HIDDEN VOICES OF BLACK MEN: The Meaning, Structure, and Complexity of Manhood

ANDREA G. HUNTER
University of Michigan
JAMES EARL DAVIS
University of Delaware

The adequacy of male role performance has dominated research on masculinity and manhood among Black men (Franklin, 1984; Frazier, 1939; Hare, 1971; Liebow, 1967; Moynihan, 1965; Pleck, 1981; Staples, 1982). Specifically, men's roles as economic providers or as patriarchs have been central to this work. Black males' struggles with manhood, whether a byproduct of structural barriers, cultural pathology, or both, are implicated as a contributor to the rates of female-headed households, never-married childbearing, and divorce in Black communities (Liebow, 1967; Staples, 1982; Wilson, 1987). However, the meaning of manhood has been treated as largely unidimensional and universal—man as economic provider and as head of the family. Further, what Black men are and what they should be is measured against the status and privilege of White males. The result is that we know little about how Black men define themselves either within or beyond conventional notions of masculinity and manhood.

AUTHORS' NOTE: We wish to thank the men who shared their lives with us. Please send correspondence to Andrea Hunter, Institute for Social Research, 426 Thompson Street, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248, or to James Earl Davis, Department of Educational Studies, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716.

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Studies of Black women emphasize how out of oppression a unique definition of womanhood was forged, one in which adversity gave rise to strengths (Davis, 1981; Giddings, 1984; Hooks, 1981; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982). However, the discourse around men and oppression focuses on the stripping away of manhood (Baldwin, 1961; Brown, 1965; Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Segal, 1990; Staples, 1982). It is a perspective that casts Black men as victims and ignores their capacity to define themselves under difficult circumstances. Clearly, Black males have had to be men in a historical and cultural context that varied radically from White males; however, emasculation and pathology were not the inevitable consequences of this variation. The historical record indicates that even in the worst of times—through slavery, economic deprivation, and urbanization—Black men managed to develop a sense of dignity and self-worth, were connected to their families, and provided for them as best they could (Bowman, 1989; Cazenave, 1979, 1984; Gutman, 1976; Gwaltney, 1980; Hunter, 1988; Shaw, 1974). In this study we asked men what manhood meant to them; what we found was a perspective on manhood and masculinity often hidden in the discourse on the Black male "crisis."

MANHOOD AND THE CRISIS OF BLACK MEN

Being Black and male in American society places one at risk for unemployment (Wilson, 1987; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), school failure (Garibaldi, 1988), and violence and crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1985, 1988; Oliver, 1989b). Historically, these patterns have been viewed, to varying degrees, as products of racism, unemployment, and poverty, as well as the results of cultural adaptations to these systemic pressures (Bowman, 1989; Franklin, 1984; Hare & Hare, 1985; Liebow, 1967; Madhubuti, 1990; Oliver, 1984, 1989a; Wilson, 1987). Further, Black males' conceptions of manhood has been linked to the "Black male crisis."

During the early 20th century, Frazier's seminal work, *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), in conjunction with the male sex role identity paradigm, provided the conceptual basis for

several decades of research defining Black men as psychologically and interpersonally impotent (Kardiner & Oversey, 1951; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964; Pleck, 1981). Frazier's (1939) thesis suggests that the history of slavery, oppression, and disenfranchisement had birthed cultural pathos that displaced the patriarchal family system. He argues that in an urban environment the fundamental pathology in the structure and organization (i.e., matriarchy) of many poor Black families led to juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy, increasing numbers of female-headed households, and a host of other social ills. Specifically, the absence of Black men at the head of their families and too powerful women precluded appropriate sex role socialization and ultimately adult male role performance (Bowman, 1989; Pleck, 1981; Staples, 1971). In short, Black males failed to learn what being a man was all about. In the absence of appropriate models of manhood (for Frazier this was the Puritan patriarch) the cycle of inadequate male role performance and poor family functioning would continue to produce ill-prepared males. Three decades of research that followed failed to question Frazier's fundamental thesis, which fit well with the prevailing racist imagery of Black men as eternal boys (e.g., Kardiner & Oversey, 1951; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964; Rainwater, 1970).

The publication of the Moynihan Report (1965) and the controversy that followed (Rainwater & Yancey, 1967) ushered in a new perspective that emphasized the impact of structural barriers on Black male role performance instead of cultural pathologies (Hare, 1971; Liebow, 1967; Staples, 1971). The dissenters of Frazier's thesis argued that Black men endorsed mainstream values about the male role, but that racist institutions and economic oppression often dismantled the supports necessary to act on these values. Although this perspective moves away from the cultural pathology paradigm, it offers an alternative explanation for Black men's failures, particularly among low-income males. Further, because early revisionist perspectives on Black masculinity and male role performance were typically steeped in the hegemony of masculinity and manhood, they failed to elaborate on the varied adaptive meanings of manhood that may have grown out of the Black experience (for

an exception to this point of view, see Keil, 1966) and their potential divergence from the traditional White masculinity model.

During the Civil Rights era, the Black Power movement articulated a radicalized Black manhood throwing off the imagery of the emasculated and shuffling Black male dictated by racial caste. The collective frustration and anger over the denial of manhood, identity, and peoplehood that led to urban riots in the 1960s was seen as a powerful expression of masculinity and as a vehicle for social protest (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Segal, 1990; Turner, 1977). The expressed rage of the urban Black male, which was once viewed as a political vehicle and a form of self-expression, today is seen as aimless, dangerous, and self-destructive (Franklin, 1987; Kunjufu, 1984; Oliver, 1989a, 1989b). Hypermasculinity (i.e., hyperaggressiveness, hypersexuality, excessive emphasis on the appearance of wealth, and the absence of personal accountability) as a dominant conception of manhood in poor inner-city communities, particularly among youth, is seen as a by-product of the pathology and despair of the "Black underclass" (Anderson, 1990; Franklin, 1984; Glasgow, 1980; Majors & Billson, 1992; Oliver, 1984, 1989a, 1989b). Further, growing concern over the survival of Black boys and men has generated widespread discussion over the potential extinction of Black males, as seen in phrases such as "institutional decimation of Black males" and "Black males as endangered species" (Gibbs, 1988; Hare & Hare, 1985; Kunjufu, 1984; Stewart & Scott, 1978). Broader sociological and economic forces are viewed as undermining both the development and appropriate expression of manhood among Black males, particularly among the inner-city poor. Hence Black males are both victims and participants in their own destruction. The remedy, some argue, is to develop Afrocentric models of manhood (Akbar, 1991; Kunjufu, 1984; Oliver, 1989a). It is unclear whether viable and adaptive conceptions of manhood are presumed to exist among the Black male population at large. But the image of manhood either unfulfilled or gone awry continues to dominate. And the issue of manhood continues to hold a central place in the discussion of the Black male condition.

BLACK MEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON MANHOOD AND MASCULINITY

Black men move between majority and minority cultures and must negotiate the racism and discrimination that accompany caste-like minority status. Franklin (1986, 1987) suggests that Black masculinity and male role identity must be viewed in these varying social and cultural contexts. Specifically, Black men are expected to conform to dominant gender role expectations (e.g., to be successful, competitive, aggressive), as well as meeting culturally specific requirements (e.g., cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group) of the Black community, which often conflict. The negotiation of these varied contexts lends itself to the development of varied and complex conceptions of manhood.

Black men do endorse the importance of economic provider roles, and family responsibility and involvement (Bowman, 1985; Cazenave, 1979, 1984; Coles, 1977; Smith & Midlarsky, 1985). Cazenave's (1979) study of working-class men shows that men endorsed roles in the following order of importance: provider, husband, father, and worker. His later study indicated that middle-class men are more likely to rank husband highest and that only infrequently do they see worker as the primary role, which suggests that the precariousness of men's economic position may affect the primacy of the provider role in their thinking about male role identity (Cazenave, 1984). Using an expanded list of attributes, Cazenave (1984) also examined white-collar men's views of traits essential for the "ideal man." At least two thirds of the sample endorsed traits of competitiveness, aggressiveness, and being successful at work. In addition, traits related to sense of self (i.e., self-confidence, standing up for beliefs) and family, and one's expressive relationship to others (i.e., warmth, gentleness, and being able to love) were also rated as important.

Hunter and Davis (1992) found parallel results. Men rated the following attributes as most important to being a man: sense of self (e.g., independence, self-esteem); resourcefulness (e.g., making the best of things) and sense of responsibility; parental involvement and sense of family (e.g., child oriented, protecting family); being

goal oriented (e.g., having goals and direction, ambitious); being a provider (e.g., providing income for family, having a good job); and humanism (e.g., being kind and caring, forgiving others). Traditional aspects of manhood, namely masculinity (e.g., being good at sports, physically strong, aggressive, competitive), were rated as somewhat important. Although professional and nonprofessional men rated the same attributes as most important, nonprofessional men rated attributes related to masculinity, spirituality, and measures of financial security more highly than did professional men.

Studies of gender conceptions at varying points in the life span indicate that Black males are less gender stereotyped in their conceptions about masculinity and femininity than their White counterparts (Albert & Porter, 1988; Bardwell, Cochran, & Walker, 1986; Smith & Midlarsky, 1985). However, images of masculinity that parallel mainstream American conceptions are evident. This is, perhaps, particularly evident in all-male settings. For instance, Franklin (1985), in a participant-observation study of a Black urban barbershop, found that the discourse emphasized "toughness, athletic prowess, decisiveness, aggressiveness, violence, and powerfulness."

Several writers (Glasgow, 1980; Madhubuti, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Oliver, 1984, 1989a, 1989b) share the view that an overemphasis on masculinity leads to a maladaptive model of manliness antithetical to the cultural imperatives and survival of the Black community. Franklin (1986) further argues that there is a formidable Black male culture supporting values (such as sexism, irresponsibility, violence) that impede adequate male role performance as defined by both the Black community and mainstream American society. Examples of the behavioral manifestations of these counterculture images are reflected in the "tough guy" and the "player of women" personas that Oliver (1984, 1989a) argues emerged as acceptable alternatives to traditional definitions of manhood, particularly among low-income Black males.

Black men do endorse traditional aspects of the male sex role and attributes that are not stereotypically masculine. In addition, occupational status and economic deprivation may shape prevailing views of masculinity and manhood. However, the complexities of these conceptions and the interconnectedness of varied dimen-

sions of manhood as a cultural construct have rarely been examined. In our previous work (Hunter & Davis, 1992), we examined the relationship between men's conceptions of manhood and their endorsement of selected behavioral proscriptions. In this article we explore further the varied dimensions of manhood identified, the relationship between concepts, and how they collectively represent a meaningful cultural construct.

METHODS

A conceptualization methodology is used in this study to represent the ideas of a sample of 32 Black men (Davis, 1989; Trochim & Linton, 1986). The conceptualization process involved three steps: (a) generation of ideas, (b) sorting of ideas, and (c) construction of a concept map. This methodology preserves the richness of ethnographic research by giving men the opportunity to speak in their own voices, while also producing a graphic display that provides a quantitative representation of the multidimensional structure of manhood. Data were collected in face-to-face private interviews in environments that were familiar to these men (e.g., work site, home, community center). Two investigators, a man and a woman, jointly interviewed approximately one third of the sample. The remainder of the interviews were divided evenly between the two interviewers.

CONCEPTUALIZATION METHODOLOGY

Generation of Ideas

In the first step, participants were asked to generate a set of statements or ideas that described the subject being conceptualized. Men in our sample were asked to respond (give opinions, attitudes, and beliefs) to the open-ended question: "What do you think it means to be a man?" The responses of each participant were tape-recorded to capture them in their entirety and in the exact wording. The interviews, ranging from 30 minutes to 1½ hours, included an interviewer probing into specific statements that had

been made. Over 250 ideas were generated from study participants. Of the complete set generated, 108 unique ideas remained after repetitive ones were discarded.

Sorting of Ideas

This step in the process was accomplished using an unstructured sorting procedure (Rosenberg & Kim, 1975). In this phase an independent group of Black men were instructed to sort, combine, or categorize the 108 unique items into groups or categories that made sense to them. Here participants provided information about conceptual relationships between the generated ideas of manhood.

After the sorting task, each person was asked to assign numbers to the categories they created. They were then asked to record each category number and the identification numbers of the individual ideas (printed on cards) that had previously been sorted. Each person twice sorted the 108 ideas into conceptually similar categories. For each sort, a 108 × 108 binary symmetric matrix was constructed, with values of 1 representing similarity (two statements were sorted in the same category) and 0 if they were not. These similarity matrices were used as input data for developing the concept map.

Construction of Concept Map

The final step was the analysis of the similarity matrix data using multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis (Trochim & Linton, 1986). These analyses yielded a concept map that is a graphic representation of ideas. First, the multidimensional scaling technique (Davison, 1983) was conducted to locate each of the 108 ideas on a two-dimensional (x-y coordinates) map. Second, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed, which begins by assuming that all ideas on the map are in a single cluster and then successively partitions them into smaller clusters that are conceptually similar (Everitt, 1980). The results of these two analyses are combined to produce a concept map representing the collective thinking of the men interviewed. By inspecting the clusters on the

map we gain additional information; relationships between clusters can be interpreted in terms of their distance and proximity from other clusters. The map also illustrates how groups of clusters form larger domains that provide a broader grouping of the concept generated by the respondents.

PARTICIPANTS

Thirty-two Black men from Central New York were selected to participate in this study. The men were recruited with the assistance of local contacts at churches, community centers, schools, and barbershops and other businesses. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided. Given the nature of the intensive interviews, it was necessary to restrict the number of interviews to a manageable quantity. The respondents were selected through convenience sampling; however, extensive efforts were made to include a group diverse in age and occupational status. About 13% were under 25 years old, 32% were 25 to 34, 42% were 35 to 54, and the remainder (13%) were 55 and over. A little over one half of the participants were currently married or had been married (42% and 13%, respectively), whereas 45% had never been married. In educational attainment there was a slight skew toward the upper end of the range. Less than 10% of the sample had fewer than 12 years of education. Thirteen percent had a high school diploma or a GED. Approximately 22% had received some college or vocational training, and a little over one half held college or graduate degrees. The group of participants was almost equally divided between professional and nonprofessional men. About 13% were unskilled workers, and 29% were skilled workers or clerks. Almost half (48%) were employed in professional positions and 6% were college students. The levels of earnings varied: 16% had an income of less than $10,000; about a quarter earned between $10,000 and $20,000. The remaining respondents reported an annual income between $20,000 and $29,000 (32%) or more than $30,000 (32%).

FINDINGS

What Does it Mean to Be Man? A Conceptual Map

Men's discussions of manhood were often interwoven with stories of their own lives and, importantly, with the movement toward self-definition and what they learned of manhood as they aged and matured. Men also spoke of the pain in their lives and the struggles of manhood. For some of the men who had been unemployed intermittently, reviewing the emotional toll of economic hardship and its impact on their sense of dignity left them poignantly reflective of the meaning of manhood in their lives. Although it was often recognized that there were unique challenges to being a Black man, the central challenge of manhood was defined in terms of what they expected of themselves. And what men expected of themselves was framed not only by family role expectations but by their perspective on identity and the development of self, connections to family and community, and spirituality and worldview. What we report here is a collective interpretation of manhood that emerged out of the disparate yet common experiences of Black men and the collective memories that have been passed across generations from father to son, from mother to son, brother to brother, and kin to kin. The emergent conceptions of manhood are surprising yet familiar. Those of us who are a part of the Black experience will see glimpses of fathers, uncles, cousins, and friends—men we know.

Figure 1 is a conceptual map of manhood, a graphic representation of the ideas about manhood gathered from the interviews. The proximity of the cluster of ideas presented in the map reflects conceptual closeness or distance between ideas, which allows us to explore linkages and relationships across varied dimensions of manhood. The shapes of the clusters reflect the location and spread of individual ideas on an x-y axis. The actual statements that constitute idea clusters are presented in Tables 1 through 3.

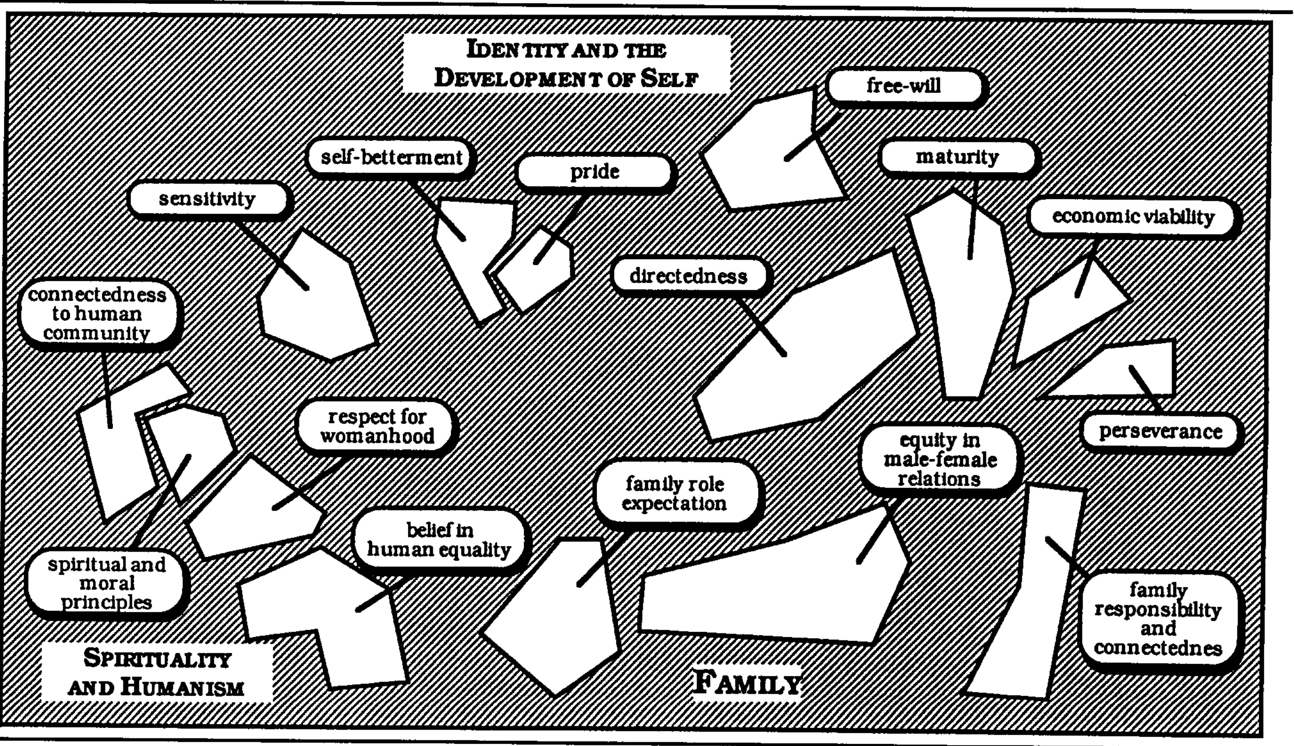

Figure 1: Conceptualization of Manhood

Identity and the Development of Self

Identity and the development of self were central components of men's views of manhood. A sense of self-direction—to have one's own mind and the free will to pursue the path chosen—was a central theme. Men talked about having vision, a strong mind, and flexibility, and of the importance of being able to hold one's head high with dignity. But with freedom comes responsibility. Being totally accountable for personal actions and able to rectify bad situations one has created were articulated as cornerstones of maturity. Men felt that economic viability, particularly the ability to support one's self, was necessary for independence. Closely related is men's recognition of the importance of perseverance, meeting challenges, and rolling with the punches. To keep going even when one doesn't want to is part of the responsibility of manhood. On the map, concepts related to maturity, economic viability, and perseverance cluster together. In general the ideas that comprise the clusters of directedness, maturity, economic viability, perseverance, and free will focus on the importance of forming or having a sturdy self, that is, having and getting one's self together and standing by what one has done, believes, and is. Related to these ideas, but spatially more distant, are the concepts of self-betterment and pride. To work toward improving and developing beyond where one is, and having a sense of pride in self, lie at the core of these concepts. The distance between the concepts of self-betterment, pride, and other concepts concerning identity and self-development possibly reflects a distinction men make about their current situation versus their capacity for improvement.

Connections to Family

Beyond the self—regardless of age, and marital or family status—family was central to men's definition of manhood and part of what was perceived to give a man's life meaning. As one respondent suggested, "Family is an extension of the male ego." This point of view is reflected in the concept map, where the cluster of ideas about family is contiguous to the core domains of the self.

TABLE 1
Black Men's Conceptions of Manhood: Statements From Interviews

Identity and the Development of Self	
Directedness	Free will
taking care of oneself	ability to express yourself without social constraints
being resourceful	control over your life
a man is thrifty	a man is independent
a man thinks about what he wants to do	having the right to be oneself
a man has dignity	having the freedom to make decisions
being able to function	
a man is clear	
having vision	Pride
a man has a strong mind	a man has pride
a man is flexible	pride in his masculinity
goal oriented	a man has a sense of self (personal identity)
a man has direction	aware of capacity
holding your head up high	
Maturity	Self-betterment
totally accountable for one's actions	going beyond mere survival
over 15 years of age	competes with self
ability to rectify bad situations you have created	self-improving
maintains himself	
self-confidence	
physically strong	
self-preserving	
accountable for damages created	
Economic viability	
having salable skills in the environment	
having monetary goals	
a man keeps on his job	
having a job	
a man takes care of the finances	
Perseverance	
having to go when it's raining	
a man "keeps on his toes"	
a man rolls with the punches	
on top pushing ahead	

Much of the richness of the discussion about family issues came out of men talking both about their family lives and about their philosophies of what men should do. There were three major

TABLE 2
Black Men's Conceptions of Manhood: Statements From Interviews

Connections to Family
Family responsibilities and connectedness
a sense of those around him
raise a family
concerned with family
keeping family together
role model for children and spouse
headship of family
makes decisions for family
a man is responsible for family
provides leadership
having responsibilities
Equity in male-female relationships
not dominated by a woman
a man is not the macho-type
contributes to the household
love for the opposite sex
side-by-side with a woman
instills equality in family
not homosexual (heterosexual)
Fulfillment of family role expectation
insures family lineage
meets expectation of being a husband
meeting expectations of being a father
moral example for family

components of men's discussions about manhood in relation to family: (a) family connections and responsibilities, (b) relationships to women, and (c) family role expectations. Manhood in a family context was defined by family leadership and responsibility, which were an expression of men's connection to family. That is, men being role models for spouses and children and providing family leadership and having responsibilities is linked to having a concern for family and the process of raising a family. Ideas about family responsibility were in closest proximity to clusters of economic viability and perseverance, suggesting a linkage to the economic provider role in families. Men's views about family ranged from the traditional to the egalitarian and many expressed

TABLE 3
Black Men's Conceptions of Manhood: Statements From Interviews

Spirituality and Humanism
Spiritual and moral principles
a man is spiritually centered
having some belief in God
faith in life
positive attitude about life
a man should try to be good
Connectedness to human community
not detached from society
being helpful
caring about fellow humans
concern for others
not warlike
Respect for womanhood
not superior to women
being faithful
respect for womanhood
Sensitivity
a man is understanding
a man is trusted
a man should have emotions
sensitive to one's femininity
not stepping on others to excel
a man is loving
emotionally sensitive
Belief in human equality
not elevated
not superior to other men
not aggressive
faith in fellow humans
dealing with people
a man is unselfish

both views. By and large, when men talked about manhood and family, the emotional content of relationships with women was rarely discussed. The cluster of ideas related to emotional sensitivity was relatively far removed from the family domain. However,

the issue of power was a family matter. Related to that was the sentiment that one need not dominate a woman, nor should a man be controlled by a woman. These notions about the power relationships between men and women are conceptually separate from ideas about family organization (e.g., a man as the head of the family) and functioning (e.g., keeping a family together). The cluster of ideas related to family role expectations appears to focus on behavioral prescriptions or expectations defined by others, such as a spouse or society in general; these include doing what fathers and husbands are supposed to do, carrying the family name and setting a moral example.

Spirituality and Humanism

Men expressed a range of ideas and philosophies about being a man and one's relationships to other human beings—ideas that included the importance of spiritual groundedness and connections to members of the human community. These constructs reflect men's thinking about the relationship between the "I" and the "We." On the concept map we move from the collective of family to the collective of the community. Men talked about equality among people and an approach to others that involves faith, caring, unselfishness, and respect. Men who talked about manhood in these terms saw it as a model for living or as something toward which to strive. They also talked about the lessons they had learned from fathers, mothers, or others who had shaped their philosophy of life. The ideas that bridge beliefs about human equality and connections to community are embodied in spiritual and moral principles. This configuration of concepts is congruent with Afrocentric philosophies (Asante, 1987) and the traditional importance of religion among Black Americans. These constructs embody a worldview that links manhood to the collective We and to spirituality. That men saw these themes as relevant to manhood is an indication of how conceptions of manhood born out of a history of oppression can transcend ideas and principles embodied in mainstream notions of masculinity and manhood (Stearns, 1990).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When we began this research we were interested in knowing what men thought about manhood. Using a conceptualization methodology, we attempted to represent a collective interpretation of the meaning of manhood that could incorporate both commonalities and diversity between men and the relationship between ideas across various dimensions. Across educational levels and occupational status men were thoughtful and articulate about what being a man meant to them. The most significant differences were between young men (under 25) and older respondents (30s and older); older men were more comfortable talking about manhood and their views were more expansive. As one respondent in his 60s said, "When you're young, you think everything is black and white, when you're older you know better."

The ideas of the men interviewed were not formed in a historical vacuum; they reflected their own experiences with racism and economic insecurity and the experiences of those who came before them (Dinnuerm, 1992). The extent to which these conceptions of manhood appear idyllic, we think, is a function of men attempting to grapple with what is truly important and defining about manhood, and to integrate notions about personal identity, social roles, and the demands and responsibilities of adulthood. We did not ask men to rate their performance, and we do not know to what extent they can and do live up to their ideals about manhood. But it is our view that the concept map reflects core or mainstream Black cultural constructions of manhood that have helped to sustain families and communities over time. That is not to say that counterculture views of manhood defined by masculinity alone do not exist or that males' conceptions of manhood do not vary with age and experience; however, this work does counter the notion that viable and adaptive constructs of manhood have failed to develop in Black communities.

Manhood defined in multiple arenas and contexts both within and beyond the traditional notions of masculinity and the male role provide men with varied tools and avenues to define themselves and negotiate manhood. This multidimensional construction of

manhood may serve as a cultural mechanism for adaptation and survival. Among Black scholars and activists there is a consensus that unidimensional concepts of manhood (such as the tough guy or player of women) are problematic and maladaptive because they do not provide the tools necessary to meet challenges and overcome the obstacles that come with being Black and male (Akbar, 1991; Franklin, 1986; Hare & Hare, 1985; Majors & Billson, 1992; Oliver, 1984). Manhood training programs developed during the last few years to counter the problems faced by Black male youth focus on areas that parallel the constructs identified in this study (Goddard, 1991; Hare & Hare, 1985). A fundamental aim of these programs is to help boys understand what being a man means and provide adult-based models to mark the transition to manhood. In some sense, manhood, if appropriately developed, is seen as a source of inner strength that males can use to negotiate racism and economic oppression. Although Black males may be at risk for a number of social and economic ills, within this context of risk there is also survival. The conceptions of manhood reported here are a part of this survival.

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Andrea G. Hunter is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and is affiliated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Her research centers on African American families and explores linkages between families, social structure, and culture.

James Earl Davis is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Studies in the College of Education at the University of Delaware. His research interests include the educational experiences of African American males, particularly the relationship between gender role identity and academic achievement.