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Where Does my Identity Lie?
The Socialization of the African American Male

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This study is not meant to perpetuate or reiterate the obvious, but provide insight into the current plight of African American males.

"The essential tragedy of being black and male is our inability, as men and of African descent, to define ourselves without the stereotypes the larger society impose upon us, and through various institutional means perpetuates and permeates within our entire culture" (Marable, 1994, p. 70).

In dedication to African American males everywhere

Recognition(s):

Michael Range, Johnny Range IV, and Lord-Stephen Range for challenging me to create myself

Johnny Range III for challenging me the most

Special thanks to:

Ryan Range (wife) Dr. Lisa Taylor (faculty advisor) Family ΦPH Fraternity Inc. Eastern Illinois University faculty, friends & staff Where does my identity lie ask the question, what aspects within society do you identify most with or where is your identity nurtured?

The question is meant to jog the mind into thinking about what things in life that has formed who you are today and how.

Where do you go to find yourself and what type of person does it tell you to be?

Question the unquestionable.

The socialization of the African American male is meant to further address the current plight of African American males in the context of identity development.

"The Thinker" is a great symbolic representation of the underlining purpose of this thesis.

The Thinker represents the pursuit for a strong sense of self. It represents continuous growth, the process of self discovery, and the dedication and intrinsic concentration it takes to be authentic and someone of worth and quality.

To be somebody in this world is not easy, especially being African American and male. The impression of The Thinker is strong and determined and it has an essence that simply cannot be denied. Despite the hardships that one may face, which is what the rain is symbolic for, it adds to the quality of The Thinker and takes nothing away.

Seek to utilize your hardships as opportunities of enhancement.

I chose to do this study because of the intrinsic motivating and convicting force that resonates within me and guides me. It influences me to take advantage of opportunity that will contribute to my overall development and well being as well as the development and well being of others.

In my upbringing, I have faced countless questionable ideals and threatening massive ambiguous forces, familial and non-familial, circumambient to African American males that attempted to stagnate me personally and threatened my sense of being. As a child and teen, these ideals and forces were beyond my understanding but within my radar of awareness. As a young adult, awareness alone has proven to be insufficient in negating the undesirable effects of these ideals and forces on my sense of being. Education has increased my understanding giving me the ability to more accurately identify these unwanted ideals, understand and stand against them, and separate myself from these threatening forces.

Experiences, such as the one following this section, have influenced me to study African American male identity. Events in which I have personally experienced or witnessed African American males take on sociopathic characteristics (antisocial, antagonistic, deviant and/or lacking in morality) in a significant amount of societal roles. In my experience, their role is commonly defined by their lack of ability to construct better sense of experiences and formulate more well-rounded, wholesome, just, and informed decisions. Being negative or pessimistic defines their approach toward most things. They have a host of inaccurate, maladjusted, and immature inferences and dysfunctional beliefs. They have a plethora of skewed perspectives and unreasonable concepts, which may reflect immorality, and leads to a deficiency in reasoning ability followed by an egocentric mind set. This does not describe all the roles that African American males may play, but the nature in which the central issue lies within African American males. These African American males seem to be trapped in a place in which the struggle to escape. The unfortunate side effect of this state is the stagnation of the self and the harmful affect it has on those close to them.

From this thesis, I have learned how to think more critically and objectively while assimilating and accommodating new information into my sense of self. I have matured intellectually and my ability to coordinate multiple perspectives has developed greatly. Moreover, I have a stronger racial identity.

The reward of being a parent

This is my father's handwriting which was probably written shortly after his discovery of this letter.

My father remarried. We moved into the city from the suburbs of Chicago.

I Bryan will make it to college. I have realized that I am going threw trial, and am now understanding my life and my family. I love my father and I respect him for who he is. But in my eyes and others, there is no reason for me to have to mentally struggle like I do. I do not like the fact that he tries to take on a mother's responsibility when he isn't a mother. I feel my mother is my mother. Forget about the differences of my father and mother, I need to make it to college. If I have to move or lie to go to a better school where I am guaranteed a better environment that fit me as a person, why not. I know that telling a lie or doing a small adjustment to make my life more of a positive challenge than negative is not going to take me or anyone else to hell. Frankly, I believe that my father really put a dent in my life because why should I have to suffer so severely when my father wants to make a change for the better in his life. I feel he made a mistake and stuck to it for the wrong reasons. My best interest was not considered. He put the effects of him before me. For gods sake. The main goal is college. Let's do what it takes for Bryan to make it happen. I am not a bad person. My thinking is not off track. The way I want to make it in life is not bad at all. I know I have my downfalls, but don't benefit them to bring me down even more. You can't constantly nag on the bad and expect to receive good out of a person (Not to excuse a persons wrong doing). But, you must lift them up with their positive attributes and consider all things about that person. Like my father, I really don't think I would ever see him as I use to, He beat me up so bad mentally that when I was going threw my things that I would rather know keep a certain length between the both of us. I can't let that happen again. And hopefully when Lhave kids, I want even bring it up. All of my faults were brought up everyday. And it's bad because I can realize my wrong doing as a teen but he can't as an adult and parent. Like the bible says "the testimony of three righteous men are true". Grandma, Pastor Carpenter, and teachers from Bogan, and everybody in this family are on my side. But they tell me. Life is sometimes hard and you must deal with it. And personally I find it horrible that this is life and that the source of the problem is my father. It was always in my head that if I did what I had to do in school and obeyed my parents, I wouldn't have to worry about being in a school I didn't belong in again. But, I was to open to the fact of things getting better. Maybe this is what I get. But my father still had no write to be wrong from the beginning and stick to it just because he was stuck on having everything his way. But I have learned from my mistakes and hoping my dad will learn from his. I am tired so I will end this by saying College is the goal. When my parents do their part, it will be much more of a positive challenge and much easier for me to make it to college. Let's' do what it really takes for it to happen. Not in the way someone else sees it but the way the person that is going to college sees it.

My father's interpretation of this letter

I am guessing that the underlining of words is in support of his interpretation.

Bryan = Selfish me, i, what i want

You can have this back, I guess Disc inform not mea me to a me to me to

Discarded information not meant for me to see

I failed to see what he is over because we do not see eye-to-eye in any way, shape, form or fashion. I refuse to accept the guilt or wrong doing this statement implies.

#### Background

The previous letter was written when I was about 15 years of age. It was in response to a very violent and inadequate school environment, a step-mother who I felt cared very little for my well-being, and a father who I feel believes he can do no wrong given his self proclaimed divinity often stated as "I'm the father." In addition, feelings of deep sadness, frustration, hopelessness, injustice and being greatly overwhelmed were being contributed as part of life by my siblings. The advice "deal with it," which meant put up with it, was dreadful because if I did, it would have consumed my spirit. Filled with hopelessness and uncertainty, I ran away to live with my nurturing yet financially unstable and unreasonable mother (which my father describes as his enemy), who resided in the NW suburbs of Chicago, my junior year and attended Glenbard East High School. I knew I would receive the education that I desired.

#### The Discovery of the Letter

My father found the letter and was furious. In his fury, he fetched his bible to assert his 'God given authority' and prove me to be what he referred to his 'disobedient' or teenage children as "devilish child from hell;" an unfair and inaccurate statement I feel he believed me to be. I was wrong; not my parents for not being able to compromise for the sake of their child, not my step-mother, not the situation, and definitely not him. The contradiction was education is important but I was forced to attend a school were education was lacking greatly. My Dad often told me "I did it and others students are too, why can't you." Today, I understand that it was much easier to blame me rather than confront the real or multiple aspects of the situation. The lack of a meaningful support, family instability, inaccurate ideals (such as teens are rebellious) and varies environmental pressures burdened me. Good education was a comfort.

#### Today

At 23 years of age, or eight years later, my Dad returned to me a copy of my letter. After filing a copy as proof for what he would refers to as my disobedience, which was thrown in my face when the opportunity presented itself within the last eight years, he returned my letter suddenly stating "you can have this back, I guess I am over it now." The reason, I don't know. Shortly after, I was told by a sibling that my Dad referred to this letter as the worst thing any of his seven children ever did to him. Most would find this hard to believe but I think I understand. Today, I have broken many barriers and overcame many pressures, but my racial identity is mediocre at best.

## The Only Power We Have is Love

You can be so right yet so wrong April 5, 2008

In this world of imperfection, it is sometimes difficult to define things as right or wrong. The best intentions can create great things but yet, injure, destroy and harm. Even those who are so sure of themselves and have no doubt about their thoughts or being, can be as wicked as the devil himself and never realize or see it

In this world of imperfection, we are very quick to point the finger. Not understanding thy own imperfection contributes to the problems that linger. Consistently assuring ourselves that the other person is the problem, denying the fact that it takes the two involved to solve them. Lost in situations that are beyond us and out of our control. no resolution or answer, a limbo, but we act as if we know and the answer is in our soul.

> In this world of imperfection, which we make the body of conflict and hardship seems to be inevitable, the only power we have is love. Yet, we have no choice but to go through the motions our imperfections creates a place beyond us, a notion So don't be so quick to judge or cast someone away you yourself are not perfect, so think, who are you to judge anyway

In your being of imperfection, remember this humility is key, it's your way to eternal bliss, success and to be truly happy

#### CHAPTER ONE

#### INTRODUCTION

"Defining their roles and identities as men is the fundamental problem now facing Afro-Americans" (Diemer, 2002, p. 31).

The purpose of this thesis is to study the influence of four institutions on African American males' identity or sense of self in one specific domain; racial identity. The four institutions that will be measured include the family, church, peers, and the media. African American males struggle to define their sense of self in a society that contains negative imagery and devaluing and dehumanizing stereotypes of African American males. The identity exploration process is a trying time in itself, but "African American youth are met with the additional challenge of discovering what it means to be black" in a society that is often hostile and indifferent toward its minorities (Martin, 2008, p. 338). In the process of discovering their identity, African American males may look to groups or institutions in society like the media, family, peers, religion (better known as the church in the African American culture) for direction and affirmation. It is believed that institutions like the family and church serve as positive and more structured and secure frames of reference for African American males, compared to peers and the media. It has become increasingly difficult for African Americans to define their roles and sense of self in a society that praises unrealistic and stereotypical ideals of African Americans, particularly males.

In many aspects of society today, African American males are portrayed in a negative light. Most depictions of African American males in the media and society are extremely negative and depressing. African American males are portrayed so negatively "young black men are generally regarded as a source of tension" (Staples,

1982, p. 12). These depictions are believed to encourage society to adopt a hopeless and/or indifferent attitude toward African Americans males which contributes to pressures and barriers unique to African American males in society.

African Americans are often perceived as black sheep, inadequate and troublesome, and are the unwanted stepchildren that regrettably persist to exist without the concern necessary for sufficient development. Lawson (2005) says "negative stereotypes of Black males have become so persuasive that many teachers regard even the youngest Black males as unworthy of compassion, empathy, love, effort or high expectations" (p, 2). This is not true in all the arenas in life but a significant amount of them. This lack of concern or indifference helps to create many barriers, pressure and ultimately ambivalence in the life of African American males. African American males often fail to understand this dilemma or use it as a crutch. This is not meant as an excuse for African American males to behave delinquently or perform any less than their full potential, but rather to understand the plight of the African American male and why it is important to focus on their identity.

Brunswick (1988) reported statistics pertaining to African American males such as crime rates and imprisonment rates that helped to describe the intensity of the current crisis that African American males are facing. "The rate of delinquency among black youth has increased from 19.6 percent of all juvenile arrests in 1960 to 23.2 percent in 1985" (Gibbs, 1988, p. 8) and the New York Times reports that this rate has almost doubled in 2003. Numerous reports have reiterated the fact that majority of the jail population are African American males. Too often, due to the ambivalence in life

induced by the pressures and barriers in society in conjunction with immediate environmental and cultural hardships such as fatherless homes, violent neighbors, inadequate education and lack of accessible male role models, young men fall subject to the illusion of the entertainment industry, crime, imprisonment and death. African American males lose grip of the significance of their cultural and a genuine sense of self which are the basis of racial identity. They misplace their ability to define themselves which can allow others to define them for them. More than often, African American males come subject to or identify themselves with what unfavorable ideals such as those presented in the media, such as the pervasive Hip-Hop culture. Hip-hop often portrays life unrealistically; glamorous with few if any real consequences. Crime, delinguent behavior, rebellious attributes and closed mindedness are glamorized and are adopted as identity standards by African American males. In other cases, the negative and stereotypical images of African American males became identity standards because they invade the mind of young African American males, limiting what they see as available options.

Cable News Network (CNN) argues that "African Americans are struggling, hurting, and dying too soon" (2008). In the special "Black in America," CNN reported there were several staggering statistics regarding African Americans that help emphasize to explain the controversial circumstances of African American males. First, "African Americans score lower on standardized tests than any other developing country, blacks are more likely than whites to die from cancer, stroke, asthma, and heart diseases, and 1/3 of all blacks live under the poverty level compared to a tenth of whites" (CNN, 2008). As a race, African Americans face many issues that hinder their

development and as a result, their identities and developmental outcomes are negatively affected. Within the African American population, men and women face separate challenges. African American males, among other races, are guite distinguishable due to their dark completion and their reputation presented in the media. Through much hardship inside and outside the home, African American males have faced continuous and very significant struggles. Inside the home, Wilkinson (1977) says, "the institution of slavery is assumed to be destructive to the institution of marriage which has given black women unnatural superiority over men, denying them a significant place in the home" (p. 1). Diemer (2002) said that central to how African American males define themselves is being the breadwinner. Being denied a significant role in the home, especially the significance of the breadwinner, leaves African American males with low self esteem and sense of self. Wilkinson and Taylor pointed out that "a man who cannot bring home money gets discouraged and bitter" (1977, p. 85). In addition, institutions that are unique to the African American culture and have traditionally served as socializing agents conducive to the development of racial identity (family, community and religion) have been said to be diminishing (Personal communication with Dr. Norman Greer February 18th 2009). Dr. Greer says that there is a lack of information such as morals, values, beliefs and traditions that are not being taught and passed down through the generations. Outside the home, there are lively stereotypes created by prejudices and racism that erode racial identity. The development of a racial identity is a strong predictor for developing a positive and secure identity. The emasculating effects of slavery and crippling consequences of stereotypes have created an immense crisis that African American males must face and

overcome. This crisis undermines an African American male's ability to be a man and establish a significant and respected place in society and the home.

Need for the Study

There currently is very little research on the development of the African American male's identity. There are some theories that exist, such as Nigressence, which focuses on the development of a racial identity, but there is very little literature that focuses on the well-being of the African American male's identity and the effects of the socializing agents and/or institutions under which identity is developed. There is limited research aimed at studying the effects that family, the media, church and peers have on the development of a racial identity. This study aims to identify how much of an effect those institutions have on racial identity.

### **EXPLANATION OF TERMS**

Socialization: the "continuing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to his or her social position" (Webster, Electronic Dictionary). It is the context in which racial identity is acquired.

Racial Socialization: a process that specializes in the development of a racial identity

Identity Development: an inclusive process in socialization. A construction of ideals built around an individual's personality.

*Identity Standard*: "the self definitions that comprise a particular identity" (Kerpelman, 1997, p. 328). Those ideals or standards in which one aspires to adopt, and defines or identify themselves by.

Self-perceptions: the way an individual sees or defines them self.

Identity: "relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about the self" (Wendt, 1992, p. 397).

Racial Identity: "the ability to perceive racial differences and to identify oneself as a member of a racial group and have a positive sense of self-resulting in positive self regard" (Martin, 2008, p. 340).

Stereotypes: "simplified and standardized conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group" (2008).

## Summary

The attainment of positive and rich ideals helps to build and maintain a secure sense of self which aids in the development of a positive and secure identity. For African American males, a great determinant of achieving a secure identity is the achievement of secure racial identity which is "experienced as a self-affirming and valued aspect of the individual" (Mahalik, 2006. p, 95). Unfortunately, for African American males this process is distorted by ideals or standards of identity that are not conducive to the attainment of a racial identity. It is believed that these standards are typically found within peers and the media and are not tailored to the needs of African American males. Therefore, they create insecurities and/or inadequacies in African American males by eroding the development of racial identity and hindering the development of a positive and secure identity. This is unfortunate because African American males may adopt the practices which originally eroded their racial identity.

### Research questions

The current study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How is racial identity related to family influences on identity?
- 2. How is racial identity related to peer influences on identity?
- 3. How is racial identity related to media influences on identity?
- 4. How is racial identity related to church influences on identity?
- 5. Which institution has the strongest effect on racial identity; the family, peers, the media, or the church?

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will review existing research on identity formation and racial identity. Four institutions (family, church, media, and peers) are expected to have a relationship with racial identity and the research on these four domains will be explored and explained in more detail.

## Overview

The media typically emphasizes the negative stereotypes and unfavorable imagery of African American males. Frequently, African American males have been misrepresented and portrayed as lazy, irresponsible, "underemployed, unprofessional and as criminals" (2008). They are often times equated with immorality and disarray through off-putting and inaccurate representations of racial identity. These representations of African American males are commonly illustrated as "violent, savage, criminal, and drunken thugs interested in molesting and insulting any female that happens to be around" (Kimmel, 2007). As a consequence, Martin (2008) says that these negative representations have the potential of eroding racial identity. Moreover, Marable (1994) says that the real tragedy is that African American males are failing to define themselves without these misrepresentations of blackness. Examples of these inaccurate, unrealistic, and negative depictions of African Americans are commonly seen in main stream Hip-Hop and Rap music videos and movies that are in many ways stereotypical and reinforce the idea that these images are what it means to be black.

Cable News Network (CNN, 2008) Black in America clearly addresses the fact that African Americans are in a state of crisis. It has been made apparent that African

American males face a unique set of challenges that affect their sense of identity. More so and specifically, African American males face the immense challenge of defining themselves and negating unfavorable depictions of what it means to be black. Family and church are theorized to be positive encouragements on racial identity and may help negate the things that erode racial identity, like the media and peers. Due to certain factors which cause instability in African American families such as fatherless homes, inadequate education, and low-income, Gibbs (1988) suggests that family may be losing its ability to encourage the development of a racial identity. In the case of peer influence on racial identity, studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between "youth behavior and the behavior of their peers" (Prinstein, p, V). Peer influence is strongly dependent upon the individual and whether or not they chose to associate themselves with a peer group that may or may not encourage the development of a racial identity (Prinstein, 2008). As for the media, due to the vast amount of negative stereotypical imagery, it has been seen to erode racial identity (Martin, 2008).

#### Identity Development

Identity is a construct of ideals with its foundation being the personality. Identity was defined by Wendt (1992) as "relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about the self" (p. 397). It is the congruency of self perceptions and identity standards, defined by Kerpelman (1997) as "the self definitions or perceptions that comprise a particular identity" (p. 238). Identity standards are ideals that guide

beliefs, attitudes, and decision in order for self perceptions to match aspiring ideals. The stability and/or congruency in identity standards and self perceptions indicate identity achievement, which is defined as "systematic exploration of alternatives followed by commitment to a choice" (Grotevant, 1978, p. 208). Choices are those decisions made in accepting and committing to acquired self perceptions and identity standards. According to research, identity achievement is not necessarily subjective to the kind of choice, good or bad, made but the commitment and dedication to those choices. Most would make the argument that good choices contribute to not only identity achievement, but a secure and positive identity.

Identity is attained through the identity formation process or exploration which typically begins around the commencement of adolescence and "involves problemsolving behavior; experimentation, investigation, trial, search or hypothesis testing" (Grotevant, 1978, p. 210). The identity formation process is the exploring of alternatives or identity standards and making those choices to achieve and maintain them. Socializing agents such as family, media, church, and peers play essential roles in providing identity standards and the opportunity to develop and incorporate them into a sense of identity. The ways in which these institutions influence identity development is through messaging. The most common type of messaging occurs within interpersonal interaction.

Interpersonal feedback is comprised of the messages received from interactions with other people. According to the Control Theory System, it is very possible to create self perceptions without social or external input but through intrapersonal feedback;

reasoning within oneself. The Process Model of Identity Formation states that, this "developing sense of identity coordinates with the constraints of one's societal and familial contexts" (Grotevant, 1978, p. 208). In the case of this study, the emerging identity coordinates with the constraints of the institution (church, family, peers, or the media) in which socialization is most influential. Within the constraints of these macro and micro socializing institutions, there are "two key processes involved: exploration of alternatives and commitment to choices" (Grotevant, 1978, p. 204). This equates to the exploration of available options/identity standards within these institutions, adopting self perceptions and establishing congruency between the two. In order to establish congruency, commitment to the choice of adopting those self perceptions and identity standards are absolutely necessary as well as the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that maintain them.

## Racial identity

"African American youth are met with the additional challenge of discovering what it means to be black" (Martin, 2008, p. 338).

Nigrescence, "the process of becoming black," (Martin, 2008, p. 341) is a theory about the development of racial identity for African Americans, not just African American males. It has four stages that occur in sequence and explains the evolution of racial identity. The four stages are as follows:

Pre-encounter. Unconsciously devalue their own sense of blackness and value

the majority ways and values.

Encounter. A crisis occurs where there is a reinterpretation of the world.

There is a rejection of white social, cultural, and institutional

standards coupled with feelings of mis-education.

*Immersion-emersion*: Withdraw from dominant culture and immerses themselves in African American culture; self pride.

Internalization: Incorporate into self concept, a sense of self-confidence and secure identity.

A strong predictor of an "authentic and natural identity" is a racial identity (Donna, 1997, p. 4). Racial identity positively correlates with the development of a genuine and healthy sense of self which plays a significant role in the identity of African American males. Racial identity is defined as "the ability to perceive racial differences and to identify oneself as a member of a racial group and have a positive sense of selfresulting in positive self regard" (Martin, 2008, p. 340). Racial identity involves a greater understanding of the context in which African Americans exist, which then in turn results in a greater understanding of what it means to be African American. It is not to be confused with ethnic identity, an emerging term, which Townsend and Langhier (2007) described as perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that an individual holds about their own ethnicity. Racial identity is significant because it has roots in Afrocentric principles that "are in relation to the majority ethnic group" (Townsend, 2007, p. 283). It emphasizes the positive and prideful nature in ones' ethnicity with cultural significance which empowers individuals to feel and have a better understanding about themselves.

Racial or black identity "is experienced as a self-affirming and valued aspect of the individual" (Mahalik, 2006. p. 95). When tapped into, it is a pervasive self confirming force that gives unique value and meaning to the self. It also gives positive meaning to racial differences and negates harmful ideas that may inhibit the development of a positive self regard. Racial identity "compensates for and buffers against environmental

risks and has been linked to overall well-being and psychological health among African American youth" (Townsend, 2007, p. 279). It serves as a guard against those things which inhibit a positive and genuine identity. The functions of a racial identity are

> To defend and protect the persons from psychological problems associated with living in a society where race matters; to provide a sense belonging and social affiliation: and to provide a basis for interacting and communicating with people, cultures, and situations beyond the world of blackness (Donna, 1997, p. 4).

Cole (2003) said the development of a racial identity originated from slavery "as resistance to racism as it challenged the limitations that the dominant society placed on African Americans" (p. 105). It negates ideals, beliefs and practices in society such as racism and discrimination that are harmful to African American males and encourages a more prideful and authentic sense of self based on self-actualization, cultural and contextual understanding and significance. Mahalik (2006) stated that Blacks' racial identity rejects the negative depictions of African Americans found in society and encourages them to achieve a more "self-affirming and realistic identity" (p. 94). The Media and Racial Identity

It is unfortunate that the media often times has a negative impact on racial identity and the development of a positive self concept. Martin (2008) stated that racism and discrimination perpetuates negative stereotypes about African Americans in the media. "In viewing television, African American youth are at a greater chance of these images decreasing their self-esteem, increasing their identification with the negative attitudes, and eventual or possible erosion of their racial identity (Martin, 2008, p. 340). Because there is a pervasive amount of inaccurate and demeaning imagery of African

American males in the media, usually in the form negative generalizations and stereotypes, the development of a positive identity and/or racial identity is a very challenging and dissonance filled task for African American males compared to those of other ethnicities that do not face such a vast amount of questionable imagery.

> "Such negative perceptions of any individual can compromise one's self-esteem and belief in one's self, but for our young men, at such a tender age, experiencing such negative stereotypes may be too much of a burden for them as they a figuring out who they are and what they want to become" (Livingston, 2006, p. 212).

The media is a widely used and highly valued tool in society. The media serves as a convenient and effective medium for information that ultimately improves the efficiency and efficacy of receiving and sending information, messages, ideas and culture. It is comprised of newspapers, magazines, radio, billboards, internet, television, movies and books. The media is a very effective socializing agent and it exists in most aspects of life with television being the most prevalent. Martin proposed that there is racist imagery that exists within the media that perpetuates the negative stereotypes of African Americans and negatively affect the development of a racial identity. Martin (2008) says that "television is such a powerful medium that it can influence people's attitudes toward one another" such that the negative stereotypes concerning African

Americans influence society's views of African American's and how African Americans view themselves and their ethnic identity. Media, especially mass media, continues to strengthen its reputation of structuring reality. Davis and Gandy (1999) explained the potential implications that the media has on African American males' identity.

There is little, if any, research regarding the impact of the media on racial identity. However, there is substantial literature regarding how the media affects identity and how individuals perceive the world. A few studies have been selected to review in this section to help support the argument for studying the media's affect on racial identity. Mahalik (2006) surveyed 124 young adult African-American males, 87 from a university and 37 from the community, racial identity as it correlated with self esteem and psychological distress. The study concluded that the internalization of a racial identity resulted in a higher self esteem compared to conforming to traditional masculine norms (Mahalik, 2006, p 94). Therefore, the traditional ideals of masculinity, as well as negative stereotypical images of African American males, do not support the development of a racial identity. Mahalik (2006) described a racial identity as "rejecting the negative racial portrayals of blacks found in U.S. society in order to achieve a selfaffirming and realistic identity" (Mahalik, 2006, p 94).

Davis and Gandy (1999) sought to research the intervening effects that racial identity can have on exposure and interpretation of the media in African Americans. Although their study did not address the effect that media has on racial identity, they looked at some important factors that assist in understanding the relationship of African American male identity and the media. Media representations form understandings of "social, cultural, ethnic, and racial differences" (Davis, 1999, p. 367). Their studies found that high levels of television watching resulted in lower self-esteem in African Americans. Davis and Grandy (1999) stated that media representations of African Americans "have been implicated in historical and contemporary racial projects that use stereotypical images to redistribute resources to the dominant culture at the expense of

others" (p. 368). African American males, in particular, are portrayed in mass media as violent and threatening (p. 368).

Because the media consist of a vast amount of negative stereotypes, the encouragement of a racial identity is highly unlikely. A racial identity is defined as an "authentic sense of self" (Donna, 1997). The adoption of the negative and stereotypical imagery of African American males in the media does not reflect authenticity.

## Peers and Racial Identity

Adolescents are undergoing identity formation which is all about the exploration of available options. Peers, those of similar or equal standing, seem to associate themselves with those they feel have similar ideas, beliefs, and interests as they do which Prinstein and Dodge (2008) describe as homophily. This relationship provides the opportunity for peers to influence each other quite significantly. Printein and Dodge (2008) wrote that "there is remarkable and strong association between youth's behavior and the behaviors of their peers" (p. V).

The general body of research concerning peer influence has shown that the outcome of peer interaction to be more negative than positive. In addition, much of the research has focused on the negative consequences of peer interaction. In researching peer influence on racial identity, a key component is selection effect. Selection effect, "the tendency for teens to associate themselves with peers that have similar attributes or behaviors," has been shown to influence behavior and identity (Prinstein, 2008, p. 4).

Wade and Okesalo (2002) studied the relationship of racial identity and peer group selection. Their study included 104 African American high school students, 55 girls and 47 were boys, ranging from age 14 to 19 years of age. The participants were

given the shortened version of the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale and five statements or scenario's in which they responded whether they would congregate with individuals of their same race, Caucasian's or mixed race students. They found that those who had Pre-Encounter attitudes selected to sit with Caucasian or mixed race students and those who had Immersion/Emersion attitudes would sit with individuals of their same race. This is understandable because the Pre-Encounter stage of racial identity is characterized by a dislike of one's own sense of self and valuing the ways or others. The Immersion/Emersion stage is characterized by valuing one's own self and worth. There were no significant findings with participants with Internalization attitudes.

Wallace and Fischer (2007) conducted a study dealing with peers and their influence on substance abuse and other risky behavior. The participants were 188 African American's, in grades 9-12, from economically disadvantaged areas. The participants completed a self-report measure which found that the disapproval of high risk behavior in peers resulted in disapproval of substance use in the participant's and higher levels of an ethnic identity.

Prinstein and Dodge (2008) "examined current theoretical and empirical evidence" in order to gain insight into the process of peer influence (p. 3). They reported that one of the strongest predictors of adolescent delinquency is the delinquent level of closest friends. These studies suggest that individuals undergoing identity formation associate themselves with those in which they feel have common behaviors and beliefs. In the mist of that interaction, there is the Socialization Effect which is described by Prinstein and Dodge (2008) as "the effect or influence peers have on each other" (p. 4). Therefore, peers may or may not have a positive effect of the

development of a racial identity. It is dependent upon the individual and if they chose to associate themselves with peers that will or will not encourage the development of a racial identity.

## Family and Racial Identity

Townsend indicated that "family is one of the most significant socialization agents for youth as they transition from adolescence and begin to develop an adult identity" (Townsend, 2007, p. 279). The family has been regarded as the primary socializing agent for children growing into adulthood. Family is defined as that nuclear cohort related by blood, adoption, or marriage. Watson (1988) reported that a primary purpose and strength of family "is to support the development of its members by retaining the ability to renegotiate family rules and roles according to the developmental needs of its members" (p. 288).

Townsend and Lanphier (2007) conducted a study by questionnaire that examined the influence of parental efficacy, family coping, and adaptive family functioning on the development of racial identity among African American youth. The participants were 52 African American parent-child dyads. The study showed that parental adaptability and family cognitive reframing were significant in the development of racial identity in children. Functional families are defined as those that have practices, such as cognitive reframing (cognitive coping and problem solving skills), that encourage familial stability and growth promote the development of racial identity. Other practices that Townsend and Lanphier mentioned were prayer, spirituality, and social support. The study concluded that "cognitive reframing in conjunction with clear

family roles and open communication to resolve problems (family adaptability) had children who reported stronger racial identity" (p. 291).

Christian and Barbarin (2001) conducted a two year study which measured parental religiosity, behavioral problems and racial attribution/identity. The study collected data through interviewing and questionnaires. The participants were families with children, ranging from 5-18 years of age, from low-income families dealing with sickle cell disease. They reported that racial attribution was conveyed as a type of protection and used to explain negative life outcomes by the participants' parents. The use of external racial attribution, the non-internalization of racial identity, was related to more frequent behavioral problems compared to internalizing racial attribution; the fourth stage of the development of a racial identity. Barbarin suggested that this is a product of the parent's "generalized external style of racial attribution" (p. 60). This suggests that parents development of racial identity effects the behaviors or their child and possibly interferes with their development of a racial identity.

## Church and Racial Identity

According to Azevedo (2005), "it is often said that the African American Church was formed in protest against the inhumane treatment African Americans received from their white Christian brothers during slavery" after slavery (p. 421). Karenga (2002) stated that the church "served as an agency of social reorientation and reconstitution, providing reinforcement for the old values of marriage, family, morality, and spirituality in the face of the corrosive effects of enslavement" (p. 264). Furthermore, Cole (2003) said the church has been pivotal in the socialization of its African American youth, especially in teaching them the expectations and roles of males and females in the

home. Christian and Barbarin (2001) agreed by stating that religion is an important sociocultural resource for African American families.

In Christian and Barbarin (2001) study on parental religiosity, behavioral problems and racial attribution/identity, the author found that children of parents who attended church more frequently had fewer behavioral problems than those who attended church less frequently. This suggests religion, an essential component to the institution church, influence less behavioral problems which reflects a healthier sense of self; an indication of the development of a racial identity.

### Summary

In the identity exploration process, African American males are left with the addition challenge of defining what it means to be black. According to research, family and church typically encourage the development of a racial identity. Family instability, the non-internalization or racial attribution of parent's, and low levels of parental religiosity may negatively affect the development of a racial identity. The media has been shown to erode racial identity due to racism and the vast amount of negative stereotypes that are present in the media. Peers may or may not encourage the development of a racial identity. Peer influence on the development of racial identity depends upon the peer group in which individuals associate themselves with.

This study seeks to understand how family, media, peers and church affect African American male identity development. Moreover, this study seeks to understand how each institution affect African American male's racial identity or which institutions encourage or discourage the development of a racial identity. The specific research questions are as follows:

- 1. How is racial identity related to family influences on identity?
- 2. How is racial identity related to peer influences on identity?
- 3. How is racial identity related to media influences on identity?
- 4. How is racial identity related to church influences on identity?
- 5. Which institution has the strongest effect on racial identity; the family, peers, the media, or the church?

#### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLGY

Thirty-nine African American undergraduate male students, between 18-24 years of age, from Eastern Illinois University were surveyed. Participants were recruited primarily through their affiliation with predominantly African American organizations such as Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Black Student Union, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. The goal of this study was to rate the participants' racial identity and correlate it with the four institutions influence under consideration and to examine which institution had the strongest effect on their racial identity.

In order to rate racial identity, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was revised. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale was selected because it reflected self esteem and/or self worth; a vital component to the development of identity. The statements were reworded to reflect the participant's level of racial identity. This was necessary to produce because the current study defined racial identity as "the ability to perceive racial differences and to identify oneself as a member of a racial group and have a positive sense-resulting in positive self-regard" (Martin, 2008, p. 340). Therefore, the wording was altered to more accurately reflect the participants' sense of self rather than just self-esteem.

The survey consisted of a 20 item scale that asked the participants to rate their agreeability on a scale of 1-4 (1 being strongly agree and 4 being strongly disagree) with statements concerning racial identity (see Appendix A). The racial identity scale measured whether the participants' had a high or low level of racial identity. Next, the participants were asked to rate the extent to which each of the four institutions (family, peers, media, church) have affected their racial identity, on a scale from 1-5 (1 being no effect and 5 being a strong effect). That way, the correlation of the participant's level of racial identity and the level of identification with the institution under consideration could be calculated. Finally, four subscales were developed that asked the participants to rate the extent to which they agreed with various statements that were intended to measure how much the participant identified with a particular institution. Items within each of the four subscales (i.e., family, peers, church, and media) were rated on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). Each subscale consisted of statements in which strongly agree and strongly disagree signified identification with the institution in question. With the exception of the subscale 'media influence on identity,' strongly agree with odd numbers and strongly disagree with even numbers indicated identification with the institution in question. This pattern was also used in the measurement of racial identity. Strongly agree with statements 1, 2, 8, 9 and 10 and strongly disagree with statements 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the media influence on racial identity subscale indicated identification with the media. Items within each subscale that were rated as 'strongly agree' (1) or 'agree' (2) were reverse coded so that higher scores would indicate a stronger influence. It was desirable to see which institution participants identified with, the level of racial identity they had, and the institution in which the participants said had the most influence on their racial identity

#### **Procedures**

Before the survey was distributed, the purpose of the survey was explained to the participants. They were informed that participation in this survey was completely voluntary and that they can chose to discontinue their participation at anytime. They were informed that the survey was completely confidential and that there were not any identifying information fields within the survey. To ensure confidentiality, the consent to participate forms were collected before the dissemination of the survey so that the participants' names could not be affiliated with their survey. A great majority of the participants received the surveys in a group setting were the survey was manually distributed and collected by the principle investigator, Bryan Range. Once the participants were finished, they were debriefed and thanked them for their participation and were asked if they had any questions. A very small amount of participants received the survey in a manila envelope, which was addressed to Dr. Lisa Taylor (faculty sponsor) 2022 Klehm Hall, and they were asked to place the envelope with the completed survey sealed inside and place it in the campus mail system.

#### Statistical analysis

To answer the first four research questions, which ask how racial identity is related to family, peer, media, and church influences on identity, the individual subscales were first summed in order to calculate a score for each domain. Higher numbers on domain scores indicated stronger racial identity or stronger influences (e.g., family, peers, media, and church). Correlations were then computed between the summed racial identity score and each of the institution summed scores. To answer research question number five, the means (and standard deviations) were calculated for the items that assessed the extent to which the four institutions affected the participants' racial identity.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

#### **RESULTS**

Descriptive statistics were computed on the demographic variables that were collected in order to describe the sample. The average age of the participants was  $20.89 \ (SD = 1.43)$ . Ninety-seven percent of the sample had never been married and did not have children (88%). 89.7% identified themselves as "religious," with 'Christian' (33.3%) and 'Baptist' (30.6%) being the most common type of religion. Descriptive statistics were also calculated for the summed racial identity score. The scores ranged from 51 to 73 (M = 62.97, SD = 6.59). Higher scores indicated a stronger racial identity, thus it appeared that the current sample had a strong racial identities.

To answer the first research question, which asked how racial identity was related to family influence on identity, a correlation between the summed racial identity score and the summed family influence score was calculated. The results indicated that the correlation was insignificant. Research questions two though four asked how racial identity was related to peer, the media and church influence on identity. The correlations that were computed to answer these questions indicated that there was not a significant relationship between these variables. In other words, family, peer, media, and church did not affect the participants' racial identity. The fifth research question asked which institution had the strongest effect on racial identity. Table 1 illustrated that family had the strongest influence on the participants' racial identity. After family, peers were selected the most often as having a high influence, followed by the church, and then media was listed as having the least amount of influence. Clearly, the participants saw their family as having a large effect on their identity.

Table 1 Racial Identity & Family, Peer, Church & Media Influence on Identity (N=38)

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Racial identity Summed Score	51.00	73.00	62.9744	6.5874
Family Influence Summed Score	20.00	79.00	66.4103	11.3247
Peer Influence Summed Score	46.00	74.00	60.6923	7.9576
Media Influence Summed Score	17.00	30.00	23.9744	2.9779
Church Influence Summed Score	30.00	80.00	61.9231	11.5790

<sup>\*</sup> Multiple media influence summed score by 2

Table 2  $Participants\ Direct\ Response\ to\ Family,\ Peer,\ Church\ \&\ Media\ Influence\ on\ Identity\ (N=39)$ 

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Family	1.00	5.00	4.5000	.9795
Peers	2.00	5.00	3.7895	.8433
Church	1.00	5.00	4.0526	1.2069
Media	1.00	5.00	2.6842	1.0931

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### DISCUSSION

The intent of this study was to gain insight into the ominous ideals that challenge African American males' sense of self. This study strived to acquire a more thorough understanding of the plight of African American males and their ability to achieve a strong racial identity which was described by Donna (1997) as a "more authentic and natural identity" (p. 4). In order to do such, this study looked at four socializing agents or institutions that may encourage or discourage the development of a strong racial identity. The research questions explored in the current study asked how four socializing agents (i,e., family, church, peers, and the media) affected racial identity.

The findings showed that family, church, the media and peers did not have a significant effect on racial identity. It was expected that the results would have shown a positive correlation between racial identity and family and church and a negative correlation between racial identity and peers and the media. The lack of support for the expectations in the current study could be attributed to the way in which the survey was structured, as the racial identity measure has never been tested before.

When asked directly, the participants reported that their family and church had the strongest impact on their identity. In previous research, findings have indicated that racial socialization is a much more likely to occur in functional families, churches and certain peer groups. The findings in the current study supported this (see Table 1).

According to existing literature on racial identity, the most common inhibitor of the development of a racial identity are the distorted and inaccurate representations of what it means to be African American male. These representations are typically negative

stereotypes presented in the media. Stereotypes, which are "simplified and standardized conceptions or images invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group," have the potential to become common beliefs held in society of a particular group (2008). It was thought by the researcher that such negative representations of African American males pose a threat to the African American males and their ability to acquire a racial identity. Unfortunately, the findings in the current study did not support this belief.

As young African American males are undergoing identity formation, they may not possess the ability or mental capacity to make the best judgments about what they see and are exposed to. For African American males, especially those who are raised in a disadvantaged environment, what they see as "available options" are likely to be negative or distorted imagery of what it means to be an African American male (Livingston, 2006, p. 212). These distorted images of African American males produce identity standards and self perceptions that are seen to erode racial identity.

As this study sought to understand how peers, family, media, and church affected identity, more specifically racial identity, a better understanding how these institutions influenced identity was acquired. Again, the media appeared not to affect the racial identity of the participants in this study but the participants rated the media as having the least effect on their racial identity. It is unclear why this was the case, but it could be attributed to the manner in which media influences were measured as the instrument was developed by the author and had been tested previously with different populations.

Mahalik stated that African American males who identify with identity standards found in the media, "may not internalize an authentic sense of Blackness" which frequently leads to "psychological distress" (2006, p. 95). Martin (2008) says internalization of these negative images in the media "can produce feelings of unimportance, lower self-esteem and negative self image" (p. 339). He continues by stating that the constant devaluing of African American male's racial identity and the acceptance of stereotypes in the media can negatively affect one's self-concept (Martin, 2008, p. 339). While the current study did not show that the media had a negative effect on the participants' racial identity, it did show that the participants in the current study had a strong racial identity. This could be due, in part, to the fact that the sample was comprised of African American males enrolled in a Midwestern university. Thus, it may be that the current sample was not as strongly affected by the negative portrayals of African Americans in the media as African American males that do not attend college.

A significant correlation between racial identity and the family was not found in the current study, but family could encourage the development of a racial identity considering the participants rated family as the strongest influencer on their identity. The ways in which family members are seen to encourage the development of a racial identity is described by Townsend and Lanphier. Townsend and Lanphier (2007) said that "cohesion (interaction and closeness among family members) among African American families often provides a buffer against the negative images and stereotypes of Blacks prevalent in Western society, which can erode an African American youth's racial identity" (p. 281). Townsend and Lanphier also said that "family functioning influences youth to cope with uncontrollable life stressors, such as racism and

discrimination and avoid psychological difficulties to preserve youth's sense of self (Townsend, 2007, p. 281). The findings from the current study appeared to support this notion.

The church was rated by the participants as the second strongest influence on their identity. Thus, the results support the idea the church has a positive effect on the development of a racial identity. Christian and Barbarin (2001) said that the development of racial identity correlates with positive identity development for African American youth. Racial identity may "influence better coping strategies, and a higher self-esteem and self-efficacy" (Christian, 2001, p. 49). Christian and Barbarin (2001) hypothesized that the religiosity of church exerts "a firmer control, has greater maturity demands, greater acceptance of personal responsibility for behavior, and teaches to endure suffering and delay gratification" (p. 49). Consequently, the results in the current study are encouraging for African American males. In addition, just as racial identity is said to serve as protection against potentially harmful environmental factors, Karenga (2002) believed that the church can serve as protection against the racism that threatens "black dignity, relevance and social worth" (p. 264).

Peers and racial identity did not have a significant correlation in this study.

When asked directly about the effects of the four institutions on racial identity, the results indicated that peer influence and the church's influence was about the same. An explanation for these findings was described by Printein and Dodge (2008) as "homophily," which is an increased level of interaction with those that are more similar to ones self compared to those that are not. The development of a racial identity among peers is dependent upon the peer group in which the individual sees as similar to

themselves. Therefore, the findings here imply that the participants were members of peer groups that took part in their racial socialization.

#### Limitations

The limitations of this study were threefold. First, the study utilized a convenience sample of African-American males that were measured in a cross-sectional manner. This hindered the study's ability to be generalized to the entire African American male population. The second limitation was the sampling size, which minimized the statistical power of the study. Finally, the study used a measure that had never been utilized nor tested prior to the current study. It is unclear whether or not the measure is effective at measuring what it was intended to measure without further data collection and analysis.

#### Future Directions

Future directions for the study of racial identity and socializing agents include utilizing a younger sample in order to assess the influences on racial identity at the beginning of development. A larger sample would increase the quality of the study as well as the findings would be more generalized and there would be more statistical power. Finally, it is important that measures are used that have been tested in previous studies to be sure of their reliability and validity in analyzing racial identity and its various influences.

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### Racial Identity as it Correlates to Family, Peers, the Church and the Media

Age:	Gender (circle one): M F	
Year in school: I student	Freshman Sophomore Jun	nior Senior Graduate
	Not a student at EIU	
Ethnicity:CaucasianAfrican-AmericanHispanicAsianOther	Marital Status Never Married Currently Married Currently Divorced Remarried Other	Parental status: I am not a parent I am a parent I am a step-parent I am both a step I am a parent AND an adoptive/biological parent
Do you identify yourself as re	eligious or spiritual? Yes _	No
If so, please identify your reli	gious affiliation:	

### Racial Identity

For the purposes of this study, racial identity is defined as "the ability to perceive	Ci	ers		
racial differences and to identify oneself as a member of a racial group and have a positive sense of self-resulting in positive self regard" (Martin, 2008, p. 340).	Strongly agree	2	3	Strongly disagree 4
Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below				
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others of other race/ ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
2. I often look at others of another race and feel inferior or unaccomplished.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel a strong since of pride when it comes to my race/ethnicity	1	2	3	4
4. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	1	2	3	4
5. I am able to do things as well as most other people of a different race/ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
6. There is a significant amount of uncertainty in my life	1	2	3	4
7. I can stand proud when it comes to my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4

8. Too often, I have feelings of dissatisfaction about myself.	1	2	3	4
9. All in all, I am satisfied with myself and hold a positive self regard.	1	2	3	4
10. Frequently, I feel that I am less than my counterparts of a different race.	1	2	3	4
11. I am proud of who I am and can succeed in any arena of life if I put my mind to it.	1	2	3	4
12. I feel that I am not a person of importance.	1	2	3	4
13. I am in control of who I am.	1	2	3	4
14. I do a lot of things that I am not proud of, but it's just the way I am.	1	2	3	4
15. I am not easily influenced.	1	2	3	4
16. I have a hard time identifying the 'right' thing to do.	1	2	3	4
17. It is relatively easy for me to identify the 'right' thing to do and do it.	1	2	3	4
18. I am unsure of who I am.	1	2	3	4
20. I can be easily influenced.	1	2	3	4

### Influences on Racial Identity

Rate the extent to which each of the four factors have affected your RACIAL IDENTITY  No effect on me		Circle your answers						
				trong ect on me				
1. My family	1	2	3	4	5			
2. My peers	1	2	3	4	5			
3. My church/religion	1	2	3	4	5			
4. The media	1	2	3	4	5			

# Family Influence on Identity

Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below	Strongly agree	2	3	Strongly disagree 4
I consider myself to be a family oriented individual.	1	2	2	4
2. I do not like to spend too much time with my family	1	2	3	4
3. My family plays a major role in who I am.	1	2	3	4
4. I purposefully distance myself emotionally and physically from my family.	1	2	3	4
5. My family provides me with a strong sense of cultural pride.	1	2	3	4
6. My family has not contributed much to who I am today	1	2	3	4
7. If I did not have my family, I don't know where I would be.	1	2	3	4
8. I have done pretty good for myself without much support from my family.	1	2	3	4
9. My family and I get together often and we enjoy each other.	1	2	3	4
10. My family does not get together often.	1	2	3	4
11. The knowledge I have acquired within my family has guided me in many of the decisions I make in life.	1	2	3	4
12. My family has caused me a significant amount of pain.	1	2	3	4
13. My family and I have very in depth conversations about the world we live in and I enjoy them.	1	2	3	4
14. My family is dysfunctional and it hinders my growth.	1	2	3	4
15. There is a lot of give and take in my family	1	2	3	4
16. I don't like to talk to me family about my personal life.	1	2	3	4
17. Despite my circumstance, my family has taught me how to be strong.	1	2	3	4
18. I wish I was from another family.	1	2	3	4

	<b>Strongly</b> agree			Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4
19. My family is cohesive and we do a lot of self disclosing.	1	2	3	4
20. My family has not done a great job in socializing its members.	1	2	3	4

# Peer Influence on Identity

Friends are those of the peer group in which you interact the most with  Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below	Strongly agree	2	3	Strongly disagree 4
I spend a lot of my time hanging out with my friends.	1	2	3	4
2. I stay to myself most of the time.	1	2	3	4
3. My friends have gotten me to do things I am not proud of and would not have otherwise done by myself.	1	2	3	4
4. My opinion and beliefs usually differ from my friends.	1	2	3	4
5. I spend more time with my friends compared to my family.	1	2	3	4
6. I like hanging out with my friends, but they are just not that important to me.	1	2	3	4
7. When it comes to my peers, I am popular and cool.	1	2	3	4
8. I don't have any friends, only associates.	1	2	3	4
9. I noticed that I pick up a lot of ideas from my friends. (Such as mannerisms, sayings, behaviors etc)	1	2	3	4
10. Friends are overrated.	1	2	3	4
11. My friends and I have a lot in common.	1	2	3	4
12. I hang out with my friends every-so-often or when I get the time.	1	2	3	4
13. My friends are a big part of my support system.	1	2	3	4
14. I have only one, maybe two, friends.	1	2	3	4

	Strongly agree		0.		•		0.		•				0.		O •		O •		O •	
	1	2	3	4																
15. Sometimes my beliefs differ from my friends but I usually take on their way of thinking.	1	2	3	4																
16. I have lot of trouble with making and keeping friends	1	2	3	4																
17. My friends are more like family to me.	1	2	3	4																
18. I am considered an outcast among my peers.	1	2	3	4																
19. I don't know what I would do without my friends.	1	2	3	4																
20. Friends bring trouble.	1	2	3	4																

# Media Influence on Identity

	Circle your answers				
Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below	Strongly agree	2	3	Strongly disagree 4	
I aspire to be in the Hip-Hop or entertainment industry as a rapper or a basketball player.	1	2	3	4	
2. I watch a limited amount of television.	1	2	3	4	
3. I spend several hours a day watching television.	1	2	3	4	
4. I do not like the representation of African American males I see in the media.	1	2	3	4	
5. I feel that there is an accurate representation of my blackness in the media.	1	2	3	4	
6. I feel that too much television is just simply bad for you.	1	2	3	4	
7. I look up to African-American actors, musicians, and sports stars. They help me in figure out who I want to be.	1	2	3	4	
8. I cannot relate to a lot of things on television.	1	2	3	4	
9. I read a great deal of magazines that feature African-Americans.	1	2	3	4	
10. Magazines, television, and going to the movies is a very small portion in my life.	1	2	3	4	

# Church Influence on Identity

1. Religion/church is very much a part of my life and who I am.  2. I do not feel like my church protects me (spiritually, psychologically, emotionally) therefore I don't care for church.  3. I enjoy going to church because I feel like I belong there and I learn a lot.  4. I go to church simple out of habit. I don't learn as much as I think I should.  5. I go to church regularly.  6. My religion doesn't provide me with much direction in life.  7. I feel a strong spiritual connection with God when I go to church that empowers me.  8. I learn more outside of church than in church.  9. I am a religious individual.  10. I know I should be more religious but its just not a big part of my life right now.  11. I feel that I have a stronger sense of who I am because of religion.  12. 3 4  13. I feel like I do better in life because of my religion and/or church.  14. I just don't care much about being religious.  15. My church is a major part of my support system.  16. I do not like the way the church operates, therefore is doesn't mean much to me.  17. I can cope better with life because of my religion/church.  18. My religion/church does nothing for me.		C	Circle your answers				
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18. My religion/church does nothing for me.	17. I can cope better with life because of my religion/church.	1	2	3	4		
	18. My religion/church does nothing for me.	1	2	3	4		

	Strongly agree	2	2	Strongly disagree
19. I am a devoted and faithful member in my church.	1	2	3	4
20. Religion is pointless.	1	2	3	4

### Gender Beliefs

	Circle your answers			
	Strongl agree	y		Strongly disagree
Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below	1	2	3	4
1. I do not show my emotions often because it is a sign of weakness	1	2	3	4
2. When I do not have money, I feel like a failure.	1	2	3	4
3. I know that being attractive is a part of being successful.	1	2	3	4
4. Having nice clothes and a nice car is very important to my success and without them I feel I am a failure.	1	2	3	4
5. Women are simply not equal to men. It's just the way it is.	1	2	3	4
6. I call women sometimes for the sole purpose of sex.	1	2	3	4
7. I would like to be with an independent woman.	1	2	3	4
8. I am usually seeing more than one female at any given time.	1	2	3	4
9. I would not have sex with a multiple females at one time.	1	2	3	4
10. I do not call females for the sole purpose of sex.	1	2	3	4
11. I would rather wait until I am married or in a serious relationship to have oral sex or intercourse	1	2	3	4
12. I am a virgin and I am waiting for marriage of a serious relationship to give my virginity away.	1	2	3	4

Thank you very much for your participation! You have assisted me in completing my Honor's Research Thesis.

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Where Does My Identity Lie? The Socialization of the African American Male

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Bryan Range (supervised by Dr. Lisa Taylor), from the school of Family & Consumer Sciences at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you meet the requirements in which the research aims to study. African American males between the ages of 18-24 are being sought out to participate in this research on identity and gender beliefs.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to study how family, peers, the church, and media affect African American males' racial identity.

#### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

(1) Take a copy of the survey in the manila envelope provided. (2) Take about 15-20 minutes to fill out the survey and then return it to the manila envelope provided. (3) Seal the envelope and return it to the principle investigator, Bryan Range, or place it in campus mail. The envelope is post addressed to Dr. Lisa Taylor's Office, the principle investigator's faculty advisor, from the school of Family & Consumer Sciences in 2022 Klehm Hall.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no potential risks or discomforts associated with this study.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants will gain some insight into their sense of self. Potential benefits for society include a base for further research on this issue.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Only the principle investigator faculty advisor and I, principle investigator, will be allowed to review the anonymous survey. No information such as name, address, telephone number etc., will be collected. The survey is completely anonymous.

### • PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer respond to.

#### **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Principle Investigator, Bryan P. Range Dr. Lisa Taylor (217) 581-3029 and/or bprange@eiu.edu Principle Investigator Faculty Advisor, Dr. Lisa M. Taylor (217) 581-8584 and/or lmtaylor@eiu.edu

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board Eastern Illinois University 600 Lincoln Ave. Charleston, IL 61920 Telephone: (217) 581-8576 E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. discontinue my participation at any time. I have	I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and e been given a copy of this form.
Printed Name of Participant	<u></u>
Signature of Participant	Date
I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explanation	ained the investigation to the above subject.
Signature of Investigator	

#### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"The Process Model of Identity Formation says "in order to benefit from exploration, individuals must be able to evaluate information and draw inferences about both the self and the environment which are then integrated with the developing sense of identity and coordinate them with the constraints of one's societal and familial contexts" (Grotevant, 1978, p. 208).

#### Personality

The personality is what individuals bring into the identity formation process. Personality factors vary from person to person and greatly influence the development of identity. According to The Process Model of Identity Formation, the personality consists of self-esteem, self-monitoring, ego-resiliency and cognitive ability. Self esteem is the evaluation of one's worth. Self monitoring is an individual's ability to observe their own behavior and adjust it if necessary. Ego-resiliency is the degree or flexibility shown in confronting new and potentially challenging situations and cognitive ability refers to the mental capacity to interpret information in one's environment and apply it toward the development of identity.

Grotevant points out several other important factors that greatly influence the identity formation. First, "the coordination or multiple perspectives makes an important contribution to identity formation" (Grotevant, 1987, p. 208). It gives individuals a greater mental capacity to reason information, make more refined inferences about themselves and the environment which enhances decision making skills. Secondly, "expectations and beliefs greatly influence what an individual perceives as available options and their potential for success in this process (Grotevant, 1987, p. 211). This refers to one's attitude, a major component of personality, before the exploration process begins. It is an individual's outlook on identity exploration which strongly affects their identity exploration process. Lastly, affective and cognitive factors

influence how an individual performs in the identity formation process. Affective is simply what is learned or beliefs established from past experience that makes judgments about future experience in the identity exploration process and how an individuals goes about making future decisions. Cognition is how an individual manages information in the identity exploration process.

#### Racial Identity

"Individuals who seek traditional masculine roles may not internalize an authentic sense of Blackness" or cultural ethnic identity, which frequently leads to "psychological distress" (Mahalik, 2006, p. 95). According to Mahalik, psychological distress of traditional masculinity leads to "anger, abuse of substance, hostility, irritability, lower self-esteem and high levels of anxiety and depression" (2006, p. 95).

#### Family

Watson (1988) stated that a primary function of the family is its ability to renegotiate roles and rules.

Unfortunately, Gibbs (1988) states that "black families do a poorer job of socializing their children than white families and single parent families do an even poorer job" (p 141). Gibbs view, which has very limited factual research, say that black family's do an inadequate job in socializing their children. The argument that Gibbs presents is that families are adopting practices that encourage delinquency in their children hence the higher rates of delinquency in African Americans. Furthermore, the reason for African American men being unable to function in the economic world questions family stability.

> Gibbs says family instability is due to a legacy of disrupted family life from the slavery period, employment discrimination, and weak economic conditions. But high unemployment or disproportionally low-income employment has devastated

the establishment and maintenance of stability in families in the black community (Gibbs, 1988, p. 311).

Livingston and Lanphier (2006) agree. They say that the high unemployment rates have had a major effect on the African American community and family stability. (p. 210). Other factors that may influence family stability and its ability to adequately socialize its young members is the high rates of crime and violence in the immediate environment and an array of economic disadvantages. Furthermore, there is an increase of mothers and grandmothers raising children, which Gibbs contributes to possible inadequate socialization, and "negative or absent influential males" (Harris, 1999, p. 13).

The influence of negative or absent fathers has been an epidemic in the African American community. Negative males are constituted as those who have an unfavorable affect on the identity development of those African American males they interact or lack interaction with. Harrison (1999) exemplify a negative influential male by pointing out that inconsistent, quick and/or questionable employment illustrations to "impressionable male child" a way of attaining 'easy money' with little education (p. 13). Although, family is meant to be conducive to the development of a positive and racial identity, African American families maybe too disadvantaged and/or unstable to perform its primary and historical function. Livingston and Lanphier (2006) ends by saying high rates of unemployment can create fatherless homes, economic instability, hopelessness characterized or manifested in children by low expectations, increase rates of high school dropout and delinquency (p. 211).

Families typically serve as "buffers against environmental risks" (Townsend, 2007, p. 279) such as racism, discrimination, violence etc. Since slavery, African

Americans have used institutions such as family, community, and church to develop an identity separate from society at large. These institutions or socializing agents where endowed with beliefs and practices that encouraged the development of racial identity. Townsend (2007) said that "parents fortify their children against societal risks through messages of cultural pride, group knowledge, and acceptance making racial socialization a central dynamic in African American Families" (p. 280). Townsend (2007) continues by stating that young African Americans develop resiliency which gives them ability to successfully develop, "even in the face of great economic hardship and community risk" (Townsend, 2007, p. 279).

McAdoo (1994) composed the following traits that are crucial in any analyses and definition of African-American family strength and stability.

"Economic sufficiency: stable employment, adequate income, property ownership, and a strong work orientation. Religiosity: positive ethnic values and a positive religious orientation. Future orientation or achievement orientation: educational attainment, educational expectations and aspirations. Flexibility in family roles: the presence of a leader in the family, ability to deal with crises in a positive manner, good communication patterns and consistent rules. Strong kinship bonds: a high degree of commitment, appreciation, mutual obligations, helping networks and exchanges, and spending time together. Positive friendship relationships: reciprocal sharing and reaching out and support in time of crises. A realistic attitude toward work: an ability to compartmentalize negative racial stereotypes, an ability to get along with others, and balance work and family time."

#### Peers

Peers play a significant part in socialization. Socialization takes place during the increased level of interaction with peers, but it is the individual who also makes the decision to interact with a particular group of peers. Printein and Dodge (2008) describe homophily as increased level of interaction with those that are more similar to ones self compared to those that are not. Homophily has two components; selection effects and socialization. Selection effect is explained as the tendency for teens to associate themselves with peers that have similar attributes or behaviors. Socialization effect is explained as the effect or influence peers have on each other. Within the socialization effect, there are particular mechanisms used in peer groups that influence beliefs, behaviors, attitudes and identity. These mechanisms are deviancy training, conformity, peer pressure, and peer contagion.

Prinstein and Dodge (2008) describe each:

- Deviancy Training: Imitating the deviant verbal and nonverbal behavior of peers.
- Conformity: The desire to fit in and identify with particular group of peer while distancing one's identity from a group of undesired peers. Conformity dictates behavior and beliefs.
- Peer pressure: A major mechanism of influence, connoted as being coerce into some behaviors by peers.
- Peer contagion: The influence is connoted as some sort of disease, negative in nature, which one catches by being of close proximity to peers.

#### Media

"In the 1970's, African American men were portrayed as underemployed, unprofessional and as criminals" (2007). Since then, there has been more positive representation of African American males in the media, but the negative images of African American males surpass the positive ones. For example, African American males in "main stream rap and hip-hop videos are largely presented as violent, savage, criminal, and drunken thugs interested in molesting and insulting any female that happens the be around" (Kimmel, 2007).

> "In Examining the stories the music videos tell us, it tells us all about both male and female sexuality and about what is considered normal. This allows us to understand more than just one aspect about our culture. It allows away to think about how the culture educate its members on how to be men and women. It gives us away to understand ourselves" (Kimmel, 2007).

Literature "has focused almost exclusively on African American men as a social problem" (Diemer, 2002, p. 31) and has "rarely studied African American men who fit societal expectations for the provider role" (Diemer, 2002, p. 32). In literature, the African American male role is equated with term "bluesman," which is a synonym for sorrow and dread. Examples are Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The Confessions of Nat Turner. Andrews (1994) says that black in the novels are hardly visible at all (p. 68). In other pieces of literature, such as Light in August and Absalom, Andrew also says blacks are portrayed as "inevitably doomed" (Andrews, 1994, p. 86). Collins (2004) stated that mass media has a "tendency to blur the lines between fact and fiction which has important consequences for perceptions of Black culture and black people" (p. 151).

Grotevant says "when choices are available, society affect the process of identity formation by shaping their members expectations and beliefs about the availability of options and the appropriateness of exploration, and by regulating access to alternatives" (1978, p. 215). More than often, the options or identity standards that are available for African American males are negative stereotypes that are derived from racism and erode racial identity. Mahalik (2006) says that an African American male's racial identity is a defense mechanism against racism (p 94). For example, gender stereotypes, for men consist of expectations and beliefs such as "showing emotion is a sign of weakness, you must be sexually potent to be successful, you are a failure if you don't accumulate wealth, and you are defined by your car and other possessions" (2007). African American males who identify with identity standards found in the media, "may not internalize an authentic sense of Blackness" or cultural ethnic identity, which frequently leads to "psychological distress" (Mahalik, 2006, p. 95).

Some common effects that are produced within African American males due to the inaccurate representations of African American males are beliefs that reflect ideals in the media. *Sexual Stereotypes in the Media* says African American males may see being in continuous pursuit of booty calls (calling someone for the sole purpose of sex) as being more black than those African American males who are not (2008). Other beliefs include the adoption of gender stereotypes such as "showing emotion is a sign of weakness, you must be sexually potent to be successful, you are a failure if you don't accumulate wealth, and you are defined by your car and other possessions" (2007). Another common belief is that "real men do not make good grades in school" (Harris, 1999, p. 13).

Martin (2008) says internalization of these negative images in the media "can produce feelings of unimportance, lower self-esteem and negative self image" (p. 339). He continues by stating that the constant devaluing of African American male's racial identity and the acceptance of stereotypes in the media can negatively affect one's self-concept (p. 339).

Townsend (2007) describes racial identity as a "buffer against environmental risks and linked to overall well-being and psychological health among African American youth" (p. 279). These stereotypes may present barriers within society such as racism which can make the identity formation process a more trying time. Wilkinson says "the social definition of the negro-the fact that he is colored and an outcast-has almost hidden the fact that Negroes have a culture," an essential component to the development of a racial identity (1977, p. 63). In addition, Lawson (2005) stated that "the negative stereotypes of black males have become so pervasive that many teachers regard even the youngest Black males as unworthy of empathy, compassion, love, effort, or high expectations." These distorted and inaccurate representations of African American males are most present in the media. A few of the representations are described by Martin (2008), which he says is "common distorted misrepresentations of African American in the media used to entertain; stressing the inferiority of blacks" (p. 340). They are the "Good Negro: socially acceptable, submissive, often insulted but wouldn't turn against his slave master" and the "Mammy: fat, fiercely independent, ill tempered and trouble maker" (Martin, 2008, p. 340). Others include:

- The Mulatto-accepted because he was half white
- The Buck-big, oversexed, savage like and dangerous

#### Coon

- Pure coon-unreliable, lazy, eats watermelon and has poor English skills
- The Pickaninny-harmless child negro whose eyes pop and hair stands on end
- Uncle Remus-satisfied with place in life as a slave/servant, harmless and naïve

Today, its ghetto: incapable, self destructive, uneducated, ignorant, immature, unemployed and comical in nature.

Gender Beliefs

Participants Gender Beliefs (N = 39)

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
GB1	1.00	4.00	2.3077	1.1039
GB2	1.00	4.00	2.4615	.9132
GB3	1.00	4.00	2.4103	.9380
GB4	1.00	4.00	2.8974	.9402
GB5	1.00	4.00	3.2564	.9925
GB6	1.00	4.00	2.4359	1.2311
GB7	1.00	4.00	1.8205	1.0227
GB8	1.00	4.00	2.4615	1.0966
GB9	1.00	4.00	2.9744	1.1353
GB10	1.00	4.00	2.7105	1.1368
GB11	1.00	4.00	3.2564	.9657
GB12	1.00	4.00	3.8462	.4887

#### Gender Beliefs Subscale Statements

- GB1 I do not show my emotions often because it is a sign of weakness.
- GB2 When I do not have money, I feel like a failure.
- GB3 I know that being attractive is a part of being successful.
- GB4 Having nice clothes and a nice car is very important to my success and without them, I feel I am a failure.
- BG5 Women are simply not equal to men. It's just the way it is.
- BG6 I call women sometimes for the sole purpose of sex.
- BG7 I would like to be with an independent woman.
- BG8 I am usually seeing more than one female at any given time.
- BG9 I would not have sex with a multiple females at one time.
- BG10 I do not call females for the sole purpose of sex
- BG11 I would rather wait until I am married or in a serious relationship to have oral sex or intercourse.
- BG12 I am a virgin and I am waiting for marriage of serious relationship to give my virginity away.

#### Discussion

The gender beliefs subscale originally belonged to the media's influence on identity subscale. The intent was to relate the participants gender beliefs with those found in the media using gender belief as a window into the participants' identity.

Because gender beliefs were not a part of this study but is an interesting component of identity, gender beliefs became its own independent subscale. It was then analyzed in order to gain insight into the participants' identity.

The result's whose mean were about 2.5 (i.e., statements 2, 3, 6, and 8) showed that a considerable size of the participants believed these statements to be true. The results from question number one suggested that there is some truth in the statement, but not very prevalent among the participants. The results of statement number ten suggest that there was more truth to the statement than not, but again not very prevalent. The participants more so disagreed with statements number 4, 5, 9, and 11 and strongly disagreed with statement number 12. Statement seven yielded that the participants would like to have a relationship with an independent woman which is a current message presented in the media. One limitation or assumption that was made is that the scale assumes the participants are all heterosexual.