

Journal of Black Studies

<http://jbs.sagepub.com>

Collective Self-Esteem and Africultural Coping Styles in African American Adolescents

Madonna G. Constantine, Peter C. Donnelly and Linda James Myers

Journal of Black Studies 2002; 32; 698

DOI: 10.1177/00234702032006004

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/32/6/698>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Black Studies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jbs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/32/6/698>

COLLECTIVE SELF-ESTEEM AND AFRICULTURAL COPING STYLES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

MADONNA G. CONSTANTINE

PETER C. DONNELLY

Teachers College, Columbia University

LINDA JAMES MYERS

Ohio State University

The authors examine the relationships between dimensions of collective self-esteem and Africultural coping styles in a sample of African American adolescents. They found that African American adolescents with higher public collective self-esteem (i.e., the belief that others feel positively about their cultural group) reported greater use of spiritual-centered Africultural coping styles to deal with stressful situations. Results also revealed that higher importance to identity collective self-esteem (i.e., the belief that their cultural group is an important part of their self-concept) was related to greater use of collective coping strategies among African American adolescents.

Identifying and understanding how adolescents cope with life stressors have been described as vital components of providing culturally relevant counseling services to children of color (Canino & Spurllock, 2000). Most of the current conceptualizations of adolescent coping neglect to consider the influence of adolescents' worldview and identity on the types of coping strategies they may use. One such style of coping, Africultural coping, is defined as the

AUTHORS' NOTE: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Madonna G. Constantine, Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology, Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 West 120th Street, Box 92, New York, NY 10027; e-mail: mc816@columbia.edu.

JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES, Vol. 32 No. 6, July 2002 698-710
© 2002 Sage Publications

degree to which African Americans utilize coping behaviors thought to be rooted in African American culture (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000). Africultural coping has been conceptualized as comprising four primary components: cognitive/emotional debriefing (i.e., adaptive reactions by African Americans in their efforts to manage perceived environmental stressors), spiritual-centered coping (i.e., coping behaviors that reflect a sense of connection with spiritual elements in the universe and with the Creator), collective coping (i.e., respondents' reliance on group-centered activities to cope with stressful situations), and ritual-centered coping (i.e., respondents' use of rituals, such as lighting candles or burning incense, to deal with stressful situations).

The extent to which African American adolescents positively view their cultural group may have significant effects on their coping behaviors and subjective well-being (e.g., Bettencourt, Charlton, Eubanks, Kernahan & Fuller, 1999; Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997; Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). Collective self-esteem has been defined as the value that individuals place on their own social or cultural groups (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) developed the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) to measure individuals' social identity based on their membership in ascribed groups such as race, ethnicity, and gender. The 16-item CSES consists of four subscales: private collective self-esteem, public collective self-esteem, membership collective self-esteem, and importance to identity collective self-esteem. The private collective self-esteem subscale measures the degree to which individuals feel positive about their social or cultural group. The public collective self-esteem subscale assesses the extent to which individuals believe that others feel positive about their social or cultural group. The membership collective self-esteem subscale measures respondents' beliefs about the degree to which they believe that they are good members of their social or cultural group. The importance to identity collective self-esteem subscale taps the extent to which individuals believe their social or cultural group is an important part of their self-concept (Bettencourt et al., 1999).

Collective self-esteem may be a salient factor in some African American adolescents' psychological well-being (Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997; Bettencourt et al., 1999; Blaine & Crocker, 1995). For example, Constantine, Robinson, Wilton, and Caldwell (2002) reported that higher public collective self-esteem in Black college students was associated with greater perceived fit within their college settings. Moreover, Crocker et al. (1994) found that collective self-esteem was a significant predictor of psychological adjustment in Asian, Black, and White college students. Among the Black students in Crocker et al.'s sample, the correlation between public and private collective was essentially zero. Based on this latter finding, these researchers surmised that Black college students may separate how they privately feel about their group from how they believe others may evaluate them. This separation between public and private evaluations may represent an important survival strategy for Black Americans because of the prejudice and discrimination they face in the United States.

When adolescents identify with and positively value their cultural group membership (i.e., when they possess high collective self-esteem), they are likely to behave in ways that are indicative of and consistent with the norms and values of their cultural group. Consequently, it stands to reason that individuals with positive views of their group and a collectivistic group orientation may be even more likely to use their cultural group to cope with stress. In particular, African American adolescents who have high levels of collective self-esteem may tend to select certain types of Africultural coping mechanisms to address their problems or stressors when warranted (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Utsey et al., 2000). For example, Stevenson, Reed, and Bodison (1996) reported that some African American children and adolescents are socialized to rely on members of their ethnic group as sources of support when faced with stressful situations. Daly, Jennings, Beckett, and Leashore (1995) also reported that when African Americans were faced with stressful situations, they used family and community-based resources to cope. Religion and spirituality have also been identi-

fied as important coping resources among many African Americans (Constantine, Lewis, Conner, & Sanchez, 2000; Ellison, 1993; Jagers & Smith, 1996; Lukoff, Turner, & Lu, 1992). In particular, religious participation through church attendance is considered to be a vital culturally based coping behavior that reflects many African Americans' collectivistic tendencies (Mattis, 2000; McRae, Thompson, & Cooper, 1999; Utsey et al., 2000). Hence, collective group identity attitudes may be important indicators of some African American adolescents' use of culturally based coping behaviors to address their stressors or concerns.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between dimensions of collective self-esteem and Africultural coping styles in a sample of African American adolescents. We hypothesized that African American adolescents' collective self-esteem would be significantly positively associated with their use of culture-specific (i.e., Africultural) coping styles.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The participants were 106 African American students (57 girls and 49 boys) who were matriculating in a large, predominantly White public high school in the Midwestern region of the United States. The mean age of the respondents was 15.25 years ($SD = .95$), and participants ranged in age from 14 to 17 years. By grade level, 31 (29.2%) of the respondents were 9th graders, 38 (35.8%) were 10th graders, 27 (25.5%) were 11th graders, and 10 (9.4%) were 12th graders. All of the participants reported that they had been born and reared in the United States. Appropriate informed consent procedures (i.e., obtaining both parents' and students' permission to participate in the study) were followed in collecting the study's data.

INSTRUMENTS

Demographic questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate their race, ethnicity, sex, age, current grade level, and birthplace.

CSES. The CSES (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) is a 16-item, 7-point (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) Likert-type scale that assesses self-esteem as it relates to belonging to specific social or cultural groups. The CSES comprises four subscales, each with 4 items. The private collective self-esteem subscale measures the degree to which individuals feel positive about their social or cultural group. Public collective self-esteem, the second subscale, taps individuals' beliefs about the extent to which others feel positive about their social or cultural group. Membership collective self-esteem assesses the degree to which individuals think that they are good members of their own social or cultural group. The fourth subscale, importance to identity collective self-esteem, measures the extent to which individuals believe that their social or cultural group is an important part of their self-concept. Subscale scores range from 4 to 28, and higher scores in each area are associated with greater levels of collective self-esteem.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analytic techniques using data from students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States have provided construct validity evidence for the four-factor CSES (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). CSES scores have also been correlated in the expected directions with various measures of personal self-esteem, psychological well-being, and adjustment to college (e.g., Bettencourt et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 1994). Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) reported adequate internal consistency reliabilities ranging from .71 to .88 for the CSES subscales and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .68 for the total scale. In our study, CSES items were revised to refer specifically to respondents' ethnic group membership (i.e., African American). This type of modification has been utilized successfully by other researchers using the CSES (e.g., Crocker et al., 1994; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Verkuyten, 1995; Verkuyten & Lay, 1998). In our

study, we computed Cronbach's alphas of .61, .58, .70, and .66 for the private, public, membership, and importance to identity collective self-esteem subscales, respectively.

Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI) (Utsey et al., 2000). The ACSI is a 30-item, 4-point, Likert-type (0 = *does not apply or did not use*, 1 = *used a little*, 2 = *used a lot*, 3 = *used a great deal*) scale that measures culture-specific coping behaviors used by African Americans during stressful situations. The ACSI consists of two parts. In the first section, respondents are asked to think of a stressful situation they experienced within the past week or so and to write a brief description of that situation. In the second part of this inventory, participants are asked to respond to the ACSI using the 4-point scale described above. Scores for four distinct Africultural coping styles are obtained by summing the responses to the items, and the four coping subscales assessed by the ACSI include cognitive/emotional debriefing (11 items), spiritual-centered coping (8 items), collective coping (8 items), and ritual-centered coping (3 items).

The first subscale, cognitive/emotional debriefing, measures African Americans' adaptive reactions in their efforts to manage perceived environmental stressors. The spiritual-centered coping subscale assesses African Americans' use of coping behaviors that reflect a sense of connection with spiritual elements in the universe and with the Creator. The third subscale, collective coping, measures the degree to which African Americans rely on group-centered activities to cope with stressful situations. The last subscale, ritual-centered coping, taps the extent to which African Americans use rituals (e.g., lighting candles or burning incense) to deal with stressful situations. Examples of ACSI items include, "Tried to forget about the situation" (cognitive/emotional debriefing subscale) and "Sought emotional support from family and friends" (collective coping subscale).

Utsey et al. (2000) reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .71 to .80 for the four ACSI subscales. Evidence of the ACSI's concurrent validity was demonstrated through a correlational study with a second coping measure. In our investigation, Cronbach's alphas of .60, .81, .66, and .66 were calculated for the cognitive/emotional

debriefing, spiritual-centered coping, collective coping, and ritual-centered coping subscales, respectively.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study's variables are displayed in Table 1. Prior to conducting a multivariate multiple regression analysis, a multivariate analysis of variance ($p = .05$) was computed to determine whether there were sex differences with regard to the study's predictor and criterion variables. Results revealed no statistically significant differences, Pillai's Trace = .10, $F(8, 97) = 1.31$, $p > .05$, so these data were not analyzed separately by sex.

To examine the study's hypothesis, a multivariate multiple regression analysis was performed. This analytic procedure was chosen to control for the possible intercorrelations among the predictor and criterion variables (Haase & Ellis, 1987; Lunneborg & Abbot, 1983; Stevens, 1986). A multivariate multiple regression analysis can accommodate multiple predictor and multiple criterion variables, all of which are continuously distributed, from which follow-up tests can determine the unique contribution of each predictor variable on each criterion variable (Lutz & Eckert, 1994). In our investigation, the predictor variables were the private, public, membership, and importance to identity collective self-esteem subscales of the CSES. The criterion variables were the cognitive/emotional debriefing, spiritual-centered coping, collective coping, and ritual-centered coping subscales of the ACSI.

Results revealed that the overall proportion of the variance in Africultural coping styles accounted for by the four CSES subscales was statistically significant, Pillai's Trace = .31, $F(16, 404) = 2.13$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_m = .08$, where η^2_m is the multivariate effect size. Because multivariate significance was reached at the .05 level, a series of follow-up univariate analyses was conducted to examine the unique contribution of each of the CSES subscales on each of the Africultural coping style subscales. Results of these analyses indicated that greater public collective self-esteem was associated

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of the Study's Variables

<i>Variable</i>	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Private CSE subscale	5.45	.82	—	.40***	.38***	.39***	.10	.20*	.08	-.04
2. Public CSE subscale	5.07	.81		—	.43***	.37***	.02	.27**	-.02	.08
3. Membership CSE subscale	5.12	.83			—	.25*	-.03	-.02	-.11	.01
4. Importance to identity CSE subscale	5.34	.64				—	-.12	.20*	.18	-.01
5. Cognitive-emotional debriefing subscale	1.87	.44					—	.46***	.31**	.20*
6. Spiritual-centered coping subscale	1.16	.66						—	.38***	.49***
7. Collective coping subscale	1.24	.53							—	.31**
8. Ritual-centered coping subscale	0.49	.62								—

NOTE: CSE = collective self-esteem. The means correspond to the range of anchor points for each of the Likert-type scales. Higher scores for each of the study's scales indicate a greater amount of the given variable.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

with greater use of spiritual-centered Africultural coping styles, $F(1, 101) = 5.64, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$, where η^2 is the univariate effect size. In addition, higher importance to identity collective self-esteem was related to greater use of collective coping Africultural coping styles, $F(1, 101) = 3.97, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$.

DISCUSSION

We found that African American adolescents with higher public collective self-esteem (i.e., the belief that others feel positive about their cultural group) reported greater use of spiritual-centered Africultural coping styles to deal with stressful situations. Results also revealed that higher importance to identity collective self-esteem (i.e., the belief that their cultural group is an important part of their self-concept) was related to greater use of collective coping strategies among the African American adolescents in our study. Taken together, these findings suggest that African American adolescents with higher collective self-esteem in areas related to their own and others' perceptions of the importance of their cultural group may tend to utilize spiritual and collective Africultural coping styles in dealing with their stressors or problems. In our study, African American adolescents' use of coping strategies that are spiritually based and group oriented may not be particularly surprising in light of many African Americans' religious coping behaviors and collectivistic tendencies. For example, African American adolescents' integration of spiritual and collectivistic coping behaviors may be best conceptualized in the context of church attendance, a largely communal activity among many African Americans. The Black Church is often viewed as a source of spiritual and social support for many African Americans (Cook & Wiley, 2000; Frame, Williams, & Green, 1999), and African Americans have been noted to use religious and spiritual resources to cope with their concerns or problems (Lee, 1999; Lewis, 1999; Williams & Frame, 1999). Thus, it is feasible to consider that African American adolescents' use of culture-specific coping mechanisms, such as family, community, spiritual support networks, and

social support networks, to address their psychological issues may contribute to their underutilization of formal mental health services, even when warranted (Constantine, Chen, & Ceesay, 1997; Utsey et al., 2000). Queener and Martin (2001) highlighted the importance of collaboration between mental health counselors and the Black Church to provide psychological assistance to some African Americans. Hence, it might be important for mental health professionals to find ways to facilitate these adolescents' psychological development in a culturally relevant (i.e., spiritual and collectivistic) manner. For example, counselors who are able to link religious, spiritual, and mental health issues in the context of group-based (i.e., collective) activities might encourage African American adolescents to see the beneficial aspects of religion or spirituality in maintaining or improving mental health. Furthermore, church personnel might consider incorporating mental health themes and strategies into their teachings to promote African American adolescents' positive mental and spiritual health.

There are several potential limitations of our study. For example, generalizability of the findings is cautioned because the African American adolescents in our investigation were enrolled in a large, predominantly White public high school in the Midwestern region of the United States. Future investigators should replicate this study in other geographical areas and other types of school settings to corroborate or refute its findings. Another potential limitation of our investigation is that because the measures were self-report in nature, the students may not have honestly reported their attitudes or behaviors because of potential social desirability or self-enhancement motives. A third possible limitation is that the study's results may be hampered by the suboptimal internal consistency coefficients of some of the CSES and ACSI subscales.

There is a need for future research with African American adolescents that focuses on exploring the roles of specific Africultural coping mechanisms in buffering stress and other psychological issues in this population. Such investigations may illuminate important information about the associations among religion, spirituality, coping, and mental health among African American adolescents. It will also be important for future researchers to examine

African American adolescents' psychological well-being and coping behaviors from an indigenous perspective to glean an appropriate understanding of these individuals' coping behaviors within a cultural context.

REFERENCES

- Bettencourt, B. A., & Charlton, K., Eubanks, J., Kernahan, C., & Fuller, B. (1999). Development of collective self-esteem among students: Predicting adjustment to college. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 27*, 213-222.
- Bettencourt, B. A., & Dorr, N. (1997). Collective self-esteem as a mediator of the relationship between allocentrism and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*, 955-964.
- Blaine, B., & Crocker, J. (1995). Religiousness, race, and psychological well-being: Exploring social psychological mediators. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21*, 1031-1041.
- Canino, I. A., & Spurllock, J. (2000). *Culturally diverse children and adolescents: Assessment, diagnosis, and treatment* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford.
- Constantine, M. G., Chen, E. C., & Ceesay, P. (1997). Intake concerns of racial and ethnic minority students at a university counseling center: Implications for developmental programming and outreach. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 25*, 210-218.
- Constantine, M. G., Lewis, E. L., Conner, L. C., & Sanchez, D. (2000). Addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling African Americans: Implications for counselor training and practice. *Counseling and Values, 45*, 28-38.
- Constantine, M. G., Robinson, J. S., Wilton, L., & Caldwell, L. D. (2002). Collective self-esteem and perceived social support as predictors of cultural congruity among Black and Latino college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*, 307-316.
- Cook, D. A., & Wiley, C. Y. (2000). Psychotherapy with members of African American churches and spiritual traditions. In P. S. Richards & A. E. Bergin (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy and religious diversity* (pp. 369-396). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Crocker, J., Luhtanen, R., Blaine, B., & Broadnax, S. (1994). Collective self-esteem and psychological well-being among White, Black, and Asian college students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 503-513.
- Daly, A., Jennings, J., Beckett, J. O., & Leashore, B. R. (1995). Effective coping strategies of African Americans. *Social Work, 40*, 240-248.
- Ellison, C. G. (1993). Religious involvement and self-perception among Black Americans. *Social Forces, 71*, 1027-1055.
- Ethier, K., & Deaux, K. (1994). Negotiating social identity when contexts change: Maintaining identification and responding to threat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 243-251.

- Frame, M. W., Williams, C. B., & Green, E. L. (1999). Balm in Gilead: Spiritual dimensions in counseling African American women. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 27*, 182-192.
- Haase, R. F., & Ellis, M. V. (1987). Multivariate analysis of variance. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 34*, 404-413.
- Jagers, R. J., & Smith, P. (1996). Further examination of the spirituality scale. *Journal of Black Psychology, 22*, 429-442.
- Lee, J. W. (1999). Antecedents to the development of mainstream orientation, spirituality, and communalism in African American college students. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 60*(5-B), 2402.
- Lewis, D. K. (1999). Kinship, self-concept, and self-identity: Roles in racial identity, spirituality, and psychopathology in African American and Caucasian-American women. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 60*(6-A), 1904.
- Luhtanen, R., & Crocker, J. (1992). A collective self-esteem scale: Self-evaluation of one's social identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18*, 302-318.
- Lukoff, D., Turner, R., & Lu, F. (1992). Transpersonal psychology research review: Psychoreligious dimensions of healing. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 24*, 41-60.
- Lunneborg, C. E., & Abbott, R. D. (1983). *Elementary multivariate analysis for the behavioral sciences*. New York: North-Holland.
- Lutz, J. G., & Eckert, T. L. (1994). The relationship between canonical correlation analysis and multivariate multiple regression. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 54*, 666-675.
- Mattis, J. S. (2000). African American women's definitions of spirituality and religiosity. *Journal of Black Psychology, 26*, 101-122.
- McRae, M. B., Thompson, D. A., & Cooper, S. (1999). Black churches as therapeutic groups. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 27*, 207-220.
- Queener, J. E., & Martin, J. K. (2001). Providing culturally relevant mental health services: Collaboration between psychology and the African American Church. *Journal of Black Psychology, 27*, 112-122.
- Stevens, J. (1986). *Applied multivariate statistics for the social sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Stevenson, H. C., Reed, J., & Bodison, P. (1996). Kinship social support and adolescent racial socialization beliefs: Extending the self to family. *Journal of Black Psychology, 22*, 498-508.
- Utsey, S. O., Adams, E. P., & Bolden, M. (2000). Development and initial validation of the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory. *Journal of Black Psychology, 26*, 194-215.
- Verkuyten, M. (1995). Self-esteem, self-concept stability, and aspects of ethnic identity among minority and majority youth in the Netherlands. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 24*, 155-175.
- Verkuyten, M., & Lay, C. (1998). Ethnic minority identity and psychological well-being: The mediating role of collective self-esteem. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 28*, 1969-1986.
- Williams, C. B., & Frame, M. W. (1999). Constructing new realities: Integrating womanist traditions in pastoral counseling with African-American women. *Pastoral Psychology, 47*, 303-314.

Madonna G. Constantine is an associate professor in the Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Peter C. Donnelly is a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Clinical Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Linda James Myers is an associate professor in the Department of African American and African Studies at the Ohio State University.