For the purpose of this study, emotional well-being was examined in relation to the individuals' responses to questions concerning such feelings of depression, loneliness, and self-worth. Addressed in this investigation was how adolescent males viewed religion while growing up with stepparents and how the males currently view their religion as young adults.

The importance of this study was to identify both the strengths and weaknesses that may be present when working with African American young adult men who were raised with a stepparent. Focused on in this investigation was the relationship that religiosity has on the lives of young adult African American men who were raised in a stepfamily. The examination of the significance that religiosity has on the lives of these young adult men can lead to a better understanding of how important the role of religion is with this particular population.

Theoretical Framework

According to Farlex (2003), stress is defined as an organism's total response to environmental demands or pressures. Stress is a universal human phenomenon that will affect everyone at some point throughout their lifespan (Rew, Principe, & Hannah, 2012). Stress truly comes in all shapes, forms and fashion. Depending on how a person responds to stress, will determine how stress will affect their life.

Many times, stress is accompanied by periods of depression. As a matter of fact, several researchers report that stressful life events are strongly correlated with depressive symptoms (Hammen, 2005; Vrshek-Schallhorn et al., 2014). Interpersonal stressors, such

as divorce, the death of a parent, and stepfamily formation have been noted to be particularly strong predictors of major depressive symptoms and episodes in both children and adults (Sheets & Craighead, 2014).

Many theories have been developed and applied that attempt to explain the how and the why stressful life experiences can have negative effects on the lives of many individuals. Among the most commonly used of these theories are the psychosocial development theories.

Psychosocial Development Theory

Howard-Hamilton (1997) revised several of these existing theories and transformed them to fit the needs of a certain population, in particular, African American males. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development will be the actual theory that will be used for this study, in particular, the fifth stage of his psychosocial development theory, the identity development stage vs identity diffusion stage. The identity development stage versus the identity diffusion stage is the most appropriate stage to utilize for this study due to the age range of the participants and the stage of life in which these participants are in, young adulthood. This is the period of their life in which they are transitioning into a stage of trying to figure life out, outside of their parents' household.

Eight stages of psychosocial development. Erikson once referred to his well-known eight stages of psychosocial development as his "all-encompassing psychological theory" (Erikson, 1950/1963, p. 424). Erikson's psychosocial development theory,

“attempts to describe the full spectrum of the human life cycle and the dialectic relationship between the psychological and social dimensions of life” (Knight, 2017, p. 1048). Erikson’s theory was a radical move from the classical psychoanalytic focus, which focused more on the intrapsychic dynamics of the individual (Knight, 2017).

Erikson’s (1950/1963) eight stages of psychosocial development is considered a comprehensive theory that encompasses how an individual develops throughout every stage of life (Knight, 2017). In looking at the term *identity*, Erikson used this term to refer to a specific aspect of the self that provides “the quality of unity and purpose of the self” (McAdams, 1995, p. 385). In using the word *stage*, Erikson referenced this word to a period of life “such as childhood or adulthood and clarifies that in each of the eight developmental stages there is a pair of opposing psychological tendencies, which need to be balanced” (Knight, 2017, p. 1049).

Erikson believed that for each developmental stage to occur, a “crisis” must first occur. He considered this occurrence as a “turning point” in the life cycle due to growth and awareness (Erikson, 1968/1994). Each stage of growth occurs within both a social and intergenerational setting (Marcia & Josselson, 2013). Erikson (1968/1994) also believed that the personal structure begins to form at the previous stages, while all of the previous stages echo the current stage and influence how future stages are negotiated.

As a clinician, Erikson (1968/1994) noted that growth becomes one of “maldevelopment” if the integration of the two opposing poles does not occur (i.e., identity cohesion vs role confusion; intimacy vs isolation). With this, maldevelopment

takes the form of either “maladaptive tendencies” or “malignant tendencies” (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Maladaptive tendencies are tendencies that lean more towards the positive side while malignant tendencies lean more towards the negative side (Erikson et al., 1986). Both the negative and the positive must balance with one another within each stage of the eight stages of psychosocial development for adequate growth to occur (Kivnick & Wells, 2013). Knight provided an example that, “a client who has malignant tendencies rooted in the first developmental stage may have an over identification with mistrust in the self and world, and a resultant persistently pessimistic outlook on life with little or no hope (the virtue)” (2017, p. 1049).

For over four decades, researchers have attempted to validate empirically Erikson’s developmental theory (Knight, 2017). Many authors have provided empirical support for Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory, to be linked to personality development, identity formation, culture, and life cycle development (Conway & Holmes, 2004; Hearn et al., 2012; O’Brien, 2010). According to Howard-Hamilton (1997), the early stages of Erikson’s model are the stages that should be studied and explored when working with African American men.

Howard-Hamilton (1997) believed that the stages during childhood (trust vs mistrust) and adolescence (identity vs identity diffusion) are the most difficult stages for the African American male to master. Without the successful completion of these stages, the African American male will struggle within their academics, career, and social success throughout the remainder of their stages of life (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This

can be detrimental not only to the African American male as an individual, but the African American family man as a whole.

The identity development model is an age-related, epigenetic principle that was first proposed by theorist, Erik Erikson in 1980. It is a psychological, biological, and environmental model that emphasizes the growth of an individual as it relates to how they respond when faced with difficult challenges (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Erikson (1980) believed that emotional decision-making is a process that occurs at different stages of one's life. He also believed that a healthy functioning personality does not fully form within an individual until they have been able to resolve each crisis adequately, as each crisis arise (Erikson, 1980).

Erikson became one of the most respected and prolific authors of the 20th century. He wrote a number of books and numerous articles throughout his career. Erikson first developed his groundbreaking life cycle theory, eight stages of psychosocial development, in the first edition of the book, *Childhood and Society* in 1950 (Knight, 2017). As the years passed, Erikson expanded his theory, making it even more applicable. He developed eight stages that individual's encounter from birth to young adulthood, also known as emerging adulthood (Howard-Hamilton, 1997): Stage five was the concept used for this study:

1. Stage One: *Basic Trust vs Mistrust*; successful completion of this stage leads to a sense of belief as to whether or not society can be considered trustworthy.

2. Stage Two: *Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt*; successful completion of this stage occurs when the individual is able to move beyond self-consciousness and inferiority toward independence and pride.
3. Stage Three: *Initiative verse Guilt*; successful completion of this stage occurs when the individual is able to discover the personality and behaviors that are a good fit for them.
4. Stage Four: *Industry vs Inferiority*; successful completion of this stage occurs when a sense of competence has been developed.
5. Stage Five: *Identity Development vs Identity Diffusion*; successful completion of this stage is actually lifelong; this is the stage in which the individual begins to make ideological and career decisions that will organize their personal world. This stage evolves into fidelity and allegiance to a particular set of beliefs and comfort with who one is and who one desires to become.
6. Stage Six: *Intimacy vs Isolation*; successful completion of this stage occurs when the individual is able to establish sensitivity towards nurturing personal relationships.

The last two stages of Erikson's psychosocial development theory typically occur between adulthood and retirement.

7. Stage Seven: *Generativity vs Self-absorption*
8. Stage Eight: *Integrity vs Despair* (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

Research Questions/Hypothesis

Young adult African American males raised with a stepparent whose emotional well-being may have been influenced by religion were the focus of this investigation. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How does religiosity influence the emotional well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household?
2. Is there a difference in the emotional well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to those raised in intact households?

The following hypotheses are made:

1. Religiosity will be significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to those raised in intact households.
2. Religiosity will significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were an adolescent.
3. Emotional well-being will be significantly higher amongst young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to those with lower levels of religiosity.

Definition of Terms

1. Adolescence – is a developmental stage marked by significant cognitive growth and notable social transitions, such as the shift from elementary school to middle school (Charlesworth, 2015).
2. African American– one’s ethnic/racial group (Brannon, Markus, & Taylor, 2015).
3. Emotional Well-Being – related to mental health concerns such as stress, depression, and anxiety (Langston & Berger, 2011).
4. Intact Family – the standard against which other family constellations were initially judged (Ganong, Coleman, & Mapes, 1990).
5. Stepfamily – where a child lives with a biological parent and their new spouse or cohabiting partner (Jensen, Shafer, & Holmes, 2017)
6. Young Adult – also known as emerging adults (ages 18-29); an important period of development, when young men and women are making choices about education, career, and family (Shafer et al., 2017)
7. Religiosity – is a cultural value that plays a significant role in the lives of people of African descent (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002); defined in terms of public (participatory) and private (devotional) religious behavior (Mookherjee, 1994).

Significance of Study

Results from this research investigation may be used to answer some critical questions concerning the connection between religiosity and emotional well-being in the life of the African American young adult male. Understanding the effect of religion on

the emotional well-being of this population can be crucial in understanding not only how the African American male functions as an individual but how they may function within their own family, especially after being raised with a stepparent. This is especially important, considering how the stepfamily structure is one of the fastest growing family structures within the United States (Livingston, 2014; Visher & Visher, 2003). The data collected from this study can shine some light on several areas that may have an effect on the African American male's family life, whether negative or positive.

Delimitations

This study was subjected to the following delimitations. The researcher only included African American males from the ages of 18-29 who were raised with a stepparent from the "National Survey of Black Americans, Wave 1-4, 1979-1982, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 database." In addition, the researcher only utilized questions from the different "Waves" that could identify the influence that religion has on the African American male as an adolescent while being raised with a stepparent and how religion may affect the emotional well-being of the young adult African American males who was raised with a stepparent.

Summary

Today's American family household is a much broader and complex system than what once existed. Currently, children residing in the United States experience at least one family structural transition by the time they reach the age 13 (Manning, Brown, & Stykes, 2016), with many of these structural transitions forming stepfamilies (Ganong &

Coleman, 2017). Because nearly one-third of the population's children are estimated to live in a stepfamily household at some point of their life before reaching their 18th birthdays (Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995; Forehand, Parent, Golub, & Reid, 2015), it is essential to understand the factors that play a role in the adjustment into adulthood.

As a child transitions into young adulthood and into the phase of starting one's own family, it is important to understand how one's family structure and family background can heavily influence their individual well-being and adult household. Within the African American community, religion has played a central role in the lives of many (Lesniak et al., 2006). However, being that the majority of the research has focused on African American females, the study of how religion can affect the well-being of the African American male can be essential to the body of literature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Despite the growing number of stepfamilies, a paucity of research exists on the factors that are influential to the development and adjustment to this family structure. To understand even a glimpse of the complexity of a stepfamily, it is important to recognize the characteristics of such. Early evidence shows that children who are raised in stepfamilies are at a higher risk of developing negative outcomes when compared to children who are raised in first-marriage families (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000). Research has even indicated that children in stepfamilies not only generally have lower well-being than children in two-biological-parent households, but research has also shown that they have little to no advantage over those who were raised in a single-parent household (Amato, 2010). To assist this growing family population better, it is essential to take a deeper look into some of the components that play a very important role in the longevity of these families, specifically the African American stepfamily.

The issue of loss is a subject that many may agree, is a much too familiar association with African American men (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). For the African American male, it is quite probable and unfortunate that many of these men have experienced and even witnessed a great deal of loss within their communities, social circle, and family. Psychosocial development theories such as Erikson's eight stages of development, Bandura's self-efficacy and outcome expectations, and Oman and

Thoresen's (2003) spiritual modeling are all excellent theoretical frameworks that can also be utilized interconnectivity to discuss, address, and understand not only the challenges but also the complexity of growing up in a step family as an African American male.

Family Structures

Intact Families

Very little research has been conducted to study the African American male raised in an intact family household, and unfortunately, the research that has been done is extremely dated and more than likely no longer valid. Empirical support for the idea that family experiences have differential effects on children from intact and divorced families has been found in previous research (Horm-Wingerd, Groves, & Nekovei, 1992).

According to McGlurk and Glachan (1987) children from divorced families held a more sophisticated understanding of the permanence of family membership than those children from intact family households, while Moore, Cooper & Bickhard (1977) found that children from divorced families had a higher acceptance for a single parent household than those from an intact household.

Gender has also played a role in the differential effects of family experiences on children from intact families in comparison to those from divorced families (Horm-Wingerd et al., 1992). Camara (1979) reported that gender differences were found in children's understanding of family and family roles amongst school-aged children while other researchers found that there was no significant difference in regards to gender and

how children viewed family and family roles (Fu, Goodwin, Sporakowski & Hinkle, 1987). Several authors have suggested that the overall findings are heavily based on the actual experiences of the children who were raised in these households (Horm-Wingerd et al., 1992).

Stepfamilies

The terms *stepfamilies* and *blended families* are often used interchangeably; however, according to Gonzales (2009) and Gibson (2013), these terms do have their differences. According to Gibson (2013), it first must be understood that the constructs of a family, and the inclusion or membership within a family is not necessarily universal, which distinguishes the term step from blended. The term blended family often replaces the term stepfamily “to describe a family in which a new spousal relationship is formed (as either the result of a divorce or death of one parent), which results in the joining of either one or both parents’ child or children” (Gonzales, 2009, p. 148). This definition ironically appears to be almost the identical definition to describe a stepfamily. According to Ganong and Coleman (2004, p. 108), “a step-family is formed when one or both adults in a new committed relationship bring with them a child or children from a previous relationship.”

Challenges in Stepfamilies

Parenting

Parenting is one of the most common challenges that stepfamilies may face. Baumrind’s (1991) threefold typology of parenting styles has been frequently used for

over two decades in the research of child development. She has labeled these styles as *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, and *permissive*. The authoritative parenting style seeks to provide “rational direction” for their child’s activities by encouraging a “verbal give and take” exchange, while the authoritarian parenting style does not seek this type of exchange, but instead values “obedience” and may even resort to “forceful measures” when conflict arises (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). However, the permissive parenting style may be the most ineffective style of parenting. The permissive parent is used primarily as a resource to be used however the child sees fits but does not play an active role “in the shaping or altering of the behavior of the child” (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62).

Inadequate parenting has often been considered a contributing factor when researching negative child behavior (Chan & Koo, 2011). According to Teachman and Tedrow (2008), stepparenting is an increasingly common parenting role, which can involve high levels of parenting stress. Several studies have been conducted to determine which parenting styles are associated with more positive child behavior outcomes. Chan and Koo (2011) presented a study to argue whether parenting styles differed depending on the family structure.

Astone and McLanahan (1991) argued that in stepfamilies, the parental authority structure is typically weaker than the nuclear family structure. Biblarz and Raftery (1999) determined that many stepparents felt as though they had limited authority to discipline their stepchildren. Chan and Koo (2011) revealed that stepfamilies are more likely to

adopt an authoritarian or permissive parenting style rather than an authoritative parenting style.

Along with examining how family structure can affect the adopted parenting style, it is also important to understand how family structure and parenting as a whole can influence the adolescents' wellbeing and their transition into adulthood. When compared, parenting behaviors and adolescent outcomes in non-intact families were determined to exhibit lower well-being than individuals in intact families (Hoskins, 2014). Research has revealed that adolescents who lived in stepfamilies reported higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior than those adolescents who lived with their biological parents (Hoskins, 2014). In addition, while high levels of control and monitoring were accepted and helpful in intact families, research has established that control and high levels of monitoring were determined to be harmful in stepfamilies (Hoskins, 2014). Adolescents may view this type of parenting as inappropriate and intrusive coming from a stepparent, which in turn could lead to even more issues and resentful attitudes as the adolescent becomes a young adult.

The role of the stepparent may be the most challenging component of the stepfamily that the stepparent may face. Many remarried couples fail to understand and even acknowledge the differences that exist between the stepfamily and the nuclear family. Failure to discuss roles and parental expectations can lead to anger, confusion, frustration and even dissolution of the family as a whole (Michaels, 2007). O'Connor and Insabella (1999) determined that the greatest challenge posed among parents and

stepparents are the negative responses that are received from the children as a result of the changes of the family structure and issues concerning the management and care of the children. Michaels (2007) contended that role ambiguity was what lead families to want to adopt a traditional or nuclear parent role. However, stepfamilies who attempt to function like traditional families during the early stages of the stepfamily formation, tend to discover that that only impedes the stepfamily integration (Michaels, 2007). Parents in stepfamilies can experience a higher level of confusion with understanding their rights and duties within the family, especially when it concerns their stepchildren (Martin-Uzzi & Duval-Tsioles, 2013).

Parenting roles. The uncertainty about the parenting role as a stepparent can often lead to the stepparent choosing not to play an active role in the child's life altogether (Shalay & Brownlee, 2007). On the other hand, some stepparents may find themselves in a position of possibly being too overwhelming when trying to overexert themselves into the lives of their stepchildren. These parents may hold a false reality in their belief that the love will come easily, and a bond will automatically develop, instantly resulting into a perfectly blended family (Shalay & Brownlee, 2007).

Previous research has suggested that stepparenting can be extremely stressful (Shapiro, 2014). The stepparenting experience for the stepmother has been identified as one of the most stressful experiences. According to Shapiro and Stewart (2011), stepmothers experience an even higher parenting stress than parents who parent children with certain behavioral disorders.

Traditional family norms tend to emphasize more gender divided roles. When stepfamilies attempt to operate under the same expectations and values as the traditional family, they may feel as though they fall short, especially in their parenting role (Shapiro, 2014). Shapiro (2014) examined gender, marital quality, and views about gendered family roles as they correlate with parenting stress. Shapiro (2014) found that not only do stepparents experience a higher level of parenting stress, but they also suggest that lower parenting stress levels occur when the stepfamily does not attempt to adhere to traditional gendered family roles.

Being a stepparent is no easy task, whether it is being a stepmother or a stepfather. Unfortunately, according to the literature, research has seldom even focused or placed interest on the mother in the stepfamily (Cartwright, 2008). This situation is not only concerning but also surprising, considering that the mother-child relationship plays such a crucial role in the child's adjustment (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Hetherington and Kelly (2002) established the presence of a positive correlation with children's self-esteem and academic achievement when mothers in stepfamilies utilized an authoritative parenting style. Unfortunately, their findings were that mothers in stepfamilies were less likely to parent authoritatively due to the increased stress levels of their new family role (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

On the other hand, literature provides a great deal of information concerning fathers in the stepfamily, especially the role of the stepfather. Although researchers have established the presence of positive relationship with children outcomes when mothers in

stepfamilies adhere to an authoritative parental style (Miller & Cartwright, 2013), it has also been determined that children tend to respond with resentment when stepfathers attempt to take on an authoritative style. In turn, in attempting to function through such role confusion, many stepfathers often opt to take more of a distance approach (Miller & Cartwright, 2013).

In general, couples in stepfamilies can face multiple challenges, which can include difficulties with establishing strong marital bonds while at the same time attempting to develop appropriate parenting alliances and adapting functioning stepparent roles (Bray, 1999). These challenges, coupled with the challenge of not having any normative roles to follow, can lead to ambiguity with both the stepparent and stepchildren, which can leave negative and lifelong scars on the child well into adulthood.

African American Stepfamily Structure

Family structure is growing increasingly in the United States (Cherlin, 2010; Stykes & Williams, 2013). In recent years, cohabitation has emerged as a common family form (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Black families are amongst the most common to enter the cohabitating family structure (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). As a result, Black children are more likely to spend at least a part of their childhood in a cohabitating family household (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008).

Although many adolescents can thrive in a variety of family structures, research tends to suggest that adolescents who were raised in two-parent intact families have an

advantage over those raised in a stepfamily (Cherlin, 2008). Research also suggest that adolescents raised in a stepfamily are at greater risk of dealing with issues surrounding their social, emotional, and mental well-being (Adler-Baeder et al., 2010). Unfortunately, most of the studies on the relationship between family structure and adolescent well-being primarily focuses on European Americans (Adler-Baeder et al., 2010).

However, other research shows that African American families tend to operate as a “pedi-focal” family system, which is centered around the children and are “characterized by a communal-oriented philosophy, permeability of family boundaries, movement of children among households, and shared parenting among multiple parents” (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis 1993, p. 244). While European American families may be faced with issues such as difficulties with parenting someone else’s child, this may not be the issue among many African American families (Adler-Baeder et al., 2010). Culturally, African Americans tend to support multi-family models and even though emerging evidence indicates that minority families and adolescents are often overshadowed by European American families, some researchers have found that African American families differ on several important and commonly assessed well-being indicators (Adler-Baeder et al., 2010).

Young Adulthood

For most young people, young adulthood is a time when many are obtaining a level of education and training that will provide the foundation for their income and occupational achievements throughout their adult work lives (Chisholm & Hurrelman,

1995). It is also a time of frequent change and various possibilities in the realms of love, work, and exploring the world (Arnett, 2000). However, this is no longer considered a brief period of transition into adult roles but a distinct period of life course change and exploration of possible life directions (Arnett, 2000).

As a matter of fact, with such life course changes and the exploration of new life directions, also comes challenges and misdirection. For the African American male, transitioning into young adulthood can present several different challenges such as increased exposure to racial discrimination (Kogan, Yu, Allen, & Brody, 2015), fear of neighbor violence (Assari, Smith, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2015), as well as increased levels of depression and stress (Kogan et al., 2015).

Young African American Adults

Young African American adults, in particular, African American men, “are especially at risk for depression due to their disproportionate exposure to stressors such as racial discrimination, unemployment, and poverty” (Conner et al., 2010, p. 538). Although many researchers have reported no ethnic/racial differences in regard to mental health, several researchers have determined that African Americans, in general, typically experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress than other ethnic/racial groups (Lincoln, Taylor, Watkins, & Chatters, 2011). In regard to the African American male, the expectation to “conform to the dominant culture’s definition of masculinity while navigating societal stigma related to their ethnic identity” (Cose, 2002, p. 58)

during this particular stage of life can make transitioning into young adulthood one of the most stressful times of their lives.

Emotional Well-Being

Researchers have established that young adults who report greater emotional and interpersonal well-being are more likely to succeed in areas such as transitioning into a college environment and experiencing greater academic success (Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004). On the other hand, young adults who report greater psychological distress and/or issues with interpersonal problems, struggle a great deal more with meeting academic expectations and adjustments (Kerr et al., 2004). Existing research and theory also support the notion that family-of-origin experiences play a major role in both the socio-emotional development and adjustment in young adulthood (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

Central developmental tasks of comprising one's personal identity, and forming healthy mature relationships, and leaving one's childhood home marks the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). This is shown to be, an extremely stressful time period for young adults, making the quality of family relationships play an even more essential role in fostering the development of healthy connections and independence for young adults (Grodnick, 2003).

Stress

Current researchers have demonstrated that stressful life events often precede major depressive episodes (MDEs; Morris, Rao, Wang, & Garber, 2014). However, the

relationship to MDEs do change across successive episodes (Morris et al., 2014). This phenomenon could suggest that as a young adult continues to transition in life and encounter stressful life events, the greater the effects those events could have on their life.

Findings from prior researchers have been interpreted to mean that stress levels among minority groups are higher than the stress levels of White individuals in the United States (Lesniak et al., 2006). Among minority populations, stress is often thought to have a correlation to the increased prevalence of physical and mental health disorders (Macera, Armstead, & Anderson, 2001). Among African American populations, stressful life events are often associated with an underlying factor related to a negative health outcome (Steptoe & Feldman, 2001). Psychological distress is also thought to play an important role in the health status of minority groups (Lesniak et al., 2006). Being aware of the potential health factors that stress plays in one's life is essential to how an individual should respond to stressful life events.

Subjective Well-Being

The concept of subjective well-being explores the evaluations of how people experience their lives, both from a positive and negative aspect (Wills, 2009). Individuals tend to measure their subjective well-being in a number of different ways (Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon, & Diener, 2005). According to Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2003), people will evaluate their satisfaction with their life as a whole, as well as rate their satisfaction with specific life domains, such as family life, social relationships, and goal pursuit.

Support can play a major role in the life of a young adult. Having positive relationships with others has been associated with better physical and psychological survival when faced with life's stressors (Winefield, Winefield, & Tiggeman, 1992). Winefield et al. (1992) investigated contributing behaviors that 483 young adults described as being supportive. The scores from the study were statistically significantly correlated with measures of self-esteem, depressive affect, and psychological disturbance (Winefield et al., 1992). The results were that the participant's psychological wellbeing was related to their levels of stressful life experiences. The strongest association with well-being among the young adults was related to the frequency of supportive behaviors they received from close family and friends (Winefield et al., 1992). Even though the previous research may be considered dated, the results may still be interpreted to mean that strong family and community support is essential to the well-being of the young adult's life.

Depression

Depression has been noted as one of the leading causes of disability and a significant contributor to the global burden of disease among many U.S. residents (Lepine & Briley, 2011). While many researchers have shown that major depressive disorder may be less severe among African Americans, other researchers have suggested that African Americans may experience even higher severity of depressive symptoms than other ethnicities (Assari et al., 2015). Researchers have also suggested that

depression tends to be more chronic, severe, and disabling for African Americans than any other race (Assari et al., 2015).

Researchers have established that emerging adulthood may be a key development stage for African American youth to be at risk for experiencing depression as well as depressive symptoms (Assari et al., 2015). Williams et al., (2007) examined depression among a nationally represented sample of African Americans and reported that adults between the ages of 18-29 reported higher lifespan rates of depression as compared to African American adults ages 30 and older. In another study on depressive symptoms among nationally representative samples of emerging adults, African Americans reported higher rates of depressive symptoms during the transition to adulthood than reported by their White peers (Assari et al., 2015). These results reveal the effects of depression on the lives of many young adult African Americans. In addition to having a strong family and community support system to assist with such issues, research also states that spirituality and religiosity plays an important role in the well-being of these young adults (Wills, 2009).

Religiosity

What is Religiosity?

Throughout the literature religiosity and spirituality have often been used simultaneously; however, it is important to note their differences. Hill and Hood (1999, p. 238) noted that religiosity referred to “religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of an individual” while spirituality is referred to “as a sense of purposefulness and

connectedness to self, humanity. Mattis and Jagers (2001, p. 522) also defined religiosity as “an individual’s degree of adherence to the beliefs, doctrines, and practices of a religion, including church attendance, prayer, and other activities.” Spirituality on the other hand, has been defined as “emotional well-being, peace, and comfort derived from belief in a higher power” (Cotton, Larkin, Hoopes, Cromer, & Rosenthal, 2005, p. 529).

Though these terms are very similar in nature they do differ by meaning and definition. Molock and Barksdale (2013) even noted that while spirituality can be considered a component of religiosity, religiosity not only involves having a spiritual connection with a higher power but also a link to religious institutions, such as a church, mosque, and temples. Being that a large body of the literature does intertwine the two terms, this may suggest that they often tend to go hand-in-hand. This may be even more prevalent in the African American community.

Religiosity and the African American

Considering how much of the literature links religiosity to spirituality, it is difficult to discuss one without the other, especially when discussing the African American culture. For example, several researchers have agreed that higher religious involvement has been linked to protecting against negative mental health outcomes due to the community support that they can often provide to individuals (van Tubergen, teGrotenhuis, & Ultee, 2005). Researchers have even suggested that religiosity can generally have a positive effect on mental health outcomes in both youth and adults (Chatters et al., 2011). Other researchers have noted that both religion and spirituality

may be culturally congruent mechanisms for reducing mental health issues in African Americans, such as dealing with issues like depression (Breland-Noble, Wong, Childers, Hankerson, & Sotomayor, 2015).

Substantial evidence has been collected to support that religiosity can function and serve as a protective factor (Laird, Marks, & Marrero, 2011). In functioning as a protective factor, high levels of religiosity have been noted to function as a buffer in the lives of individuals “from the negative impact of experiences or characteristics that put them at risk for maladaptive behavior or psychological problems” (Laird et al., 2011, p. 79). According to Smith and Denton (2005), religion can provide additional effective coping mechanisms for adolescents that can be beneficial for “negotiating and resolving their mental, emotional, and interpersonal stresses and problems” (p. 245). This is also consistent with Wills, Yeager and Sandy (2003) that high religiosity has been linked to protecting adolescents from increasing substance after encountering some stressful life events.

Although spirituality and religiosity are similar in nature, they still have different concepts that may only be fully explained and developed in a particular cultural context (Wills, 2009). Regnerus, Smith, and Smith (2004) noted that African Americans’ place a much greater importance on religion and are more likely to attend church and engage in prayer when compared to other ethnic groups. Researchers have also suggested that for many African Americans, being actively involved in church and church activities generates positive feelings of well-being, which also provides strength associated with

lower levels of stress (Eiser & Ellis, 2007). Engaging such beliefs and participating in such activities in the face of life stressors, appear to be the preferred coping mechanisms for many who seek religion (Chapman & Steger, 2010).

Within the African American community, gender also appears to play a major role in differentiating the role that religion plays in one's life (Lesniak et al., 2006). Previous researchers strongly suggest that African American females tend to have higher levels of religiosity than African American males in that females, tend to report using more religious coping strategies when dealing with stressful life events (Lesniak et al., 2006). As for the African American male, limited research studies have been conducted on the role of religion in their lives.

Family Structure and Religiosity

Research has increasingly focused its studies on the religious lives of adolescents and young adults (Petts, 2015). Research has placed its focus on the patterns of religiosity of adolescents and young adults experience during their life stage and the factors that influence these processes (Petts, 2015). Since adolescence is a life stage that is often characterized by religious instability and the development of a religious identity, these studies are extremely important to the body of research (Desmond, Morgan & Kikuchi, 2010).

Family is the most important source of religious socialization (Petts, 2015). According to Smith and Denton (2005), adolescents raised in religious families are more likely to be more religious than those raised in nonreligious families. In this case, family

structure can also play a role. While some studies suggest that adolescents raised in stepfamily households have lower levels of religiosity than those raised in intact family households (Myers 1996), other studies suggest that there are only differences found between single-parent and two-parent households (Uecker & Ellison, 2012). On the other hand, some studies findings indicate no direct effect between family structure and adolescent religiosity (Denton, 2012).

Summary

Because religiosity has been linked to higher levels of well-being (Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003), it is essential to understand how religious resources provide a feeling of strength and guidance toward finding significance in one's life (Wills, 2009). Understanding the connection that religiosity can have on the emotional well-being of African American males being raised in a stepfamily household instead of a traditional nuclear family household can assist family practitioners with understanding the needs of this population. For the African American male, this can be extremely powerful and life changing, especially in leading and guiding one's own household.

As research has stated, being raised by a stepparent can present several challenges (Gonzales, 2009). However, those challenges do not have to be detrimental to one's life if positive reinforcements and resources are available. By seeking the inner guidance from a higher power and having the physical and positive support of family and friends, the African American young adult man can tackle those stressful life events in a healthy manner that will be encouraging and beneficial to his own family.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative method that was used in this study utilized secondary data from the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992. The survey data were collected for the purpose of providing both a theoretical and empirical approach in the study of Black Americans (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). Investigated in this survey was a range of concepts such as neighborhood-community integration, services, crime and community contact, the role of religion and the church, physical and mental health, self-esteem, life satisfaction, employment, the effects of chronic unemployment, the effects of race on the job, interaction with family and friends, racial attitudes, race identity, group stereotypes, and race ideology (Jackson & Gurin, 1997).

Population and Sample

The National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 is a survey of data collection used to provide theoretical and empirical approaches to concepts, measures, and methods in the study of Black Americans (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). Participants consisted of Black citizens of the United States of America, ages 18 years and older. Every Black American household in the United States of America had an equal probability of being selected (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). Wave 1 was administered to 2,107 respondents, Wave 2 to 951 respondents (including 935

participants who had been in Wave 1), Wave 3 to 793 respondents (including 779 participants who had been in Wave 2), and Wave 4 to 659 respondents (including 1 participant from Wave 1, 28 participants from Wave 2, and 623 participants from Wave 3). The multi-stage national probability sample was based upon the 1970 census, and subsequent updates of the distribution of the black population (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). The sampling of housing units within primary areas was conducted in an effort to yield approximately the same level of clustering and precision of estimates as survey research center household samples of comparable size (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). Input was given by nearly 100 professional social scientists, students, Black scholars, policy makers and practitioners. In addition, small focus groups composed of members representing their target population were also involved to aid in conceptualization and operationalization of various measures (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). Various methods were used to development the questionnaire over a 2-year period to address issues of conceptual and measurement equivalence (Jackson & Gurin, 1997).

Target Population

The target population for the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 consisted of Black citizens of the United States of America from the ages of 18 years and older. The participants were from families from all different backgrounds and various household experiences. I will only include African American males from the ages of 18-29 years of age for this particular study. I believe this age range for this population is often overlooked or overshadowed by the European,

economically established college graduate. Frequencies were calculated for each of the four Waves to determine the numbers of African American males within this age range. In Wave 1, 164 African American males were present; in Wave 2, 239 were present; in Wave 3, 171 African American males had provided data; and in Wave 4, 221 males were present.

Measures

Participants whose survey responses were analyzed herein also included only those African American males who acknowledged that they were either raised with a stepparent or with both of their biological parents. Frequencies were next calculated to determine the numbers of African American males in the specified age range within each wave who were either raised with a stepparent or with both of their biological parents.

Table 3.1 below contains these numbers and percentages.

Table 3.1

Descriptive Statistics for Sample Size by Wave

Wave and Family Status	n	Percent
Wave 1		
Raised in a stepparent household	17	10.4
Was not raised in a stepparent household	147	89.6
Wave 2		
Raised in a stepparent household	19	7.9
Was not raised in a stepparent household	220	92.1

Wave 3			
Raised in a stepparent household	3	1.8	
Was not raised in a stepparent household	168	98.2	
Wave 4			
Raised in a stepparent household	20	9.0	
Was not raised in a stepparent household	201	91.0	

In Wave 1, 17 African American males were raised in a stepparent household; in Wave 2, there were 19 African American males who were raised in a stepparent household; in Wave 3, there were 3 respondents; and in Wave 4, there were 20 African American males who were raised in a stepparent household. Given the low sample sizes in each wave who met the previously mentioned criteria, a decision was made to combine the four waves into a single cross-sectional sample for the stepparent household and traditional household comparisons. Thus, the total sample was 59 African American males who were raised in a stepparent household and 736 African American males who were not raised in a stepparent household.

Religiosity. Religiosity was measured using a Likert scale consisting of several survey questions. Examples of survey questions ranged from: How often do you usually attend religious services? Would you say nearly every day, at least once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or less than once a year? How religious would you say you are—very religious, fairly religious, not too religious, or not religious at all? How

often do you read religious books or other religious materials? Would you say nearly every day, at least once a week, a few times a month, a few times a year or never?

Emotional well-being. Emotional well-being was measured using a Likert scale consisting of several survey questions. Examples of survey questions ranged from: How often do you feel good about yourself? Would you say very often, fairly often, or not too often? How often do you feel bad about yourself? Would you say, very often, fairly often, not too often, hardly ever or never?

Protection of Human Subjects

In using secondary data, I was not in contact with any human subjects. All data collected for the study consisted of coded information collected through a web-based survey.

Instrument

A large pretest was conducted in the areas of Detroit, Michigan and Montgomery, Alabama on two different occasions (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). The final questionnaires represent nearly 80% of new material that was determined to be more responsive to the cultural distinctiveness of Black Americans than previous surveys. The final instrument was comprehensive in encompassing several broad areas related to the Black American life (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). These areas included: (a) neighborhood-community integration, services, crime and community contact; (b) religion-role of the church and religion; (c) health-physical health status, health care utilization, physical disability, self-esteem and life-satisfaction; (d) employment and unemployment-effects of job related

problems, effects of chronic unemployment, irregular economy activity, work discrimination, effects of race on work force composition, barriers to employment, effects of under-and un-employment; (e) family and friends-degree of contact with family and friends, fictive kin, social support, loneliness, marital satisfaction, role relationships; (f) mental health status and utilization-problem recognition and life-time prevalence, problem severity, symptom reports, coping strategies, informal and formal help sources, evaluation of mental health services; (g) group and self-identity-racial identity and consciousness, race ideology; and (h) background, education, income and occupation, political behavior and affiliation, parental attainment, cross-race contact (Jackson & Gurin, 1997). The methods of questionnaire development, sampling, field work, and coding resulted in a high-quality dataset. I used SPSS to analyze the data from this survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not religion plays a role in the emotional well-being of young adult African American men who were raised in a stepfamily. It was my desire to identify if religiosity had an effect on the well-being of the young adult African American male who was raised with a stepparent. This situation can be an important factor in the life of the African American male as he continues through the cycle of life and begins a family of his own.

The data were analyzed using Pearson chi-square inferential statistical procedures. I investigated the association between young adult African American males who were

raised in a stepfamily household, their emotional well-being, as well as their religiosity in comparison to those young adult African American males who were raised in an intact family household. By utilizing Pearson chi-square inferential statistical procedures, I investigated the influences of religiosity on the emotional well-being of the young adult African American male who was raised in a stepfamily household. This statistical data analysis allowed me to determine whether or not religiosity had an effect on the emotional well-being of the young adult African American males who were raised in stepfamily households in comparison to those young adult African American males who were raised in an intact households.

The Pearson chi-square test is a statistical test applied to sets of categorical data to evaluate the likelihood of the observed differences occurring by chance. This test is used to assess three types of comparison: goodness of fit, homogeneity, and independence; a test of goodness of fit establishes if an observed frequency distribution differs from a theoretical distribution, a test of homogeneity compares the distribution of counts for two or more groups us the same categorical variable, and a test of independence assess whether observations consisting of measures on two variables, expressed in a contingency table, are independent of one another (McHugh, 2013).

The Pearson Chi-square test is a non-parametric statistic, also called a distribution free test. Non-parametric tests should be used when any one of the following conditions pertains to the data (McHugh, 2013):

1. The level of measurement of all the variables is nominal or ordinal,

2. The sample sizes of the study groups are unequal; for the χ^2 the groups may be of equal size or unequal size whereas some parametric tests require groups of equal or approximately equal size,

3. The original data were measured at an interval or ratio level, but violate one of the following assumptions of a parametric test:

(a) The distribution of the data was seriously skewed or kurtotic (parametric tests assume approximately normal distribution of the dependent variable), and thus the researcher must use a distribution free statistic rather than a parametric statistic,

(b) The data violate the assumptions of equal variance or homoscedasticity,

(c) For any of a number of reasons, the continuous data were collapsed into a small number of categories, and thus the data are no longer interval or ratio.

Because I share the same racial identity as the participants and have a son that shares the same age and background as some of the participants who are being studied, I decided to use a quantitative approach to study the population to control for personal bias. I read each question of the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 questionnaires to determine which questions were the most suitable for use in the current study. I used questions from the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 questionnaires

that can identify whether or not the young African American male was raised with a stepparent or with both of his biological parents, questions pertaining to his emotional well-being and questions concerning religiosity. Some of the questions from the questionnaires are more complex than others, and therefore, may reveal even more in-depth answers. So therefore, prior to finalizing the findings of the current study, I reviewed all of the questions on the questionnaires again to ensure no valuable questions were neglected. I also reviewed the questions chosen, to determine their appropriateness to the current study. I worked with my chair to ensure that I accurately interpreted and analyzed the data collected.

Independent Variable

The independent variable is religiosity. Religiosity was measured based on the responses to the questions concerning their religion. For purposes of this investigation, two survey items were used in this analysis as indicators of religiosity. One survey question was “How religious the respondent reported himself to be currently.” The second survey question was “How important religious was to the respondent when he was an adolescent.” Both items were categorical in nature, thereby permitting the use of Pearson chi-square procedure.

Dependent Variables

Family structure and emotional well-being are the dependent variables for this study. Family structure was analyzed based on whether or not the young adult African American male was raised in a stepfamily household or raised by both biological parents.

Emotional well-being was measured based on the responses to the questions concerning how they feel about self, how happy they are, and their overall satisfaction with life.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. How does religiosity influence the emotional well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household?
2. Is there a difference in the emotional well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to those raised in intact households?

Hypothesis One

Religiosity is significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to those raised in intact households.

Hypothesis Two

Religiosity will significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were adolescent.

Hypothesis Three

Emotional well-being will be significantly higher amongst young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to those with lower levels of religiosity.

Reliability and Validity

Using secondary data is a time and cost-effective way to conduct research (Hox & Boeije, 2005). However, there can be some reliability issues in working with secondary

data due to the data collection not being from a primary source. On another note, secondary data can provide additional information that can be extremely beneficial to the researcher's research that can lead to future research.

Whenever secondary data is utilized, it can be difficult and sometimes impossible to assess the reliability and validity of the original procedures (Hox & Boeije, 2005). It may be necessary to contact the original researcher to obtain further information concerning the data collection procedures if issues and concerns arise concerning reliability and validity.

When secondary data is being used, it is essential to evaluate the data very closely (Hox & Boeije, 2005). To maintain the integrity of the study, it is important to ensure that the data collected correctly fits the research questions that I have posed for my study. It is never acceptable to alter my research questions to fit the data collected. Maintaining the integrity of the study is essential and necessary to ensure that the study brings a level of value to the topic and body of literature.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effects that religion had on the well-being of the young adult African American male who was raised in a stepfamily household. The information was collected using secondary data from the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992. The data was analyzed to identify issues concerning family structure, self-worth,

and religion. It is my desire that the findings of this study be used to bring about awareness to better serve this population.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Research Questions

In this chapter, the research questions previously discussed will be addressed.

1. How does religiosity influence the emotional well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household?
2. Is there a difference in the emotional well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to those African American males raised in an intact household?

Hypothesis

Hypothesis One

Religiosity is significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to African American males raised in an intact household.

Hypothesis Two

Religiosity will significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were an adolescent.

Hypothesis Three

Emotional well-being will be significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to African American males with lower levels of religiosity.

Prior to calculating any descriptive and/or inferential statistical procedures, several variables in the dataset were recoded for purposes of this investigation. First, data on respondents other than African American males in the age range of 18 to 29 years of age were removed from analysis. Respondents whose data were not used in this study were African American females, anyone who was outside the age range previously specified, as well as anyone who did not respond to the following survey questions. Two survey questions involved whether respondents had been raised in a stepparent household of either the mother or the father. These two survey questions were merged. This merging permitted the creation of a stepparent household variable with two response options: (a) raised in a stepparent household of (b) raised in an intact household. Following these recoding procedures, frequencies were calculated on the numbers of African American males in each of the four waves.

In Wave 1, 17 African American males were raised in a stepparent household; in Wave 2, there were 19 African American males who were raised in a stepparent household; in Wave 3, there were three respondents; and in Wave 4, there were 20 African American males who were raised in a stepparent household. Given the low sample sizes in each wave who met the previously mentioned criteria, a decision was

made to combine the four waves into a single cross-sectional sample for the stepparent household and intact household comparisons. Thus, the total sample was 59 African American males who were raised in a stepparent household and 736 African American males who were not raised in a stepparent household. Readers are directed to Table 3.1 for these numbers and percentages.

Following these procedures, descriptive statistics were then calculated on the variables that constituted religiosity and emotional well-being. In the following tables, readers will be provided with frequencies and percentages for these items, reported separately by stepparent household status. Readers should remember that these statistics were calculated on all African American males between the ages of 18 and 29, across all four waves. Respondents were queried regarding how important was church to them when they were young. As revealed in Table 4.1 below, over 60% of African American males raised in a stepparent household responded that church was very important to them when they were an adolescent, compared to over 50% of African American males raised in an intact household.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics for the Importance of Church by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Stepparent Household Status	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Important
Stepparent household	62.0% (<i>n</i> = 39)	11.7% (<i>n</i> = 7)	3.3% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Intact household	53.1% (<i>n</i> = 391)	14.8% (<i>n</i> = 109)	5.6% (<i>n</i> = 41)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

Respondents were next queried about their religious affiliation when they were adolescents. As revealed in Table 4.2, the most common affiliation for both groups of African American males were Baptist, followed by Methodist. The third most common religious affiliation was the Roman Catholic Church. Other less frequent affiliations are also listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Frequencies and Percentages for Religious Affiliation when Respondent were Adolescents by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Religious Affiliation	Stepparent Household	Intact Household
Baptist	63.3% (<i>n</i> = 38)	60.1% (<i>n</i> = 443)
Methodist	20.0% (<i>n</i> = 12)	14.4% (<i>n</i> = 106)
Roman Catholic	6.7% (<i>n</i> = 4)	6.0% (<i>n</i> = 44)

Fundamentalist	0	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 12)
African Methodist	0	1.5% (<i>n</i> = 11)
Presbyterian	0	1.2% (<i>n</i> = 9)
<u>Episcopalian</u>	0	0.8% (<i>n</i> = 6)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

In Table 4.3 below, Baptist was the current religious affiliation of almost half of the male African American respondents. Congruent with Table 4.2, Methodist was the second most frequent religious affiliation.

Table 4.3

Frequencies and Percentages for Current Religious Affiliation of Respondent by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Religious Affiliation	Stepparent Household	Intact Household
Baptist	48.3% (<i>n</i> = 29)	48.4% (<i>n</i> = 357)
Methodist	13.3% (<i>n</i> = 8)	9.2% (<i>n</i> = 68)
Roman Catholic	8.3% (<i>n</i> = 5)	5.8% (<i>n</i> = 43)
Fundamentalist	0	1.4% (<i>n</i> = 10)
No Preference	15.0% (<i>n</i> = 9)	14.7% (<i>n</i> = 108)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal the total number of participants whose data was analyzed herein.

With respect to having attended church since age 18, over 90% of African American males who were raised in a stepparent household indicated that they had. Less

than 90% of African American males who were raised in an intact household responded that they had attended church since they were age 18 (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Descriptive Statistics for Having Attended Church Since Age 18 by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Stepparent Household Status	Yes	No
Stepparent household	94.9% (n = 56)	5.1% (n = 3)
Intact household	87.7% (n = 646)	11.8% (n = 87)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal the total number of participants whose data was analyzed herein.

Concerning the frequency with which respondents attended church, 40% of African American males raised in a stepparent household indicated that they attended church a few times monthly or annually. In comparison, more than 50% of African American males raised in an intact household responded that they attended church a few times monthly or annually (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for How Often Respondent Attended Church by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Stepparent Household Status	Nearly Everyday	Few Times	Less Than Once A Year
Stepparent household	6.7% (n = 4)	40.0% (n = 24)	13.3% (n = 8)

Intact household	3.3% (<i>n</i> = 24)	51.7% (<i>n</i> = 381)	11.9% (<i>n</i> = 88)
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Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

Regarding how helpful respondents reported that church was to them, over a fourth of African American males who were raised in a stepparent household indicated that church was a lot of help to them. In comparison, less than a fourth of African American males who were raised in an intact household responded that church was a lot of help to them. Low percentages, 6.7% and 3.9%, of African American males raised in a stepparent household and in an intact household, respectively, indicated that church was only a little help to them (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Descriptive Statistics for How Much Help Respondents Indicated Church Was to Them by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Stepparent Household Status	A Lot of Help	Some Help	Only Little Help
Stepparent household	28.3% (<i>n</i> = 17)	11.7% (<i>n</i> = 7)	6.7% (<i>n</i> = 4)
Intact household	23.1% (<i>n</i> = 170)	12.1% (<i>n</i> = 89)	3.9% (<i>n</i> = 29)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

With respect to how often respondents indicated that they read religious books, one fourth of African American males who were raised in a stepparent household

reported that they did so nearly every day, compared to less than one fourth of African American males who were raised in an intact household (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for How Often Respondents Indicated They Read Religious Books by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Stepparent Household	Nearly Everyday	Few Times	Never
Status	Monthly/Annually		
Stepparent household	25.0% (<i>n</i> = 15)	41.7% (<i>n</i> = 25)	10.0% (<i>n</i> = 6)
Intact household	17.9% (<i>n</i> = 132)	50.4% (<i>n</i> = 371)	9.4% (<i>n</i> = 69)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

Concerning how important religion was to them when they were young, almost 90% of African American males who were raised in a stepparent household indicated that religion was very important to them. Less than three-fourths of African American males who were raised in an intact household reported that religion was very important to them when they were young (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics for the Importance of Religion when Respondent were Adolescents by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

Stepparent Household	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Important
Status			
Stepparent household	79.7% (<i>n</i> = 47)	16.9% (<i>n</i> = 10)	3.4% (<i>n</i> = 2)

Intact household	73.5% (n = 542)	17.5% (n = 129)	5.7% (n = 42)
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Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

Regarding how religious the respondent currently was, 40% of African American males who were raised in a stepparent household indicated that they were very religious. In comparison, less than 30% of African American males who were raised in an intact household reported that they were very religious.

To answer the first research hypothesis, “Religiosity is significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to African American males raised in an intact household,” a Pearson chi-square statistical procedure was conducted. This procedure was appropriate because the independent variable of stepparent household status was dichotomous and the dependent variable of how religious the respondent perceived himself to be was categorical (i.e., four response options). A significant difference was not revealed between African American males raised in a stepparent household and African American males raised in an intact household, $\chi^2(3) = 4.41, p = .22$. As revealed in Table 4.9, similar percentages of African American males, regardless of stepparent household status, reported that they were fairly religious (46.7% and 46.5%, respectively). As such, this research hypothesis was not supported by the statistical analysis that was conducted.

Table 4.9

Frequencies and Percentages for How Religious is Respondent Currently by Stepparent Household Status of African American Males

How Religious	Stepparent Household	Intact Household
Very Religious	40.7% (<i>n</i> = 24)	29.3% (<i>n</i> = 216)
Fairly Religious	47.4% (<i>n</i> = 28)	46.5% (<i>n</i> = 343)
Not Too Religious	8.5% (<i>n</i> = 5)	17.4% (<i>n</i> = 128)
Not Religious	3.3% (<i>n</i> = 2)	5.7% (<i>n</i> = 42)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

Next, the second research hypothesis, “Religiosity will be statistically significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were adolescents,” was addressed. To answer this research hypothesis, data on only African American males who were raised in a stepparent household were analyzed. The two survey items that were used in this analysis were: “How religious the respondent reported himself to be currently” and “How important religious was to the respondent when he was an adolescent.” Both items were categorical in nature. That is, participants could place a mark in one of three categories for how religious they were: *very religious*, *fairly religious*, or *not too religious* and in one of three categories for how important religion was to them: *very important*, *fairly important*, or *not too important*. As such, because both variables were categorical in nature, Pearson chi-square procedures could be calculated.

A statistically significant difference was yielded for this analysis, $\chi^2(6) = 19.32, p = .004$, Cramer's V of .40, indicating a moderate effect size. A very high percentage of African American males who were raised in a stepparent household and who viewed religion as very important when they were young reported that they were currently either *very religious* (40.1%) or *fairly religious* (51.9%). All but eight respondents indicated that they were currently either very religious or fairly religious. Table 4.10 contains the frequencies and percentages for this analysis. Given the results of this analysis, this research hypothesis was supported by the statistical analysis that was conducted.

Table 4.10

Descriptive Statistics for the Importance of Religion when Respondent were Adolescents and How Religious Respondent is Currently for African American Males Raised in a Stepparent Household

How Religious	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Too Important
Very Religious	40.1% (<i>n</i> = 21)	20.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)	100.0% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Fairly Religious	51.9% (<i>n</i> = 27)	20.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Not Too Religious	5.8% (<i>n</i> = 3)	40.0% (<i>n</i> = 2)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Not Religious	1.9% (<i>n</i> = 1)	20.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

To answer the third research hypothesis, “Emotional well-being will be significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent

household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to African American males with lower levels of religiosity,” several different Pearson chi-square statistical procedures were conducted. Multiple procedures were calculated because the variable of emotional well-being consisted of several survey questions. This procedure was appropriate because the independent variable of how religious the respondent was categorical in nature and the dependent variable of how often the respondent reported that he felt bad about himself was also categorical in nature. A significant difference was not revealed between how religious the respondent was and how often the respondent felt bad about himself, $\chi^2(15) = 10.04, p = .82$. As revealed in Table 4.11, similar percentages of African American males, regardless of how religious they reported that they were, reported how often they felt bad about themselves. As such, this research hypothesis was not supported by the statistical analysis that was conducted.

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics for How Religious Respondent is and How Often He Feels Bad About Self

How Often Feel Bad About Self	Very Religious	Fairly Religious	Not Too Religious	Not Religious
Very Often	8.3% (<i>n</i> = 2)	3.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Fairly Often	4.2% (<i>n</i> = 1)	17.9% (<i>n</i> = 5)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Not Too Often	25.0% (<i>n</i> = 6)	35.7% (<i>n</i> = 10)	50.0% (<i>n</i> = 3)	50.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Hardly Ever	16.7% (<i>n</i> = 4)	17.9% (<i>n</i> = 5)	33.3% (<i>n</i> = 2)	0.0% (<i>n</i> = 0)

Never	41.7% (n = 10)	25.0% (n = 7)	16.7% (n = 1)	50.0% (n = 1)
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Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

In the second Pearson chi-square analysis for emotional well-being, the independent variable was how religious the respondent viewed himself and the dependent variable consisted of how often the respondent reported that he felt good about himself. Both variables were categorical in nature. A significant difference was not revealed between how religious the respondent was and how often the respondent felt good about himself, $\chi^2(6) = 2.76, p = .84$. As revealed in Table 4.12, similar percentages of African American males, regardless of how religious they reported that they were, reported how often they felt good about themselves. As such, this research hypothesis was not supported by the statistical analysis that was conducted.

Table 4.12

Descriptive Statistics for How Religious Respondent is and How Often He Feels Good About Self

How Often Feel Good About Self	Very Religious	Fairly Religious	Not Too Religious	Not Religious
Very Often	73.9% (n = 17)	60.7% (n = 17)	66.7% (n = 4)	50.0% (n = 1)
Fairly Often	21.7% (n = 5)	32.1% (n = 9)	16.7% (n = 1)	50.0% (n = 1)
Not Too Often	4.3% (n = 1)	7.1% (n = 2)	16.7% (n = 1)	0.0% (n = 0)

Note. Because not every participant provided a response to every survey question, the number of respondents will not equal to the total number of participants whose data were analyzed herein.

Summary

In this Chapter IV, the responses of African American males who were raised in either a stepparent household or in an intact household with respect to their religiosity and emotional well-being were addressed. Because of the very low sample sizes of African American males between the ages of 18 and 29 in each of the four waves, a decision was made to analyze data across the four survey waves. Descriptive statistics were calculated on several survey items for these two groups of African American males. Then, the three research hypotheses were addressed. With respect to the first research hypothesis, “Religiosity is significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to African American males raised in an intact household,” the results of the statistical analysis did not support this hypothesis. Regarding the second research hypothesis, “Religiosity will significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were adolescents,” results were supportive of this hypothesis. Concerning the third research hypothesis, “Emotional well-being will be significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to African American males with lower levels of religiosity,” results of the statistical analyses were not supportive of this hypothesis.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Research has determined that more than 75% of households in the United States are “non-intact families” (Lantz, 2012, p. 2). Approximately 30% of children in the United States will spend a period of time before reaching adulthood living in a stepfamily household (Copen et al., 2012). According to Johnston et al., (2020) several children in the US live in an intact household, but even more live in a variety of family structures as their parents often repartner over the course of their childhood. Adler-Baeder and Higginbotham (2004) noted that stepfamilies, in general, tend to face more challenges such as negotiating parental roles, decision-making, and the sharing of parenting responsibilities between two sets of parents, than the nuclear family. These challenges can make for an extremely stressful situation especially among African Americans who are typically faced additional challenges, such as increased exposure to racial and ethnic diversity (Brittian et al., 2015) making the transition into a stepfamily all the more difficult.

In examining the history of the African American culture, religion has played a major and important role in the lives of many African Americans. On average, more Blacks report higher levels of prayer, Bible study, and other types of private religious involvement than any other ethnic/racial group (Molock & Barksdale, 2013; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Schwadel & Smith, 2005). In addition to the role of religion in the

African American culture, other researchers have also established the presence of a positive relationship between religiosity and improved mental and physical health (Holt et al., 2015; Koenig et al., 2001). Previous researchers have also documented the presence of connections between religious coping and the ability of individuals to adjust to major life stressors (Pargament et al., 2000).

Stress is universal and affects everybody at some point in their lifetime (Rew et al., 2012). Interpersonal stressors such as the formation of a stepfamily and growing up in a stepfamily household have been documented to be strong predictors of major depressive symptoms and episodes (Sheet & Craighead, 2014). Several theories have been developed to explain the effects of stressful life experiences on individuals. Psychosocial development theories are the most commonly used to explain issues concerning depression, stress, and overall well-being.

Examined in this dissertation was Howard-Hamilton's (1997) revision of psychosocial developmental theories and how these theories were transformed to fit the African American male population. In particular, used in this study was the fifth stage of Erik Erickson's eight stages of psychosocial development. Erikson's fifth stage, the identity development stage vs identity diffusion stage, is the stage wherein individuals begin to make ideological and career decisions that will organize their personal world (Erikson, 1980; Howard-Hamilton, 1997). This stage has been noted to be a lifelong stage. Howard-Hamilton (1997) revised this stage and noted that the identity development vs identity diffusion stage is one of the most difficult stages for African

American males to master. Howard-Hamilton (1997) noted, unfortunately, that if African American males fail to complete this stage successfully, they will struggle with their academic, career, and social successes for the remainder of their life.

In this empirical analysis, two research questions were addressed: (a) How does religiosity influence the well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household? And (b) Is there a difference in the well-being of young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to those African American males raised in an intact household? Three hypotheses were present in these two research questions: (a) Religiosity is significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to African American males raised in an intact; (b) Religiosity will statistically significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were an adolescent; and (c) Well-being will be statistically significantly higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to African American males with lower levels of religiosity.

Survey questions from the National Survey of Black Americans, Waves 1-4, 1979-1980, 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1992 were analyzed to answer the research questions listed above. Only survey questions that were responded to by African American males in the age range of 18 to 29 years of age were included in the statistical analyses. Two survey questions were present involving whether respondents had been raised in a

stepparent household of either the mother or the father. For the purposes of this investigation, these two survey questions were permitted to create a stepparent household variable with two response options: (a) raised in a stepparent household or (b) raised in an intact household. As stated previously, the intent of this researcher conducting this study was to examine respondent answers to the survey questions across the four waves. In calculating frequencies on the numbers of African American males who met the age range and the stepparent criterion, very low sample sizes were present. Specific numbers for the sample size available at each wave were provided in Chapter IV. Given these very low sample sizes, a decision was made to combine the four waves into a single cross-sectional sample for the stepparent household and intact households' comparisons.

Connections with Theoretical Framework

The psychosocial development theory theoretical approach was utilized in this study due to the appropriateness of not only the age group of the population sample but also the race and gender of the sample. As the researcher, I utilized Howard-Hamilton (1997) revision of the psychosocial development theory in respect to Erikson eight stages of psychosocial development theory and applied as a representation of the young adult African American males who were studied to conduct this research. In addition, the fifth stage of Erikson eight stages of psychosocial development theory, the identity development stage vs the identity diffusion development stage were utilized in this study to analyze the behavior, actions, and attitudes of the African American males from their adolescent stage of life to their young adult stage of life as it relates to their religion.

Family structure is growing increasingly in the United States (Cherlin, 2010; Stykes & Williams, 2013). Black families are amongst the most common to enter the cohabitating family structure (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Overall, this psychosocial development theory helped me as the researcher to better analyze and understand the population for which I studied.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon the findings of this empirical investigation, several suggestions for future research can be made. First, a larger sample of African American males needs to be obtained to conduct a more in-depth analysis. A larger sample could possibly provide a wider range of responses, even if every participant does not answer each question. Second, this study should be extended to other groups such as African American females, Hispanic males, and Hispanic females. It would be interesting to see if there is a major cultural difference between the African American cultural and the Hispanic cultural. Culturally, both African Americans and Hispanics have strong ties to religion. It would also be interesting to see the differences between the responses between the African American male and the African American female considering that most of the research states that the African American female is typically more religious than the African American male. Is there a difference in their overall religiosity or in certain areas? Third, a qualitative investigation may be beneficial, one in which participants could be interviewed to obtain more detailed information about their religiosity and emotional well-being other than relying on a tool such as a Likert-scale survey item. By conducting

a face-to face interview, I would be able to detect and document body language, emotions, and other non-verbal communication that could be extremely beneficial to the findings of the study.

Limitations

Unfortunately, there were limitations to conducting the current research. In working with secondary data, I was limited to the data that was collected in the dataset. I could not add any additional information to the data that had already been collected, therefore I was limited to the questions that the original researchers had developed. In addition, probably the biggest limitation was the small sample size that was available in the secondary dataset. I honestly believe that if I conducted this same study today, the number of participants who identified as being raised in a stepfamily household would possibly outnumber those who would identify as being raised in an intact family household.

Implications

Overall, my research did not reveal what I thought it would reveal. While I thought that there would be a much wider variance between the two populations, the results revealed that everything was fairly consistent across the board even with the differences in the sample size. I was somewhat surprised that more families did not identify as a stepfamily. It makes me wonder if they just chose otherwise considering that culturally, many African Americans don't acknowledge "stepfamilies." To the typical African American, family is Family.

Conclusion

Culturally, religion plays a very important role in the lives of African Americans. Previous research has highlighted the fact that African American females tend to be more religious than African American males (Lesniak et al., 2006). The current research turned its focus on whether or not young adult African American males who were raised in a stepfamily household had higher religiosity than those who were raised in a nuclear traditional household. While a statistically significant difference was yielded for the analysis that religiosity will significantly increase for young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household in comparison to when they were in their youth, a statistically significant difference was not revealed between African American males raised in a stepparent household and African American males raised in a traditional nuclear household. There was also no statistically significant difference found to support that well-being would be higher among young adult African American males raised in a stepparent household who had higher levels of religiosity in comparison to those young adult African American males with lower levels of religiosity.

Based on the results of this study future research is recommended due to the limitations of working with a small sample size. It is also recommended to consider conducting a qualitative research study for this particular research. In theory, the identity development stage vs the identity diffusion stage is one of the most critical stages of Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development theory (1950/1963). Howard-Hamilton (1997) believed that both the childhood stage (trust vs mistrust) and the

adolescence stage (identity development vs identity diffusion) are the most difficult stages for the African American male to overcome. Failure to successfully complete these stages of life can have major damaging effects on the remaining stages of life.

As the young adult attempts to maneuver through one's academic endeavors, career, social life and even starting a family, one may be faced with great difficulty if never having the opportunity to complete the most critical stages of life. This can be extremely crucial, especially for the African American male considering that many may encounter great losses along the way. Because religiosity has been linked to higher levels of well-being (Smith et al., 2003), it can be essential to understand how religious resources provide a feeling of strength and guidance (Wills, 2009) the young adult African American male. Understanding the connection that religiosity can have on the well-being of African American males being raised in a step family household in comparison to being raised in a traditional nuclear family household can assist family practitioners with understanding the needs of this population and how to help them move forward with their future endeavors.

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