AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN TEEN GIRLS

The primary goal of the chapter is to use a "life-course-persistent" developmental process to identify pathways of early and ongoing risk factors to consider their role in explaining later criminal and violent behavior (Schaeffer et al. 2006). The trajectory shows divergent pathways of aggression among African American girls through elementary school years leading into their teenaged years. Some studies predict a high risk that early onset aggression is performed exclusively or routinely by African American females will augment over their lifetimes (Xie, Cairns, & Cairns 2002). It also proposes that some behaviors are not as prevalent or disappear completely as the individual reaches adulthood and learn alternatives to physical aggression (Tremblay 2003). These findings also explore what sociologists know about sociocultural and structural influences that inhibit Black girls' physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Finally, intervention options are introduced in support of directions for future research on this subject matter.

Aggression Types

Three distinct types of aggression are reported in studies on African American female-perpetrated violence and victimization: relational, verbal, and physical aggressions. Current research also confirms frequent use of both overt and subtle forms of aggression among African American girls (Xie, Farmer, & Cairns 2003). Current research reports that Black girls are more physically and relationally aggressive than White girls are (Crick, Ostov, & Wener 2006). But in general, studies show that African American girls perform similar rates of relational aggression and less physical aggression than boys of all ethnicities. Relational aggression, a more subtle aggression type, is less open and more manipulative than are verbal and physical aggression types. Social and direct relational aggression types are forms of socially manipulative aggression that can injure victims psychologically (Xie et al. 2003). Direct relational aggression consists of episodes in which aggressors seek to damage the self-esteem or social standing of their peers. Studies are more likely to survey Black female teens' use of relational aggression to complement reported patterns showing that African American elementary students are more likely than Caucasian children to use overt and relational aggression (Xie et al. 2002).

Social relational aggression is non-confrontational social interaction. Social relational aggression is also especially common among more assertive girls, and is branded in studies by its role in the process of maintaining prominent status in peer groups (Rose, Lockerd, & Swenson 2002). However, when interrelated delinquent acts are considered, gendered findings may differ. For example, Farrell, Kung, White, & Valois (2000) report that girls are no more relationally aggressive than are boys who use illicit drugs. Social forms of relational aggression include argumentative assertiveness, overt androgyny, and use of defensive tones. Other examples include social exclusion such as excluding people from a group and social isolation, which involves deliberate ways to ignore others. Alongside the aforementioned types, African American girls are also reported to use social alienation as a form of relational aggression such as telling others they are not welcome (Xie et al. 2002).

Similarly, verbal aggression occurs when an individual used a hostile tone or and hurtful words. Most research on bullying behavior compares aggression of girls to that of boys with a focus on taunting or teasing that accelerates physical or psychological harm of others. Findings that reflect Black girls' use of verbal aggression include acts such as gossiping, writing notes about individuals, insulting others, talking about someone behind their back, the betrayal of trust, humiliating others, giving verbal threats, name calling, yelling, and arguing (Xie et al. 2003).

Physical aggressive behavior typically includes hitting, pushing, kicking, and fighting, jumping someone, throwing a chair at someone, or using a weapon. Physical aggression is generally expressed actively or passively, but also entails intent to cause harm, increase relative social dominance, or intimidate others. Miller-Johnson, Moore, Underwood, and Coie (2005) offer data on patterns of female-perpetrated assault, which illustrate African American girls' performance of physical aggression. They report that female perpetrated assault rates are slightly higher for African Americans than those of other ethnicities, but almost half of the female population in detention is Black (p. 76). Differential treatment among female populations who perpetrate physical aggression is a current research initiative that should not be overlooked since African American girls are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system.

Social Motivations for Aggressive Conduct

Universal depictions of gender often fail to consider applicable racial, feminine, and gendered contexts of Black girls' socially aggressive conduct. In several childhood aggression studies, gender is conceptualized as "White adolescent female" and ethnic-minorities are generalized as African American males. It appears that African American girls' aggression is best characterized in more complex analyses that associate intersectional dimensions of social relationships (McCall 2005). Social motivations for Black girls' aggression include gendered socialization processes, constructions of historical identity, and empowerment tactics.

Social Motivation 1: Gendered Socialization Processes

Blake, Lease, Olejnik, and Turner (2010) contradict claims that girls in general are socialized to avoid conflict. Their sentiment is mirrored in multiple studies arguing that unlike Caucasian girls, African American girls are taught aggression as a way to build self-esteem and self-confidence (Damon & Lerner 2008). This finding also patterns ongoing claims that early on socialization processes prompt Black women to have a higher self-esteem and fewer mental health issues than other women (Holsinger & Holsinger 2005, p. 236). These aggression studies embody how African American girls should act, respond, and negotiate conflict as children, teenagers, and later in their adult years. Studies claim that African American girls perform various types of aggression in ways that are distinct from girls in other race categories (Hamlett 2011).

In Blake et al. (2010), the parents of fourth and fifth grade girls actually admit to encouraging their daughters to be aggressive by motivating them to be firm, liberated, and emotionally resilient. The authors note that early on, these African American parents are

compelled to socialize their daughters to withstand harsh criticism, and contingent upon community conditions, these parents may also train their daughters to challenge adversity or to defend themselves (Blake et al. 2010, p. 396). Henceforth, as compared to other White working-class parents, African American parents are documented as being less disapproving of their daughters' aggressive behavior.

African American parents who encourage their daughters to behave aggressively may inadvertently inspire other inappropriate acts of aggression. It is also presumed that parents of African American children use less sex-specific socialization patterns, which encourages a loose, masculine interpretation of Black girls' aggression. Perhaps the relevant truth is that African American girls are encouraged or expected to behave as aggressively as boys and to use overt aggression. They are then positioned to defend themselves and to mask relatively hurt feelings later in life (Blake 2007, p. 78).

Social Motivation 2: Constructions of Historical Identity

Since slavery, a process of identity construction has produced a unique characterization of African American girls as social beings. Alice Walker's compilation of work, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose," warns that depreciated Black feminine concepts stem from historical experiences of slavery, humiliation, and a lack of sensitivity toward African American females from childhood to adulthood (Walker 1983). Equally stated in a poetic interpretation from Smith (1983), McCray writes: "Black girls, mean and too-loud-laughing, can never walk with their heads down and never care that their brand of beauty is not popular" (p. 57). McCray's poem best symbolizes a Black feminist interpretation of African American girls' alleged angry voice and demeanor. "Loudness" is a metaphor that characterizes this type of Black aggression and femininity (Lei 2003). Although McCray's depictions reject stereotypes of young African American girls as naturally and unconsciously aggressive young women, by some means, these depictions show that Black girls run risk of taking on a traditional dichotomous definition of femininity. Similar to the ideas presented in McCray's poem, Fordham (1993) goes so far as to offer a much bolder reference of African American girls as the "good girl-bad girl, virgin-seductress, angel-whore", which presents such an unfortunate representation of Black girls in a unique context that frames their victimization and violent performance (p. 4).

Furthermore, Mahiri and Conner (2003) urge that the media socially constructs Black girls' criminalization via the discourse of rap and hip hop music. Through song, dance, and video, stigmatized images revisit culture-ancient stereotypes of Black identity and sexual proclivity (p.123). African American girls are often stereotyped using aggressive and flamboyant definitions when they engage groups and relationships. Media, texts, and research characterize attitudes about Black female aggression using a race and class prescribed definition of femininity, which typecasts Black girls as loud, disruptive, aggressive, and therefore potentially threatening.

Social Motivation 3: Empowerment Tactics

African American females are reported to aggress as a form of resistance, as an act of liberation, and to assume responsibility for their own survival. An ethnographic study, "Fighting to be somebody: Resisting Erasure and the Discursive Practices of Female Adolescent Fighting" describes the experiences of five at risk female middle school students, two of whom are African American (Adams 1999). The author redefines Black girls' aggression as a symbol of power and self-empowerment. In Adams (1999), one teen claims, "she will fight someone if they're messing with her boyfriend" (demands respect) and the other teen says "she will fight if someone calls her a bad name" (defends her character) (p. 115). Other studies cosign ways that teenaged African American females adopt "bad girl identities" by exaggerating toughness in order to seek independence and respect (Laidler & Hunt 2001, p. 659).

Risk Factors as Pathways to Aggression

Considerable research reports instances where children and teenagers model aggressive conduct or become angry as a result of family conflict, condescending treatment by teachers, or being teased by peers (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2001). Different pathways and risk factors such as individual, peer, home, and neighborhood characteristics are shown to influence aggressive behavior of teenaged African American females.

Pathway 1: Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics such as poor problem solving skills, focusing attention, temperament balance, and low intelligence are shown to increase risks for aggressive behavior among African American girls. These traits place the aggressive child at risk of misinterpreting behavior of others, which may lead to conflict and potential acts of violence (Pepler & Slaby 1994, p. 39). Unlike most studies, research entitled, "Aggression and Fighting Behavior among African American Adolescents: Individual and Family Factors" links African American girls' performance of relational aggression to weapon carrying, perceptions of their families' views toward violence, and their participation in fights at school. In this study, Cotten, Resnick, Browne, Martin, McCarraher, and Woods (1994) survey Black female students using a continuum of relational aggressiveness that correlates the degree of African American girls' performance of relational aggression and influences on their attitudes about violence. Violent attitudes significantly correlate with girls' use of violent conduct and weapon carrying (for confidence and security): Fourteen percent of the female sample is suspended from school and 16% carried a weapon (p. 620). Cotten et al. (1994) find that aggression displayed in adolescent years by African American girls who report individual level characteristics are likely to accelerate as they grow older.

Pathway 2: Peer Relationships

Zimmerman and Messner (2010) propose that females who lack adult guidance and control foster weaker emotional bonds between friends and family. Lack of supervision increases the likelihood of Black girls' exposure and contact with violent peers. Moreover,

African American girls who are violent tend to bond in groups that accompany and support their physically aggressive acts against others. Talbott, Celinska, Simpson, and Coe (2002) argue that group interaction among violent Black girls encourages relational, verbal, and physical aggression. Girls using these aggression types are less probable to bond with others and are more susceptible to victimization, which increases their likelihood of being bullied by peers.

African American females also experience high levels of victimization in forms of bullying, neglect, abuse, physical assault, and homicide. National research indicates that African American youth report being bullied more often than White American youth (Nansel et al. 2001). A study about the characteristics of child maltreatment victims provides evidence that "in 2010, slightly fewer than one-half (45 percent) of all child victims of maltreatment were White, 22 percent were African American, and 21 percent were Hispanic" (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 2012). Even more severe, an analysis of national homicide data by *Violence Policy Center* in Washington, DC reports that, "in 2009, 928 (14 percent) of 6,505 Black homicide victims were female and 5,576 (86 percent) were male" (2012, p. 2). Correspondingly, large samples of African American girls report acting out aggressive conduct toward peers, family, and friends to retaliate against abuse and ill-treatment.

Pathway 3: Home Environment

Research predicts that a disproportionate number of single-mother families, increasing divorce rates, and an increase in non-marital childbirths have negatively impacted the health and wellness of African American girls (De Bell 2008). Concurrent studies argue that adolescents who reside in homes where families provide limited social support or minimal involvement with youth are also shown to be at risk for aggressive behavior (Pepler et al. 1994). Hamlett (2011) confirms that father-figure status and psychosocial variables such as parenting style and relationships impact Black girls' aggression (p. 88). Hamlett provides evidence that fathers' residency influences aggression among girls who reside in single parent households.

Parenting behaviors such as disciplining, involvement, engagement, emotional connection, and guidance are also strong predictors of children's emotional development and future involvement in criminally aggressive activities. McLoyd and Smith (2002) report that "African American and poor parents rely on spanking their children as a form of punishment or discipline" (p.45). Studies also compare parental disciplinary measures performed across different jurisdictions. For example, in Singer, Anglin, Song, and Lunghofer (1995), "compared with 5.5% of the girls living in small cities, 10.3% of urban girls reported being 'beaten' by their parents". Since the 1990's, it has become popular for studies to examine aggression among lower-income African American girls whose parents carry out harsh or inconsistent physical discipline (Hamlet 2011).

Regardless of a parent's justification for spanking their child, experts suggest that physical discipline entails long-term risks and potentially deleterious side effects. Judith Graham, a human development specialist, says "spanking teaches a child that they are a victim who deserves discomfort and suffering" (Graham 2001, p.1). In turn, the punishment incites uncontrolled fits of violent anger, suppressed self-worth, and challenges forming lasting relationships. Spanking may also instigate types of relational aggression such as testing

boundaries, pushing limits of reasonable control, and engaging in power struggles with others. Professionals recommend that "parents develop disciplinary strategies other than spanking for managing undesired behavior" (American Academy of Pediatrics 1998, p. 723).

Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit (2004) track patterns of parental discipline used for 585 children (ages 5 to 16) from elementary and high school. They find that African American parents are more likely to use physical punishment to address hostile conduct. Interestingly, parents in the study report using harsh and strict discipline when they worry that the youth will have a future that is at risk. Lansford et al. recognize the parents' reported intent to discipline or punish their children rather than to promote negative behavior. Given their findings, it is probable that some parents consider spankings as a more effective, direct, and immediate form of discipline. Related nonviolent disciplinary options include linking bad behavior and the relative consequences, offering rewards to motivate good behavior, and encouraging youth to build healthy relationships. In contrast, spanking advocates argue that spanking is "a sign of nonpermissiveness, anticipatory socialization, God's will, a morally neutral childrearing tool, and a psychic release" (Davis 2003, p. 7). Depending upon the context, findings on traditional defenses of spanking indicate that spanking may alter the discourse of the violent child's aggression (Davis 2003).

Pathway 4: Neighborhood Factors

In social environments characterized by social disorganization, society anomie, and high levels of poverty and unemployment, there is considerable exposure to violence and a high probability of personal victimization. Although the impact of societal factors is quite unpredictable for assessing the outcomes for all African American girls, "disadvantaged neighborhood dynamics are known to increase the likelihood that children will misbehave as a result of exposure" (Hann & Borek 2002, p. 100). In a dissertation on self-regulation of aggression among African American adolescent girls, Hamlet (2011) finds that girls from urban, low-income communities are disproportionately at risk due to factors such as low socioeconomic status (SES), neighborhood violence, and an overrepresentation of peers in the juvenile justice system.

In communities characterized by high levels of neighborhood crime, chaos, and social disorganization, disruptive behaviors may be more normative or expected (Schaeffer et al. 2006). Hence, persistent use of confrontation-inflicted physical aggression may also reflect living in a low-income urban setting in which certain levels violence are to a certain extent acceptable (Lockwood 1997). It is important to note that some studies caution against using a "deficit model" (emphasizing problem behavior as a causal factor), over-pathologizing, or stereotyping minorities as victims of slavery (Holsinger et al. 2005, p. 212).

African American girls who fight often suffer "triple jeopardy", an interacting hierarchy of class, gender, and race discrimination and victimization (Russell-Brown 2004). The burden of each status builds from numerous social biases that put Black girls at risk of a poor quality of life. African American girls are deviant adolescents who fight to meet an alleged code of the streets in their communities. Simultaneously, these girls are type casted as unnaturally strong,

abnormal girls who implement inappropriate feminine behavior. Ultimately, Black girls are also plagued by a gender neutral interpretation of aggression that feminizes Black masculinity.

"Girls can and do fight with far more than words and tears when necessary", says Jones (2008, p. 63). Using fists to fight can prove publicly that young Black girls are not scared. The element of toughness that stems from fighting lessens a need to "look over one's own shoulder", which serves as code for accountability, strength, and a fearless presentation of self. Consistent with findings about "boys in the hood" in Anderson (1999), Jones (2008) offers a girl's literary account of the book, *Code of the Streets*. Jones conducts field research such as interviews, home visits, and observations with teenaged African American girls in the inner-city of Philadelphia. In this study, the participants frame fighting as a "tough front" used to deter potentially aggressive future challenges. They report sharing the lived experiences of their male peers in the streets of Philadelphia. For example, African American girls recall being "rolled on, jumped, or having a friend who has been shot, robbed, or stabbed" (p. 69). However, Jones does not associate the use of guns with urban adolescent girls' illustration of their power or lack thereof. In tandem, Lockwood (1997) reports that physical aggression via street fighting is typically a result of engaging in direct confrontation with others as opposed to using subtle forms of relational aggression. Fighting in school is another way that anger is unleashed on others in a community setting (Lines 2006).

Anger as Physical Violence

Winn (2013) suggests that in late adolescence or early adulthood, many African American females learn that physically aggressive behaviors have high stakes and are too risky as a means for resolving conflict. As a result, no strong relationship exists between Black girls' onset episodes of violent, verbal, or relational aggression and any alleged *future* performance of deviance. Studies on dating violence and suicidal behavior demonstrate the extent by which aggression presents predicted short-term risks for African American girls' involvement in physically violent and delinquent behavior.

Physical Aggression 1: Dating Violence

Dating abuse is common in relationships of African American male and female college students. Nearly one-third of Black college students sustains or inflicts physical aggression in a dating relationship (Clark, Beckett, Wells, & Dungee-Anderson 1994). Correspondingly, among subjects in West and Rose (2000), more than 90% of both African American male and female college students report experiences of verbal aggression as an aggressor or victim throughout their dating relationships (p. 472). As adults, aggressive girls are more at risk of becoming perpetrators and victims of domestic violence (Smith & Thomas 2000).

Relational and physical aggressions are commonly performed among Black female college student populations. First, it is common for dating partners of African American females to make them feel inferior or to degrade them (Clark et al. 1994). Relational aggression has been performed in response to disrespect. By the same token, no matter the race, class, or ethnic orientation of the couple, an unhealthy dating relationship that entails limited respect is

more likely to involve psychological or physical violence than is a relationship where verbal aggression is not present. Secondly, Black females are said to aggress in response to a full range of violence in relationships and are significantly more likely than White females to threaten, slap, hit, or throw objects at their partners. In line with research on stereotypes about Black girls' attitudes (the bad girl analogy), potential justifications for Black girls' "acting out" and experiencing dating violence include: lacking conflict resolution skills, responding aggressively to victimization, and seeking dominance in the relationship after adopting a relatively androgynous role as both a wage earner and a caretaker (Lines 2006).

West et al. (2000) investigate the prevalence of aggression experienced by young African American college students from low-income families. The treatment of Black girls by their partners explains how and why they sustain or inflict aggression during dating relationships. Although Black girls hit as often as their partners, very few studies explore motivations for female-perpetrated intimate partner violence (Howard-Bostic 2011). West et al. posit that Black women are punished by African American males in dating relationships because they have greater access to economic resources than do their partners. African American girls who believe "Black women have more opportunities than Black men" are likely to experience more types of psychological abuse in their dating relationships than Black females who do not subscribe to the belief (p. 484).

Abused African American girls are more or less portrayed by academics as aggressive victims who are trapped in cycles of abuse. The historically marginalized status of African American girls also makes them at risk for violence, with an increased number of risks escalating the probability for victimization. African American girls are often framed in studies as victims who fight in self-defense or who perform aggression because they are not taught alternative responses. Black teen's ability to sustain or use less aggression also influences their experiences of dating violence. Black females may take the blame for their partners lesser position, or deny their own economic stress or hardship in order to reduce conflict in the relationship (West et al. 2000, p. 475). For that reason, Black teens are said to be more tolerant of abuse and more willing to retaliate with physical violence. Consequently, use of aggression signifies their oppression and invisibility.

Physical Aggression 2: Sexual Violence

Few studies examine sociodemographic variables and the sexual health of African American teenaged girls. However, Silverman, Raj, Mucci, and Hathaway (2001) report that Black female high school students appear to be more likely than individuals from other groups to report sexual violence in absence of a dating relationship. Reported victimization types include being shoved, slapped, hit, or forced into any sexual activity. Common responses of African American girls in the study include "Yes, I was hurt physically and sexually" and "I was not hurt on a date" (p. 574). The study also notes that lower income Black girls are vulnerable to their boyfriends, but they should also be weary of men on the streets. Silverman et al. warn with great caution that African American girls are at a greater risk than others of being sexually abused by males whom they are not dating. Furthermore, young Black girls living in disadvantaged neighborhoods may lack access to support and resources to deal with trauma.

Hence, their victimization is magnified because lower income residents are also less likely to receive protection from law officials following instances of abuse (Schaffner 2007).

Silverman et al. (2001) also correlates sexual dating violence with all assessed forms of substance use (alcohol, tobacco, and cocaine), unhealthy weight control, and suicidality. Jones (2008) connects "staying pretty" to aggressive attitudes that influence an African American girls' role in potential acts of violence. Jones says "a young Black girls' ability to have a light-brown skinned complexion, 'straight' or 'good' hair, and a slim figure is directly influenced by Black girls' involvement in interpersonal aggression or violence" (p.75). Hence, these young ladies may be prone to fight in order to protect a certain "look"; they may also be hit as a response to their bodily images.

Wingood, DiClemente, McCree, Harrington, and Davies (2001) conduct a unique study of Black adolescent females who report having a physically abusive boyfriend. The study, "Dating violence and the sexual health of Black adolescent females" includes a sample of 522 Black females ages 14 to 18, 18.4% who reveal a history of physical dating violence. The study positively associates girls' history of violence with their sexual health outcomes and sexual behavior. The authors acknowledge that African American female adolescents have a higher prevalence of dating violence and higher rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Wingood et al. 2001). They also remind the reader that sexually violent experiences influence negligent choices such as "dreading the consequences of negotiating condom use, accepting lesser control over sexuality, and having anxiety about pregnancy prevention options" (p.4). The findings in Wingood et al. confirm that prevalence of sexual victimization among African American female teens is associated with increased performance of physical and relational aggression.

Physical Aggression 3: Self-harm

The scope of self-injurious violence explored in research on African American girls' suicide is limited to occurrences of chronic self-cutting, suicide attempts, and successful suicide. Self-cutting includes penetration of jewelry into eyebrows, lips, tongues, nares, nipples, or genitals. Suicide attempts are less common among African American girls than among other youth. However, Borowsky, Ireland, and Resnick (2001) report record increases in suicide rates among African American and other minority groups. Suicide rates for African American children ages 10 to 14 years old increased 126% from 1980 to 1995 (p. 485). Future research is needed to develop culturally responsive prevention and intervention strategies.

Studies relate suicidal tendencies to issues of interpersonal safety, anger, and emotional needs. Holsinger et al. (2005) warn that African American youth tend to mask symptoms of suicidal behavior by acting out in high risk ways (i.e. substance use or abuse and becoming pregnant). Thus, parents, mentors, and health advocates should be mindful of circumstances such as having a friend commit suicide, illicit drug use, and history of mental health treatment that predict suicide attempts of Black youth (Holsinger et al. 2005, p. 486). Reported risk factors for self-harm (childhood abuse, violence perpetration, and weapon carrying) relate more closely to physical abuse and violence (Borowsky et al. 2001). A previous suicide attempt,

violence victimization, violence perpetration, alcohol use, marijuana use, school problems, and ease of access to guns at home are also significantly associated with Black girl's suicide.

Silverman et al. (2001) report that "recent suicide ideation and actual suicide attempts are approximately 6 to 9 times as common among female teens who report being sexually and physically hurt by dating partners" (p. 578). Silverman et al. mention that the pain and humiliation of teens that experience dating violence may predispose them to suicidal thoughts and behavior. There is a need for additional research that specifically considers African American teen girls' experiences of suicidality.

Aggression and Delinquent Acts

In recent public discourse and media, African American girls are increasingly represented as "dangerous others" (Mahiri et al. 2003). Whether it is an issue of violence, crime, or sex, these African American girls are burdened with escaping high expectations for violence and brutal images projected of them as whores. Relationships vary between Black female teens' aggression and forms of delinquency such as high school dropout, sex/pregnancy, drug/alcohol use, and detention/arrests.

Delinquent Act 1: High School Dropout

Although dropout rates differ dramatically by state, the dropout rates for African American girls are troubling. The National Women's Law Center reports that approximately 40% of the Black female population of the class of 2003-2004 dropped out of school (2007, p. 6). High rates of high school dropout are associated with an array of individual (low achievement), social (antisocial peers), family (low educational aspirations), and cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional factors. These dynamics enhance the likelihood of students' loss of interest or detachment from the learning/socialization process (Kokko, Tremblay, Lacourse, Nagin, & Vitaro 2006).

Kokko et al. (2006) find that developmental trajectories of physical aggression predict both school dropout and physical violence. Ultimately, high aggression levels and problem behaviors at school impact cognitive capacities and chances of completing school. They also project an increased risk of school dropout among the highly aggressive compared with the moderately aggressive (p. 415). In contrast, relational (prosocial), or aggressive attitudes and relative conduct aggression does not have additive or protective long-term effects on occurrences of high school dropout. No preexisting research (longitudinal studies on life course and dropout rates) specifically demonstrates how African American girls' use of aggression directly correlates with their failure to complete high school. Thus, the issue requires further research.

Delinquent Act 2: Sex/pregnancy

It is well-documented that aggression places girls at concurrent risk for early sexual activity, teen pregnancy, and early childbearing (Hamlett 2011). A growing body of literature suggests that limited opportunities and social disorganization increases the likelihood that

African American girls will engage in sex at an early age and become pregnant. Current research also links teen decisions not to use contraception to feelings of hopelessness and a perceived lack of personal opportunities in the future (Kogan et al. 2013).

Waddell, Orr, Sackoff, and Santelli (2010) report that teen pregnancy rates among NYC residents are more than four times higher among Black females (122/1,000) (p.427). African American female students are also most likely to be currently sexually active (35.4%), followed by Hispanics (32.7%), and White females (23.4%) (p. 430). Furthermore, Black girls are said to engage in risky sexual behaviors that later develop into violent intimate relationships (Moffit, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva 2001). It is not unlikely for African American girls to replicate this cycle of abuse as future mothers.

Delinquent Act 3: Drug/alcohol Use

Drug use, relational aggression, and delinquency during adolescence are a considerable focus of research. Findings showing a direct association between African American girls' aggressive misconduct and drug and alcohol use are inconsistent. Farrell et al. (2000) considers Black girls' attitudinal changes that result from drug use and predict a strong correlation between Black girls' use of relational aggression and drug use. Wells et al. (1992) add that antisocial behavior and attitudes are stronger predictors for initiation of drug use for Asian children than for Black and White adolescents. Nevertheless, studies confirm lesser drug use problems among African American girls and increased criminality as compared to other youth, but arrest rates for drug offenses are more prevalent among Black female teens (Snyder 2002).

Both welfare recipiency and lower socioeconomic status are closely examined in research on drug and alcohol using behavior. Epstein, Botvin, Baker, and Diaz (1999) find that adolescents with two parents residing in highly urbanized New York City have significantly lower levels of delinquency and illicit drug use than do adolescents with single parents. Such research raises specific concern about the potential mental health and quality of life outcomes for African American girls residing in single parent households.

Unlike studies on drug use, representation of inner-city minority youth remains very small in national surveys of alcohol use. Among studies that consider racial/ethnic minorities, drinking status of friends, parental use, and perceived attitudes of others are strongly associated with alcohol use (Epstein et al. 1999). There is no significant relationship presented regarding aggression and alcohol use such as binge drinking, alcohol misuse, or alcohol consequences (Walton et al. 2010).

Delinquent Act 4: Detention/arrests

Chesney-Lind (2010) speculates that Black girls are targets for relational aggression, which is oftentimes falsely confused and replaced with assumptions about their role in more serious types of violence. Chesney-Lind does not ignore bullying programs that protect victims from "mean girls". Nevertheless, female aggression has generated a public debate regarding the corresponding changes in administrative discretion with regards to arrests of African American girls. More young African American girls are brought into detention, typically being

framed as aggressive liars, manipulators (overemotional and needy), or "bad girls" (Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz 2004). However, it is estimated that over 90% of girls in the juvenile justice system report prior experiences of child victimization (Schaffner 2007, p. 8). In tandem, the reported reputational findings about young female delinquents rarely consider links between juvenile offending to violence against girls such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.

Whether the roots of female violence are systematic, gendered, or individually based, African American girls' overall involvement in crime has continued to increase. Between 2003 and 2007, female/youth-perpetrated homicide increased by 51.3%, and girls' performance of larceny-theft increased by 13.9% as compared to a 3.5% increase for boys (Gage, Josephs, & Lunde 2012, p.604). Relative studies confirm that race and ethnicity are salient predictors for female delinquency and representation in the juvenile justice system (Tracy, Kemf-Leonard, & Abramoske-James 2009). In 2004, data show that 31% of African American girls were arrested. At that time, 17% of all juveniles were African American females. Also, rates of injuring another individual badly (requiring bandages or medical care) increased significantly among the population of African American females (Gage et al. 2012, p. 605). Ultimately, more recent criminally delinquent behavior among these girls has been characterized as "merciful victimization, brave and liberated aggression, conduct void of decent morals, out of control performance, and cold hearted killing" (Schaffner 2007).

Conclusion: Interventions

African American girls who are violently aggressive face increased risk of behavioral, social, and emotional problems. *Four* intervention efforts (building relational skills, acknowledging distress, encouraging counseling, and challenging differential treatment) can include, but not be limited to outreach, education, early intervention services, specialized youth services, public education, and media campaigns. However, success of each intervention depends on whether the processes centralize each African American girl's safety, enhances their accountability, improves their ability to build a positive peer network, and works to change the climate in the community.

First, to **build relational skills** and target use of relational aggression, *mentorship programs* can be designed and implemented to: (1) enhance relational skills and Black girls' propensity to resolve interpersonal conflict (DuRant, Cadenhead, Pendergrast, Slavens, & Linder 1994); (2) reinforce positive and nonviolent attitudes of girls and boys of all race and ethnic groups (Adams 1999); (3) teach them to listen, understand, and bond with others; (4) minimize defensiveness and be more cooperative and receptive to the ideas of others, (5) devise creative solutions that genuinely address mutual concerns; and (6) regulate emotions and manage difficult situations, which can ultimately preserve the emotional safety.

Secondly, to **acknowledging distress** and better explore violence against Black girls, stakeholders should consider a *gender-specific intervention program* that acknowledges signs of distress that is designed and implemented to: (1) target types of distress that are commonly triggered by emotional and behavioral problems; (2) show concern via support and encouragement during or following stressful situations; (3) acknowledge behavioral changes to draw attention to potential source(s) of their problems; and (4) offer necessary

recommendations for professional counseling to help African American females cope with challenging situations. As a third intervention, parents, teachers, and mentors should **encouraging counseling** because *treatment*: (1) safely manages, prevents, or slows the rate of negative outcomes; (2) is a form of support; (3) points out adverse consequences that aggression presents for Black girls and others; and (4) helps girls hear similar stories that focus on positive ways to address challenges.

To conclude, practitioners, authorities, researchers, and policymakers should **challenge differential treatment** of African American females by: (1) acknowledging that studies over-exaggerate Black girls' involvement in sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol use, and violent crime; (2) avoiding use of discriminatory stereotypes that cause a large number of innocent African American girls to be subjected to disrespect and humiliating assumptions about being "bad girls"; (3) reporting data showing the disproportionality of court involvement among African American females; (4) reexamining measurement bias and using better documented reasons for suspension and punishment in schools (Gage et al. 2012, p. 619); and (5) better addressing racial and sexual justice.

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