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# African American Women's Understanding of How Family Values Contribute to Social Aggression

Elsa Bernice Butts  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Elsa Bernice Butts

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## Review Committee

Dr. Jane Lyons, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty  
Dr. Robin Friedman, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty  
Dr. Timothy Lionetti, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2019

Abstract

African American Women's Understanding of How Family Values Contribute to Social

Aggression

by

Elsa Bernice Butts

MA, Webster University, 2001

BA, Morris College, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Educational Psychology

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## Abstract

Researchers have found that social aggression has increased among African American females. Researchers have reported that the family value systems of many African American families endorse aggressive behaviors. Beliefs of fighting verbally and physically for self-worth and equality have been embedded in the socialization process for some African American females. It is important to explore the influence of family values on socially aggressive behaviors among this population. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family values. The theoretical framework for this study was social learning theory along with aggression, a subset of social learning theory. The research question was designed to explore how African American females in early adulthood experience and perceive social aggression and family values. Ten African American females were interviewed. Moustakas' method of data analysis was used to identify 4 themes: common family values, learned socially aggressive behaviors, acting out, and handling conflict. Understanding the behaviors and experiences of African American females with socially aggressive behaviors could result in positive social change, first, by increasing knowledge about the origins of socially aggressive behaviors among this population and then by improving guidance and counseling for African American females involved in socially aggressive behaviors.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents Percy and the late Pastor Evangelist Hattie Butts. Their words of encouragement and unwavering faith in me has given me the courage to pursue my biggest dreams. Even though my mother is no longer here, I can still feel her love and hear her cheering me on to the finish line.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Researchers have found that social aggression among African American females is increasing in today's society (Blake, Lease, Turner, & Outley, 2011; Ness, 2010; Rivera-Maestre, 2015). Socially aggressive behaviors are intended to harm friendships, damage other's self-esteem, and have a negative impact on social position (Underwood, 2003). Socially aggressive behaviors include spreading gossip about peers, verbal and nonverbal threats, and socially excluding tactics such as facial expressions, passing rude notes, rolling the eyes, and manipulating friendships (Underwood, 2003). Neal (2010) suggested that within the female population, social aggression is an increasing problem and damages emotional development in both the victim and perpetrator. Cappella and Weinstein (2006) argued that females who manifest socially aggressive behaviors often have low self-esteem, which can hinder emotional and social development. Moretti, Catchpole, and Odgers (2005) suggested that engagement in socially aggressive activities could result in peer rejection for both the victim and perpetrator.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2013), 31% of African American females reported that they have engaged in socially aggressive behaviors. However, many African American parents view their daughter's socially aggressive behavior as a form of independence and assertiveness (Blake, Lease, Olejnik, & Turner, 2010). Everett, Marks, and Clarke-Michell (2016) suggested that African American mothers encourage their daughters to defend themselves verbally or physically, because it demonstrates their daughters' ability to combat adversity. These findings

indicate that family values may play a significant role in shaping African American females' socially aggressive behaviors.

The goal of this research study was to explore and understand African American females' early adulthood experiences of family values with respect to socially aggressive behaviors. It was important to learn how African American females described and understood social aggression and their experiences of family values in their nuclear families.

In this chapter, I introduce the study topic and provide a brief discussion on the background of social aggression and family values of African American females. I introduce the research problem, the purpose of the study and the research questions. The conceptual framework sections include a discussion of the social learning theory and its subset theory of aggression. This is followed by the sections on the nature of the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and a discussion of the significance of the study, including positive social change.

### **Background**

Some researchers have described social aggression as a survival skill for African American females (Goodwin, & Alim, 2010; Talbott et al., 2002; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). For example, Xie et al. (2003) reported that urban African American females' participation in social aggression may result in physical violence because they feel threatened and this may be the only way that they know how to resolve conflict. Furthermore, African American parents, especially mothers, tend to encourage their daughters to use verbally and physically aggressive behaviors to resolve conflict (Blake

et al., 2010; Ridolfo, Chepp, & Milkie, 2013). According to Smentana, Daddis, and Chuang (2003), African American mothers tend to socialize their daughters in a strict manner that prepares them for systematic racism and for judgements from others. Edmondson and Nkomo (1998) referred to the process in which African American mothers socialize their daughters as *armoring*.

Researchers suggest that the behaviors of African American females are often perceived as socially aggressive because their social etiquette tends to contradict the mainstream society's concept of femininity (Morris, 2007; Ridolfo et al., 2013; Thomas & King, 2007). Goodwin and Alims (2010) and Neal (2010) described African American adolescent females who display nonverbal, socially aggressive behaviors as "acting ghetto or Black." However, these nonverbal actions may be a statement of independence rather than a form of intimidation (Ridolfo et al., 2013). Some researchers argued that the slavery era in the United States had a profound effect on socialization by creating a value system in African American families that could perpetuate aggressive behavior (Blake et al., 2010; Ridolfo et al., 2013). The family values of many African American families are twofold because families create family values that are based on the concept of double consciousness (Perry, 2014). African Americans have two identities, one that is accepted by the mainstream society and one that truly represents who they are (DuBois, 1903). Furthermore, belief in fighting for self-worth and equality are embedded in the socialization process of African American females (Blake et al., 2010; Davis, 1972; DuBois, 1903; Ridolfo et al., 2013). These beliefs may cause many African American women and adolescent females to adopt a more aggressive attitude in social situations.

Fitzpatrick, Dulin, and Piko (2007) stated that most research on African American females focused primarily on the consequences of aggressive behaviors rather than on how these behaviors are formed. Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) argued that a person's social interactions with family, peers, and the environment have more influence on his or her participation in social aggression than television and other media sources. Brown (2003) suggested that the way African American females deal with conflict is based upon social interaction patterns taught and exhibited by their parents. Even though African American females encounter many challenges during their journey to adulthood, and their family values may play a pivotal role in how they interact with peers (Brittian, 2011). In general, African American parents tend to rear their daughters to be strong, confident, and self-reliant individuals (Blake et al., 2010; Townsend & Lanphier, 2007). Exploring the family values of socially aggressive African American females in early adulthood could help to identify contributing factors in the development of social aggression, which, in turn, could increase self-awareness and create positive social change. There is ample research on African American families, but there is little research that directly examines family values and social aggression among the African American female population (Blake et al., 2010; Townsend & Lanphier, 2007). This research study was intended to provide insight into the socially aggressive behaviors of African American females, which could prompt discussions about diversity in counseling and education. In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive review of the literature on family values and social aggression among this population.



### **Problem Statement**

Family values are believed to influence the social behavior of children and their decision-making skills. Evidence of this influence could be seen in peer conflict (Neblett et al., 2012). Past and current empirical research on African American females emphasizes the consequences of their participation in physical and verbal altercations rather than why they engage in such behaviors (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Koonce, 2012). Blake et al. (2010) and Underwood, Beron, and Rosen (2009) indicated that the increase in social aggression among adolescent females shows no racial or ethnic boundaries. However, it seems that African American females engage in socially aggressive acts more than peers from other racial groups (CDC, 2010). Furthermore, research indicated that African American females from low socioeconomic status homes in urban areas are more likely to participate in socially aggressive activities for a variety of reasons, including lack of financial resources and environmental factors that contribute to low levels of achievement (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2013). However, little is known about the relationship between family values and African American females' socially aggressive behaviors.

Blake et al. (2011) reported that some African American parents were accepting of their daughter's participation in socially aggressive activities. Some researchers have suggested that African American females are socialized to display both female and male characteristics, and social aggression may act as a defense technique for peer conflict (Everett et al., 2016; Ridolfo et al. 2013). However, a gap in literature exists regarding how African American females who manifest or have manifested socially aggressive

behaviors experience family values. It is important to understand how these experiences translate into behaviors that are labeled as social aggression. Therefore, with this research study, I sought to contribute to the current body of research by exploring the experiences of African American females regarding the influence of family values on socially aggressive behavior.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family values. I explore and describe how 10 African American females, who have manifested socially aggressive behaviors against others, experience family values.

### **Central Research Question**

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research questions are constructed to guide an investigation and should be reflected in every aspect of an investigation. For this research project, the focus was African American females' perceptions of family values and how it affects socially aggressive behavior. Thus, the research question was as follows: How have African American women's socially aggressive behaviors been shaped by their family's values?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's social learning theory and his subset, the social learning theory of aggression. Social learning theory describes the development of behaviors (Bandura, 1973); the key construct underlying social

learning theory is observational learning. Observational learning occurs in four processes: (a) attention, (b) retention, (c) motor reproduction, and (d) reinforcement and motivational (Bandura, 1973). Observational learning and how it relates to the development of social aggression is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

According to Bandura (1978), the social learning theory of aggression is based on the premise that individuals learn aggressive behaviors from three modeling sources: the aggression modeled by family members and other close influential people, the environment, and the media. During the 1960s, Bandura, along with his colleagues, found that children learn how to behave aggressively by observing parents and various family members' behavior in an aggressive manner (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). The overall theme of social learning theory and the social learning theory of aggression indicates that individuals learn how to interact socially from their family (e.g., parents or siblings). Moreover, these theories helped to explain the relation between family values as perceived by African American females and social aggression as experienced by this population.

### **Nature of Study**

I used a phenomenological design to explore and understand African American females during early adulthood experiences of socially aggressive behaviors in light of family values. A phenomenological design allowed me to explore the lived experiences of the participants to understand and describe the phenomenon (Frederick, 2013). The phenomenological design approach is the most appropriate to use in this current study

because it allowed me to explore the experiences of the participants of this phenomenon without being too invasive (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

Participants were recruited from an urban 4-year college in the Southeastern section of the United States. Through open-ended interview questions (IQ), 10 African American female students had the opportunity to describe their family values and how they are associated with their levels of social aggression. Each interview lasted about 1 hour. The interviews and responses were tape recorded. I used the Dragon Speech Recognition software to help transcribe responses to the IQs. I used Moustakas' (1994) data analysis plan to help analyze the data for this study. Moustakas' (1994) data analysis plan consists of the following main procedures:

- (a) review all interview transcription and list statements relevant to the experience, (b) reductions and elimination determine the invariant constituents, (c) cluster and thematize invariant constitutes (create meanings from horizontalized statements), (d) cluster all statements into common themes and remove any concurring and repetitious statements, (e) validate invariant constituents and themes by creating individual textual descriptions, (f ) create individual structural descriptions, and (g) construct a composite description of the meaning and essences of the participants' experience, themes, and incorporating invariant constituents for each research participants. (p.120-121)

In Chapter 3, I provide a more detailed discussion on the research methodology.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Acting black/ghetto:* A style of speech that consists of the use of slang terms or broken English, which includes assertiveness, hand gestures, and eye and neck rolling (Alims, 2010; Koonce, 2012).

*Aggressive behavior:* Behavior that is hostile and forceful and intended to attack or inflict hurt or harm (Bandura, 1973).

*Observational Learning:* A type of learning that occurs when individuals imitate the behaviors of people they encounter in their daily relations (Bandura, 1973).

*Social Aggression:* A form of aggression that includes both overt and covert behaviors (e.g. spreading gossip, passing rude notes, making mean faces, and rolling eyes at others) that are intended to exclude someone socially, harm friendships, and /or damage someone's self-esteem and social status (Underwood, 2003).

### **Assumptions**

The basic assumptions of this study were that participants gave meaningful and accurate accounts of their understanding and experiences with family values and social aggression and were open and honest.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family values. The scope of this study included 10 African American females ranging from 18-22 years of age who had engaged in social aggression and had experienced family values that influenced that behavior. Participants were

recruited from a 4-year college located in the Southeastern region of the United States. For this study, I considered only African American female students who attended this college full-time or part-time, who were aware of instances of socially aggressive behavior with friends or others and who could describe these experiences in detail. By working with a smaller sample size, I was able to capture the essences of the participants' experiences. However, 10 is a small population and does not permit generalized assumptions about the population (Merriam, 2002).

There were several delimitations in this research study. The first delimitation was that participants were solicited from one college because it was categorized as an Historical Black College and University, which made it easier to recruit African American female college students. The second delimitation was that male students and female students who did not identify themselves as African American were excluded from this study. The third delimitation was the sample size of 10 participants. The fourth delimitation relied on social learning theory as the conceptual framework. Family systems theories were not considered for this study because they often focus on the emotional interactions of a family. To address potential transferability, I used thick description. Kuper, Lingard, and Levinson (2008) suggested that the goal of thick description in research is to provide readers with descriptive information that emulates the research setting or the atmosphere of the research setting.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study was reliance on the participants' perceptions and recollections of their experiences. I relied on self-reported information from

participants to understand their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Because this study was limited to African American female students who attended a specific college, no assumptions could be made for the general population of African American female college students or other racial or ethnic groups. Lastly, this study is limited to African American female students, research would not likely represent the family experiences of male students at this college.

### **Significance of the Study**

Previous researchers studied social aggression among African American females, focusing on the behavioral consequences of socially aggressive behaviors and how social aggression occurs in their friendships. However, researchers have not explored the role that family values play in the development of social aggression among the African American female population. This study is significant because it sought to help African American females and their families understand how family values influence socially aggressive behaviors.

This research study may be particularly beneficial to school administrators, educators, and guidance counselors because it examined and provided insight into the origins of socially aggressive behaviors or attitudes that some African American female students display. This research could also be beneficial to family therapists because it could lead to discussions about healthy communication within African American families. Understanding any relationship between family values and social aggression helped both educators and family therapists to develop programs that discouraged socially aggressive behavior and promote positive family and peer communication skills.

Moreover, this research study could encourage African American parents to examine their family values and the way they socialize their daughters. The implications for positive social change include the potential to identify any relationship between family values and social aggression levels in African American females as well as to better understand cultural differences.

### **Summary**

Current research indicates that social aggression among the African American female population has increased (CDC, 2013). Some researchers have suggested that African American females are reared to communicate in a socially aggressive manner (Blake et al., 2011). The existing literature on the family values of African Americans in general puts more emphasis on cultural awareness than their family values. This phenomenological study was designed to address the gap in the literature on African American females' experiences of their family values and how these may influence their socially aggressive behaviors. I used the social learning theory and social learning theory of aggression was to discuss how is developed. Bandura (1978) explained how aggression is developed and adopted into one's behavior by observing parents and various family members. I used a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of African American females and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family values. Ten African American females who had engaged in social aggression and had experienced family values that influenced that behavior were recruited as participants in the study. The findings of the study could help increase knowledge about the origins of socially aggressive behaviors among this



population and improved guidance and counseling for African American females involved in socially aggressive behaviors.

In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive review of empirical and theoretical literature related to African American females who had engaged in social aggression and had experienced family values that influenced that behavior. I will explain my literature search as well as key search terms used. I will also discuss the use of social learning theory as the conceptual framework.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family's values. The current literature has focused on African American females and social aggression, but not on how family values can influence socially aggressive behaviors (Blake et al., 2010; Townsend & Lanphier, 2007). Understanding the relationship between family values and social aggression were the key to further understanding of social aggression among African American females. In this chapter, I cover the following topics: social aggression among African American females, the theoretical background used to frame this study and help to examine the relationship between family values and social aggression, social learning theory with an emphasis on aggression, family values, the historical and developmental overview of social aggression, the socialization process of African American females, and "acting black/ghetto."

The literature for this review was retrieved from Academic Search Premier, PsycARTICLES, SAGE Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertation and Theses. These electronic databases were searched between January 2011 and November 2016. The filters used were English only, full-text only, and peer-reviewed. The following search terms were used: *social aggression, black females, family values, family relational values, social aggression, behavior of black adolescent females, adolescent females' peer relationships, and social learning theory.*

### **Social Learning Theory**

Many research studies have applied social learning theory and other developmental theories of socialization to explore socially aggressive behavior (Hall, Herzberger, & Skowronski, 1998; Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008; Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, & Suchindrain, 2013; Snethen & Van Puymbroeck, 2008; Williams, Conger, & Blozis, 2007). This study used social learning theory to examine and understand the effects that family values have on social aggression among African American females. Social learning theory describes the development of behaviors. According to Bandura (1978), the social learning theory of aggression is based on the concept that individuals learn behaviors from three modeling sources: (a) the aggression modeled by family members and other close influential people, (b) the environment (e.g., town or neighborhood), and (c) the media (e.g., news, television, radio, or internet). During the 1960s, Bandura along with his colleagues Ross and Ross, conducted a groundbreaking research study on the imitation of aggression. The results of that research study indicated that children learn how to behave by observing the adults in their lives (Bandura, et al., 1961).

Bandura (1973) suggested that human beings are not born with an aggressive nature but are taught to be aggressive via observational learning (Bandura, 1973, 1978). Observational learning is defined as learning that occurs when individuals imitate the behaviors of people they encounter in their daily lives and routines (Bandura, 1973). Observational learning consists of four major components: the processes of attention, retention, motor reproduction, and reinforcement and motivation (Bandura, 1973;

Bandura, 1978). Bandura (1973) described the four processes of observational learning as follows:

*Attention process* is the first stage of observational learning. During the attention process stage, a person pays attention to the behaviors of a model (person) who is influential, powerful, and in control of their social surroundings.

*Retention process* is the second stage of observational learning, and it involves memory. In order to imitate social behaviors when the model is no longer present to act as a guide, the desired response has to be stored in memory in a symbolic form.

*Motor reproduction process* is the third stage of observational learning and is concerned with behavioral representation of what one has learned. To achieve behavioral reproduction, a learner must be able develop responses that mimic the model's behavioral patterns.

*Reinforcement and motivational process* is the final stage of observational learning, and it is concerned with reinforcement. Reinforcement influence not only regulates the obvious expression of matching behavior, but also affects observational learning by determining the amount of attention people paid to various models they encounter in their everyday lives. (p.69-72)

According to Hergenhahn and Olson (1997), social learning theory assumes that all human beings learn by observing other people, through direct and indirect experiences, and that all behaviors must be reinforced. Therefore, researchers have applied social learning theory to their body of research and have expanded certain aspects

of the theory. For example, Grusec (1992) suggested that observational learning occurs in the following stages: (a) the observer must pay attention to events lived, (b) the observed behavior is represented in memory, (c) symbolic representation is transformed into actions, and (d) motivational variables. Bandura's (1973) social learning theory of aggression suggested that people with aggressive behaviors often receive tangible rewards for their behaviors. For example, a girl who acts socially aggressive towards another girl maybe rewarded with control or the friendship of others (Bandura, 1973; Underwood, 2003). Furthermore, the overall theme of social learning theory indicates that individuals learn how to interact socially from their family (e.g., parents or siblings).

Underwood (2003), supported Bandura's social learning theory by stating that social learning theory of aggression believes that children learn both positive and negative behaviors by observing their parents argue, which may include socially and physically aggressive acts. Furthermore, Underwood argued that parents who display socially aggressive behaviors such as, ignoring each other when they are upset; involving other people to defend their point of view in a disagreement; threatening to divorce or leave the relationship; withholding affection and friendship are teaching their children how to resolve conflict with socially aggressive behaviors. Williams et al. (2007) reported that adolescent children who have aggressive interpersonal relationships with both their parents and siblings are more likely to communicate with peers in an aggressive manner. Brown (2003) suggested that the manner in which females deal with conflict is based upon social interaction patterns taught and exhibited by their parents. Underwood (2003) suggested that a mother's communication pattern with other females acts as a social

blueprint for her daughter's communication and interpersonal skills. Therefore, if parents interact aggressively towards each other in the presence of their child, then the child learned to handle conflict with peers in the same aggressive manner.

### **Family Values**

Family is the cornerstone in all societies around the world (DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Hillaker, Brophy-Herb, Villarruel, & Hass, 2008). According to Defrain and Asay (2007),

Families are our most intimate social environment. They are the places where we begin the vital processes of socializing our children: teaching them-in partnership with countless others in the community-how to survive and thrive in the world.

Life in families can bring us great joy or excruciating pain, depending upon how well family relationships are unfolding. (p. 2)

Parents often establish rules and values they want their children to apply during all stages of development. However, the development of personal values and adhering to family values during adolescence is a unique and challenging process that is affected by many factors (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2006). Factors such as low socioeconomic status, neighborhood or community, and parent-child relationship are related to conduct problems in African American youth (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2013).

Some existing empirical literature on family socialization utilized the term family values to cover to the broad spectrum of family communication and relationships (e.g. Cassas et al., 2007; Hardy, Padilla-Walker, & Carlo, 2008; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2006; White & Matawie, 2004). Edgar-Smith and Wozniak (2010) adopted the term

family relational values to explain family communication and interpersonal relationships. Family relational values is a personal value system formed within a family that is influenced by one's verbal and nonverbal communication with family members and acts as a guide when communicating with others outside of the family (Edgar-Smith & Wozniak, 2010). Even though adolescent females encounter many challenges during their journey to adulthood, their family relational values can play pivotal roles in how they interact with peers (Brittian, 2011; Hardy et al., 2008). African American family values place emphasis on kinship, spirituality, respect to elders in the community, and combating racism (Perry, 2014).

Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2007) suggested that individuals' need for connection with others helps them distinguish what is socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Adolescents who have parents who respect their beliefs and points of view are more likely to adhere to their family values throughout adolescence (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004). Edgar-Smith and Wozniak (2010) conducted a quantitative study that examined family relational values. The main purpose of their research was to explore the role of family relational values in the parent-adolescent relationship. The authors made two hypotheses about their study. Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be a set of common family relational values among upper-middle class families; and hypothesis two stated that the adolescence stage would influence family value agreement between parents and adolescents. To measure family relational values of parents and adolescents, Edgar-Smith and Wozniak (2010) used a demographic survey and the Relational Family Values (RFVQ) questionnaire. The RFVQ is a questionnaire that consists of 52 family

value statements designed to evaluate family communication, individuality within the family, family unity, and parental respect (Edgar-Smith & Wozniak, 2010). The results from the study supported hypothesis one because the authors found that 61.4% of the participants shared the same family relational values. However, there was not enough statically significant data to support Hypothesis 2 because they found that family agreement was consistent in all stages of adolescence (Edgar-Smith & Wozniak, 2010).

Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2007) explored the effects of maternal and peer expectation on personal values during adolescence. The purpose of Padilla-Walker and Carlo's study was to examine whether parents or peers had more influence on prosocial and antisocial behaviors during adolescence. The authors hypothesized that peers would have a greater influence than parents on an adolescent's engagement in antisocial behaviors. The participants were recruited from a public high school, located in the Midwest section of the United States. To measure the adolescents' personal values and prosocial and antisocial behaviors, Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2007) utilized the following instruments: Values in Action Inventory and the Youth Version of Child Behavior Checklist. Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2007) reported that peer expectation  $p < .35$  had a greater influence on adolescent females' behaviors, both prosocial and antisocial, than parental expectations  $p < .25$ . Dixon, Graber, and Brooks-Gunn (2008) suggested that African American females tend to obey and respect their parents' rules and family values because of stricter parenting styles. However, Blake et al. (2010) argued that because African American females are raised to be independent, that sense of independence has allowed them to make their own decisions regarding social behaviors,



friendships, and the treatment of others. Blake et al. (2010) stated that African American adolescent females tend to develop beliefs and behaviors that are like their parents. According to Karriker-Jaffe et al. (2013), African American adolescent females from families with poor communication have a higher risk for participating in socially aggressive activities.

### **Historical and Developmental Overview of Social Aggression**

Past research on aggression was based on physical aggression and the human male's tendency to display physical aggressive behaviors (White & Kowalski, 1994; Xie, Cairns, & Carins, 2002). Prior to the 1960s, women were excluded from research studies on aggression. However, during the 1960s, researchers such as Feshbach and Bandura conducted studies that explored gender difference regarding aggression (Underwood, 2003). Research studies (e.g., Bandura et al., 1961; Feshbach, 1969; Feshbach & Sones, 1971) laid the foundation for studies on female aggression.

For many years, aggression was often a word used to describe the behavior of rebellious teenage boys (Kozlowski & Warber, 2010; Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2002). Archer and Coyne (2005) wrote that when females use manipulative forms of aggression, they destroy the stereotype that females are less aggressive than boys. Forms of aggression that have been associated with female aggression include indirect aggression, relational aggression, and social aggression. Lukas, Paulos, and Robinson (2005) reported that aggressive adolescent females tend to use passive, non-physical forms of aggression such as indirect aggression, relational aggression, or social aggression. Indirect, relational, and social aggression are alike because they consist of devious acts that are

meant to harm a person's ability to form relationships with others (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Both indirect and relational aggression seek to destroy a person's relationships primarily through gossip and spreading rumors, but relational aggression consists of direct behaviors such as social exclusion (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2007; Loukas, Paulos, & Robinson, 2005).

Social aggression is defined as manipulating behaviors that are both direct and indirect and are intended to harm friendships and/or damage another's self-esteem and social status (Underwood, 2003; Underwood et al., 2009). This includes spreading gossip about others and social exclusion (Underwood, 2003). Making mean facial expressions, passing rude notes, or rolling eyes at others when authority figures are not looking are examples of socially aggressive behaviors (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Loukas et al., 2005; Underwood et al., 2009). Xie et al., (2002) suggested socially aggressive behaviors are distinctive because it is non-confrontational and uses the social community to cause harm. Therefore, social aggression was explored in this study because it includes both verbal and non-verbal acts of aggression result in social exclusion.

According to Underwood et al. (2009), social aggression is a behavior that occurs during early childhood and continues throughout adolescence. Xie et al.'s (2003) research study on subtle forms of aggression among African American youth found that female conflict involving social aggression was significantly higher than male conflict. Karriker-Jaffe et al. (2008) suggested that social aggression tends to increase in females after age 12. Additionally, Talbott et al. (2002) suggested social aggression is a unique form of aggression displayed mostly by females during adolescence and has damaging effects to

those who participate in it. However, Currie et al. (2007) argued that adolescent females who participate in socially aggressive acts are usually popular and well-liked by their peers. Therefore, past research studies have categorized social aggression as an adolescent girlhood behavior that is often used to navigate their peer relationships.

### **Social Aggression among African American Females**

The increase in social aggression among adolescent females shows no racial or ethnic boundaries (Underwood et al., 2009). However, previous literature has described social aggression as a survival skill for African American females (e.g., Talbott et al., 2002; Xie et al., 2003; Xie et al., 2010). African American females who display nonverbal socially aggressive behaviors such as eye and neck rolling and sucking of teeth are often described as acting “ghetto or Black” (Goodwin & Alim, 2010; Neal, 2010). Blake et al. (2011) suggested that African American females are more likely to use both social and physical aggression to solve peer conflict than their European American peers. For example, Talbott et al. (2002) conducted a qualitative research study on social aggression and urban adolescent females. The main purpose of their research was to explore the direct relationship between social aggression and physical violence among African American adolescent females. The authors hypothesized that socially aggressive behaviors such as gossiping, and name-calling would have a more negative impact and would be a precursor for physical violence. The results from the study supported their hypothesis because they discovered that gossip and rumor spreading are often overlooked by school officials. Those socially aggressive behaviors could lead to serious acts of physical violence (Talbott et al., 2002). Furthermore, Blake et al. (2011) reported that

socially aggressive African American females had a more negative outlook on school experiences and educators than their socially aggressive European American same sex peers.

Blake et al. (2010) examined parents' attitudes toward their daughter's use of aggression. The Hypothetical Aggression Situations-Parent-Child questionnaire was used to measure parental attitudes about aggression. Blake et al. (2010) found European American parents to be less accepting of their daughter's participation in socially aggressive activities than African American parents. Thus, some researchers have suggested that African American females are socialized to display both female and male characteristics, and social aggression may act as a defense technique for peer conflict (Blake et al., 2011; Solomon, Bradshaw, Wright, & Cheng, 2008; Simmons, 2002; Underwood, 2003). However, Buckley and Carter (2005) argued that African American females who embody both female and male characteristics have high self-esteem and good communication skills. Based on previous research, socially aggressive African American females often exhibit negative feelings towards some social settings, such as school. This has led some researchers to believe that some African American females' negative attitudes towards school may stem directly from judgment they receive from teachers and peers of other ethnicities (Morris, 2007). Therefore, it is important to explore and discuss the socialization process of African American females and it is important for educators to understand the complexity of social aggression for African American females.

### **The Socialization Process of African American Females**

All adolescent females have to deal with the social demands of adolescence, but African American adolescent females also have to cope with societal criticism and stereotypes (Leadbeater- Ross & Way, 2007; Ridolfo et al., 2013; Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Simmons, 2002). The difference in which African American and European American females are socialized is prevalent (Hall & Bracken, 1996). African American parenting style is often centered on heritage and the social and psychological effects of racism and oppression (Everett, Marks, & Clarke-Mitchell, 2016). Simmons (2002) wrote that African American females' socialization processes differ from their European counterparts because they are often exposed to their parents' conceptions and experiences about their own unfair treatment by society, causing some African American females to reject the concept of the perfect friendship. Therefore, it is apparent that racism and societal oppressions play an important role in how African American females are socialized.

African American parents tend to rear their daughters to be strong, confident, and self-reliant individuals (Blake et al., 2010; Townsend & Lanphier, 2007; Underwood, 2003). Edmondson and Nkomo (1998) referred to the process in which African American mothers socialize their daughters as armoring. According to Edmondson and Nkomo (1998), armoring is the socialization process in which African American mothers teach their daughters how to be assertive, outspoken, and independent. African American parents help prepare their daughters for harsh criticism and stereotypes that they may face in society (Edmondson & Nkomo, 1998; Hall & Bracken, 1996; Sanders & Bradley,

2005; Stevens, 2002; Thomas & King, 2007). Thomas and King (2007) conducted a research study that examined socialization messages of 36 African American mothers and adolescent daughters. To measure the socialization messages of the mother-daughter dyad, Thomas and King utilized the following instruments: Teenage Experiences of Racial Socialization, Parent-Adolescent Communication Form, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Parent Experience of Racial Socialization, and the Parent-Adolescent Communication-Mother Form. Thomas and King (2007) reported that 17.3% of the adolescent daughters stated they received messages on assertiveness and self-determination from their mothers.

Simmons (2002) suggested African American mothers are well-known for their determination to shape their daughters into independent and vocal individuals that can navigate in a society that diminishes African American women and girls. Ridolfo et al. (2013) conducted a research study that examined the socialization practices of black and White mothers. The main purpose of their research study was to explore the quality of mother-daughter relationships. The researchers hypothesized that African American adolescent females would have higher self-esteem and better relationships with their mothers than their European American peers. The results from the study supported their hypothesis because they discovered that African American females had higher self-esteem and better mother-daughter relationships than European American females (Ridolfo et al., 2013). Ridolfo et al. (2013) suggested that African American mothers have quality relationships with their daughters because they teach their daughters the importance of self-respect at an early age.

Suizzo, Robinson, and Pahlke (2008) explored African American mothers' socialization, philosophies and goals. The researchers interviewed 12 African American mothers of children ranging from three to six years of age. The IQs focused on the following areas: (a) questions about their relationship with their children, (b) questions on mother's own childhood and family background, (c) questions about mother's socialization beliefs and parenting practices, and (d) questions about the mother's expectations and goals for their children. Suizzo et al. (2008) reported African American mothers had close relationships with their female children and emphasized racial discrimination when socializing their children. Dixon et al. (2008) suggested that African American females tend to respect their mothers because of their mother's authoritative parenting style. According to Hall and Bracken (1996), authoritative parents encourage their children to be independent and self-actualized individuals. However, females with authoritative parents often engage in socially aggressive behaviors more than females whose parents utilize other types of parenting (Underwood, Beron, Gentsch, Galperin, & Risser, 2008). Hall and Bracken (1996) conducted a research study on African American and European American adolescents' interpersonal relationships with their mothers. They used the Assessment of Interpersonal Relations to measure the interpersonal relationships of 165 students. Hall and Bracken (1996) reported that African American adolescent females had more positive interpersonal relationships than their European American peers. Furthermore, past research studies have indicated that the past experiences of African American mothers play an important role in the socialization process of African American adolescent females.

The mistreatment, degradation, and devolvement of African American females can be traced back to slavery in America (Stevens, 2002; Thomas & King, 2007). During the era of slavery in America, African American women were not considered citizens because they were less than men and as domesticated workers that were human property (Lipford-Sanders & Bradley, 2005). Fox-Genovese (1988) described African American female slaves as domesticated servants in the book, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. According to Fox-Genovese (1988), African American female slaves' functions ranged from textile makers and seamstresses, to cooks, maids, field hands, nannies, and wet nurses (female slaves who breastfed their mistress's children), and nurses. Even though African American female slaves provided domestic services, they were provided with less than adequate resources (e.g., given strips of material to make clothing) to care for themselves and their families (Fox-Genovese, 1988). The institution of slavery robbed African American slave women of their femininity because they were given the same job duties as their African American male counterparts (Blake et al, 2010; DuBois, 1903). According to Davis (1972), African American enslaved women were not considered the weaker sex because African American men were not allowed to protect their families. This made many enslaved women become emasculating females. Slavery made enslaved African American women physically strong and aggressive (Ridolfo et al., 2013). Throughout the post-slavery era in the United States, African American women have had to fight both verbally and physically to overcome the effects slavery had on their self-esteem and family life (Ridolfo et al., 2013; Thomas & King, 2007; Edmondson & Nkomo, 1998; Dubois,



1903). Furthermore, beliefs of fighting for self-worth and equality have been embedded in the socialization process of African American females. These beliefs have caused many African American females to adopt a more aggressive attitude in social situations.

### **Acting Black/Ghetto**

Many researchers have argued that African American females are perceived as aggressive because their social etiquette tends to contradict the mainstream society concept of femininity (Thomas & King, 2007; Morris, 2007; Underwood, 2003; Simmons, 2002). According to Troutman (2010), many people outside of the African American community view the hand gestures, neck and eye rolling, and sassy defensive tone that many African American females use as “ghetto or acting Black.” Moreover, the assertiveness, self-determination, and outspoken characteristics of many African American adolescent females are often misconstrued and interpreted as socially aggressive, especially in educational settings (Steven, 2003; Xie et al., 2003). For example, Morris (2007) conducted a two-year ethnographic research study that explored the perceptions and experiences of African American female students in the classroom. The study took place at an urban public middle school in which the student population was 46% African American, 43% Hispanic, 7% Asian American, and 3% European American (Morris, 2007). The data were collected from observing students’ behaviors in various school settings, interviews with teachers, and conversations with students. Initially, the main goal of this research study was to examine the academic successes of African American female students. However, Morris noticed that African American female students received more attention for their lack of social etiquette than for their

academic successes. Morris discovered that many of the teachers he interviewed found the behaviors of their African American female students to be rude, disrespectful, and unladylike. For example, one teacher he interviewed stated, many African American female students are very aggressive and have a need to be in control of the classroom (Morris, 2007). Morris' (2007) findings indicated that most of the African American female students in his study were viewed as problematic because of their assertive and outspoken mannerisms, which caused them to receive consequences that gave them negative social labels and shunned their academic successes.

Koonce (2012) conducted a qualitative research study that explored the speech practice talking with an attitude (TWA) among African American adolescent females. Koonce (2012) described TWA as a smart, sassy, and assertive speech style used by both African American women and girls. The main purpose of Koonce's (2012) research study was to examine African American females who TWA with or around their teachers. Koonce interviewed five African American females, but only two participants were chosen because of their experiences with teachers. Koonce (2012) discovered that African American females used TWA when they were disrespected or embarrassed by a teacher. Based on Koonce's (2012) findings, TWA is a verbal defense mechanism used by some African American adolescent females. Troutman (2010) suggested that African American females who TWA are strong, independent young women with high self-esteem but often are viewed as confrontational.

DuBois (1903) suggested that all black people operate on a system of double consciousness. Meaning, African Americans have two identities, one that is accepted by

the mainstream society and one that truly represents who they are (DuBois, 1903). Many researchers argued that African American mothers stress the importance of education to their daughters because education is the only way for them to have equal opportunity in the world (Edmondson & Nkomo, 1998; Ridolfo et al., 2013; Suizzo et al., 2008). Even though African American mothers stress education, they also place emphasis on aggression (Ridolfo et al., 2013). Everett et al. (2016) wrote, many Black mothers demand their daughters to fight back or be punished at home, which can be a conflicting socialization message. African American females often have trouble balancing the socialization skills taught by their parents with what is acceptable behavior in mainstream social settings (e.g., school). Therefore, learning how to mask one's true self to navigate social situations can be a difficult skill to learn and more information on the family values of African American adolescent females is needed.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 2, I provided a comprehensive review of the literature and related studies that offer support for the current study. While conducting this literature review, I found an absence of literature on the family values of African American females. The existing literature on the family values of African Americans in general puts more emphasis on cultural awareness than their family values. Based on the literature review, it is evident that African American females are socialized to be more aggressive in social settings outside of the home. The social learning theory and social learning theory of aggression was discussed. Bandura (1978) explained how aggression is developed and adopted into one's behavior by observing parents and various family members. The

social learning theory of aggression is based on the premise that individuals learn aggressive behaviors from three modeling sources, which are the aggression modeled by family members and other close influential people, environment, and media (Bandura, 1978). Both theories provide an explanation on the development of socially aggressive behaviors.

This literature review indicated that African American females are taught to behave respectfully at home and within their communities but are also taught to be more assertive and aggressive outside of those places; these types of behaviors can send mixed messages (Blake et al., 2010). Receiving conflicting socialization messages from parents makes it difficult for African American females to navigate in social settings, which may lead to mixed interpretations of their behavior. Furthermore, this current study helped to address the gap in literature by exploring how African American females in early adulthood perceive their family values have influenced their socially aggressive behaviors.

In Chapter 3, I provide a full in-depth description of the research methodology, the role of the research, the participants, and the ethical concerns involving this research study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family values. In Chapter 3, I present the research methodology that was used to investigate how females experience family values and its influence on social aggression. This chapter includes a discussion of the research design as well as its underlying rationale and theoretical basis. I also discuss my role as the researcher, the data collection and analysis procedures, and the interpretation of data. The final section includes a description of the precautions needed to protect participants' rights.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research questions are constructed to guide an investigation and they should be reflected in every aspect of an investigation. For this research project, the focus was on African American females' perceptions of family values and how they affect socially aggressive behavior. The research question for this study was as follows: How have African American women's socially aggressive behaviors been shaped by their family' values?

The phenomenological design was chosen to understand and describe the experiences of African American females who have manifested aggressive behaviors and the relationship of those behaviors to family values. Tomkins and Eatough (2013) described phenomenological research as a method to capture different experiences that

seeks to reduce preconceived beliefs about the subjects being studied. Starks and Trinidad (2007) wrote that phenomenology reality is going through lived experiences. Merriam (2002) argued that the goal of the phenomenological research method is to explore the essence or the common experiences of participants, which would lead to deeper discoveries that are not addressed in everyday life.

The grounded theory approach was not appropriate for this research study because the goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory that is based on the experiences of the participants in a study (Hays & Woods, 2011). Case study and ethnographic research methods were not appropriate for this study because they both require a researcher to take an active role in the daily lives of the participants in a study by becoming a fixture in their communities or environment (Merriam, 2002). The phenomenological approach was the most appropriate to use in this current study because it allowed me to explore the experiences of the participants of a particular phenomenon without being too invasive (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). The grounded theory, case study and ethnographic research methods would not yield the data that I needed to properly answer the research question in my study.

### **Role of Researcher**

My primary role in this study was the observer-participant. I was the active researcher in this study. I recruited and interviewed participants, and transcribed and analyzed the data. Farber (2006) described qualitative researchers as observer-participant because they can interact with and observe their participants. I am a licensed professional counselor, and I have counseled people of all ages, genders, and ethnicities. I have over

thirteen years of experience in clinical counseling. I specialize in treating adolescents with mental health disorders and social developmental issues. My educational and professional work experience in counseling diverse populations has helped me to develop several interviewing techniques and therapeutic interventions. According to Hays and Wood (2011) counseling researchers have more success conducting interviews in qualitative studies because they have been trained to separate personal experiences from their clients' experiences and are able to identify common themes and behavioral patterns.

To bracket my experiences, I wrote about my personal experiences and feelings in a research journal. My personal bias stems from my experiences as an adolescent. When I was an adolescent, my mother told me that I had to defend myself against others because if I did not, I would receive a consequence. The consequence would usually consist of extra chores. However, as a child, I did not understand why my mother's usually nurturing parenting style would become strict and demanding when there was an issue with me not defending myself. I now realize that my mother was preparing me to defend myself. My mother was teaching me how to function in society without allowing other people's beliefs and comments influence my perceptions and beliefs. My mother was me preparing to live in two worlds.

Reflecting in a daily research journal allows the researcher to express his or her feelings about the phenomenon being studied and prepares the researcher to address any past personal experiences that might be triggered during contact with participants (Lamb, 2013). Tufford and Newman (2012) argued that bracketing is the process in which a

researcher addresses and removes his or her beliefs, prejudgments and personal experiences. Nelson and Evans (2014) suggested that it is impossible for qualitative researchers to remove all their personal viewpoints and experiences from a study but should allow their personal experiences to act as motivation to understand another person's perception of the subject studied. My experience growing up with a mother that emphasized assertiveness and self-defense encouraged me to explore how other young African American females perceive their family values. Furthermore, as a researcher, my personal experiences allowed me to be non-judgmental, which helped me to fully understand and capture the participants' family experiences.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

For this research study, I utilized criterion sampling strategy. Criterion sampling is a sampling strategy that is designed to narrow the focus of a research study, by requiring participants to meet predetermined conditions (Robinson, 2014). Criterion sampling provides a good replication of a population, which can strengthen a researcher's ability to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2010). Participants for this research study consisted of 10 African American females in early adulthood who attend an urban four-year, historically black college that is in the southeastern region of the United States. This study considered African American female students who met the following criteria: (a) attend college full-time or part-time, (b) 18-24 years of age, and (c) aware of instances of socially aggressive behavior with friends or others and can describe these experiences in detail. A sample size of 10-15 participants is based on the concept of



adequate saturation. Marshall et al. (2013) described saturation as a process in which researchers select enough participants to represent a given population without the occurrence of repetitive themes. Creswell (2007) suggested that a sample size in a phenomenological study could consist of 3-30 participants. Rivera-Maesto (2014) had a sample size of 19 in her qualitative study that explored relational aggression in young African American and Latino women. Goodwin and Alim (2010) had a sample size of seven in their study on social aggression. Moreover, too many participants in a qualitative study can cause data to be redundant and lose the essence of the topic being explored (Mason, 2013). It is my belief that a sample of 10-15 participants were sufficient to provide saturation.

After Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted (10-10-17-0056717), I contacted the Academic Dean of the college to request permission to access the campus (Appendix A) and discuss the locations on the campus in which I could post notices (Appendix B) about this study. I asked that the notification be posted on the college social media page and around campus. Using social media helped to notify the entire student body about the current research study. Posting flyers around various location on the campus helped solicit participants for this study without being too invasive.

After receiving emails or telephone calls from students willing to participate in this research study, I called or sent a return email to each student to screen for eligibility to participate by asking the student her age and her enrollment status at the college. I scheduled interviews with the students who were eligible to participate. If I did not

recruit enough participants, I expanded the search by using snowball sampling. *Snowball sampling* is a sampling strategy used by researcher that relies on active participants in a study to encourage other people to become a participant in the same research study (Handcock & Giles, 2011). Therefore, I relied on the participants to refer their friends and classmates to this study.

### **Data Collection**

Many researchers have argued that interviews are the most effective method to use to collect data in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rossetto, 2014). Data for this qualitative study was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants. When an in-depth interview is conducted properly, some participants may use the interview to process their personal experiences about the phenomenon being studied, which may be therapeutic (Rossetto, 2014). Milena, Dainora, and Alin (2008) suggested that with in-depth interviews, participants often feel safe and relaxed, which helped them to express their feelings and thoughts on the subject being explored. I created the IQs with guidance from my dissertation committee. I scheduled and conducted all the interviews. All interviews took place at the college library in a private conference room during weekend hours. These interviews were approximately 35-50 minutes. I took copious notes during the interviews, and I transcribed all interviews shortly after each interview.

At the beginning of the interview, I explained and reviewed the consent form and informed the students that their participation is not a school requirement, that they have the right to remove themselves from this study at any time, and that they have a right to

refuse to answer questions they may be uncomfortable with. I requested permission from each participant to audiotape her interview. I had two consent forms ready, so that the participant has her own copy. After the participant reviewed and signed the consent forms, I began the interview.

According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), open-ended questions encourage the participants to tell their story and do not set limits or boundaries on participants' responses. I have prepared open – ended IQs that focus on family values, social aggression, relationship with family members and peers, and methods of conflict resolution (Appendix C). At the end of each interview, I informed the participant that she had an opportunity to review a summary of the findings from her interview to verify accuracy and provide additional comments via email or postal mail. I also assigned each participant a number as an identifier to ensure confidentiality throughout the research study. Participants were verbally thanked for their participation.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I utilized Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis plan. Moustakas (1994) data analysis plan consists of the following steps: (a) review all interview transcription and list statements relevant to the experience, (b) reductions and elimination to determine the invariant constituents, (c) cluster and thematize invariant constituents (create meanings from horizontalized statements), (d) cluster all statements into common themes and remove any concurring and repetitious statements, (e) validate invariant constituents and themes by creating individual textual descriptions, (f ) create individual structural descriptions, and (g) construct a composite description of the meaning and

essences of the participants' experiences, themes, and as well as incorporating invariant constituents for each research participant's responses to IQs .

I used the Dragon Naturally Speaking 13 software program to help transcribe responses from the interviews. The Dragon Naturally Speaking13 is a speech recognition program that helped me to transcribe and create manuscripts of all the interviews. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. I read and reread the transcribed interviews to identify horizons and develop themes. Coding is an important part of qualitative research because it helps the researcher categorize data into themes and concepts (Stake, 2010). I used multicolored highlighters to help identify any common words or phrases that are used by participants. I created a chart with each research question listed at the top of the page and place all responses that relate to that research question beneath the question. These charts helped me interpret the data and write the results section of my research project. Stake (2010) referred to this type of charting as patches because a researcher able to piece together information to write the results section. I organized data according to themes that emerge, to gain a deeper understanding of the data. During this stage of analysis, I checked for discrepant or contradictory data. There was not discrepant data, for me to analyze and report.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

There are many ways to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research (Barusch, George & Gringeri, 2011). Creswell (2003) argued that verification strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and audit trail help create credibility. To ensure and

protect methodological quality, I utilized the following strategies: audit trail, member checking, reflective journal, and thick description.

### **Credibility**

I utilized strategies throughout this study to ensure quality. The credibility strategies that I used are member checking and a reflective/research journaling to help eliminate any researcher bias. I wrote about my personal experiences and feelings in a research journal. Writing in a reflective/research journal helped me keep track of my personal thoughts and questions that may arise during this research study.

Member checking was employed to strengthen credibility. The participant had an opportunity to review a summary of the findings from her interview to verify accuracy. I emailed each participant the summary of findings from her interview and request that comments be sent back to me by email. All participants were asked to review a summary of their interview and were encouraged to make suggestions about the language being used or interpretation. Harper and Cole (2012) suggested that member checking could be therapeutic for participants because it allows them to have control over their words and how they are perceived, which can be empowering. Member checking provides the researcher with a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Barusch et al., 2011).

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent the findings of a research study can be applied to participants or situations (Polit & Beck, 2010). Generalization is not relevant in phenomenology because phenomenological research findings focused on individual

experiences rather than general findings that represent the entire population being studied (Ericikan & Roth, 2006). To strengthen transferability, thick description was used throughout the analysis. I used thick description to capture the participants' experiences. The use of thick description allowed readers to have a shared experience with the participants (Cho & Trent, 2006). Thick description gives readers the opportunity to compare the phenomenon being examined with experiences they have encountered in their lives (Shenton, 2004). According to Kuper, Lingard, and Levinson (2008), the goal of thick description in research is to provide readers with descriptive information that emulates the research setting or the atmosphere of the research setting. I used therapeutic counseling skills including active listening, paraphrasing and summarizing, and checking-in with the participants to confirm that I accurately described their personal experiences.

### **Dependability**

I kept detailed notes throughout this research study. I created an audit trail to establish dependability. According to Creswell (2007), audit trails consist of chronological data that help to support a researcher's research position, or the research subject being studied. The audit trail for this research study derived from a research journal, emails, and field notes, transcriptions of interviews, audio tapes, codes, and themes.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the necessary steps a researcher takes to remove any of his or her personal opinions and beliefs about a phenomenon (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Confirmability was enhanced using bracketing by making daily entries in a research journal. I used the research journal to write about any biases I may have, my reaction to participants' responses, and personal experiences that I have about the phenomenon being studied. Bracketing is beneficial in qualitative research because it helps a researcher to maintain self-awareness during the entire research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

### **Ethical Procedures**

I adhered to the American Psychological Association (2002) code of ethics to protect participants' rights. These ethical codes are strict regulations that protect participants by placing emphasis on privacy, confidentiality, debriefing patients, and avoiding harm (Fisher, 2003). I first gained approval from Walden University's IRB to proceed with the study. Following IRB approval, I gathered the necessary information to begin this study. Information regarding the purpose of the study and consent forms were provided to potential participants. Only students who express interest in participating in this study, by contacting me via email or telephone, were contacted for possible participation. Each participant completed an informed consent agreement. I assigned each participant a number as an identifier to protect their anonymity. Participants were referred by their assigned number during this entire research study. There were no rewards given for participation. I provided my contact information along with the contact information for Walden University, Dissertation Chairperson and Human Subjects Review Board.

Ethical risks to the participants that was considered include a possible increase in anxiety while answering questions about family relationships, especially for participants that have strained relationships with their parents. If any participant became anxious or

emotionally disturbed during the interview; she was excused from the interview and reminded that she has no obligation to complete any portion that makes her feel uncomfortable and has the freedom to withdraw from this study at any time. I provided a list of resources and local counseling support services for participants who request it after completing their interview or at any time during the interview process. I informed the participants that they play an active part in the development of this study. They were treated with respect and dignity at all times.

I plan to protect all participants' privacy by storing data collected in a secure location for five years. Audiotapes, field notes, USB storage device, hard drive, and transcriptions were stored in a locked fireproof safe in my home. All electronic data were stored on a USB storage device, backed up and password protected on my personal computer in my home. I was the only person with access to the data. After the fifth year, I will shred and burn all notes, transcripts and paper documents. I erase all audio tapes and USB devices pertaining to this study.

### **Summary**

In chapter 3, I described phenomenology as the best methodology to address the research questions. In this chapter, I reviewed various methodologies and empirical research that support the chosen research approach. Personal interviews were used to gather data. My role as a researcher along with the management of researcher bias was addressed. I also provided an in-depth discussion on the selection of participants, data collection, Moustakas' process for data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical measures for the protection of human subjects.



Chapter 4 consists of a detailed discussion of the findings and results.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family's values. The study sought to answer the following research question: How have African American women's socially aggressive behaviors been shaped by their family's values?

In this chapter, I provide information on the setting and demographics of the study. I include a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis steps. I also discuss evidence of trustworthiness and the results of the study.

### **Settings**

I conducted this research study at a historically Black college, a 4-year liberal arts school in an urban area in the Southeastern region of the United States. The student body population was 754, with women making up 59% of the population; 98% of the students enrolled at this college identify themselves as African American. All of the study participants were women. Additional demographics on participants in this research study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Demographics*

Participants	Age	School Classification	Enrollment Status
Participant 1	21	Junior	Full-time
Participant 2	22	Senior	Full-time
Participant 3	22	Senior	Full-time
Participant 4	21	Junior	Full-time
Participant 5	20	Junior	Full-time
Participant 6	18	Freshman	Full-time
Participant 7	20	Sophomore	Full-time
Participant 8	21	Sophomore	Full-time
Participant 9	21	Junior	Full-time
Participant 10	19	Sophomore	Full-time

**Data Collection**

After Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted (Approval No. 10-10-17-005671), I contacted the Academic Dean of the college to request permission to gain access to the campus (Appendix A) and to discuss the locations on the campus in which I could post notices (Appendix B) about this study. After receiving e-mails or telephone calls from students willing to participate in this research study, I called or sent a return e-mail to each student to screen for eligibility to participate by asking the student her age and her enrollment status at the college. Data

were collected over a period of 1 month. I conducted scheduled interviews on four non-consecutive days at the college. All interviews took place in a private conference room in the library. The interviews were from 35-50 minutes in length. I scheduled each interview an hour apart. Data for this study were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

At the beginning of the interview, I explained and reviewed the consent form and informed each participant that her participation was not a school requirement, that she had the right to remove herself from this study at any time and had the right to refuse to answer questions for which she felt uncomfortable. I had two consent forms ready for each participant to sign. Participants were given two copies of the consent form to review and sign, one for the participant and one for my records. After the participant reviewed and signed the consent forms, I began the interview. Protecting confidentiality was of primary concern. I assigned each participant a number as an identifier to protect their anonymity. I recorded all interviews on a digital voice recorder. I also took detailed notes during each interview and transcribed all interviews shortly after each interview. The participants in this study were 10 African American female college students ranging from 18-22 years of age.

At the end of each interview, I informed the participant that she had an opportunity to review a summary of the findings from her interview to verify accuracy and provide additional comments via email. I also thanked each participant for her participation in the study. There were no variations in data collection from the plan

presented in chapter 3. Data collection went according to plan and no unusual circumstances occurred.

### **Data Analysis**

I utilized Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis plan. Moustakas' (1994) data analysis plan consists of the following steps: (a) review all interview transcription and list statements relevant to the experience, (b) reductions and elimination to determine the invariant constituents, (c) cluster and thematize invariant constituents (create meanings from horizontalized statements), (d) cluster all statements into common themes and remove any concurring and repetitious statements, (e) validate invariant constituents and themes by creating individual textual descriptions, (f) create individual structural descriptions, and (g) construct a composite description of the meaning and essences of the participants' experiences, and themes.

I used the Dragon Naturally Speaking 13 software program to help transcribe responses from the interviews. The Dragon Naturally Speaking13 is a speech recognition program that helped me to transcribe and create manuscripts of all the interviews. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. When interviews were completed and transcribed, I began to look for emerging themes. I read and reread the transcribed interviews to identify horizons and develop themes. I used multicolored highlighters to help identify any common words or phrases that were used by participants. I grouped data into categories based on similarities in responses and represented data as themes. For example, in each participant's transcribed interview, I highlighted main words or phrases to determine the invariant constituents, and then group the common invariant constituents

into the core themes of the experience. During this stage of analysis, I checked for discrepant or contradictory data. There was not discrepant data, for me to analyze and report.

### **Findings**

I developed one central research questions to guide this study. Nine IQs addressed the research question: How have African American women's socially aggressive behaviors been shaped by their family's values? In this section, I present a summary of the major responses for the nine IQs.

IQ1: What values are important to your family? Responses to this question was varied. The terms and phrases that were found included: higher education, be goal oriented, true friendship within family, be responsible, family togetherness, and closeness. However, stand up for self and respect were consistent responses across the 10 participants.

IQ2: How do you define social aggression? The participants' responses were similar to each other. The participants defined social aggressions as: a way of talking down to others, talking about someone in a negative manner, putting another person down verbally to feel better about self, and interacting in aggressive way with others.

IQ3: Tell me about an incident in which you acted socially aggressive? The participants gave vivid examples of how they acted out socially aggressive with family member and with peers.

IQ4: What was the intent of your aggressive behavior? This interview question produced an assortment of responses. For example, gain respect, to be heard, and to prove a point.

IQ5: Have you witnessed this type of behavior from other people in your life? All ten participants reported that they have witness various family members act socially aggressive: mother, father, step-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins.

IQ6: How would you describe how your parent(s) handle conflict? The participants' responses varied. The phrases and terms that were found include: yelling, isolation, giving the silent treatment, arguing, verbal attacks, and threatening physical harm.

IQ7: Please describe how your parent(s) taught you how to handle conflict? This question garnered array of responses from the participants. For example, phrases that were found include: do what you have to defend yourself, get them before they get you, and try to walk away.

IQ8: How do you handle conflict with friends? The participants' responses include: isolate myself, give each other space, talk it out, fuss and yell, and cry.

IQ9: How do you handle conflict with females who are not your friends? The participants' responses were similar. The phrases and terms that were found include: ignore them, stare them down, ask her what is her problem, laugh at her, and fight her.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

There are many ways to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research (Barusch, George & Gringeri, 2011). To ensure and protect methodological quality, I utilized the

following strategies: audit trail, reflective/research journal, member checking, and thick description.

### **Credibility**

The credibility strategies that I used were reflective/research journaling and member checking. Writing in my reflective journal helped me to document my feelings and personal thoughts, which helped me to remove my own biases. I also used my reflective journal to write down questions that arose during interviews and research process in general. I employed member checking to strengthen credibility. I gave each participant the opportunity to review a summary of the findings from her interview to verify accuracy. All participants were asked to review a summary of their interview and were encouraged to make suggestions about the language used as well as the interpretation of their responses. I e-mailed each participant the summary of findings from her interview and requested that any suggestions were returned to me via email. Four participants responded indicating that the transcripts were accurate, while the remaining six participants did not respond, indicating they were giving approval to the transcripts.

### **Transferability**

To strengthen transferability, thick description was used throughout this analysis. I used thick description to capture the participants' experiences. I also used my therapeutic counseling skills, which included active listening, paraphrasing and summarizing, and checking-in with participants to confirm that I accurately described their personal experiences.



**Dependability**

I wrote and kept detailed notes throughout this research study. I created an audit trail to establish dependability. The audit trail for this research study derived from my research journal, emails and field notes, transcriptions of interviews, audio tapes, codes, and themes.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the necessary steps a researcher takes to remove any of his or her personal opinions and beliefs about a phenomenon (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Confirmability was enhanced using bracketing. I made daily entries in a research journal. I used my research journal to write about any biases I had, my reaction to participants' responses, and personal experiences that I have about the phenomenon being studied.

**Results**

One central research question formed the basis for this study: How have African American women's socially aggressive behaviors been shaped their family's values? This research question laid the foundation needed to generate a deeper understanding of the experiences shared by the African American female college students. The findings revealed significant patterns of emerging and overlapping themes.

**Identified Themes**

Four themes emerged in the final analysis: (a) common family values, (b) learned socially aggressive behaviors, (c) acting out, and (d) handling conflict.

## Common Family Values

**Theme 1: Common family values.** The participants indicated that standing up for self and respect were important values within their families. For example, Participant 2 stated, “I’m an only child and my mom is a single parent and she wants me to take care of myself. I used to get bullied, but now I have learned to speak up for myself.”

Participant 4 discussed a situation in which her mother’s words forced her to stand up for herself.

I guess I am sensitive. But one time, I ain’t even going to lie. Like dealing with these jobs. Like I tell you; every job that I go on there is somebody that don’t like me. Pick at me or I’m at the cash register and I’m doing something wrong and I’m not doing it wrong. It just always something. You know I say mama, “Mama I’m going to quit this job and she will say (name stated) you weak.” I almost want to cry when your own mother says I’m weak, but she is right. I was weak, but you know I asked God to take that from me. Because I don’t want to be weak, but I’m still holding on to my job. I have been there for 8 months. Because I ain’t no weak person and I had to show her that. That’s what my mom thought I was being weak.

Participant 8 revealed that is important to her parents that she can stand up for herself by being responsible: “I have to learn to take responsibility of my actions and be responsible. If I am not responsible; then I feel like I am just going to depend on my parents for everything.” Participant 3 discussed how her parents viewed respect: “My parents are big on respect. They taught us that what they say goes and told us to treat

each other like we would want to be treated.” Participant 10 also named respect as an important value within her family: “Respect, loyalty, trust, and honesty are important values in my family.”

Participant 5 revealed what values were important to her family and she also discussed what her mother told her about self-respect:

Respect, honesty, communication, and faith. I feel like those are the main four. she taught me, my brother and sister a lot of things. Like how to present yourself in public because you don’t know who may be watching. Like, say if you out in public you don’t be cussing and looking any kind of way.

### **Learned Socially Aggressive Behaviors**

**Theme 2: Learned Socially Aggressive Behavior.** During the interview participants discussed witnessing acts of socially aggressive behaviors. The participants describe various accounts in which they witnessed family members acting socially aggressive.

Participant 1 discussed her father’s aggressive behaviors and the abusive manner in which her father treats her and her brother:

My dad is physically and verbally abusive. He is always yelling at us for something. I remember this one time when I was in middle school, I got called into the guidance counselor’s office and when I walked in the office, I saw my step-sister setting in there and I thought it was about her. But the guidance counselor showed me a picture of my brother with a mark on his face. So, the guidance counselor asked what happened to my brother and I told her that my dad

beat him last night. Once I got home my dad was already home from work because he left early that day and he was mad too. He wanted to know who told the school because a DSS worker contacted him and that he was under an investigation for abuse. But my dad has always done mean stuff. I remember another time me and him got into a fight. And he almost slammed my face into a table because I called my brother in there to see what he was doing to me. And he got even madder because I called my brother in there. I wanted someone else to see what he was doing because my dad tells everybody, like my grandma that it is us causing trouble. But that's not true, it is him.

Participant 4 discussed the manner in which she believed her father behaves socially aggressive towards her:

He is a good dad. But when things don't go his way he ain't going to listen and he ain't going to do for you. Like if I don't do something or if he hears something that is not true; he will not answer the phone and stuff like that or he will call me when he wants to. He just be petty.

Participant 5 described that she witnessed her extend family members behave socially aggressive. She stated, "I just feel like rolling your eyes, sucking your teeth, snapping your fingers. I just think of a black person. Oh yes, my cousins! Most of my cousins are from Marion County and all of them do it."

Participant 7 discussed her brother's socially aggressive behavior:

Yeah, talking about social aggression? My brother's baby mama and my brother. He used to. Well it was like situations were in he didn't want to be with her. He

wanted to be with her because of the baby. He wanted the baby to grow up with both of them in her life; but it got to the point he was still talking to other girls and he would bring other girls home and his baby mama would be there. I feel like that was disrespectful to her because you know that she is here and you bringing in another female into the house. So, they got into it one day; and my brother was talking down to her and treating her like a dog, like the bottom of his shoe and he did not care. And she got to the point; she didn't have nowhere to go, so she was just staying with us. So, she got to the point where she said she was going to leave and go to a hotel and she was taking the baby. But my brother was just to the point where he didn't care anymore, and he didn't want to be with her and she was his baby's mama and he didn't want her to be his baby's mama. He was like I am only in your life because of the baby and I am here for the baby. He was talking down to her, dragging her through the dirty and all. He is still doing the same stuff, but she is like doing her own thing on the side. It is like when she sees him, she has like flashbacks and she will go into the room and start crying and go talk to my mama.

Participant 9 described how her extended family and her mother acted socially aggressive. She stated:

My family, we are divided mostly. Well, at my grandma's funeral they had like a big bawl. Like, my cousin was fighting her father, my uncle tried to jump on my mother, and they started fighting. They were putting my grandmother in the car... My cousin had a lock in a sock and she hit her father over the head with it. Cops

were involved. I heard a story when my mom almost hit my father; I was a baby in the car. My mom has calmed down over the years, but she is really hands on; she is really aggressive, and she doesn't care about fighting. She even got on the bus on time and it was really crazy.

Participant 10 described how her mother takes out her socially aggressive behaviors on other people. She stated:

Well, my mom; she is pretty much always socially aggressive. My mom is very socially aggressive. It just like how I explained it; if someone is looking at me to long (she does that to), if we are at the drive-thru and sound like they got her order wrong she gets angry and starts talking about them for no reason. She will say stuff like .... if they get her order wrong; they must got the slow bus working tonight or somebody not in there doing their job, make sure you count everything because they don't know how to count, I know I said that and she didn't hear me say that.

### **Acting Out**

**Theme 3: Acting Out.** Acting Out was derived from the participants' responses to the third and fourth IQs, which explored their experiences with social aggression and the intent of their socially aggressive behaviors. Many participants expressed that involvement in socially aggressive behaviors stemmed from feeling disrespected. The participants also revealed that they have acted socially aggressive with family members and people who are not family members. Furthermore, the intent of their socially aggressive behaviors is to protect their images and act as a defense mechanism.

Participant 1 described a time she was socially aggressive to her father because of the abuse she has endured from her father. Participant 1 stated, “My dad is physically and verbally abusive. There was this time when I told my dad about himself. I really want to hurt him because he always hurt me and my brother”. Participant 2 said, “I have a problem when I feel like I’m being disrespected. I even have been in a couple of fight here at school.” she then described the intent of her socially aggressive behavior:

I got into it with a girl in the café. I was putting my tray up and I missed and bump into this girl and she got an attitude. I was like dang girl, I’m sorry and I didn’t mean no harm. But that seemed to made her mad and want to fight me, so we did. Like, these teachers around here think they can talk to people any ole way, but I let them know they are not going to talk me like that. I ‘m not going to let nobody embarrass or disrespect me and not defend myself.

Participant 5 discussed a time when she acted socially aggressive towards another student in high school because she felt disrespected because the other student was spreading rumors about her sexual orientation. She stated:

There was this one time when this girl, and I didn’t even know her. She was a cheerleader and she was spreading rumors about me. She was telling people I was a lesbian. I was like, girl I don’t even know you. When I heard that I just had to find her. In the heat of the moment, I just snapped. And I found her I was like don’t be putting my name in your mouth; like girl! I just went off on her and I was having a bad day and that was the cherry on top. I just exploded, and I ran up to her. I didn’t hit her, but I was rolling my neck and pointing finger telling her she

better keep my name out her mouth, and I threaten her like; I would beat you up.

But I wasn't going to do nothing. I knew I was going to do nothing, but she looked scared, so it worked.

Participant 7 recalled at time in which she acted socially aggressive because she felt disrespected by a peer.

I can recall it like yesterday because I got suspended for this. This girl had come up to me and she was talking to me, but it was like her friend didn't like me. So, her friend was like throwing shots at me and saying different stuff. She was like saying you think this; you think you that. Like, that day before my mama had just got me a car. So, I drove to school and she was like can I ride home with you. I was like no because you talk junk about me; this, that and the third. And you think I'm about to let you ride in my car. So, she got mad and she was nitpicking. She said, don't nobody want to ride you with you anyway and your mouth is messed up. She was just saying different stuff. I was like okay get out of my face, get out of my face. And I pushed her, and we got into an altercation and we started fighting. I feel like I was socially aggressive through it because after the fight I was talking so much junk about her. I was calling her ugly. Things she was say about me; I was admiring things that were wrong with her too. I was saying things out of the blue to her.

Participant 9 recalled a time in which she acted socially aggressive because she felt disrespected by an older European American woman, who she believed was a racist.



Yeah. Okay, we were outside the pharmacy and the lady was older and she was a different race (she was white), and there were no parking spots. Instead of her saying can you please move your car, she was disrespectful. So, me in return I was above disrespectful to her. I even got out the car and kind of wanted to fight her a little bit. Because she was just like... At first, she try to play like, she was racist as well. So, it was just that alone trigger me and pissed me off. Well, she went inside the store, (my mom was inside the store) and she was like you people this, and then she came back outside and said, you people need to move your car, but she was really rude and cursing. It was like, you can tell I am still a minor. It was obvious. Is that how you talk to your grandchildren or whatever. I was just not having it. Cause my grandma didn't talk to me that way. I wanted to be heard and respected. I didn't want to be disrespected. I feel like, if I am respecting you then you should be respecting me.

Participant 10 described what other people do to make her behave socially aggressive:

I'm not socially aggressive often, but sometimes I can be. Like for instance... If I am minding my own business and someone looks at me for too long, like they have a problem with me; I can be socially aggressive. That's like the only time I get socially aggressive. I'm just like what! I stare at them back or I will like roll my eyes, jump at them or ask them do they have a problem.

## Handling Conflict

**Theme 4: Handling Conflict.** Handling Conflict arose from the participants' responses to the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth IQs, which investigated how their how parents handle conflict and how their parents taught them how to handle conflict.

Participant 1 said this about her parents:

My dad and his girlfriend are abusive to each other. They are always fighting, yelling and cursing each other out. They don't handle conflict well. My dad he gets mad and stop talking to people, isolate himself and get depressed. I act just like them. I too yell a lot, and I have the tendency to isolate myself and shut down when I am upset or mad and avoiding things all together. Because that is what I saw my parents do. I tend to leave or tell the person I have to go because I know how I can act when I am mad... I'm use to yelling and acting crazy, but I know yelling doesn't help a situation.

Participant 2 stated, "I am just like my mother. We are both direct people. If my mother sees something wrong with a person [like their makeup], she will make a comment about it and I am the same way. My mother taught me that I have to get people before they get me". Participant 3 said, "I am very direct person. My dad was in the Army and he has always told me to do what I have to do to defend myself." Participant 6 stated, "My dad is, like, go with your emotions, but try to talk about it first. But if you can't, go with your emotions. And my mom is, like, think first before you go with your emotions." Participant 5 discussed how she isolates and give the silent treatment when has to handle conflict:

I usually just get an attitude and shut down. that is how I am. I really need to work on that because that is how I'm with my boyfriend. When there is conflict, I shut down and I just have an attitude and I don't talk until I am ready to. I don't know where I get that from, but my brother does the same thing. And my sister. Me my brother and sister we all do the same thing, and I don't know where we get that from. Because my mom doesn't do that. Like when me and my sister get into it, shut down attitude, me and my brother shut down attitude. And that's how all three of us are; I really don't know where that comes from.

Participant 7 described how her parents taught her to handle conflict:

My parents taught me to walk away from it, but if you can't; if they hit you, you know what you are supposed to do. Hit them, beat them up. It has been times when people tried me here. I got into a fight here. Because this girl, her boyfriend wanted to talk to me. I didn't mean to break up no happy home, but if their home was so happy, I wouldn't be able to get through the door. First of all, that is what I told her, and she got mad at me because I told her that, so she pushed me, and we fought here. We didn't get in any trouble. It is not hard for me to walk away.

Like, right now if we fuss; I can walk away from that argument because I would be like I don't have time for this. But if it gets to the point where you start yelling at me, calling me out of my name and stuff, I would just be like do it again, do it again. I would hit someone first. If you keep coming to me and edging me with it, I am just gone to give you what you want.

Participant 9 discussed how she was taught to handle conflict as a child and how she handles conflict now as an adult:

I was taught to... If somebody hit me to hit them back. If you disrespect me, I would tell a teacher [when I was younger], but now I handle it. Now, if you disrespect me then I am going to have to disrespect you. If you hit me, I am going to hit you back.

Participant 10 revealed how both of her parents handle conflict aggressively and what they taught her about handling conflict:

My mom and my dad both are hot headed. It's like they are calm until you mess with them. So, it's like they both handle situations the exact same way, aggressively. I was taught to avoid conflict as much as possible because sometimes it is not always necessary. I was also taught if somebody hits me I am supposed to hit them back or if somebody says something about me I am supposed to stand up for myself.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I discussed common themes that emerged from 10 interviews. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and understand how their socially aggressive behaviors were influenced by their family values.

I used Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis plan. I reviewed transcripts of interviews, going line by line to identify common words, patterns and themes. Four major themes were identified in the final analysis: (a) Common family

values, (b) Learned socially behaviors, (c) Acting out, and (d) Handling conflict. The results revealed that family values do shape the participants in this research study socially aggressive behaviors. Transcript excerpts were used to support the major points.

In Chapter 5, I present a summary of the findings and an interpretation of the findings in relationship to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I also discuss how the findings of this research could contribute to positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

I used a phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of African American females' family values and socially aggressive behaviors. Previous research focused on the negative aspects of African American adolescent females' behaviors rather than their lived experiences (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in early adulthood and to understand how their socially aggressive behaviors are influenced by their family values. The phenomenological design was chosen to be able to understand and describe the experiences of African American females who have manifested aggressive behaviors and the relationship of those behaviors to family values. The phenomenological design allowed me to capture the perceptions of African American females about their family's values with respect to their involvement in socially aggressive activities. In accordance with Merriam (2002), the goal of this phenomenological research method was to explore the essence or the common experiences of participants, which would lead to deeper discoveries that are not addressed in everyday life.

Ten African American female students met the inclusion criteria for participation in this study. The participants had to have manifested socially aggressive behaviors against others. In this study, I used an interview protocol with nine open-ended questions to collect data, face-to-face, from participants. The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder. I transcribed the resulting data. The interviews

conducted in this study revealed that the family values of African American females do have an influence on their socially aggressive behaviors. The participants' responses indicated that they not only received encouragement from their parents to behave in socially aggressive ways, but they also acted out socially aggressively when they felt disrespected. Four essential themes were identified in the findings: (a) common family values, (b) learned socially aggressive behaviors, (c) acting out, and (d) handling conflict. These themes, along with their relevance to the research question, are the focus of this discussion. They are discussed in relationship to the conceptual framework and the literature review.

### **Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework**

I applied the social learning theory and social learning theory of aggression to examine and understand the effects that family values have on social aggression among African American females. According to Bandura (1973), social learning theory describes the development of behaviors. One major concept of social learning theory is that learning takes place through observational learning (Bandura, 1973; Bandura, 1978). Observational learning is defined as learning that occurs when individuals imitate the behaviors of people they encounter in their daily lives and routines (Bandura, 1973). According to Bandura (1973) the four processes of observational learning as follows: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and reinforcement and motivational processes. Bandura (1978) explained how aggression is developed and adopted in one's behavior by observing parents and various family members.

During the attention process stage, a person pays attention to the behaviors of a model (person) who is influential, powerful, and in control of their social surroundings (Bandura, 1973). Regarding the participants in this study, many of them provided vivid stories of family members acting socially aggressive in front of them. Retention process is the second stage of observational learning, and it involves memory. In order to imitate social behaviors when the model is no longer present to act as a guide, the desired response has to be stored in memory in a symbolic form (Bandura, 1973). The participants in the study were able to remember responses that their family members received when they behaved in aggressive manner. For example, participant 10 discussed how she witnessed her mother act aggressively with her family during arguments to get her point across. Motor reproduction process is the third stage of observational learning and is about behavioral representation of what a person has learned. In order to achieve behavioral reproduction, a learner must be able develop responses that mimic the model's behavioral patterns. Participants reported that they behave socially aggressive because they witnessed repeatedly act aggressive with other people. For example, participant 1 discussed how she witness her father behave in a socially aggressive manner and she also admitted that she acts just like her father. The final stage of observational learning is the reinforcement and motivational process. During the reinforcement and motivational stage, reinforcement influence not only regulates the obvious expression of matching behavior, but also affects observational learning by determining the amount of attention people paid to various models they encounter in their everyday lives (Bandura, 1973). Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) argued that a person's social interactions with family,



peers, and environment has more influence on his or her participation in social aggression than television and other media sources. Many participants reported that they watched their parents act socially aggressive. Therefore, observing their parents act aggressively had a more profound impact on their socially aggressive behaviors.

Bandura's (1973) social learning theory of aggression suggested that people with aggressive behaviors often receive tangible rewards for their behaviors. For example, participants who acted socially aggressive towards another person may be rewarded with respect or respect from others. Furthermore, the overall theme of social learning theory indicates that individuals learn how to interact socially from their family (e.g. parents or siblings). Both social learning theory and the social learning theory of aggression were the best theories to use as the conceptual framework to explore how socially aggressive behaviors are formed. The findings in my research study indicate that social aggression is a behavior that is learned through verbal and non-verbal actions.

### **Comparison of Data to Literature Review**

#### **Theme 1: Common Family Values**

The participants indicated that standing up for self and respect as important values within their families. African American parents tend to rear their daughters to be strong, confident, and self-reliant individuals (Blake et al., 2010; Townsend & Lanphier, 2007; Underwood, 2003). Edmondson and Nkomo (1998) referred to the process in which African American mothers socialize their daughters as armoring. Armoring is the socialization process in which African American mothers teach their daughters how to be assertive, outspoken, and independent (Edmondson and Nkomo, 1998). African

American parents help prepare their daughters for harsh criticism and stereotypes that they may face in society (Edmondson & Nkomo, 1998; Hall & Bracken, 1996; Sanders & Bradley, 2005; Stevens, 2002; Thomas & King, 2007).

According to Hall and Bracken (1996), authoritative parents encourage their children to be independent and self-actualized individuals. Many of the participants in the research study reported that they were encouraged by their parents to stand up for themselves. For example, participant 2 stated, “I’m an only child and my mom is a single parent and she wants me to take care of myself. I used to get bullied, but now I have learned to speak up for myself.” Everett et al. (2016) wrote, many black mothers demand their daughters to fight back or be punished at home, which can be a conflicting socialization message. Black mothers often encourage their daughters to fight back because they do not want their daughters to be viewed as being weak (Everett, Marks, & Clarke-Mitchell, 2016). The findings in my study supports this statement. For example, participant 4 described a time when her mother told her that she was weak because she wanted to quit a job because she thought she was receiving unfair treatment at work. Therefore, participant 4 expressed that she thought she had to continue to work on her job to prove to her mother that she was not weak person, and that she could deal with adversity.

Dixon, Graber, and Brooks-Gunn (2008) suggested that African American females tend to obey and respect their parents’ rules and family values because of stricter parenting styles. African American females are taught to behave respectfully at home and within their communities but are also taught to be more assertive and aggressive outside

of those places; these types of behaviors can be interpreted as socially aggressive (Blake et al., 2010). Ridolfo et al. (2013) suggested that African American mothers have quality relationships with their daughters because they teach their daughters the importance of self-respect at an early age. Many of the participants reported that their parent(s) emphasized the important of having respect for their parents, themselves, and getting respect from others. For example, participant 3 stated “My parents are big on respect. They taught us that what they say goes and told us to treat each other like we would want to be treated.”

## **Theme 2: Learned Socially Aggressive Behaviors**

The participants describe various accounts in which they witnessed family members behaved aggressively in a social situation. According to Underwood (2003) children learn both positive and negative behaviors by observing their parents argue, which may include physically aggressive acts. Many of the participants voiced that they watched their father, mother, brother and other extended family members act out socially aggressive. Parents who display socially aggressive behaviors such as, ignoring each other when they are upset; involving other people to defend their point of view in a disagreement; threatening to divorce or leave the relationship; withholding affection and friendship are teaching their children how to resolve conflict with socially aggressive behaviors (Underwood, 2003). The findings in my study supports this statement. For example, participant 4 discussed how her father gives her the silent treatment with her.

Williams et al. (2007) reported that adolescent children who have aggressive interpersonal relationships with both their parents and siblings are more likely to

communicate with peers in an aggressive manner. Many of the participants in this study expressed that they observed that their parents act aggressively in social situations and were encouraged behave in the same manner.

### **Theme 3: Acting Out**

All participants revealed that they had a history of being bullied or teased at some point in their lives. Some researchers have described social aggression as a survival skill for African American adolescent females (Goodwin, & Alim, 2010; Talbott et al., 2002; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003). For example, Xie et al. (2003) reported that urban African American adolescent females' participation in social aggression may result in physical violence because they feel threatened or disrespected and this may be the only way that they know how to resolve conflict. According to the participants feeling disrespected was identified as a reason for their socially aggressive behaviors.

Participants indicated that their socially aggressive behavior is a way for them to protect themselves from being hurt by other people. Koonce (2012) discovered that African American females display negative attitudes when they were disrespected or embarrassed by an authority figure. Many of the participants believed that they must always be in defense mode because they have mentality of hurting other peoples' feelings before their feelings are hurt. African American females who display nonverbal socially aggressive behaviors such as eye and neck rolling and sucking of teeth are often described as acting ghetto or black (Goodwin& Alim, 2010; Neal, 2010). Some of the participants revealed that displayed nonverbal socially aggressive behaviors to intimidate someone who may have spread rumors about them or just shown the disrespect in

general. Koonce's (2012) suggested that Talking with an Attitude (TWA) is a verbal defense mechanism used by some African American adolescent females. Troutman (2010) suggested that African American females who TWA are strong, independent young women with high self-esteem but often are viewed as confrontational. Many of the participants discussed how some of their verbal arguments have resulted in physical altercations. Furthermore, socially aggressive behaviors such as gossiping, and name-calling have a more negative impact and is be a precursor for physical violence (Talbot et al., 2002).

#### **Theme 4: Handling Conflict**

In the final theme in this study. Participants revealed how their parents handle conflict and how their parents taught them how to handle conflict. All participants voiced that their parents encouraged them to defend themselves, either with words or with physical violence. African American parents, especially mothers, tend to encourage their daughters to use verbal and physical aggressive behaviors to resolve conflict (Blake et al., 2010; Ridolfo, Chepp, & Milkie, 2013). Blake et al. (2010) stated that African American adolescent females tend to develop beliefs and behaviors that are like their parents. The findings in my research study supports this statement, for example, many participants reported that they handled conflict just like their parents. Furthermore, many African American parents view their daughter's socially aggressive behavior as a form of independence and assertiveness (Blake, Lease, Olejnik, & Turner, 2010).

Brown (2003) suggested that the manner in which females deal with conflict is based upon social interaction patterns taught and exhibited by their parents. Underwood

(2003) suggested that a mother's communication pattern with other females acts as a social blueprint for her daughter's communication and interpersonal skills. Many of the participants voiced that they do not handle conflict well because they have admitted to having issues controlling their anger. Many of the participants that handle conflicts with others by yelling, staring the person down, giving the silent treatment, arguing, and physically fighting.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study had 2 main limitations. The first limitation is that the findings of this study is limited to African American female students who attend a specific college and cannot represent the general population of African American female college students or other racial ethnic groups. The second limitation is that this study is limited to African American female students, research would not likely represent the family experiences of male students at this college.

### **Recommendations**

According to the literature and findings of this study, the family values of African American females do have an influence on socially aggressive behaviors. Even with a small sample of African American females, I was able to identify the common themes, common family values, learned socially aggressive behaviors, acting out and handling conflict, generated from the participants' responses. Many researchers have argued that the socialization process of African American females consist of encouragement from their parents to be independent and out-spoken in various social settings (Blake et al., 2010; Townsend & Lanphier, 2007; Underwood, 2003). Current research fails to explore

why African American females' behaviors are often perceived as aggressive. More in-depth research on the pathology of aggressive behaviors is needed to fully understand socially aggressive behaviors of African American females (Blake et al., 2011). There is still more to be learned about the family values of African American females, ages 18-24.

Although this study only pertains to African American females, who attend one specific college. Future research can be conducted to include African American females from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, including women without a high diploma, women with only high school diplomas or with associate degrees. Future research needs to include parents, siblings and other extended family member in order to fully examine the family values of African American females. Future research also needs to address why African American females feel the need to act socially aggressive.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

Implication for social change have emerged from the findings of this study. Social aggression among African American females has increased, yet little research exists pertaining to their family values and how to offer support to this population (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). This research study may be particularly beneficial to school administrators, educators, and guidance counselors because it examined and provides insight into the origins of socially aggressive behaviors or attitudes that some African American female students may display. Educators who lack in cultural awareness often believe that African American female students who do not follow mainstream social etiquette/ behavioral norms are unintelligent or have behavioral problems (Nelson

&Guerra, 2014; Goldenberg, 2013). However, if educators are familiar with the socialization process of African American females, they may be able to develop a more holistic educational approach; which would help them to focus on a person's capabilities rather than his/her mannerisms.

This research could also be beneficial to family therapists because it may lead to discussions about healthy communication within African American families. This research study could encourage African American parents to examine their family values and the way they socialize their daughters. According to Lindsay- Dennis (2015), socialization process of African American females is derived from indirect and direct messages passed down from generation to generation. However, findings of this research study unveiled a weakness in the socialization process of African American females. The out-spoken and assertive behaviors that are encouraged by African American parents are often viewed and received as aggressive. Therefore, it is important for African American parents to have awareness about the difference between assertiveness and aggression. This can lead to open a dialogue about the needs and concerns of African American females. This research can help therapists to encourage their African American clients to explore the roots causes of their aggressive behaviors; in hopes to create awareness, which could possible lead to better communications skills.

Understanding any relationship between family values and social aggression can help both educators and family therapists to develop programs that discouraged socially aggressive behavior and promote positive family and peer communication skills. The implications for positive social change include the potential to identify any relationship



between family values and social aggression levels in African American females as well as a better understanding of cultural differences.

### **Conclusion**

In this phenomenological study, data were collected from 10 participants all of whom were full-time college students. The data collected was important in describing the lived experiences, family values, attitudes, and perceptions of African American females. Most indicated that their family values contribute to their socially aggressive behaviors and attitudes. Some pointed out that they have witness their parents behave in a socially aggressive manner. This population has had trouble masking their true selves to gain social accepts in social environments such as school (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). The family values of many African American families are twofold because they create family values that are based on the concept of double consciousness (Perry, 2014). As a professional African American woman, I still struggle with being accepted for who I am. When I was an adolescent, my mother told me that I had to defend myself against others. I provide counseling to a very diverse population. Sometimes after meeting a client who is of a different race than myself, I often find myself reassessing my behavior during the session in hopes that my mannerism was not too aggressive for that individual. However, I am learning that balancing what was taught to me as adolescent with what is viewed as acceptable behavior by mainstream standards; can be a lifelong process.

Educators and mental health therapists need to understand the challenges associated with educating or proving help to African American females. Some family values of African American families may perpetuate aggressive behavior. The findings

from this study demonstrated that the family values of African American females do play vital role in their socially aggressive behaviors and more research is needed in this area.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Elsa Butts,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Young African American Women's Understanding of How Family Values Contribute to Social Aggression among African American female students. As part of this study, I authorize you to post recruitment flyers on campus and on the college social media page. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: provide a room to conduct interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,  
Authorization Official  
Contact Information

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What values are important to your family?
2. How do you define social aggression?
3. Tell me about an incident in which you acted socially aggressive?
4. What was the intent of your aggressive behavior?
5. Have you witnessed this type of behavior from other people in your life?
6. How would you describe how your parent(s) handle conflict?
7. Please describe how your parent(s) taught you how to handle conflict situations?
8. How do you handle conflict with your friends?
9. How do you handle conflict with females who are not friends?