

The Rites of Passage as a Cultural Retooling Process for Black Youth in their Adolescent-to-Adulthood Transition

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Transitions from one developmental stage to the next are very challenging periods for all human beings. African American youth, many of whom suffer from identity crisis caused by acculturation, are particularly strained. Because of the unique cultural circumstances Black youth face during critical transitional periods and the negative sociocultural implications precipitated by these difficulties, youth development programs that served Black youths have been adding cultural paradigms to their existing programs, or developing new cultural programs all together. Incorporating cultural paradigms into the existing programs address the youths' needs for cultural reformation. Inspired by the African-centered movement that emerged in the late 1980s, the Black community at-large, including its social workers, educators, sociologists, community activists, and parents, among others, have recognized the need for a more formalized method of socializing Black youth that rely heavily on cultural reconnection (Pinckney et al, 2011; Harvey & Hill, 2004; Harvey & Rauch,1997). During this time period, African centered approaches were very popular among cultural interventionists who served African American youth populations. Following this trend, leaders in the contemporary youth rites of passage movement slowing began planning, implementing and evaluating rites of passage programs around the country to help Black youth in their developmental transitions.

Leaders in the contemporary youth rites of passage movement and others have noted that during these developmental transitions, the prominent role expectations shift from one of "carefree and self-centeredness" to "responsibility and self development." This important role shift is not only imposed by society, community and family, but is personally reinforced as these social expectations are internalized in to one's own value system. Hence, the search for adulthood becomes a major life crisis for young African Americans.

The intention here is not to diminish the strain of the adolescent-to-adulthood transition for youth of all races and gender. But, the chronic sociocultural implications specific to Black youths has made their transition a special psychosocial challenge (Bowman, 1990). The extreme difficulty in the search for adulthood experienced by increasing numbers of Black youths is nonnormative and has far reaching implications. Teen-age pregnancy, substance abuse, delinquency, violence and other antisocial behaviors are manifestations of these implications that must be addressed from a developmental perspective.

Adaptive Cultural Resources

While intense adulthood search conflicts carry psychological risks among Black youth, cultural resources that are transmitted from one generation to the next may facilitate adaptive as opposed to maladaptive modes of coping (Bowman, 1990). We currently know far too little about the factors that differentiate Black youth who fall victim to barriers in the adolescent-to-adulthood transition from those who some how manage to make the transition

successfully. Adaptive cultural resources may combine with the successful resolution of fe/male conflicts to facilitate adaptive coping with impending adolescent-to-adulthood role barriers. A growing literature on Black youth supports the adaptive value of unique patterns of African centered methods of socialization and behavior modification, as well as subjective cultural resources such as strong bonds with Black role models (Asante, 1987; Jagers, 1996; Hill, 1991). Like any other ethnic group, Black Americans may transmit such cultural resources to each generation to help them cope with the barriers they face in major life roles (Bowman, 1990). Rather than regarding them as mere reactions to oppression, African centered scholars view these African American cultural patterns as essentially African forms that are strategically adapted to shifting economic, social and ecological imperatives (Bowman, 1990; Nobles, 1990).

In psychosocial terms, adaptive cultural resources may empower young Black Americans in two major ways (Bowman, 1990; Nobles, 1990). First, cultural resources may nurture a general sense of personal efficacy by facilitating adaptive coping with adulthood role strain. Second, adaptive resources may enable youth to overcome impending barriers in the adolescent-to-adulthood transition. Social learning studies demonstrate processes through which role success at one developmental level may increase a sense of personal empowerment and efficacy in coping with role barriers during subsequent stages. Similarly, cultural resources that promote mastery of role barriers at one stage may provide the psychosocial basis for successful adaptation to future role

strains. Personal empowerment, which is rooted in culture and prior childhood role success, may be the basic formula for a successful transition from adolescent-to-adulthood.

Traditional African Rites of Passage

Traditionally, many indigenous African ethnic groups relied on a complex system of rites to transmit adaptive cultural resources and to facilitate the adolescent-to-adulthood transition. These rites are presently referred to as rites of passage. Rites of passage are those structures, rituals, and ceremonies by which age-class members or individuals in a group successfully come to know who they are and what they are about-the purpose and meaning for their existence, as they proceed from one clearly defined state of existence to the next state or passage in their lives (Mensah, 1990). Traditionally, African rites of passage have been rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age (van Gennep, 1960). Such rites, also called transitional rites, indicate and constitute transitions between states where transition is regarded as a process, a becoming, and even a transformation (Turner, 1987). Among the Ibo of Nigeria the rites of passage are rituals and ceremonies that punctuate the phases of life of man on earth, such as, birth, childhood, passage from puberty into adulthood, marriage, old age, death and passage into the next world (Onuh, 1992). The Akan of Ghana exercise these rites as ceremonies that accompany the individual or group in their life crisis. Secondly, they function as an educational process for accelerating growth in a passage of an individual or a group, pointing to special needs in a particular passage; to a social position

that needs to be understood, accepted or rejected; or to a movement from one status to another (Mensah, 1990).

Van Gennep (1960) has shown that all rites of transition are marked by three phases: (1) separation (preliminal), (2) Margin (liminal), and (3) aggregation (postliminal). The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a “state”). During the second phase, the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) is ambiguous: he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase, aggregation, the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or group, is a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined “structural” type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards (Turner, 1987).

The subject of the passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically “invisible” (Turner, 1987). Traditionally, liminality has been characterized by a state of death, decomposition and catabolism. The neophyte in this liminal period is characterized by having nothing. They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows (Turner, 1987). This symbolic death is a state of waiting to be reborn (Turner, 1987; Onuh, 1992; Mensah, 1990). The concepts of the “invisible”, “dead” subject of passage is of particular interest when discussing the adolescent-to-adult transition. During this period of liminality, the subject is

theoretically “not-adolescent-not-adult.” S/he is in a state of “betwixt and between” or in a perpetual “state” of nothingness (Turner, 1987). These ideas of invisibility and death may explain the condition of Black youths who suffer from chronic adulthood search strain and the lack of a process that will help them out of the state of liminality. On the other hand, liminality is also characterized by a state of reflection (Onuh, 1992).

A Life Cycle Framework

To identify pivotal antecedents and implications of chronic adulthood search strain in the adolescent-to-adulthood transition, we can extrapolate from a vast wealth of ethnographic literature on African life span development traditionally known as transitional rites or rites of passage (Mensah, 1990; Onuh, 1992; Kenyatta, 1938; Turner, 1987; van Gennep, 1960). According to these traditional African life-span models, healthy human development requires one to progress through five critical stages of: (1) Birth, (2) Puberty years, (3) Marriage (adulthood), (4) Elder ship (old-age), and (5) Death. Collectively these various stages can be called the African spiritual/life cycle (Mensah, 1990; Onuh, 1992; Kenyatta, 1938; Turner, 1987; van Gennep, 1960). During each period of this life cycle, mental, physical and spiritual well being and successful development depend on resolving crises and mastering tasks related to the prominent role strains. While Erickson and other adult development theorists provide useful models, a viable life span approach to Black adulthood search strain among Black youth must have several unique features. In contrast to other life span paradigms, Table I highlights specific role strain processes

necessary to conceptualize pivotal primers and implications of chronic

adulthood search strain in the adolescent-to-adulthood transition.

TABLE I

PRIMERS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CHRONIC BLACK ADULTHOOD SEARCH STRAIN IN THE BLACK ADOLESCENT-TO-ADULTHOOD TRANSITION

Stage	Prominent Goals	Pressing Barriers	Critical Conflicts/ Implications
Birth	Celebration Naming ceremony Education in the family and community tradition Socialization Moral/ethical Codes	Cultural disconnection	Identity crises
Puberty	Rites and celebration Manhood training Initiation into manhood	Cultural disconnection Lack of role models	Identity crises Chronic Black adulthood strain Antisocial and self-destructive behavior
Marriage (Adulthood)	Celebration and family building	Chronic employment problems Self-centeredness and lack of mother/father figure	Unstable family structure
Eldership (Old age)	Rites and celebration Community leadership Youth guidance	Undignified aging	Elderly role discouragement Leadership incompetence
Death	Final rites and life celebration	Cultural disconnection Undignified death	Abnormal fear of death

Source: Bowman (1989).

The Importance of Rituals

A ritual is defined by Onuh (1992) as a stereo-typed sequence of activities [rites] involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence natural entities or forces on behalf of the actor's goals and interests.

The importance of rituals is that they are the vehicles by which rites are carried out. They also provide structural actions in which individuals feel themselves active in divine action. A ritual is a way of investing in a situation, act, life change, event with meaning and importance.

Young people everywhere have a need for rituals to mark their transition into adulthood. Where these rituals do not exist, young people will create their own. Historically, indigenous cultures established elaborate ordeals and trials for adolescent males to test their courage and manhood. Young females were taught the intricacies of healing, magic, and the secrets of communicating with the ancestors. Highly complex rites existed in the forms of hunts, ritual warfare, scarification, and circumcision. Although manifest in different forms, actions very similar to indigenous practices can be found being exercised by inner-city African American youth.

The power of ritual can be witnessed everyday on the streets and places where young African American males congregate. Pouring out a little wine for the “homies who ain’t here” can be traced back to the African tradition of pouring libation to the ancestors. What are commonly called “gang signs”, “gang symbols” and “gang hand shakes” are really rituals performed by these young men in the spirit of unity, loyalty, defiance, respect, and reverence among other things. Using a Chicago street gang as an example, when a young man throws up his hand (the five), which stands for five universal principles, and then balls his fist up and pounds on his heart, he is actually performing a ritual that bonds him psychologically, physically, and even spiritually to the organization that he represents. In this case, instead of rejecting these rituals as mere gang signs, focusing on the five universal principles as higher order thought re-directs the associated negative connotation that can bring about a prosocial transformation. Moreover, it could be reinforced that the true spirit of unity and loyalty must

include the community at-large while defying all of which is harmful to the community. Using gang rituals to tackle gang problems may not be as crazy as it sounds. It could be the only way to stop the disaster that exists (Pinnock, 1997).

Western culture and the dominant world religions reject the ancient practices of ritual. Due to the enslavement of African people and close to 400 years of oppression, African Americans have been disconnected from traditional cultural practices. Nevertheless, where there are but remnants of traditional rituals, Black youth creatively create new rituals that are applicable to their existence. Unfortunately, however, misguided search for self-identity, empowerment and social respect leads to rituals that sometimes include weapons, drugs, and antisocial behaviors. Without community supervision, these rituals are the first step down the path to violence, self-destruction and social chaos.

Initiation

Initiation ceremonies have been the means through which people are incorporated into a new status, an association, or an office. Like other transition rites, initiation involves making social or physical transformations. Initiation into adulthood is probably the most widespread initiation in Africa (Kratz, 1993). A common characteristic of initiation is to reveal secrets and esoteric knowledge to the uninitiated. Concealing this special knowledge is a way to differentiate the initiated from the uninitiated. Secret knowledge also is often associated with differences of power, authority, or other privileges (Kratz, 1993). While initiation into adulthood is most clearly related to processes of socialization, all kinds of

initiation and transition rites are concerned with questions of personhood, as well as with related ideas about social values, morality, rights, and responsibilities. Initiation into adulthood is likely to focus on notions of childhood, adulthood, gender, and ethnic identity.

Among the Igbo there are three distinct aspects of initiation. The first is obligatory for all members of society. These rites function to effect the transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood. The two other aspects of the initiation concern the reception rituals into secret societies or groups or confraternity, as well as rituals requisite for obtaining a higher religious status. These two forms are not of obligatory nature to all members of a society (Onuh, 1992).

Initiation to adulthood is an important rite of a mandatory nature, in the transformation of an individual into the fully social adult, as Mircea Eliade observes:

These rites are obligatory for all youth of the tribe. To gain the right to be admitted among adults, the adolescent has to pass through a series of initiatory ordeals: it is by virtue of these rites, and of the revelation that they entail, that he will be recognized as a responsible member of the society. Initiation introduces the candidate into the human community and into the world of spiritual and cultural values.

It is the initiation rites that establish a distinction between childhood and adult status, which is not dependent on physiological development but on social recognition through the community rituals (Onuh, 1992).

Clarification of Cultural Orientation

To bring clarification and deeper meaning to the discussion of rites of passage programs, it is necessary to have a solid framework for analyzing the objective and subjective complexities of culture. In doing so, I provide a framework for the building of a cultural understanding of these programs and the cultural orientations of the youth initiates and their communities. Furthermore, a combination of Swindler's (1986) "cultural tool kit" paradigm and Boykin and Toms' (Simpson & Parson, 2009) "triple quandary" framework will be used to discuss the youths' cultural attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

Cultural Tool Kits

Culture is not a static, one-dimensional system that guides action in a linear direction; rather, "it is more like a 'tool kit' or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action" (Swindler, 1986, p. 277). For instance, the spirit of competition and possessive individualism are both essential "tools" needed to be successful in mainstream American society. There are a multitude of tools, e.g., individualism, growth, progress, rationalism (science), time as linear, professionalism (status), individual wealth, private virtue, superiority of Western civilization among others, that, when used determine an actor's degree of cultural competence, contribute to her/his degree of success in mainstream American society. Those who use alternative tools not commonly found in mainstream America society's tool kit, say, the spirit of cooperation, altruism, or Black pride, tend to be less culturally competent, and therefore their degree of success in society is minimized.

Swindler's (1986) paradigm of culture as a tool kit will serve as the foundation for discussing the rites of passage programs for Black youth. The stories, rituals, and worldviews expressed by the mentors and initiates offer images of culture as a tool kit of symbols that both groups use, in varying configurations, as adaptive coping resources to solve their problems. Studying the rites of passage programs offered a unique opportunity to examine two alternative tool kits that were distinctly different from the mainstream American society tool kit, letting me examine how each of these tool kits independently and collectively shape adolescents perceptions.

Although Swindler's tool kit paradigm provides a solid foundation for discussing culture in general, it must be expanded to capture the unique and diverse cultural orientations present among African Americans, particularly African Americans who live in marginalized communities. Building on Swindler's "tool kit" paradigm, I added the Boykin and Toms' triple quandary framework to help bring clarity and deeper meaning to the cultural findings from an African-centered perspective. The triple quandary framework posits that, "African Americans simultaneously negotiate through three distinctive realms of cultural experience" (Jagers & Mock, 1993, p. 392). These three cultural orientations include (a) the Anglocultural orientation, also referred to as a Eurocentric perspective, or mainstream American orientation, (b) the marginal, or minority orientation, and (c) the Afrocultural, or African centered orientation. Most African Americans tend to be rooted in one particular orientation; however, it is

common for African Americans to simultaneously use tools from each of these orientations as an adaptive response to given social situations. When Swindler's tool kit paradigm was combined with the three realms of African American cultural experiences set forth by Boykin and Toms, three distinct cultural tool kits became available for use in discussing the deeper meaning of rites of passage programs: (a) the Anglocultural tool kit, which contains cultural tools needed to be successful in the mainstream American society; (b) the marginal tool kit, cultural tools that are mal-adaptive responses to structural barriers; and (c) the Afrocultural tool kit, adaptive emic resources that have been transferred into etic responses to current social imperatives (Table II).

The first tool kit, the Anglocultural tool kit, consists of middle-class Anglo-American (Eurocentric) cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors that represent the appropriate cultural tool

TABLE II
CULTURAL TOOL KITS

	Anglocultural Tool Kit	Marginal Tool Kit	Afrocultural Tool Kit
Contents	Mainstream values, attitudes, and beliefs necessary for success in American society	Adaptive coping responses to lack of structural opportunities	Adaptive cultural resources preserved from prior generations that help individuals cope with contemporary pressing imperatives
Tools	Machiavellianism, possessive individualism, competitive spirit, egalitarian-based conformity, person/object relations (materialism), personal responsibility	Machiavellianism, predatory individualism, illicit economic activities, gang membership, male dominance, emotional nonresponsiveness, hypermaterialism	Spirituality, communalism, affect, empathy, social interaction/involvement, social responsibility/duties, social interconnectedness, emotional expressiveness
Associated behavior	Conforming	Antisocial	Prosocial
Existing perspective	Mainstream and pathological perspectives of self and community Want out of their communities, never to return	Pathological perspective of self and community No future for themselves nor their communities	Adaptive coping and oppression perspectives of self and community View community as theirs and feel obligated to it through community service

kit for success in mainstream America. Many Black youth subscribe to the use of tools from the Anglocultural tool kit, such as possessive individualism, the spirit of competition, conformity, and effort optimism. It is not uncommon for the highest achieving students in school to possess this orientation. Although many of these youths live in the most marginalized Black communities and are exposed to risks common to marginalized communities, they tend to be more amenable to the mainstream middle-class value system. They appear to have more family support than most of their peers. They know how to mobilize their resources in an effort to achieve their personal goals. It is the

ability to mobilize some of the Anglocultural tools, such as personal responsibility, that these youths use to make decisions that enhance their chances to be successful in life.

Egalitarian-based conformity is a prominent tool in the Anglocultural tool kit. Many of the youths in the Anglocultural category use the egalitarian-based conformity tool frequently, which is what keeps them out of such troubles as gang activity, pregnancy, school-related problems, or drug involvement that many of their peers find themselves in. Although these young people live in risky environments, they are “in it but not of it” thanks to their ability to mobilize the

Anglocultural tool egalitarian-based conformity.

Although there are benefits to youth who are able to marshal tools from the Anglocultural tool kit, there are also some adverse responses to the use of some of the tools central to the Anglocultural tool kit. For instance, possessive individualism, the spirit of competition, Machiavellianism, and materialism are principal tools found in the Anglocultural tool kit. All of these tools have the potential to desensitize youth to forms of collectivism, cooperation, and spiritualism.

Many youth in the African American community have a mainstream perspective of personal achievement that is rooted in the Anglocultural orientation. Understandably, many of them also have a pathological perspective of their own community, their school, and the people in their communities. Their initial life goals include plans to use Anglocultural tools to escape their communities, never to return to them.

Although many youths in the Black community have an Anglocultural orientation, there have been a growing number of youths who possess a marginal, or minority, orientation. The marginal orientation reflects those experiences that are fostered by maladaptive coping to the historical legacy of racial and economic oppression (Bowman, 1990; Jagers, 1993; Jagers & Mock, 1993). These youths are perceived to be at greater risk for school failure and they tend to exhibit the most severe forms of social and economic marginalization that exist within poor inner-city communities.

It is believed that the predominant expressions found in the marginal tool kit are a variety of self-

deprecating antisocial expressions, such as “predatory individualism” and gang-related activities as well as aberrant achievement and survival strategies, e.g., rejection of formal schooling and consequent participation in street economy (Bowman, 1990; Jagers, 1993; Jagers & Mock, 1993). Most people agree that structural circumstances are the ultimate causes of the perpetuation of a culture of marginalization in inner-city communities. The lack of structural opportunities, not intrinsic pathologies of the people in these communities, is largely to blame for intergenerational marginalization. Although it is clear that people in marginalized communities share the values and aspirations of the middle class, e.g., education, friendships, stable marriages, steady jobs, and high incomes, due to the structural barriers to opportunities, many individuals in these communities develop behavior that is a defensive cultural adaptation to the structural barriers. Typical of the marginal subculture is the use of such marginal tools as Machiavellianism and predatory individualism that are employed to cope with the role strain that exists in those communities. Many, if not most of the youth who subscribe to this orientation engage in high levels of antisocial behavior. Too many of these youths use marginal tools that lead to fighting and gang-related activities as a means of coping with role strain.

Whereas only some of the youths in the African American community who possess an Anglocultural orientation have a pathological perspective of their communities and the people in them, the majority of youths who have a marginal orientation feel that their communities and the people in them are pathological. This might explain why they adopt the use of the

marginal tool kit to cope. For instance, using the marginal tool of hypermasculinity may be perceived by some of the young males as an effective way to ward off threats from other aggressive males in their environment. Of course, using hypermasculinity increases the risk for aggressiveness, which can lead to elevated levels of antisocial behavior and violence, especially when other males in the immediate environment are using the same marginal tool to cope with their role strain. Nevertheless, it is logical to assume that if a young male perceives the males in his community to be pathologically violent, he would also perceive hypermasculinity as the appropriate tool to protect himself against pathologically aggressive males.

Given the objective and subjective difficulties that both the Anglocultural orientation and marginal orientation present to African American youth, an Afro-cultural orientation is an alternative cultural orientation. The Afro-cultural orientation suggests that African Americans have preserved and mobilized emic or old cultural patterns from prior generations. Subsequently, the old emic cultural patterns have transformed into etic or new adaptive resources to meet pressing imperatives. These adaptive resources function as an Afro-cultural tool kit that provides Black people with expressions to help them cope with barriers that they may face in major life roles.

The tools in the Afro-cultural tool kit include, but are not limited to, Spirituality, the belief that all elements of reality contain a certain amount of life force; Communalism, which denotes awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people; and Affect, which implies the importance of

emotional experiences, the affective values of information, and a particular sensitivity to the emotional cues given off by others.

Certain tools that are prominent in the Anglocultural and marginal tool kits pose particular problems for African American youth, specifically with regard to antisocial behavior and delinquency. For instance, Machiavellianism, a well established tool in the marginal tool kit and an increasingly popular tool in mainstream American society, has far reaching implications for antisocial behavior among African American youth. Machiavellianism suggests a social strategy that features a willingness and an ability to manipulate people for one's own purposes. Duplicity, guile, and opportunism are characteristics associated with Machiavellianism personality. Wrightsman (1992) suggested that mainstream American society became increasingly more Machiavellian in the 20th century. Thus it might be that the greater one's Anglocultural orientation, the more one will demonstrate a Machiavellian attitude. Moreover, it has been well established in the literature on youth behavior that a marginal orientation is a contributing factor to a greater frequency of delinquent and aggressive behaviors among African American youth.

Jagers and Mock (1993) found that African American youth who demonstrated a greater difference between an Afro-cultural orientation and a marginal orientation reported decreased levels of delinquent behavior. The more that African American youth reported embracing an Afro-cultural orientation, as opposed to an Anglocultural orientation, the lower the likelihood of their possessing such problematic attitudes and behaviors as

Machiavellianism, delinquency, and aggressive behaviors. Moreover, the greater the difference between spirituality, a primary element of an Afro-cultural orientation, and an Anglo-cultural orientation, the greater the association with lower levels of Machiavellianism and delinquent behavior. Such negative relationships also emerged for the affect-Anglo-cultural and communalism-Anglo-cultural difference scores. In addition, higher scores on the communal-Anglo-cultural pairing were positively associated to empathy and negatively associated with the report of aggressive behaviors. The Anglo-cultural orientation was implicated in higher levels of each of the undesirable outcomes assessed in the study. Thus, an Afro-cultural orientation was consistent with more favorable social outcomes for African American youth.

The Rites of Passage as a Cultural Retooling Process

Given the potential detrimental effects that some elements of an Anglo-cultural orientation and marginalization orientation have on African American youth, the rites of passage model can retool Black youth with these orientations to an Afro-cultural orientation. While cultivating the prosocial tools that youth possess from the Anglo-cultural tool kit, such as personal responsibility, the rites of passage model can purge the antisocial tools associated with the Anglo-cultural and marginal toolkits and replace them with Afro-cultural tools, such as social responsibility. Instead of fault-protecting the youths who use tools from the marginalized toolkit, for example, Machiavellianism, and consequently furthering the pathological stigma that society places on marginalized

communities, rites of passage programs can Black youth through intensive efforts to explain to the youths the role of society in the production of marginalization and how society's role fosters the use of Machiavellianism and other marginal tools. At the same time, the programs can purge the antisocial tools associated with the marginal tool kit and replace them with Afro-cultural tools, e.g., empathy.

Cultural Tool 1: Self-sufficiency, Self-empowerment, and Ethnic Pride

Many rites of passage programs attempt to cultivate tools of self-sufficiency, self-empowerment, and ethnic pride among their initiates by facilitating activities that simulated major events of oppression of African people, e.g., the transatlantic slave trade, the middle passage, the dehumanizing process of African people being sold as chattel, Jim Crow segregation, and police brutality. They do these activities to educate the program participants on the atrocities committed against their ancestors so that the initiates can better appreciate the strength of their people, who endured such human suffering, hoping that this knowledge will be transferred to a consciousness of the need for ethnic pride, self-empowerment, and self-sufficiency. Simultaneously, many of these programs promote experiences of resistance to institutional racism and oppression by exposing the youth to Maroon life and revolutionary political activism. Ultimately, however, the programs serve as a natural intervention of antisocial behavior for their initiates by fostering tools for self-sufficiency, self-empowerment, and ethnic pride because they are all forms of self-efficacy,

making them all protective factors against violence-related behaviors.

7.6.2 Cultural Tool 2: Community Building

In an attempt to establish strong bonds between their initiates and their community, the rites of passage programs intensively engage the initiates in leadership training and community service projects. Further, these programs strongly involve initiates in becoming activists for social change in their community. Not only are the initiates engaged in community service in their communities, but they are also intricately involved in community service projects in Africa, thereby connecting these youth to a global community. As Black youth begin to become more active in working for social change in their community and perceive themselves to be community builders, the less likely they will be involved in behaviors such as violence that destroys the community.

Cultural Tool 3: Economic Empowerment

In what appears to be a natural and planned response to the socioeconomic dilemma of the community that they were a part of, many rites of passage program's leadership attempt to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship among their participants. The entrepreneurship spirit is a tool to reduce the initiates' job role strain and to prepare them to overcome the economic devastation that existed in their communities. The programs' leadership also provides a range of other alternatives that help the initiates to overcome involvement in the underground economy that oftentimes involves selling drugs, theft/fencing, and robbery.

Cultural Tool 4: Ritual as Tools for Preventing and Solving Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Conflict

Many rites of passage programs use a variety of approaches to help their initiates cope with stress, frustration, and rage, which ultimately lead to violence-related behaviors. These approaches exist within the context of the rites of passage training that is the vehicle through which the initiates are retooled. As the initiates enter into formal training, they are immersed in the process of an inward journey. The inward journey uses traditional African group psychotherapeutic techniques to enhance the emotional functioning of its participants. This process, also referred to as clearing, facilitate the participants' going inward to confront past emotional traumatic experiences that function as a current barrier to healthy emotional functioning. Many of the initiates with a marginal orientation manifest emotional nonresponsiveness, a tool frequently used by youth who suffer personal trauma due to living in a high risk environment, particularly young, African American males. Through rituals involving clearing and checking in physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually (P.I.E.S.), the programs provide the initiates with the tool of emotional expressiveness. This is a particularly powerful tool for young, African American males, many of who possess maladaptive tools of emotional nonresponsiveness, which leads to violence-related behaviors.

Cultural Tool 5: The Spirit of Communalism

In the spirit of communalism a major goal was getting initiates to see their community as the "village." It was abundantly evident through the

demonstration of the programs' involvement in community service that the spirit of communalism is a high priority. Most rites of passage programs place a high value on the Afrocultural tools of social interconnectedness and community involvement. The initiates find the community service experience to be the most personally rewarding and most beneficial aspect of participating in the program. The fact that young, African American initiates find community service to be rewarding and beneficial is extremely promising given that preliminary empirical evidence from studies on violence in inner-city communities indicated that increased collective efficacy, as demonstrated in community service, reduce the level of violence at the community level.

Cultural Tool 6:
Empathy/Affect

Empathy is viewed as being critical to positive growth and development. It suggests a very close relationship between persons, especially one resulting in mutual understanding or affection. Empathy conveys being sensitive to another's feelings or ideas. Conversely, Machiavellianism implies a steadfast focus on personal goal attainment.

Furthermore, Machiavellianism suggests a willingness to exploit others in order to achieve one's desired goals.

There are several components of effective rites of passage programs that foster the Afrocultural tool of empathy among initiates. For example, the process of clearing allows all group members to experience the most personal and private life experiences of other participants. This allows them to experience the misfortunes of others, thus making them more empathetic to the situation. Of course, being privy to

their fellow initiates' life traumas brought them closer together, thereby increasing the empathy that they had for each other.

Cultural Tool 7:
Spirituality/African centeredness

The Afrocultural orientation connotes spirituality. Spirituality is the belief that all elements of reality contain a certain amount of life force. Likewise, the African-centered perspective of African culture holds spirituality at the core of its aspects, i.e., ideology, ethos, and worldview; its manifestations, i.e., behavior, values, and attitudes; and its factors, i.e., ontology, cosmology, and axiology. Therefore, where there is African culture in any form, there is spirituality: the two coexist.

Central to most rites of passage programs' mission is the process of cultivating spirituality among the initiates. The rituals of libation and smudging, among others, are generally obligatory events at each and every gathering. Libation is a traditional African ritual that symbolizes the calling forth of one's ancestors to participate in the event. This ritual also is used to invoke the spirits of the ancestors who are also perceived to be helpers of their earthly relatives. Smudging symbolizes the process of spiritual cleansing of a sacred ritual space.

Spirituality is an Afrocultural tool that should be of particular interest in rites of passage programs because preliminary empirical data indicate that the endorsement of an Afrocultural orientation also has spirituality associated with it, which seems to function as a protective factor against violence-related behaviors. Rites of passage initiates report spirituality to be a deterrent to weapon carrying and other forms of violence-related behaviors.

These young people perceive themselves as being protected by their ancestors, which made carrying weapons and engaging in other risky behaviors unnecessary to protect themselves from violence.

Conclusion

Many leaders in the contemporary youth rites of passage movement go beyond simply reconnecting youth with family, community, and racial group. There has been a large effort to re-establish a communal base complemented with instruction on spiritual and affective issues (Jagers, 1993). It is this transitional process that facilitates the cultural transmission that Bowman (1990) and others consistently call for. These rites of passage interventions seek to build and instill Afrocultural social ethos and spirituality (Jagers, 1993) by focusing on four areas. First, a considerable effort is made to impart traditional African and African American values, morals, and ethics. The traditional societal African values of we, cooperation, and the internal, are instilled as opposed to the Euro-American societal values of I, competition, and the external. The principles of the Nguzo Saba and the Theory of Kawaida are central to these values. Second, the Black value system stresses the importance of commitment to God, the Black community, the Black family, self-discipline and self-respect. Third, there is a dedication to the pursuit of excellence and education and the disavowal of the pursuit of middle classness. Fourth, the initiates are encouraged to adhere to the black work ethic.

In most of these programs, an effort to instill a sense of empathy and compassion for others is cultivated in the

participants. There also is an effort to teach collective efficacy. Instilling in the participants a sense of community and a perspective of the school as community are key components. By teaching collective efficacy, these programs hope to help the initiates to understand the importance of interdependence and increased communal values, thus, decreasing delinquent behavior. Finally, efforts were made to promote social cohesion among the initiates. Social cohesion or the lack-there-of is associated with the degree to which violence is present at the community level (Williams, 2009). It is interpersonal conflict that leads to the greatest degree of fatal social deterioration among young African American youths (Williams, 2009). To address these problems, considerable time is given to intensive conflict resolution training along with the same degree of anger management skills training.

African American pre-adolescents and adolescents who reported having pro-social friends and friends who disapprove of violence were more likely to avoid physical fighting and possessing weapons (Williams, 2009). There is a large volume of literature implicating association with antisocial peers in the escalation of antisocial behavior, although the specific processes of risk have not been identified (Williams, 2010). These rites of passage programs are likely to build comradeship among young African Americans that is based on prosocial values that can be highly influential in reducing antisocial behavior.

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