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"THE STREETS"
An Alternative Black Male Socialization Institution

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The primary purpose of this article is to describe the social significance of "the streets" as an alternative to the family, church, and other community-based institutions that facilitate Black male socialization. A major assumption of this discussion is that for many marginal Black males, "the streets" is a socialization institution that has a major influence on their psychosocial development and life-course trajectories and transitions. In addition, the article addresses some of the problematic consequences associated with the pursuit of manhood and social recognition in "the streets."

Keywords: *Black males; socialization; race and gender identity; hip hop; street culture*

The primary purpose of this article is to describe the social significance of "the streets" as an alternative site of Black male socialization. Socialization is a formal and informal interactive process in which the adults in a society, through the use of the institutions that they control, deliberately seek to inculcate in young people the beliefs, values, and norms that will allow them to functionally adapt as members of society (Coser, Rhea, Steffan, & Nock, 1983). In most discussions of the socialization process, the emphasis is on the role and function of conventional socialization institutions (e.g., the family, church, educational system, community-based organizations, and mass media) in shaping identity and behavior. In contrast, there is a lack of research on the role and function that unconventional social institutions play in facilitating the socialization of adolescents and young adults.

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The phrase "the streets" is used here to refer to the network of public and semipublic social settings (e.g., street corners, vacant lots, bars, clubs, after-hours joints, convenience stores, drug houses, pool rooms, parks and public recreational places, etc.) in which primarily lower and working-class Black males tend to congregate. Hence, a major assumption guiding this discussion is that for many marginalized Black males, "the streets" is a socialization institution that is as important as the family, the church, and the educational system in terms of its influence on their psychosocial development and life course trajectories and transitions. Furthermore, the view developed here expands on a finding reported nearly 30 years ago by Useni Perkins (1975) in his seminal work, *Home is a Dirty Street*, in which he concluded that "the streets . . . constitute an institution in the same way that the church, school, and family are conceived as institutions" (p. 26).

AMERICAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE STREET INSTITUTION

The streets as a ghetto institution is the creation of the American social structure (Clark, 1965; W. J. Wilson, 1996) as well as functional and dysfunctional individual and cultural adaptations to intergenerational structural challenges confronting African American males (Feagan & Vera, 1995; Perkins, 1975; Welsing, 1974; W. J. Wilson, 1996). For example, high rates of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, and inadequate family and fatherhood role functioning are major characteristics of Black males who center their lives in "the streets" (Anderson, 1999; W. J. Wilson, 1996).

The idleness of many underclass Black males, resulting in part from chronic unemployment, is a major factor contributing to their being available to participate in street-related activities. For example, Black male unemployment on average is 2 times greater than the unemployment rate among White males. In addition, Black males earn 62 cents for every dollar earned by White males. Also, as a result of the decline of low-skill, high-wage heavy industrial

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jobs and the expansion of low-wage service jobs and high-wage, high-skill information and technology jobs, Black males have born the brunt of the loss of low-skill, high-wage manufacturing jobs resulting from the geographical shift in the concentration of jobs from the inner cities to the suburbs and Third World countries (Kasarda, 1990; W. J. Wilson, 1996). Indeed, although all Americans must adapt to shifts and transformations in the national economy, among Black males the adverse effects of the restructuring of the economy are enhanced as a result of their intergenerational exposure to historical and contemporary patterns of racial discrimination, particularly blocked access to educational and employment opportunities (Freeman, 1996; Liebow, 1967; W. J. Wilson, 1996).

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ADAPTATION TO THE STREETS

Most lower and working-class Black males do not center their lives in “the streets” and street-related activities (Anderson, 1990, 1999; Hannerz, 1969). Indeed, the majority of lower and working-class Black men are resilient and conform to a decency orientation in response to adverse structural conditions that tend to limit their capacity to successfully compete with White men in the arenas of politics, education, economics, and the maintenance of a stable family life (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; Hunter & Davis, 1994; White & Cones, 1999). However, there is a substantial number of Black males who lack the resiliency and personal and social resources that are necessary to cope effectively with the adverse structural conditions directed against them (Madhubuti, 1990; Taylor-Gibbs, 1988). Consequently, it is this population of marginalized lower and working-class Black males who are most prone to seek respect and social recognition by constructing their identities as men in the social world of “the streets” (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; Perkins, 1975; Staples, 1982). Among such men, it is during adolescence that they learn that an important step toward social recognition and respect as a man, given the social realities of marginalized Black men, involves developing the ability to suc-

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cessfully navigate life in the streets (Anderson, 1999; Perkins, 1975).

The importance of "the streets" as an alternative Black male socialization institution is related to the manner that macro-level, life-sustaining institutions (e.g., the political system, the economic system, the educational system, the criminal justice system, and mass media) have historically been managed by the White majority, and particularly White men, to prevent African American males from achieving political, economic, and social equality (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Madhubuti, 1990; Welsing, 1974). According to White and Cones (1999),

> White males have constructed a society in which they have empowered themselves in positions of wealth, decision making, and prestige. They exercise controlling vetoes over aspirations and choices in most of the political, economic, and legal areas of American life. In empowering themselves, they have reduced the opportunities and choices of Black males. (p. 142)

Hence, the cumulative effects of intergenerational exposure to historical and contemporary patterns of racial and gender oppression directed against Black males has served as a catalyst leading many marginalized Black males to socially construct masculine identities that place emphasis on toughness, sexual conquest, and street hustling (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; White & Cones, 1999; Whitehead, Peterson, & Kaljee, 1994) as a means of coping with and transcending what some researchers have characterized as "frustrated masculinity" (Hare, 1964) or "fragmented gender identity" (Whitehead et al., 1994). Indeed, individual and collective perceptions of systematic exclusion from the conventional means of achieving identity and status as a man within the legitimate opportunity structure, along with individual-level variation in access to supportive family and community support, has had the effect of enhancing the attraction and institutionalization of the streets as an alternative setting to pursue personal and social significance (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; W. J. Wilson, 1996). Consequently, for many lower and working-class Black males, a significant stage in their rite of passage into manhood involves learning how to suc-

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cessfully manage the challenges of street life by constructing masculine identities that are respected and feared by other men in and outside the social world of "the streets" (Anderson, 1999). As a result of this social process, "the streets" is an institution that exists primarily to meet the psychological and social needs of socially and economically marginalized Black males (Anderson, 1999; Perkins, 1975; White & Cones, 1999).

Although there are a number of gathering places (e.g., basketball courts, churches, Masonic lodges, social clubs, community centers, parks, liquor and convenience stores, bars and clubs, skating rinks, bowling alleys) in which Black males congregate and use to bond and enact what A. J. Franklin (1999) described as "brotherhood rites of passage and activities," none is more significant in constructing Black male gender identities that are associated with problematic behavior than the network of settings that are colloquially referred to by Black men as "the streets."

The emergence and intergenerational existence of "the streets" as an important ghetto institution is also the product of exposure to inadequate family and community support, community tolerance of various patterns of dysfunctional behavior routinely engaged in by marginalized Black males, and the lack of organized and sustained community resistance directed toward Black males who embrace street-related values, norms, and roles (Madhubuti, 1990; Perkins, 1975; W. J. Wilson, 1996). The psychologist A. N. Wilson (1992) has characterized marginalized Black males who are most at risk for becoming involved in street-related violence as men

> whose training for positive manhood is nonexistent or inadequate; whose avoidance of masculine responsibility or confusion about what it means to be a man under oppression, have moved them to accept an incomplete, distorted, self-defeating and, sometimes self-destructive definition and expression of masculinity. (p. 340)

Consequently, street-related values, norms, and roles are culturally transmitted across succeeding generations of Black males, particularly among those males whose daily lives are entrenched in the social realities and experiences of the urban underclass (Anderson, 1999; W. J. Wilson, 1987, 1996). It is for this reason that the various

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street-corner settings where many marginalized Black males spend an inordinate amount of time socializing and "hanging out" have importance based on their routine use as social stages that allow and tolerate the ritualized enactment of street-oriented masculine identities (Perkins, 1975; White & Cones, 1999). Furthermore, it is in "the streets" that many marginalized Black males proactively assume masculine identities that are adopted for the purpose of transcending what Franklin (1999) has described as an "invisibility syndrome," that is, "an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism" (p. 761). Thus, from the perspective of marginalized Black men, the achievement of success and status in "the streets" is a means to become highly visible in the social world of the urban underclass.

HIP HOP AND STREET CULTURE SOCIALIZATION

Hip hop culture, particularly gangsta rap music and videos, has had a major influence on the evolution and transmission of contemporary street culture socialization and the social construction of gender identity among poor and nonpoor African American males (Kitwana, 2002). For example, prior to the emergence of hip hop, exposure to and socialization into street culture involved investing time and energy in being physically present in the various street-corner social settings that provide familiarity with street life and opportunities to develop various street-related skills (Hannerz, 1969; Horton, 1972; Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). According to Horton (1972), for example, "the more or less organized center of street life is the 'set'–meaning both the peer group and the places where it hangs out. It is the stage and central marketplace for activity, where to find out what's happening." Thus, prior to the emergence of hip hop, to learn "the game" as it is played on "the streets," one had to be physically present in various street settings. In contrast, hip hop music, music videos, gangsta films, hip hop magazines, and television programs featuring hip hop artists have provided Black youth as well as youth and young adults of other races

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and class levels opportunities to be exposed to street-related values, norms, roles, and activities without being physically present in street-corner settings (Kitwana, 2002). Hence, technological advances in the dissemination of Black popular culture have functioned to glorify and reinforce urban street culture, particularly among those Black males who are most vulnerable to pursuing social recognition in "the streets."

The thematic concerns and images presented in hip hop music and videos often depict members of the hip hop generation in street-corner settings (e.g., street hangouts, nightclubs, parties, and various social situations, etc.) engaging in patterns of behavior ritually expressed in a manner associated with urban street culture (Best & Kellner, 1999). In addition, the worldview and expressive style of so-called old-school pimps, players, hustlers, and street women are prominent in rap and hip hop videos and in the public personas that many rap and hip hop artists present for public consumption (Dyson, 2003; Kitwana, 2002, p. 136; Pough, 2004; Powell, 2003). For example, in his song "One More Chance," the rapper Biggie Smalls raps about his player skills and his ability to steal another man's girl because he is president of the players club. However, unlike previous generations of lower and working-class Black males who learned the content of street-corner socialization by being physically present on "the streets" observing and emulating the attitudes and behavior of more seasoned players and hustlers (Allen, 1978; Hannerz, 1969), the contemporary generations of young street-corner males are exposed to various media products that constitute an urban street-corner soundtrack. That is, values, norms, roles, and behavior associated with the streets are often depicted in hip hop music videos and gangsta films and reinforced by lyrics and video images that tend to glorify life in "the streets." According to Best and Kellner (1999),

> The images and lyrics show and tell us that it is a time of intense poverty and differences between the haves and the have-nots, that it is a time of urban crime and violence, a time of gangs and drugs, a time of STDs, HIV, and AIDS, a time of buck wilding and extreme sexuality, a time when the urban underclass is striking out and strik-

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> ing back, and thus is a tense and frightening time for the culture at large. (p. 8)

Furthermore, rap artists present "a highly articulated awareness and sense of place" (Best & Kellner, 1999, p. 7). Thus, the significance of rap music is that it is a music that expresses views about the conditions, experiences, and aspirations of Blacks living in urban ghettos (Dyson, 1996; Kitwana, 2002). Indeed, gangsta rap is about existing on the margins of American society (Dyson, 1996; Kitwana, 2002). For example, in the early years of its origin as a Black youth cultural art form, hip hop's lyrical content reflected the challenges, concerns, and aspirations of marginalized Black men and women whose lives were not centered in street culture but who were very aware of the types of social pressures that compel individuals to seek social recognition in "the streets" (Dyson, 1996). This type of thematic concern is most evident in Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's (1983) classic hit "The Message," in which they describe life in the ghetto as a jungle in which residents are on the edge of loosing their minds due to poverty and hatred toward the larger society. In addition, the group raps about their admiration for the street hustlers who as big money makers used their wits to transcend ghetto poverty and achieve a measure of material success unattainable to most ghetto residents. The popularity and social significance of "The Message" was that its incisive social commentary describing the challenges confronting lower and working-class Blacks resonated with a broad segment of the Black community.

In contrast, over the past decade and a half, hip hop soul and rap, as a musical genre, have tended to glamorize America's obsession with achieving status through material acquisition and the manner through which material and social success is sometimes alternatively pursued and ritualized by underclass Black males who maintain a street culture orientation (Dyson, 1996; Kitwana, 2002). In this sense, not only does rap music describe the rage and anger that exists in the ghetto, but it also describes the extreme means that a distinct segment of the Black male population are willing to use to transcend poverty and hopelessness.

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In addition, contemporary rap music increasingly reflects the larger society's misogynistic attitudes and behaviors toward women (Dyson, 1996; Kitwana, 2002; Pough, 2004). In recent years, so-called gangsta rap has fell out of vogue to be replaced by what Neal (2002) referred to as "playa/pimp/balla/high-roller" (p. 189) rap. Thus, the promotion of street-oriented manhood roles, in which men achieve significance as players and ballas, is a prominent feature of contemporary rap and hip hop music and videos (Kitwana, 2002). Consequently, in response to the potential wealth and status associated with achieving success in the hip hop industry as an artist or entrepreneur, an alternative to drug dealing as a means of achieving the American dream for many marginalized Black males has emerged. That is, the economic opportunities associated with hip hop culture are now perceived by many young Black men as the new "street game" and a viable and legitimate alternative to selling drugs or committing burglaries or robberies and other forms of street hustling as a means of acquiring money, various material goods, and status in and outside the ghetto (Kitwana, 2002). It is because of this that rap and hip hop artists, record producers, record executives, and various hip hop merchandisers have emerged as role models for a generation of young Black men and women who are obsessed with achieving success and status through acquiring wealth and material consumption (Kitwana, 2002).

Rap and hip hop video images in which young Black men are portrayed as gangstas, ballas, and players is problematic because these images of masculinity serve to promote and glorify masculine behavior that condones exploiting others to achieve material success, resorting to violence as a means of resolving disputes and to indiscriminate pursuit of sexual relationships with women (Kitwana, 2002). Equally problematic is the portrayal of young Black women as hypersexed, promiscuous, devious, violent, and willing to do anything to gain access to a man's money and other material resources (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004). Consequently, portrayals of Black women by male artists in hip hop culture serve to perpetuate existing stereotypes (e.g., Jezebel and Sapphire) or reformulate new stereotypes (e.g., "skeezers," "bitches," "hoes" and "ride-and-die chicks") that render Black women vulnerable to

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aggression and violence perpetrated by Black males who have internalized misogynistic messages that provide justifications for engaging in acts of violence against Black women (Wyatt, 1997).

THE CONTENT OF STREET SOCIALIZATION

The essence of the streets as an important ghetto institution is not its physical location as a place of excitement and danger but its social function as a ghetto-based institutional site in which the worldview (i.e., ideology, values, and norms) and manhood roles that dominate Black male street culture are ritually expressed and continuously reformulated and embraced by successive generations of marginalized Black males (Anderson, 1999; Liebow, 1967; Kitwana, 2002). Equally important is the social function of the streets as an institutional site in which various street-corner settings are available for use as social stages on which valued masculine identities can be enacted in the presence of significant others, who serve to validate one's manhood (Hannerz, 1969; Oliver, 1998). Among Black males who center their lives in street culture, an individual's efforts to achieve manhood are not regarded as valid unless they can be successfully enacted in the presence of a social audience who possesses the credibility to validate competent enactment (Oliver, 1998). For example, Horton (1972) reported,

> Here [in "the streets"] peer socialization and reinforcement also take place. The younger dude feels a sense of pride when he can be on the set and throw a rap to an older dude. He is learning how to handle himself, show respect, take care of business, and establish his own rep. (p. 25)

Thus, "the streets" is a social stage in which marginalized Black males become exposed to street-related values, norms, and roles and subsequently engage in behavior that reflects an effort to achieve respectability (Anderson, 1999; Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992).

Anderson (1999) has characterized the worldview of "the streets" as the "code of the streets," that is, a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior in underclass communi-

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ties. According to Anderson, the heart of the code is the emphasis on respect, which is described as the desire to be treated right or granted deference in all interpersonal relations. Routine adherence to the code of the streets is generally expressed through the enactment of masculine identities that are valued among males who center their lives in street culture. Hence, the code of "the streets" is a normative standard that marginalized and nonmarginalized Black males who adhere to street culture rely on to assess the extent to which their peers and others adhere to values and norms that place emphasis on toughness, sexual conquest, and hustling. Consequently, in the course of social interaction, such assessments influence how street-corner men behave toward others and how street-oriented men are responded to by those who are ghetto insiders and outsiders (Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 1998; W. J. Wilson, 1996).

There are three masculine roles that constitute the core of the hierarchy of manhood roles that are valued by Black males who seek social recognition in "the streets." These roles include the tough guy/gangsta, the player, and the hustler/balla. These roles are not mutually exclusive in that individuals may adopt elements of all three in their construction of masculine identity and presentation of self. However, in the encounters of everyday life, the concerns, normative expectations, and behavior associated with a particular masculine role orientation may predominate over others based on the circumstances, the participants, and what is at stake in a given situation.

The Tough Guy/Gangsta

For males, successful participation in street settings on a regular basis is dependent on an individual's ability to convey to other males through symbolic (e.g., demeanor and cool poses) and overt displays (e.g., tough talk, threats, actual acts of violence) of toughness that he is willing to resort to violence as a means of resolving disputes (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992; Oliver, 1998). Although conventional conceptualizations of manhood emphasize toughness, what is unique about adherence to the toughness norm in the streets is that street-oriented men are more likely to become

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involved in interpersonal encounters in which their commitment to toughness will be challenged in ways that threaten both their reputation and physical safety (Oliver, 1998). Thus, males who are unable to convey a credible commitment to toughness are at risk of being harassed, exploited, and physically assaulted (Oliver, 1998). Hence, marginalized Black males who frequent various street settings are hypersensitive to conducting themselves in a manner in which they can avoid attempts by others to violate their desire to be free from external interference. Thus, in street lore and in the social world of "the streets," respect and deference are attributed to those males who are able to present credible portrayals of themselves as being "bad niggas," "thugs," and "hard" (Roberts, 1990).

The Player of Women

Overt emphasis on sexual conquest and sexual promiscuity is not unique to lower and working-class Black men (Pleck & Pleck, 1980). However, what is unique is the manner in which Black men ritualize the sexual conquest orientation as a feature of masculine identity and social practice in the social world of the underclass community (Majors & Mancini-Billson, 1992). Limited access to the legitimate means necessary to support establishing manhood in terms of being an independent self-sufficient adult and/or providing for one's family has served as a catalyst for some Black men to define and claim manhood in terms of sexual conquest and exploitation of women (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969; Staples, 1982; W. J. Wilson, 1996). Among Black males generally, and particularly those who organize daily life around their involvement in street life, there is substantial support and respect for those males who successfully demonstrate their proficiency in enacting the player of women role (Anderson, 1999; Hannerz, 1969). In his ethnographic study of urban Black males, Anderson (1990) found that "casual sex with as many women as possible, impregnating one or more, and getting them to have your baby brings a boy the ultimate esteem from his peers and makes him feel like a man." Indeed, a major theme in contemporary hip hop is the sexual objectification

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and exploitation of Black women (Kitwana, 2002; Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004).

The Hustler/Balla

The hustler/balla role is a role orientation in which manhood is defined in terms of using one's wits to aggressively pursue access to legitimate economic opportunities and the illicit resources of the ghetto to improve one's economic and material condition. In his ethnography of urban street life, Horton (1972) concluded, "Hustling is the central street activity. It is the economic foundation for everyday life. Hustling and the fruit of hustling set the rhythm for social activities" (p. 23) in the social world of the streets. The social significance of the hustler/balla role among marginalized Black men is that it represents an alternative to more legitimate means of acquiring material goods, constructing a valued manhood identity, and achieving status in an environment in which many men believe that they lack the skills and resources to achieve success through legitimate means (Whitehead, Peterson, & Kaljee, 1994). Hence, street hustling may involve selling drugs, operating an afterhours joint, selling stolen merchandise or merchandise purchased wholesale and presented to the buying public as stolen, gambling, pimping, and so forth (Horton, 1972). Furthermore, the emergence and popularity of hip hop as the most salient expression of contemporary Black popular culture has provided many marginalized Black males with an ever-widening range of illegitimate and legitimate alternatives to traditional forms of street hustling. Thus, the ideology and principles of street hustling, also referred to as "the game," are now being incorporated in marginalized Black males' efforts to pursue money, material goods, and status by engaging in entrepreneurial activities, ranging from hip hop artists, record producers, concert promoters, sellers of bootleg CDs, sellers of hip hop clothing at the retail and street-corner level, and detailers of automobiles to those providing a host of goods and services that are essential to those who identify with hip hop culture.

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF STREET SOCIALIZATION

"The streets" is an important setting in the lives of many marginal Black males because it provides an alternative to the traditional opportunity structure as a means of achieving status and respect. However, there are a number of problematic consequences associated with the pursuit of valued manhood identities in the streets.

DISCONNECTION FROM EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Centering a major portion of one's life in street-related activities (hanging out, drinking, pursuing indiscriminate sexual relations, using drugs, selling drugs, robbing, and stealing) increases already weak labor force attachments emanating from the lack of marketable skills, the transformation of the economy, and the loss of low-skill, high-wage manufacturing jobs. That is, commitment to dysfunctional manhood roles and involvement in routine activities associated with such roles weaken marginalized Black males' attachment to the conventional labor force (Van Haitsma, 1989; W. J. Wilson, 1996). Furthermore, routine enactment of social roles and participation in activities associated with street life reduces the likelihood that underclass Black males will have access to social networks, information, training, and employment opportunities that are likely to lead to a strong attachment to a changing economic market place (W. J. Wilson, 1987, 1996). Thus, the transformation of the national economy is a major source of structural pressure confronting marginalized Black men and is compounded as a result of their assumption of manhood roles that reinforce economic marginality and social isolation.

DISRUPTION OF FAMILY LIFE AND ABDICATION OF FATHERHOOD RESPONSIBILITIES

Routine participation in street-related activities renders street-oriented Black men less desirable as husbands and long-term intimate partners and also contributes to high rates of family and

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relationship disruption (e.g., high divorce rates, female-headed families, out-of-wedlock births, less commitment of men to relationships, and negative perceptions of Black men on the part of Black women) (Hare & Hare, 1989; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). In addition, participation in street culture contributes to the scarcity and shortage of marriageable Black males. For example, research suggests that among Black men, participation in street-related activities is linked to increased rates of substance abuse and drug trafficking (Whitehead, Peterson, & Kaljee, 1994), violent crime offending (Oliver, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1997), incarceration (Mauer, 1999), unemployment (W. J. Wilson, 1996), poverty (W. J. Wilson, 1996), firearm injuries resulting in paralysis, other forms of disability, and premature death due to homicide (Oliver, 2000; Zawitz, 1994).

Furthermore, participation in street-related activities diminishes a man's capacity to function as a responsible father. For example, among the conventional norms associated with fatherhood is an expectation that fathers will mentor and provide financial support for their children. However, commitment to and involvement in street life decreases street-oriented males' attachment to family life and their capacity to fulfill the responsibilities associated with fatherhood (W. J. Wilson, 1987, 1996).

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

The pursuit of money, status, and respect in the streets is a major source of interpersonal conflict leading to violent confrontations involving marginalized Black men as perpetrators and victims (Oliver, 1998; Wright & Decker, 1997). Although the streets are regarded as exciting, they are also perceived by those who spend an inordinate amount of time in these settings as dangerous places where reputations, freedom, and even lives may be lost (Anderson, 1999; Oliver, 1998). For example, in his focused interviews with violent Black men, Oliver (1998) found that violent confrontations among Black men are generally precipitated by one or both combatants' adherence to values, norms, and routine activities associ-

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ated with enactment of manhood roles that are valued in Black male street culture.

Furthermore, Black women who are romantically involved with male partners who are actively engaged in street-related activities (e.g., drug use, drug dealing, hustling, gangs, and street violence) may be at increased risk of experiencing intimate partner violence. For example, men who construct their identities in terms of manhood role orientations that are valued in the streets (the tough guy, the gangsta, the player, etc.) are likely to import pro-violence values, norms, and expectations into their intimate relationships (Dunlap, Johnson, & Rath, 1996; Richie, 1996).

HIGH RATES OF INCARCERATION

Black males' involvement in street life is directly related to their high rates of incarceration (Whitehead, 2000). For example, at year end 2002, the incarceration rate of Black males (4,810/100,000) was 8 times higher than the incarceration rate of White males (649/100,000) (Harrison & Karberg, 2003). Moreover, in 1991, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that African American males had a 29% lifetime risk of serving at least 1 year in prison, which is 6 times higher than the risk for White males (Bonczar & Beck, 1997). Currently, an estimated 10% of Black males ages 25 to 29 were incarcerated at year end 2002, compared to 2.4% of Hispanic males and about 1.2% of White males in the same age group (Harrison & Beck, 2003).

Consequently, the prevalence of incarceration among Black males has come to be recognized as an expected reality and a significant aspect of the rite of passage into manhood among Black males who reside in underclass neighborhoods (Whitehead, 2000). The anticipation of experiencing imprisonment is enhanced by their exposure to Black youth popular culture that has promoted prison-style clothing and glamorized images of prison life (Clayton & Moore, 2003). Furthermore, following a period of imprisonment, it is not uncommon that the challenges associated with finding a job, housing, or reuniting with family leads many Black males back to

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the streets and their pre-prison associations and activities (Clayton & Moore, 2003).

CONCLUSION

There are many unanswered questions relative to understanding the pervasiveness of the streets as an unconventional socialization institution in the African American community. For example, how do we explain the fact that most Black males who are exposed to street culture are resilient and grow up to conform to a decency orientation rather than a street orientation in terms of how they structure their daily lives (Anderson, 1999; Hunter & Davis, 1994)? What type of life events or social processes lead men to reject "the streets" at certain points in their lives and adopt a decency manhood orientation? How does street culture influence prison culture, and how does prison culture influence street culture? How does street culture influence the leisure activities of stable lower-, working-, and middle-class Blacks? What role does the streets as a socialization institution play in the social construction of womanhood identities among marginalized and nonmarginalized Black females? This is a particularly important question given the broad dissemination in many hip hop lyrics and videos of images that glorify women who present themselves as promiscuous or who are willing to do anything (legal, illegal, or die) to support their man (Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004). Finding answers to these and other questions will enhance our understanding of the social significance of unconventional institutions such as "the streets" in facilitating socialization, sociability, and social problems in the Black community.

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