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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, DEVELOPING A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS' JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS, by FELICIA L. BERRY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS' JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS
by
Felicia L. Berry, M.S.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how African Americans define justice and injustice. This study examined the justice perceptions of 12 (8 females, 4 males) African American undergraduate students and consisted of two phases: (1) Completion of the cognitive appraisal instrument (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990) which predicts the relationship between specific types of events and perceptional/emotional reactions to that event, and a semi-structured interview; and (2) Completion of focus groups one (FG1) and focus group two (FG2). Grounded theory (GT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was the constant comparative method used for simultaneous data collection and data analysis. Consensus coding was determined through unanimous decisions between the coders. The results of the study indicated that the participants define justice as morality, vindication, and fairness/balance. Injustice was defined as unfair, unequal, discrimination, and immoral. The results of the study further indicate that the justice perceptions of African Americans are affected by the history of oppression and their minority status in the United States. The awareness of oppression factor was influenced by: discrimination, attempts at alternative explanations for unjust experiences, belief that slavery is sometimes used as an excuse, and the effect of just and unjust events on their

psychological well-being. Racial identity is influenced by: spirituality/religion, media, gender and class. A relationship was observed between spirituality and racial identity in that racial identity was a main factor in determining what was just, while spirituality determined the event's outcome. The present study contributes to the literature regarding what is known about African Americans' religious coping and justice perception and can guide practice, advocacy, social justice, and future research.

DEVELOPING A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS' JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS

by

Felicia L. Berry, M.S.

A Dissertation

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Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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in
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in
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I honor the memory of my mother, Helen Berry, who always encouraged me and instilled in me a desire to achieve. I dedicate this manuscript to her memory. I also honor the memory of my father, Wallace Berry, Sr. for his love and acceptance.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BTW	Belief in a Just World
FG	Focus group
GT	Grounded theory

CHAPTER ONE

THE EVOLUTION OF JUSTICE AND ITS IMPACT ON AFRICAN AMERICANS' JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS: THE NEED FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ADVOCACY

Introduction

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly" (King, 1963, p. 1-2). These statements, written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (1963) were directed to clergy in Alabama who opposed his approach to the Civil Rights movement. Dr. King's message eloquently referenced the oppression experienced by African Americans in the United States during that time and the need for everyone to be concerned about these injustices. Today, the challenge of these statements remains relevant. The ideal of connected destinies is one reason we all share responsibility to eradicate oppression; in order for there to be justice, there must be a fair distribution of opportunities and burdens (Gostin & Powers, 2006).

While it is true that everyone has a responsibility to eradicate oppression, the undertaking of such a task can be daunting. However, working against oppression may be easier when we work together; one way to work together is via professional organizations. Professional organizations provide an opportunity for individuals to join together in promotion of mutual goals, values, and interests. These mutual goals,

interests, and values can be promulgated to effect change in the larger society. To this end, the professional organizations of counseling and psychology have adopted advocacy and social justice to reduce oppressive forces their clients and the larger community experience (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Just as he admonished his fellow clergy, Dr. King directed similar challenges at social scientists during the Civil Rights movement. As part of the Invited Distinguished Address at the American Psychological Association's (APA) Annual Convention in 1968 (APA, 1999), he urged the field of psychology to focus on three areas of research regarding Black people: leadership, political involvement, and the psychological and ideological changes they face.

In accordance with Dr. King's charge, the fields of counseling and psychology have urged practitioners to become aware of how the history of oppression experienced by persons of color (and all who are marginalized) directly affects their mental health (Constantine et al., 2007). Understanding the racial disparities experienced by African Americans in accessing resources such as education, health care, and adequate employment can bring awareness to the pervasive oppression faced by this group (Jones, 2006). While other racial and ethnic groups may experience these injustices, African Americans have a history marred by four centuries of oppression and injustices that they continue to experience in the United States. This history of injustice can affect the psychological well-being of African Americans (Harrell, 2000). Therefore, due to this history, it is important to understand how African Americans perceive justice and injustice, as well as how they perceive the injustices they continue to experience.

The mental health profession can accomplish this through conducting research

and practice that is aligned with the social justice and multicultural competence movements. Research and practice that utilizes an emic perspective (Yeh & Inman, 2007), allowing those being studied to describe their own reality, can inform scientists and practitioners about the pervasive system of oppression that adversely affects African Americans. The result of research focused on advocacy and social justice may provide insight into ways to reduce these oppressive forces and improve the psychological well-being of African Americans (Prilleltensky, 2001; Vera & Speight, 2003).

This paper presents a thesis of the sociocultural origins of justice and its impact on African Americans. The focus is on how African Americans have been adversely affected due to the development of Western culture and its oppressive forces, namely the unjust practice of racial discrimination. The purpose of this conceptual article is to:

1. Provide a critical review of the origins, theoretical underpinnings, and various concepts of justice that have been used to oppress African Americans,
2. Review the literature which illustrates the impact of racial injustices on the psychological health of African Americans, and
3. Present an argument for the necessity of counselors and psychologists to become involved in social justice and advocacy in order to end the oppressive forces African Americans encounter. Examples of how counselors and psychologists might become involved in social justice and advocacy are included.

From its inception justice was philosophically conceptualized from a Eurocentric (White) male perspective (herein referred to as Eurocentric perspective). This limited conceptualization of justice led to injustice through its implementation based solely on this Eurocentric perspective as justice was a right reserved for White males. This will

become evident during the following review of the genesis of the concept of justice. This review provides an argument of how the conceptualization of justice that included only the voice of White men has oppressed others. It is important to understand the oppressive system in which people of color (and others who are marginalized) have been subjugated. Understanding the history of this system will allow others to fully appreciate their experience and to be a better advocate for them (Harrell, 2000). Counselors and psychologists need to understand the oppressive history of African Americans, and its impact on their psychological health in order to best advocate for African Americans and become involved in social justice to end these oppressive forces.

Until recently in the United States, justice for "all" referred to all White men. This is evident in the language of such documents as the *Declaration of Independence* and *The United States Constitution* The fact that these documents were all penned by White men without the input of women, people of color, or marginalized individuals (because they were not seen as privy to the benefits of justice), highlights how in the United States the concept of justice was fashioned from a Eurocentric perspective, and was not inclusive of all people (Coates, 2004). Additionally, prominent Supreme Court cases such as *Dred Scott* and *Plessy v. Ferguson* also reflected that justice was reserved for White men. In this way, documents intended to ensure freedoms and rights were ironically created in ways that were inherently oppressive.

Ideologically, justice is usually thought of in terms of fairness, or the belief that people get what they deserve (Lerner & Miller, 1978; Rawls, 1999). Historically, African Americans have not received equal or just treatment in the United States. As previously mentioned, at times the very documents that were created to ensure justice were used to

subjugate African Americans (Cook, 2005). This is evident in the analysis of the conceptualization of justice when examined through the pervasive history of oppression experienced by African Americans.

The Concept of Justice

Historically, justice has been defined by the court systems as the fair and proper administration of laws (Black, 2004). In the last few decades, another perspective regarding what is just has dominated academic disciplines (Furnham, 2003). The Just World Hypothesis asserts that people have a need to believe in a world where good things usually happen to good people and bad things tend happen to bad people, so that people get what they deserve (Lerner, 1965). This perspective concerning what is just has been used to oppress those who are disenfranchised since the concept was introduced (Lerner & Miller, 1978).

Biblical/classical concept of justice. According to Biblical accounts, justice has been meted out in some form since the beginning of creation. The Old and New Testaments of the Bible provide many accounts of justice that are based on obedience to God's word (Solomon & Murphy, 2000). This obedience to God's word was expected of everyone, regardless of status. If obedience was not followed, retribution was taken against those who were disobedient to God's commands; thereby punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent (Pojman, 2006; Solomon & Murphy). This concept of justice as each person getting what they deserve is found in the top three Western religions (Pojman). The Bible provides some of the initial underpinnings of the belief in a just world where people get what they deserve, as evidenced by the concept of "an eye for an eye" (Exodus 21:24), God bringing judgment against those who do not follow his

commandments and the reward of the afterlife for those who follow the tenets of the Christian faith. There is also a sense of fairness in this view of justice as rewards or punishments are given equally to all based on adherence to, or disobedience of God's laws.

However, in the United States religion has played a role in the oppression of African Americans. Western religion was also used by European Americans to justify the enslavement of Africans (Goldenberg, 2005; Moland, 2002). Direct references in the Bible may have been used as a rationale for slavery (See Colossians 3:22; Ephesians 6:5; 1 Peter 2:18). Many ministers were slave owners and therefore defended slavery from the pulpit using Scripture to justify and support their position (Moland). To this end, Moland asserted that "…religion has played a significant role in the socio-cultural history in America…" (p. 445).

In *The Republic*, Plato describes Socrates' interaction with fellow philosophers regarding the question, "What is justice?" As noted, scholars still debate regarding the answer to this question. What is yielded from these debates in *The Republic* is a depiction of a non-egalitarian view of justice, one that focuses on people getting what they deserve based on their social class and status. The concept of justice espoused in *The Republic* is akin to distributive justice as it assesses the disbursement of resources based on each person's skills or potential and the value of their contribution to society (Solomon & Murphy, 2000). So, here justice continues to be viewed as something one deserves but with the added component of social class and status. The concept is used as justification to maintain the oppression of those without an elevated position in society. *The Republic* provides the first definition of justice in Western literature as a concept of giving to each

what is owed (Pojman, 2006).

Using a critical theory perspective, Fisk (1993) postulated that Plato attempted to circumvent conflict between the social classes through his assertion that each class has unique functions, hoping that this would cause them to avoid each other. Unfortunately, Plato's conflict resolution attempts involved endorsing unequal treatment of people based on class. Modern Western societies, specifically the United States adopted the practice of separating society's members. In the United States African Americans were denigrated and segregated because of their race (Cook, 2005).

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* provides further support for distributive justice based on status. Here, Aristotle presents distributive justice in terms of a principle of proportionate equality based on merit (Cohen & Greenberg, 1982). This concept is based on what one deserves, or "desert," according to their social status, so that not all people have the same merit, or deserve equal distributions. The concept of justice based on social status and the individual's contribution to society is different from the type of justice African Americans sought through their religious beliefs, the equitable execution of justice based on obedience to God's word (Solomon & Murphy, 2000).

Aristotle noted the difference between distributive justice and commutative justice, in that the latter focuses on contracts so that if one agrees to a contract, it is just, whether or not the terms are the same for different persons (Pojman, 2006). Commutative justice is similar to the concept of equality before the law so that two people who present for the same crime receive the same consequences regardless of status (Solomon & Murphy, 2000). This is the intended premise of justice being blind (Pojman, 2006). However, we know that justice is not blind. For instance, there is an abundance of

research regarding the disparity of African Americans in the court systems (Chisholm, 1999; D'Alessio & Stolzenberg, 2003). It has been well documented that African Americans have a higher probability of being arrested and receive harsher sentences than other ethnic or racial groups (Henderson, Cullen, Cao, Browning, Kopache, 1997). Because African Americans were not seen as equal to European Americans, they were not entitled to the privileges of this contrived system of justice. Furthermore, the system was used as a means to oppress African Americans such as Jim Crow and Black Codes (Chisolm; Cook, 2005). Yet African Americans are expected to trust that they can receive justice in this system that was, and continues to be used to oppress and subjugate them.

Thomas Hobbes' pivotal "The State of Nature and the Laws of Nature" from *Leviathan* (1651) describes a different concept of justice based on contracts as that proposed by Aristotle. Solomon and Murphy (2000) asserted that this pivotal work is the foundation of social contract theory. Hobbes depicted commutative justice, which is based on contracts, not status and is based solely on the agreed upon covenant. Justice is indicated as the third law of nature, so that people keep the agreements they make. Hobbes postulated that without promised agreements, people have nothing. When these covenants are not kept, causing a breach in the contract, an injustice occurs (Cohen & Greenberg, 1982). Hobbes makes the distinction that actions themselves are not injustices, only the broken covenants that result from these actions. Along this line of reasoning is the premise that rights are embedded in covenants (Cohen & Greenberg).

Understanding this premise is important to accepting the argument that the broken contracts between the United States and African Americans equate to a pervasive history of injustice. Examples of the broken contracts between the U. S. government and African

Americans are evident in the Fourteenth Amendment, Freedman's Bureau Act of 1865, and the *Declaration of Independence*. Coates (2004) refers to these attempts at justice as "Band-Aids…[that] have done little more than frustrate the condition, aggravate the wounds, and accelerate the progression of cancer running rampant in America" (p.854).

Modern Concept of Justice

Solomon and Murphy (2000) describe the *Declaration of Independence* as a working example of social contract theory in politics. Aside from its specific content related to government, the *Declaration of Independence* is the source of natural rights in the United States. Famous portions of the document include, "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" and "endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable Rights…among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Coates (2004) asserted that these endowed rights by the Creator were the threads that connected people to each other due to the social contract members of society had with each other. The *Declaration of Independence* explicitly stated the individual rights of the people and provided for fair representation, fair treatment, and outlined breaches to the document (Solomon & Murphy). However, these individual rights and protections did not include those of African descent. The term African descent is used here, and hereafter, as indication of the lack of citizenship and acceptance of African persons in the United States during the founding of the U.S. until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The *Declaration of Independence* represents the foundation of American society in terms of freedoms and individual rights. It also contains many of the rights (see above phrases) people consider when determining if a situation is just or not. Unfortunately, during the time period in which this document was penned thousands of African people

were enslaved and these “inalienable rights” were not inclusive of all men and women, only those of European descent (Coates, 2004). Furthermore, in order for the *Declaration of Independence* to be accepted and signed demonstrating the unification of the states and separation from England, Thomas Jefferson was encouraged to exclude any opposition to slavery (Cook, 2005). The southern compromise gave license to the acceptance of slavery. Evidence for this assertion is found in the practice during the Revolutionary War of a awarding a slave to any person who volunteered to serve in the war (Coates).

The *Declaration of Independence* determined that all men are created equal, and therefore deserve equal treatment. Again, “all men” represented all White men and excluded African Americans. African Americans were excluded from the *Declaration of Independence* because they were not considered as deserving of any rights, especially citizenship. Coates (2004) noted the importance of this concept of civil justice during the formation of the United States and its exclusion of persons of African descent. The need for social justice rather than civil justice was asserted by Coates due to the oppressive implementation of civil justice which denied the rights of persons of African descent. Social justice, however, is based on a moral balance of equity and fairness for all people that respects the dignity and values of everyone (Cook, 2005).

The United States Constitution further represents how the development of Western civilization in the U.S. depended on the oppression of persons of African descent through documents penned to ensure the rights, privileges, and justice for all. Once again, the origination of this document did not include persons of African descent in “all” as they were believed to be inferior and unworthy of any rights that White men should respect (Cook, 2005). This subjugation and oppression of persons of African

descent was noted in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 1857. Tillich (as cited in Cook) noted that justice was not possible when people are treated and traded like property. Due to centuries of being treated as property, African Americans have experienced grave injustices in the United States.

The 3/5 Compromise of the U. S. Constitution further reflects the lack of rights and personhood those of African descent experienced. In an effort to increase their advantage over each other regarding taxation and representation, the North and South agreed that fives slaves would be counted as three non-enslaved men (Cook, 2005). This practice further illustrates the oppression of persons of African descent of this time as they were unable to engage in the democratic process but were continued to be used as property and denied human rights. Attempts were made throughout the years to correct these injustices after the Civil War. Some of these attempts at restorative justice include the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 (Cook). However, it would be almost a century later before persons of African descent were finally granted the rights, protections, and privileges guaranteed them in those Amendments and legislation.

The disparities of unequal treatments between those of European and African descent continues today and illuminates the breach in contract between the United States government and its citizens when there are inequalities in areas such as education (Jones, 2006), access to healthcare (Dreeben, 2001), and employment (Palmer & Little, 1993). Furthermore, there are many documented cases of African Americans receiving unfair treatment in the legal system; examples include instances of racial profiling, disparities in incarceration lengths, and sentencing recommendations, all of which affects individual

freedom and liberty (D'Alessio & Stolzenberg, 2003; Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005). The broken contract between the United States and African Americans due to the oppressive applications of the *Declaration of Independence* and *The United States Constitution* is unjust. What is needed is a conceptualization of justice that creates more of a balance and does not maintain the status quo, the continued oppression of African Americans for those in power. Coates (2004) noted the need for social justice and asserted that people in power do not ever freely share their power.

Rawls (1999) offered a conceptualization of justice as fairness in the *Theory of Justice.* In this pivotal work Rawls asserted that the most disenfranchised should receive more resources based on a veil of ignorance. Rawls sparked much of the debate regarding the notion of justice as fairness, and rekindled interest in justice as a concept. He declared that institutions and laws that are unjust be abolished or reformed. This position was maintained through the assertion that individuals' primary virtues are justice and truth and should be defended as such. Rawls further established his declaration of justice as a virtue by upholding justice as an inalienable right due to each person that cannot be usurped by institutions or individuals. His is a hypothetical contract approach to justice in that members of society are bound together by the agreement to share resources to reduce the disparities that exist.

Rawls' ideas are especially applicable regarding the injustices African Americans face in the United States. Distributive justice is necessary in a manner similar to that as proposed by Rawls so that those who have the least are especially honored in social contracts (Coates, 2004), promoting the allocation of society's resources based on need not status or race. Improvements are required in the access and re-distribution of

resources for African Americans in areas such as health care (Dreeben, 2001) and education (Jones, 2006; Ogbu, 2004). According to Rawls (1999), addressing discrepancies is the primary place where social justice is needed. This notion of justice as fairness is so ordered that the most disenfranchised members of society are positioned to receive the most advantage followed by a system of equal opportunity to all (Greenberg & Cohen, 1982). With that in mind, a redistribution of resources is necessary that will reduce the disparities between African Americans and Caucasians

Relation of Justice Theories to the African American Experience

A brief examination of how these theories of justice may impact the justice perceptions of African Americans follows. Researchers have indicated that spirituality and religion are central to African American culture (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Mattis & Jagers, 2001), thus spiritual beliefs may in part determine African Americans' perceptions of justice. Spirituality and religion have been documented as coping resources for African Americans, used to restore order, provide meaning for life circumstances, and offer moral values (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006; Willis, 2006). In terms of the Biblical origin of justice, everyone from slaves to kings had access to the kingdom of heaven, and were subject to the same rules, laws, and covenants (Solomon & Murphy, 2000). The concept of justice as fairness and equality follows the ideal African Americans hold regarding justice. This perspective reflects the five foundations of democracy proposed by Jackson (2000) which are based on a premise of equal: protection under the law, opportunity, access, proportionality, and concern for the disenfranchised. Belief in such a concept of justice is what allowed African Americans to persevere during the Civil Rights movement in spite of a harsh reality contrary to these

beliefs (King, 1967).

Furthermore, Cone (1986) asserted that the evolution of these constructs have been affected by the socio-cultural, historical, and political events of the time and have come to be a source of refuge against oppression and a haven for justice. Mattis and Jagers (2001) related deities in the African American religions to defenders and guardians of the oppressed, as well as a representation of the triumph over oppressive forces. Religiosity and spirituality also offer the concepts of love of mankind, extending God's love to man, and forgiveness. In this way, it can be seen that the tenets of religion and spirituality provide the manifestation of Rawls' ideal situation for African Americans' justice perceptions, a humanistic value for, and fair treatment of every person, which expresses love for the fellow man.

The Greek concept of justice as a virtue based on status, class, and race is more representative of the African American experience. Justice is not meted out to all people the same, but according to one's merit. Perhaps there is no other racial/ethnic or cultural group in the United States who is more aware of this than African Americans. It has been well-documented that the injustices against those who are marginalized have been justified through the assertion that their fate is deserved (Lerner & Miller, 1978).

The two diverging conceptualizations present a conflict for African Americans. They struggle to see the world as just according to their ideal, yet their experiences lead them to appraise the world as unjust. The impact of racism and discrimination on the psychological well-being of African Americans has been well-documented (Feagin, 1991). As evidenced in the review of the historical underpinnings of justice and the Western application of this concept, persons of African descent, have experienced grave

injustices in the United States and have observed that justice has historically been based on status, class, and race (DuBois, 1903; Nobles, 1991). The concepts of justice as fairness and justice as merit are in conflict. The two concepts present a divergence in thinking, being, knowing, and behaving as African Americans attempt to reconcile the difference between their experience and their ideal. This is central to the dual consciousness African Americans experience proposed by DuBois and Boykin's (1985; as cited in Ogbu, 2004) Triple Quandary. Essentially, DuBois asserted African Americans have identities as persons of African descent and as Americans; these identities may conflict with each other at times. Boykin expounded on this complexity through the examination of African Americans' pursuit of the American dream as U. S. citizens, their identity as members of a minority group also shared with other disadvantaged groups, and their "cultural legacy" which included the African worldview as well as a history of slavery and oppression. He also noted that holding these various dichotomies for centuries required resilience for coping.

The modern concept of justice poses similar discrepancies in the concept of justice for African Americans. Regarding the contract agreement of the *Declaration of Independence* between the United States and its citizens, the rights and equalities mentioned are concepts and beliefs held by African Americans in terms of their own status as equals and citizens but differ from their daily experience. Based on the acculturation research that has been widely documented (Cokely, 2002; Parham & Helms, 1985), African Americans experience stress and anxiety based on the relationship of their experiences of oppression and racial identity. Therefore, the experiences of oppression cause stress and cognitive dissonance for African Americans. It is difficult to

hold onto beliefs that all men are created equal and given inalienable rights which include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, when one's life experiences denote otherwise.

The Rawlsian (1999) concept of justice also presents a split in how African Americans perceive an ideal concept of justice versus their actual experiences. Rawls is correct in noting the impact and influence systems have on the rights, liberties, and opportunities of citizens. In a well-organized society, as he suggests, this concept of institutional orchestration would fare well. However, in the United States, it is evident such a society does not exist due to the great inequities between persons of European and African descent and those with resources and those who are marginalized.

What is needed to end these disparities is a reformation of the United States system of subjugation of many for the benefit of a few. What is needed is restorative justice. Restorative justice involves aspects of correcting the damage that has been done and restoring the relationships among involved parties (Volpe & Strobl, 2005). Western societies have previously attempted to reconcile these disparities through such programs as Affirmative Action and bussing programs (Coates, 2004; Chisolm, 1999). However, in recent years there have been attempts to reverse or dismantle these programs, which were created to reduce the inequities and level the playing field for African Americans. These attempts at restorative justice are consistently being attacked and labeled as un-American, immoral, and unjust (Jones, 2006). Coates argues for restorative justice through reparations and notes this as the only way for African Americans to receive what they are due as a result of the centuries of oppression experienced in the United States. This presents another example of the dissonance in how African Americans perceive justice based on their ideal of the concept, and their experience in society.

This cognitive dissonance is similar to having two ways of being for African Americans (DuBois, 1903; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003), so that African Americans have two identities- one as a member of a minority group with an extensive oppressive history, and one as a citizen in a nation. This also can refer to the belief and presentation of one aspect of the African descent self in one setting and a different aspect of the self, as an acculturated member of society in another. This cognitive dissonance is emotionally, spiritually, and physically draining to the individuals who have these multiple ways of being (Akbar, 1984; Utsey, Bolden, & Brown, 2001). It is just as draining to hold two diverging thoughts about justice in one's awareness at all times in order to cope with the injustices that prevail. This conflict is often what brings African Americans to therapy as they try to maneuver between unjust systems which often cause stress, anxiety, depression, and self- and within-group denigration (Akbar, 1981).

The Effect of Injustice on African Americans' Psychological Well-Being

In 1983, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) reported that psychological distress (anxiety, depression, and anger) due to racism was the most common concern reported by African Americans who sought mental health services. The literature is rife with studies which indicate that the experience of racial discrimination is common among African Americans (Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). As discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes generally lead to individuals being treated unequally and unfairly, for the purpose of this discussion, these constructs will be described as injustices or unjust treatment. The prevalence of such experiences has both physical and psychological adverse effects on African Americans (Harrell, 2000; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003; Williams &

Williams-Morris, 2000). A review of recently published studies documents the effect of racial discrimination on African Americans' psychological well-being and is critical to understand injustice as experienced by African Americans. Following the brief review of the relevant data will be a discussion on how these data can be used in the quest for social justice and advocacy for African Americans.

Klonoff, Landrine, and Ullman (1999) reported that racial discrimination was highly correlated with psychiatric symptoms reported by African Americans. This study and others by these authors (e.g., Klonoff & Landrine, 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996) have been cited by several researchers investigating the adverse effect of racism on the mental health of African Americans. The authors reported that half of the psychiatric symptoms scores measured using The Symptom Checklist-58 (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickles, Ulenhuth, & Covi, 1994) were best predicted by racial discrimination. These included the Total scale score, Somatization, and Anxiety, even when controlling for general life stressors and social status. Additionally, gender accounted for a significant amount of variance across symptoms, indicating that gender (female) was a significant predictor of psychiatric symptoms. Research conducted since this landmark study was published has continued to produce similar results.

Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, and Bylsma (2003) conducted a study with African American college students at a predominantly Caucasian college campus with the purpose of examining their experiences of common occurrences of racism. The types of reported racist incidents included: being looked at intently, oral expressions indicating prejudice such as racial slurs, stereotypes or generalizations made about African Americans, being discriminated against when seeking services, and indiscriminant

actions in interpersonal relationships (acting awkward, nervous, or rude). The results indicated that African Americans experience of racism is frequent and common. According to Swim et al., more than sixty percent of the participants reported experiencing at least one racist incident during a two week period. The majority of the participants noted feelings of anger in response to their experiences with everyday racism. Some of the participants continued to experience distress after the incident was over, indicating that the effects of racial discrimination may have lasting effects. Racial identity was not significantly correlated to the documented experiences of racism. Regarding gender, there was little difference in the reported experience of everyday racism between men and women, although the women reported slightly more incidents than men, and were more likely to respond to these injustices.

Prelow, Mosher, and Bowman (2006) examined the relationship between experiences of perceived racial discrimination, social support, and psychological adjustment with African American college students. The authors examined the frequency of perceptions of racial discrimination within the past year. The purpose of the study was to examine three different models of the effect of social support and how they correlate with racial discrimination, and psychological adjustment. The three models were:

1. The stress-buffering model, which predicts that social support would act as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological adjustment,
2. The support mobilization model, which suggests that social support is a mediating variable so that fewer symptoms of depression and greater life satisfaction result from discrimination; and

3. The support deterioration model, which also purports that social support is a mediating variable but suggests that due to the lack of social support, racial discrimination would have an adverse effect psychological well-being (Prelow et al.).

The study further confirmed the prevalence of perceived discrimination experienced by African Americans. Ninety-eight percent of the sample reported that within the previous year they had experienced an event they perceived to be discriminatory. The stress-buffering model was not supported in that social support was not the moderating variable that protected against perceived racial discrimination as the authors predicted. Furthermore, perceiving that one had experienced discrimination did not lead to symptoms of depression and or affect life satisfaction. The support mobilization model was not supported and failed to provide evidence for social support as a mediator in the relationship between depression and life satisfaction. Only the support deterioration model was supported. This suggests that when individuals have limited social support, the effect of perceived discrimination on psychological adjustment is greater. The less social support someone has is related to the increase in depressive symptomology and decreased life satisfaction (Prelow et al., 2006).

There is no denying the potential effect of racial injustices on the total well-being of African Americans. However, as noted by Harrell (2000) and Priest (1991) there are those who attempt to invalidate the impact the history of oppression has had on African Americans and take the stance of “blaming the victim”. Rawls (1999) asserted that a lack of consensus regarding what is just and unjust makes it difficult for members of society to agree on what is agreeable to each other; this lack of agreement causes conflict.

African American clients frequently perceive the cause of their psychological stressors to be oppressive societal forces and may discontinue therapy if they feel their concerns are not validated in the therapeutic process (Priest). Therefore, Harrell suggested that helping professionals be aware of the burden the history of oppression has placed on African Americans in order to best serve them. This awareness is a necessary component of social justice and advocacy.

How Social Justice and Advocacy Might Be Applied

The issue of social justice has had resurgence in the literature recently, as evidenced by special issues and articles dedicated to this area of study (See *Counseling Psychologist*, May 2003 issue; Constantine et al., 2007; Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Prilleltensky, 2001). In these articles, social justice is often discussed in relation to multicultural competencies. Vera and Speight (2003) posited that multiculturalism is central to social justice due to the pervasive system of oppression in the United States that maintains the inequities experienced by persons of color and other marginalized groups.

For psychology and counseling, the purpose of advocacy is to empower clients and promote changes in the sociopolitical structures that are oppressive and influence their lives (Toporek, 2000). This includes providing members of the legislature and those in administrative positions with the appropriate information needed to become informed policymakers in order to improve health care and access to these services (DeLeon, Loftis, Ball, & Sullivan, 2006; Safarjan, 2002). Psychologists and counselors must use their professional influence to create change. Following the model provided by Clifford Beers (1956, as cited in Kiselica & Robinson, 2001), one of the most prominent

advocates for the mentally ill, helping professionals must step outside of their comfort zones. Professionals should use their expertise and influence to garner support from policymakers, industry leaders, and influential persons regarding the importance of mental health, and the effectiveness of their profession in addressing mental illness (DeLeon, et al.; Safarjan; Toporek).

Psychologists and counselors must answer the challenge of Constantine et al. (2007) to implement both multicultural competence and social justice regarding their African American clients. Research such as that presented here is one way for professionals to become informed about the actual plight of African Americans. Once armed with this information psychologists and counselors must advocate for African Americans, and other oppressed groups.

Psychologists and counselors should also review the multicultural competencies for their professions and see how these can be applied in advocating and bringing about social justice for their clients. The need for action was originally recommended by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) “advocate specific strategies and issue a call for action regarding the implementation of multicultural standards” (p.477). Arredondo (1999) provided an outline in which she delineated how the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992) could be used as resources in tackling oppression and racism. Some of the recommendations suggested by Arredondo include mentoring professionals of different cultures than the professional, that professionals include the oppressive forces African Americans and other marginalized clients experience in the case conceptualization, and the promotion of policy changes through implementation of the Multicultural Competencies and participation in social

justice professional organizations. The reader is encouraged to review the article for further information. Psychologists and counselors should become knowledgeable about how the tenets of their profession may be used in serving their clients in advocacy and social justice, which can promote advocacy for their clients and the profession.

In order to be good advocates for their clients, psychologists and counselors must be informed. This information must then be put to use; psychologists and counselors may educate lawmakers and administrative leaders who make decisions regarding health care (Toporek, 2000) and inform them of the need for social justice for African Americans. Social justice requires that African Americans receive equality and impartiality in access to resources (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002). When speaking to these officials, sharing information which originated from the United States government may prove beneficial as it is likely to legitimate the findings. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health (2001) and the NIMH (1983) report may be useful tools in informing health care decision makers about the effects of racism and the history of oppression on the mental health of African Americans. The Surgeon General's report called for more research that examined the mental health of minorities. The NIMH report noted the prevalence of race-related stress in the number of African Americans who sought mental health treatment.

Gostin and Powers (2006) offer ways social justice may be used to change public policy. The authors note that a change is needed in public policy that would address the noticeable and oppressive disparities in health care. Gostin and Powers note that before this can take place those in power must be committed to the well-being and equal value of all its citizens. Psychologists and counselors can share with policy makers the direct

harm they have observed in their patients as a result of racism and the lasting effects of the history of oppression African Americans have endured.

In addition to advocating for the social justice of African Americans through educating and lobbying about their plight to lawmakers and health care decision makers, there are several other tasks psychologists and counselors can become engaged in to affect change. Kiselica and Robinson (2001) provide a framework for the skills and interventions mental health professionals need, and can engage in, while attempting to bring advocacy to life through social justice. Kiselica and Robinson note that several attributes and skills are necessary for mental health professionals to be effective in advocacy. These include an appreciation for the suffering of fellow human beings and dedication to the relief of such injustices, as well as effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The authors also recommend that providers have a capacity to embrace an appreciation for the impact various systems have on the clients' lives and be adept in the implementation of diverse interventions needed for individual, group, and organizational clients. Furthermore, Kiselica and Robinson advised that helping professionals interested in advocacy should be knowledgeable about the various technologies including the use of media, computer skills, and the internet, and proficiency in assessment and research skills.

It is a necessity that psychologists and counselors possess a tireless commitment to the disenfranchised, due to the burden such an undertaking can cause. For as cautioned by Kiselica and Robinson (2001), advocacy can be demanding work. Therefore, it is suggested that psychologists and counselors take on a cause, group or people that they can be passionate about. This writer hopes that there are psychologists and counselors

who have a heart for the plight of African American people; the impact of the history of oppression is real and has been devastating to their mental, physical and spiritual health.

Conclusion

This article began with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and it is fitting to end it with a quote from this advocate, Nobel peace prize winner, and Drum Major for Justice who peacefully sought equality, in the face of violent oppression, for all people but especially Black people. It is essential that the unjust experiences of African Americans be made known in order to eradicate the subtle and explicit oppressive practices they endure. For as King (1963) stated in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, "Injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured" (p. 6). However, in order for injustice to be cured for African Americans, there needs to be a clear understanding of what this group deems just and unjust. Their voices need to be heard regarding the meaning of justice and the impact oppression has had on those views. While there has been substantial investigation into the impact of oppression on African Americans, little research has examined how the pervasive experience of oppression impacts African Americans' justice perceptions. What is needed is a theory of justice that is inclusive of those who have been oppressed by the term. This would serve as a corrective experience; restorative justice in its truest sense.

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CHAPTER TWO

DEVELOPING A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS' JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS

Introduction

Historically, justice has been defined by the court system as the fair and proper administration of laws (Garner, 2004). Currently, a unified definition of justice across academic disciplines does not exist, due in part to the various ways in which justice is conceptualized (Tornbloom, 1992). The literature on justice usually includes a definition that relates to people getting what they deserve or are entitled to (Drew, Bishop, & Syme, 2002). Many scholars and researchers are not satisfied with this definition of justice and dispute it as being too simple (Mill, 1861; Reis, 1984). Mill refuted a standard definition of justice that would be universally applied due to his belief that each person's meaning for justice is based on individual preferences and experiences. Others believe justice as a concept is too complex to define (Reis; Tornbloom).Yet, many disciplines have attempted to tackle defining justice: anthropology, economics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology (Drew et al., 2002)

Rawls (1999) in his pivotal work *A Theory of Justice* asserted that justice is a right due to all, not to be given to few at the expense of many. His treatise sparked much of the debate regarding the notion of justice as fairness, and rekindled the interest in justice as a concept. Rawls declared that institutions and laws should be abolished or reformed that are unjust.

He maintained this position by asserting that individuals' primary virtues are justice and truth. Rawls further established his declaration of justice as a virtue by upholding justice as an inalienable right due to all that cannot be usurped by institutions or individuals.

The right of each person to justice and fair treatment has been established in such documents as the *Declaration of Independence*, but these rights are not evident in reality (Coates, 2004). In recent years, counseling psychology has focused on the issue of social justice. Mikula, Petri, and Tanzer (1990) asserted that "examples of situations and events that have elicited a sense of injustice can provide the beginning of a taxonomy of subjects or ordinary people's justice judgments and give a general idea as to the nature of lay conceptions of justice" (p.134). Pepitone and L'Armand (1996) suggested that future research focus on understanding what causes people to perceive just events in their own lives. Cvetkovich and Earle (1992) believed justice perceptions to be the result of everyday life events. Moreover, Drew et al. (2002) and Sampson (1986) asserted that personal justice perceptions are incomplete if they do not incorporate the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts in which the perceptions are made.

Akbar (1991) implored African American researchers, specifically, to commit themselves to the pursuit of "knowledge of the facts of ourselves, of our condition, and establishing principles for the restitution of ourselves and the amelioration of our condition" (p. 710). Wright and Littleford (2002) asserted that it is important to conduct research that will provide a lens through which to understand the humanistic experiences and perceptions that have an impact on ethnic identity. Helms (1990) and Cross (1991) also acknowledged that experiences with racism affect ethnic identity exploration. Individuals' experience of privilege and oppression affects their identity and shapes their

cognitions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Therefore, these experiences will affect how people determine what is just and unjust. This concept has garnered minimal interest in the literature and is an important issue worthy of further empirical study.

In a time period that has been marred by injustice against persons of color (Chisolm, 1999; Utsey, Bolden, & Brown, 2001), research is needed that examines the justice perceptions of such persons in order to fully understand the concept of justice that is inclusive of various experiences. As a person of African descent, understanding the justice perceptions of African Americans is especially important to this author. Furthermore, the author supports the charge given by Akbar for research that reflects the experience of African Americans from a perspective that does not pathologize those being studied and considers the historical, socio-cultural, and political struggles of African Americans in order to bring about justice.

The research following Lerner's (1965) Belief in a Just World (BJW), which has been simplified as good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people, has not always reflected the above assertion. The BJW fostered a body of research (See Furnham, 2003 for a review). Unfortunately, at times the research spawned by the BJW indicated a tendency towards blaming the victim or the disenfranchised for their conditions (Furnahm). Most of this research was conducted through questionnaire studies and did not examine personal justice perceptions, specifically, those of minorities and the disenfranchised, who were often targeted in the application of BJW literature (Furnham).

In their study which examined the differences in just world beliefs between ethnic groups, Calhoun and Cann (1994) noted that African American participants were less

likely to perceive the world and other people as compassionate in comparison to European Americans. Deutsch (1986) found that those who are disadvantaged have a greater sensitivity to perceptions of injustice than those who are privileged. Therefore, individuals who are oppressed are more likely to see the world as unjust.

Umberson (1993) reported that Blacks and those who are disenfranchised perceived the world as more just than Caucasians and others with privilege. These findings were inconsistent with BJW research previously reported regarding minorities and those who are disenfranchised as believing less in a just world than those of the majority culture and of higher socioeconomic status. Hunt (2000) and Umberson asserted that a high BJW among the disenfranchised may be a means to cope with the injustices they experience. More research is needed that examines the personal justice perceptions of African Americans in order to understand the meaning of these findings.

For exploratory research, the use of qualitative methodology can provide rich descriptions that add to the understanding of the concept being studied (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Mikula et al. (1990) suggested that the only way to obtain information on ordinary life unjust events is to employ open-ended questionnaire methods that require participants to recall personal experiences. There have been few qualitative studies that ask participants to describe their personal experiences of just and unjust events (Berry, Hill, & Brack, 2006; Mikula, 2003; Mikula et al.). With the exception of the Berry et al. study, there have been few studies which have examined the personal justice perceptions of African Americans. This gap in the literature has also been noted by Calhoun and Cann (1994).

Merchant and Dupuy (1996) stated that qualitative research is usually reserved for areas of study that are unknown or were not examined in an investigative fashion. Given the lack of empirical research regarding the justice perceptions of African Americans, a qualitative analysis of the concept is needed. The ethnographic study of African Americans' personal justice perceptions is important to further understanding this concept from the perspective of a historically oppressed group of people. Such research is needed to present the reality of the lived experiences of African Americans through rich descriptions (Merchant & Dupuy), in order to contribute to the understanding of African Americans' perceptions of justice.

Berry et al. (2006) provided a framework to build upon in terms of African Americans' personal justice perceptions. The study examined raw local secondary data, which Schensul et al. (1999) defined as data that has been collected previously and unanalyzed. The use of these data did not allow for member checking or other such credibility or dependability criteria. The study involved the examination of 135 (41 just and 94 unjust) written statements of just and unjust events of African American college students from a historically Black college in the southeastern United States. Participants in this study were randomly presented with one of two stimuli statements, one in which they were asked to describe a recent just or unjust event they recently experienced.

A unique finding occurred in 23 out of the 64 reported just events. The participants were instructed to write about a just event, yet provided statements that pertained to unjust events. The Berry et al. (2006) study found several unexpected results. The primary researcher expected that there would be explicit descriptions of events of racial discrimination for the unjust statements due to the prevalence of racial

discrimination African Americans experience, which has been documented in the literature (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003).

Additionally, the unexpected result of justice depicted as pride was surprising due to previous research findings that depict justice in terms of distributive justice, described as fairness or equity in the allocation of resources based on an input/output basis (Conner, 2003). Pride is not mentioned in the other common theories of justice such as procedural justice, which examines the methods used in the allocation of the resources, as well as affecting the process by giving “voice” to those who may be affected by the allocations (Thibaut & Walker, 1975); interactional justice, which focuses on providing a rationale for the allocations made and the treatment of the individuals affected throughout the course of the allocation procedures (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). Restorative justice focuses on correcting the damage that has been done and restoring the relationships among involved parties (Volpe & Strobl, 2005). It is possible that pride is an indication of the restorative justice the participants experienced. Due to these unexpected results and the inability to member-check the findings, Berry et al. (2006) suggested that further research be conducted to understand these findings, and further the knowledge of African Americans' justice perceptions utilizing in-depth interviews and focus groups to obtain depth to the data regarding this phenomenon.

The purpose of this study is to expound upon the work by Berry et al. (2006) and begin to develop a substantive theory of African Americans' justice perceptions through an examination of their experienced just and unjust events via semi- structured interviews and focus groups. Specifically, the present study was interested in: (1) How African

Americans define justice and injustice? (2) Does the history of oppression of African Americans in the United States have an affect on their justice perceptions? (3) How does African Americans' awareness of themselves as members of a minority group affect their justice perceptions?

Method

Research Design

Grounded theory (GT) guides this research and is based on the work of Glaser (1992) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). GT is an iterative process where theory emerges until saturation is met, indicating that new information is not evident from the process of constantly comparing the new data to the established codes and patterned themes (Fassinger, 2005; Glaser; Glaser & Strauss). This study consisted of two phases: (1) completion of the cognitive appraisal instrument and semi-structured interview; and (2) completion of focus group one (FG1) and focus group two (FG2).

Researcher-as-Instrument

Consistent with the principles of GT, reflexivity is recommended of the researcher (Morrow, 2005; Rennie, 2004; Yeh & Inman, 2007), as the researcher's awareness of herself as a cultural being may impact the data process, and ensuing outcomes of the study. As an African American woman who has suffered injustices, cognizant of my racial identity, and the history of oppression of African Americans in the United States, I am aware that these multiple ways of knowing may impact the co-construction of the data. Therefore, a research journal (Morrow) was kept in which expectations, biases, and ponderings at each point of data collection was documented (Fassinger, 2005). The journal was audited by a member of the research to confirm the unbiased research

process. Additionally, the journal provided another data source, which was a measure of reflexivity and triangulation.

The Research Team

The research team consisted of two female African American Master's level Counseling Psychology doctoral students and an African American female with a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology who conducted an audit of the analyses. Each member of the research team has experience conducting qualitative research.

Participants

The participants were African American undergraduate students, 20 years old and older from an urban culturally diverse southeastern university. There were eight participants for the semi-structured interviews who ranged in age from 20 to 29 years old (M = 22.75; SD = 3.45). Six of the participants were female and two were male. There were four African American undergraduate participants for each focus group. FG1 included three females and one male and FG2 included two females and two males. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 21 years old (M = 20.5; SD = 0.57) for FG1 and 21 to 33 years old (M = 25.5; SD = 5.25) for FG2. Participants received light snacks and a $10 gift card to a retail store for their participation in each phase of the study.

Procedure

Validity. The study was designed to reflect the constant comparative method inherent in GT in order to demonstrate the strengths of the various approaches (reflexivity, triangulation, auditing) undertaken to advance the reliability of the results (Fassinger, 2005; Morrow, 2005). Auditing was incorporated into the study to further reflect the rigor of the findings and included both peer debriefing and inquiry auditing

(Fassinger). The research team provided peer debriefing and the auditor reviewed all of the data to confirm that the procedures employed were in adherence to the study design (Fassinger). Credibility checks were also employed in FG1 when the participants were presented with the data from their individual interviews collectively in order to test whether the interpretations made by the researcher were consistent to the meaning of their statements (Morrow).

GT. The constant comparative coding process resulted in categorizations and connections between the data until saturation of the data occurred (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process occurs through open coding (giving a name to themes identified in the sentence or paragraph which served as the unit of analysis so that categories could be identified), axial coding (the process of identifying the relationships between the categories), and selective coding (identifying the overarching main category that relates to all others), while constantly comparing the data until saturation is met (Fassinger, 2005; Morrow, 2005). The participants described just events in terms of pride, achievement, reconciliation, vindication, and retribution (restorative justice). The themes that emerged as indicative of the participants unjust events were: discrimination, powerlessness, disrespect, and betrayal.

Consensus coding. Consensus coding (Fraser & Russell, 2000; Willms, et al., 1990) was the coding process employed in this study that resulted in the unanimous acceptance of the codes and themes by the research team members. The primary researcher taught the coding system to the female Counseling Psychology doctoral student. These team members individually coded the data and met after coding the first and fourth interviews, and after all the data was coded to review the coding system,

discuss discrepant codes, and operationally define the coding structure. Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) recommend having a process meeting to help verify the recursive process regarding how the codes emerged from the data and to enable an agreement among the raters. When there were questions about a code or discrepancies were noted in the data (i.e., participants contradicting previous statements made during the interview), a consensus was reached through discussing the context, meaning, and reviewing the relevance of the code to other related items (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Willms et al., 1990). This process helped to operationally define the coding system and determine at which point saturation was met.

Codebook. The codebook from the Berry et al. (2006) study was used as the basis of the coding system for the present study as it included a taxonomy of codes and operational definitions of African Americans justice perceptions. The codebook was modified as new data was added from the present study which confirmed or disconfirmed the findings from the Berry et al. study. For example, the codebook was modified when it became apparent that the participants of the present study described justice in terms of balance and fairness. The codebook from the Berry et al. study was modified to incorporate this definition regarding the themes of reconciliation, retribution, and vindication where appropriate. Additionally, the opportunity to follow-up with the participants allowed for a more in-depth exploration of their justice perceptions than possible in the previous study. As such, the codebook was modified to include the themes related to the current research questions which is new data and was not addressed in the previous study. The process of modifying the codebook continued until saturation was met. The researcher noted saturation of the data at interview five and continued to collect

new data (two individual interviews) to confirm that saturation was met. To further test this assertion, the researcher conducted an eighth individual interview following the second focus group, as a theoretical sample (Fassinger, 2005) to confirm that saturation had been met. Theoretical sampling is a significant method used in GT and is useful to avoid the tendency to have redundancy in the data caused by oversampling (Fassinger). The Codebook is included as Appendix A.

Sources of Data

Demographic questionnaire. The participants signed informed consent forms then provided information regarding their age, gender, race, marital status, part-time or full-time status, and classification within the university.

Cognitive appraisal instrument. The cognitive appraisal instrument, which was developed using Roseman's (1984) revised structural theory of cognitive determinants, was used to answer research question one. This appraisal theory was used in the Berry et al. (2006) study because its format allowed the researchers to investigate the relationship between specific types of events and perceptional/emotional reactions to that event (Roseman, 1991; Roseman & Evdokas, 2004). In order to repeat the research process from that study, and therefore generalize the findings, the Roseman appraisal instrument was completed by participants prior to the semi-structured interview.

The participants were asked to provide a written statement of a recent just and unjust event with an individual. The participants were asked to identify the emotion they felt as a result of the just or unjust event from a list of emotion words provided. They provided written statements of events they considered to be just and unjust, respectively. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the participants were provided light snacks while

the researcher reviewed their written accounts of just and unjust events. The questionnaires were reviewed to determine if emergent or confirmatory data to the Berry et al. (2006) study were evident in the text. The data derived from the written statements, whether confirmatory to the findings of the previous coding, or discrepant, was used in the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews. Due to the dearth of literature documenting the use of qualitative methodology to ascertain the justice perceptions of African Americans and the factors associated with these perceptions, it seemed most appropriate to use semi-structured interviews as a data source to obtain this information. Schensul et al. (1999) noted the benefit of using semi-structured interviews to categorize variables during the formation of the model so that relationships can be identified among the factors. Other authors have also supported the use of semi-structured interviews to reduce the possibility of imposing the researcher's bias on the findings (Morrow, 2005).

The questions were developed with the lack of research literature in mind, as well as to obtain data that might fill in the gaps of the Berry et al. (2006) study. Due to the limitation of the Berry et al. study based on the lack of opportunity for recursivity, there were a few questions that the researchers could not answer, which have been previously discussed. The questions were also developed so that the researcher could obtain the participants' input regarding the research literature on the BJW as the Berry et al. study was in part based on this research. Also, presenting the participants with these findings allowed the researcher to gain the participants' perspectives on the conflicting results regarding African Americans in recent studies. Having the participants of this study

provide their assessment of the data might further aid in understanding the factors and variables that guide African Americans' justice perceptions.

The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher the opportunity to obtain the participants' input about whether the taxonomy of codes was consistent with their perspectives, which enabled the researcher to continue to engage in the constant comparative method. The participants were asked about the statements they described regarding just and unjust events from the cognitive appraisal instrument. They were also asked questions related to the research questions and presented with data about African Americans and the BJW (Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Miller, 1978) in order to gather information about the variables regarding their justice perceptions. This method of collecting data -- trying to understand the meaning of the data while simultaneously analyzing it and comparing and contrasting it to other data -- is crucial to the recursive design of this approach to qualitative research (Morrow, 2007), and to GT (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) specifically.

The semi-structured interviews provided in-depth opportunities to explore the concept of justice; these concepts of justice received additional follow up in the focus groups, thus remaining true to the iterative nature of the study design. The eighth interview was conducted after the second focus group in order to present all of the collected data to the participants and ensure the consistency of the findings. As saturation had been met, the purpose of this final interview was to apply a method of theoretical sampling as a way to triangulate the data, strengthen the findings, and substantiate the theory (Fassinger, 2005).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants after they completed the cognitive appraisal instrument in order to answer the research questions. It took approximately 40 to 55 minutes to conduct the interviews. The semi-structured interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The complete list of questions is included (Appendix B).

Focus group interviews. Krueger and Casey (2000) noted the effectiveness of focus groups in assessing perceptions, cognitions, and feelings pertaining to various issues and circumstances. The use of two focus groups was employed to: (1) provide an opportunity to member check the findings with the semi-structured interview participants and (2) provide another data source in answering the research questions with different samples, affording an opportunity for discrepant and emergent data to be collected through triangulation.

Data derived from the first focus group and semi-structured interviews were presented to the second focus group, which is consistent with the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1992) and essential to the development of a substantive theory. Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi, and Borgatti (1999) also note the usefulness of focus group interviews to obtain the participants' reactions from previous research. The focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The complete list of questions is included (Appendix C).

The participants of FG1 completed the cognitive appraisal instrument and semi-structured interview during phase one and were presented with the findings of the collective interviews from the seven interviews in order to verify the accuracy and meaning of the data constructed by the researcher. Members of both FG1 and FG2 were

also asked to provide responses related to the research questions and were presented with prior research findings about African Americans and the BJW in order to gather information about their justice perceptions. The dynamics between group members led to the recursive process of simultaneous data collection and data analysis. This happened at times when group members contradicted themselves from either earlier statements provided in the individual interviews or earlier during the focus group interview (Schensul, LeCompte, et al., 1999). The length of FG1 was approximately 120 minutes. FG2 met for approximately 100 minutes. During FG2 the researcher presented the key findings to this group to solicit their perceptions, as well as to ask them to answer the research questions. This was done so their responses could be compared to those previously collected.

A process observer, the female African American master's degree-level researcher, assisted in this data collection process as another means of reducing subjectivity. She took notes of the observed dynamics between group members in both focus groups and made comments to the primary researcher after the focus groups regarding the researcher's interaction with participants and how this may have impacted the recursive process. She kept a journal of her reactions and biases that were used to assess her reflexivity in the observations she made about the focus group members and process of the experience (Morrow, 2005). The process observer, her notes of the focus group interviews, and her journal are all sources of data and provide further opportunities for triangulation.

Analysis

Morrow (2005) noted the importance of the researcher's immersion in the data

analysis phase, which begins during the data gathering process. After each interview and focus group the researcher documented common themes and any discrepant data. This is noted as the constant comparative method, simultaneous data collection and data analysis in GT. The analysis included data from the transcripts of the eight individual interviews, both focus group interviews, the statements taken from the cognitive appraisal instrument completed by eight participants, the researcher's notes from the abovementioned interviews, as well as the process observer's notes from each focus group.

The individual interviews resulted in 157 pages of transcribed text, with an average of 19.62 pages. The first focus group interview contained a total of 44 pages and FG2 yielded 25 pages of transcribed text. The total number of pages analyzed was 246, which included the written statements of the cognitive appraisal instrument. The analysis resulted in the development of 51 codes. The code frequencies are included in Table 1. The analysis of the data resulted in several themes and patterns which identified how African Americans define justice and the variables impacting their justice perceptions of justice.

The data analysis for this study began with the codebook from the Berry et al. (2006) study as a guide. The codebook was modified as previously described. The coding system was used to analyze data derived from all data sources in the current study examining the events African Americans perceived as just and unjust, in order to further develop the substantive theory of African Americans justice perceptions. As such the data analysis was a constant process of comparing each new source of data against this taxonomy of codes.

In accordance with the constant comparative method and GT, as patterns became

evident in the data, themes and categories were linked and merged to reduce the duplication of meaning in the codes and ensuing codebook (Fassinger, 2005). The themes from each proceeding interview (individual and group) were then applied in the next interview; this is again a reflection of the dual data collection and data analysis associated with the constant comparative method (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Morrow, 2005). As new themes were developed and continued to be linked and merged with other codes, the existing codebook was formed. The data analysis also included a review of the researcher's journal and interview notes to identify biases or expectations from each interview that would impact the data, as well as the emergence of codes that either confirmed or disconfirmed it.

Results

The purpose of the current study was to explore how African American undergraduate college students perceive justice and to understand the variables that impact how they determine what is just and unjust. The participants identified several factors which influenced their justice perceptions. Although there was overlap between their awareness of the African American history of oppression (research question two) in the United States and their identity as a minority group member (research question three), there were also differences between these variables. Another overarching central theme which affected how African Americans perceive justice was their spiritual/religious identity. Despite the shared influence of these variables, they will be discussed separately in order to provide an accurate depiction of the complexity of factors involving African American justice perceptions. The data will be discussed in relation to the research questions they represent.

Research Question One: How African Americans Define Justice and Injustice

The participants described justice in terms of the dichotomy of justice and injustice. The definitions they provided involved moral justice versus legal justice, fairness, vindication, and balance/harmony. Injustice was defined as unfair, unequal, discrimination, and immoral. A discussion of these identified themes related to the definitions of justice is described next, followed by the factors which influence these definitions, their relevant patterns, and quotes from the data which illustrate them.

Dichotomy of Justice and Injustice

All of the participants made multiple references to the dichotomy of justice when asked to provide a definition of justice and injustice. This was evident in a number of definitions provided for justice that included some component of restorative justice, having endured an injustice that was later corrected, as opposed to seeing justice as fair or equal. The participants also explicitly noted the relationship between justice and injustice and often described how what they perceived to be just was related to what was unjust. All but one participant from the individual interviews defined justice in relation to injustice. A female participant defined justice as, “If some wrong has been done to someone or and then it’s corrected by someone else then I feel that justice has been served.”

Justice

Morality and balance. All of the participants provided definitions of justice as it related to morality and a sense of balance or harmony. These were the two main themes regarding the definitions of justice. Under these themes, there are the subthemes of moral justice and power which apply to morality and fairness, retribution, and vindication

which apply to balance/harmony. A male participant from FG2 described justice as a moral, egalitarian concept, “Human rights do kind of equate to justice. See, so that if you want everybody on an even plain to receive their just due.” The participants described the difference between moral justice and legal justice, and often used this discrepancy to determine if justice was served based on morality. This is evident by a statement from a man who participated in FG2,

> Yeah because slavery used to be legal but who’s to say that was moral so it’s already up to again it’s according to whoever’s perception it is because I’m sure the people who are making laws, they owned slaves and they didn’t see a problem with it.

Power (immoral). The immorality of the social construction of justice based on the definitions of those in power was noted in FG2 and all but two of the individual interviews. In response to the Just World Hypothesis, a female participant stated,

> So, they say this is what we call justice and this is what we call injustice and who is there to debate that? Or to define those things and it’s as so though they’ve defined it for us and blanketed us and expect us to adopt the idea that people do get what they deserve because we know that they don’t. …like I said heterosexual white males is the person that’s going to define that and that’s kind of the head of hierarchy and everything else trickles down and some people are so far down- on the ladder, that, that it’s unfair.

Fairness and retribution. A female participant’s definition of justice included the concepts of fairness, vindication, and retribution (restorative justice), “So I guess just

would be fairly- fair treatment and also when some kind of vindication or reparation, some kind of restoring…"

Injustice

Discrimination, immorality, and unfairness. All of the participants identified injustice as having some element of discrimination, immorality, and unfairness. This was noted in all of the individual and group interviews. Current events and research findings presented to the participants resonated with them as evident in their responses. The following statement from a female participant captures the aforementioned definitions of injustice in reference to Don Imus, a shock jock radio personality who made derogatory remarks about the 2007 National semi-finalist Rutgers women's basketball team,

> The thing is that he exercised his First Amendment right, however, he impeded upon someone else's freedoms by slandering them…It's illegal to publicly defame another person and he did that to an entire basketball team…because not only is it illegal, but it's just immoral to on public radio call someone such a name

Factors Which Influence African Americans' Justice Perceptions

The participants noted several factors which influenced their justice definitions and how they perceived justice. The most prominent factors noted as instrumental in the determinations made by these participants when perceiving whether they experienced justice or injustice were: spirituality/religion, racial identity, media, gender and class.

Spirituality/religion. Spirituality/religion was the dominant theme identified by all of the participants as having a direct impact on their justice perceptions. This concept was identified throughout the data as the guide used in determining what is just and unjust. One male participant stated that spirituality influenced his justice perceptions with this

general premise, “Well, because I based it on do unto others as you have them do unto you.” Another male participant noted that his religious beliefs held an ultimate justice, that justice would be executed regardless of the time that elapsed, or whether or not he witnessed it, which was prevalent throughout the findings, “Well, I believe that there is a punishment and a reward for everything even if it doesn’t show up in this world.”

Racial identity. Racial identity was discussed as the second most dominant factor impacting the justice perceptions of the participants. It was discussed by all of the participants throughout the interviews. As this variable is discussed later as a broader research question, it will be discussed only briefly here. Participants discussed the influence race had on their justice perceptions as it related to the prevalence of injustices against African Americans and their experiences of discrimination.

A female participant provided this statement about the prevalence of racism and being racially profiled because she was driving her mother’s Acura,

> To me that was such an unnecessary stop. Like, so the only thing I came up with was race. So I think in circumstances like that, it’s just that race is so prevalent in our society, well, to minorities and I think racism is so much more subtle now.

Another female participant also noted the prevalence of being discriminated against because of race and the hypervigilance undertaken to ensure that she is not discriminated against, “…[You] always have to make sure you’re being treated—that’s how I feel like I’m—it’s like a second job to make sure that you’re not being treated unfairly…”

Media. The influence of the media on the participants’ justice perceptions was discussed by seven of the eight participants who completed semi-structured interviews, as well as in both focus groups. The participants felt that there were more negative

portrayals of African Americans in the media than any other racial or ethnic group. They explicitly stated that the media perpetuated stereotypes about African Americans which added to the injustices the group as a whole experienced. A male participant of FG2 stated, “I think what we find is even people who do obey the law…the whole population of Black people in America aren’t criminals but we’re criminalized in the media.” The participants identified the news, movies, and hip hop as outlets within the media which affected how they perceived what was just and unjust. Regarding the usage of “the N word”, a female participant stated, “…if you do have people that are in the limelight that are on television, on the radio, in movies, that are still doing it, then people are going to think it’s okay…” The media was also noted for being too influential in what society focused on and perceived as just or unjust.

Gender and class. Gender and class have been combined in this discussion because the participants often spoke of these concepts in relation to each other. Six participants referenced gender in their individual interviews and class was mentioned in five individual interviews. Both concepts were discussed in FG1 and FG2. The participants often spoke about gender and class together, as illustrated by a male participant of FG2 who denied race was the most significant factor influencing justice perceptions, “I think you have to factor – race as well as class and gender.” A female participant described the fight for justice due to her identities as an African American and a woman,

> Like me being an African American woman I have to get over, I have to fight for my race, then I have to fight for you know, for like gender because African

> Americans like in the workforce are paid less than other minorities and people of European descent. And then women get paid less than men.

Research Question Two: Awareness of the History of Oppression and Its Affect

The participants were presented with the vague prompt of, "Can you tell me what history you are aware of for African Americans in this country?" The identified themes included discrimination, attempts to look for alternative explanations for the unjust experience, the tendency for some African Americans to use slavery as an excuse, and the impact of just and unjust events on their psychological well-being.

Discrimination

The participants discussed their experience with discrimination as it related to their awareness of the history of oppression that African Americans have endured in the United States. All of the participants identified slavery as the beginning of oppression for their ancestors. One female participant acknowledged this history in her own family, "My, I think my great-grandmother was a sharecropper, so she's like the next step up from slavery, so I'm very aware." Another female participant described the effects of slavery,

> It has taken away and separated our families and just with me personally being light-skinned it ties into so many different factors because we were just…we were taught to divide. We were divided and conquered so it was light against dark, and as well as the fact that with my family it was tainted because I am light-skinned and my great-great grandmother, I believe, was raped by her slave master. So, it just has a big emotional part from our history. It really does affect us, and it also is the lack of understanding of our white counterparts.

Attempts to Look for Alternative Explanations for the Unjust Experience

Half of the respondents of the individual interviews stated that due to the awareness of the history of oppression they often sought alternative explanations when confronted with discrimination. This theme was also noted in FG1. The participants stated that in an attempt to be fair, they preferred to process all of the information so as not to jump to any conclusions that the experience was due to their race. This statement from a male participant illustrates this point, “Yeah, I know I go out of my way to be fair all the time too.” Other participants also noted the benefits they derived by seeking alternative explanations to their race regarding unjust situations. During FG1, a female participant stated,

> I mean, I don't want to attribute everything to my race just because, for one, it’s not comforting to think it's always because I’m Black because that's something that's not going to change. So if I go into every situation you think that everything happens to you because I'm Black. I mean, really there's no motivation to strive because I'll always be Black.

Slavery as an Excuse

Six participants in the individual interviews noted that they felt some African Americans used slavery or other oppressive experiences as an excuse for not succeeding. This theme was also discussed in FG1. Five of the respondents who endorsed this belief respected the value of this history yet did not approve of the inaction or lack of motivation they observed in some African Americans. This female participant stressed that holding onto slavery impeded progress,

> I think that one thing that hurts us is, you gotta know where you came from or know what was going on behind you to understand how to move forward- but African Americans, or Blacks holding onto the whole slavery thing, oftentimes makes it hard to move forward because there's such a focus to looking back to what happened, what happened, what happened- but you know, what I say about my generation- we were not slaves.

Another female participant stated,

> I want to say that some African-Americans use it as an excuse, use oppression as an excuse, not to say that it isn't—it wasn't wrong and that it isn't wrong to be oppressed and to have been oppressed, however, there is a difference between recognizing something that was a horrible act and recognizing that we were oppressed and there was a distinct difference in just making an excuse for not wanting to do better for yourself…

Impact of Just and Unjust Events on Psychological Well-being

All but one of the participants reported that experiencing just and unjust events had an impact on their psychological well-being. They endorsed feeling that unjust events had a longer lasting effect than just events. The following quote from a female participant depicts this sentiment, "When something bad happens, I like dwell on it, like a lot. And it really gets me down and it affects like other things that I do." Another female participant described a sense of hope when she experienced just events, "But it does make you feel as if the world can change when you are treated justly or you see that people are fighting for the same ultimate goal."

Research Question Three: Affect of Identity as Minority Group Member

The participants described their racial identity as a significant factor regarding their justice perceptions. The factors which impacted their justice perceptions in relation to their racial identity are: racial discrimination, receiving unjust treatment from other African Americans, and the influence of spirituality or religion.

Racial Discrimination

The participants reported that encountering racial discrimination affected their racial identity development. One female participant described how her identity as an African American woman was affected after moving from a predominantly African American urban community to a predominantly Caucasian suburban community,

> …when I moved from [county named] to [city named]…I was the only Black…I mean it was all Black. Moving to [city named] I was the only Black. I talked different; I looked different, just my whole personality was different, and I was called a nigger.

A male participant described his experience of racial profiling which impacted his racial identity,

> …I didn't break any traffic laws and then, you know, I had on a ball cap and I have dreadlocks, you know, the whole thing and I was like, okay. So as soon as he came to the window I was like, excuse me, sir, did I do anything wrong? Like why did you pull me over basically and he just ignored the question…

Discrimination from Other African Americans

Four participants from the individual interviews described receiving unjust treatment from other African Americans as having an impact on their justice perceptions and identity as a minority group member. This was also discussed in FG1 and FG2. Some

participants noted that if members of their own group mistreated them that they had to re-assess how they perceived what was just. The following statement from a male participant illustrates this point,

It was the Black people, I mean, so like most of the situations that I can think of in my life, it was Black people being unjust and so if the Black people are being unjust to other Black people, then that makes me, I mean, that makes me look inside myself and I guess, try to be more understanding of other people, because I don't want to be that kind of person and I don't want to be the person that's just hating on other people just because they're like me.

A female participant described her sense of hopelessness as a minority group member due to the communication style she observed in younger African Americans,

> Usually when I'm out and I'm around a group of younger African-Americans and "niggas" flying around so much and 'I can't believe that bitch said this' and the whole tone of the voice changes. I kind of just hang my head, like, it would take me so long to get them to understand what they're doing and what they're saying to one another…

Influence of Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality was noted as a central factor that influenced how the participants perceive themselves as minority group members and impacted their justice perceptions. As this factor was discussed previously, the focus here is the relationship between spirituality and racial identity as the most salient factors impacting the participants' justice perceptions. The participants in the individual interviews reported spirituality as having a greater impact on their justice perceptions than their racial identity.

A female participant of FG2 noted the importance of spirituality/religion for African Americans, as well as the belief in ultimate justice, “I think at the core most Black people have a spiritual base…we still have that belief in that we’ll be ok, that eventually with time, once we go to heaven and meet Jesus…” The participants indicated that essentially both identities as African Americans and spiritual persons impacted their justice perceptions. A female participant from FG1 stated, “I think race plays a big part and then I think spirituality could be coping.” Another female participant stated, “My spiritual beliefs kick in when I determine how I’m going to act…”

Discussion

The present study sought to understand the personal experiences of African Americans’ justice perceptions and the factors which influence these perceptions. The process of having the participants define justice and injustice served two functions: (1) it provided the participants a “voice” in being able to construct the meaning of a term that at times has been used to oppress people of color; and (2) it provided the participants an opportunity to construct the meaning of justice for African Americans. This is important as there is a lack of consensus in the literature as to the meaning of justice, as well as the lack of personal justice perceptions of African Americans (Drew et al., 2002).

Regarding the first research question, a surprising finding was observed in the participants’ focus on restorative justice in their definitions of justice. The historical oppression experienced by African Americans (Coates, 2004), as well as the prevalence (Swim et al., 2003) of racial injustices may be the reason for this finding. Several authors have noted the need for reparations for African Americans due to the history of oppression experienced by this group (Chisolm, 1999; Coates, 2004). The participants

definitions related to restorative justice may indicate support for reparations. Further, their belief that atonement and the restoration of relationships are needed in the U.S. between the races is important for race relations and should be examined in future research. Another interesting finding was the participants' tendency to describe justice as a dichotomy, as indicated by their consistent definition of the relationship of justice to injustice, rather than simply fairness or equality. This finding is inconsistent with the existing literature (Furnham & Procter, 1989) that supports the separate dimensionality of justice and injustice.

Another interesting finding was the consensus regarding the negative affect the media has on African Americans. This finding supports the assertion by Winant (1998) that issues of race are common in the media, impacting American culture and politics. It should be noted that during the time that the data was collected there were multiple high profile news stories in the media reflecting discrimination against African Americans.

The participants' definition of justice as moral fairness is akin to the theory of justice espoused by Rawls (1999). The participants' definitions of injustice are similar to the concept of social justice, where individuals seek to end oppressive systems and bring about fairness and equality for all (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002). Consistent with the theory of justice espoused by Rawls (1999), the participants noted a distinction between moral justice and legal justice, noting that what is legal is not always just or fair. This distinction has also been noted by Coates (2006). The frequent reference to a prominent legal case in the state of Georgia, that of Genarlow Wilson, an African American young man who received a ten year sentence for having consensual sex with a 15 year old girl when he was 17 years old was often discussed to illustrate this point (Scott, 2007).

Spirituality and racial identity were identified as having the most shared influence in the participants' justice perceptions. Consistent with the current literature (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006), the participants spiritual beliefs served as a form of problem-solving in order to make meaning of the situation, gain control, and receive comfort. All of the participants described a belief in ultimate justice which has been noted by Maes (as cited in Furnham, 2003) and reflects the salience of spiritual beliefs in justice perceptions. The participants stated that they were frequently reminded of their minority status through discriminatory acts and described a process whereby their experiences with injustices reminded them of past discrimination so that discrimination was a pervasive experience for them. Utsey et al. (2001) define this constant encounter with oppressive situations and race-related stress as psychic violence and note that this violence is enmeshed in the psyche of African Americans. The participants attempted to ward against this psychic violence by holding an optimistic perspective which Sethi and Seligman (1993) assert is a factor in religiosity. Despite this attempt at optimism, the participants did not believe that they would experience justice in their lifetimes.

In regards to the second research question, an important finding was the participants' attempts to look for alternative explanations when confronted with injustices. This finding is important as it disputes the criticism associated with perceived discrimination that African Americans are "too sensitive" or go out of their way to look for discrimination (Broman, Mavaddat, & Hsu, 2000). Crosby (1984) asserts this intention of fairness reaction can be a way of coping with the pervasive experience of oppression. The process of seeking alternatives to race-related stress is supported in the literature and indicates that minorities exert large amounts of time and energy on race-

related stress (Feagin, 1991). Pierce (as cited in Harrell, 2000) has noted that the stress associated with processing the event is often in excess of the stress of the actual event itself. This is consistent with the participants'. The hypervigilance associated with the stance of being constantly alert and the frequent experience of discrimination, as well as the resultant stress response may be associated with hypertension and heart disease, which African Americans have disproportionately high rates of compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Additionally, the participants acknowledged the impact of slavery and oppression on African American culture but they did not want that history to be used as an excuse for not being motivated to achieve. The participant's identification of slavery as the beginning of oppression for African Americans is consistent with the literature regarding the impact of slavery on African Americans psychological health (Akbar, 1984). Clarke (as cited in Allen & Bagozzi, 2001) has noted the psychological devastation of slavery on African Americans and postulated that it is the defining event which has formed the mentality of today's African Americans. Some researchers consider historical oppression of African Americans to be the cause for inequities in American society (Steinberg, 1995).

With regards to the third research question, an important finding was the participants' rejection of race as the most prominent factor regarding their justice perceptions. They noted the importance of spirituality and class as key factors in assessing justice. This finding does not support the existing literature regarding race as the single most important factor in justice perceptions (Hunt, 1996). An interesting finding included the creation of a justice perception by the participants that incorporated

both spirituality and race as equally important. This unique finding further adds to the development of the theory. The participants stated that their justice perceptions were first filtered through their identity as a minority group member and their response to the event was based on their spiritual identity. This type of religious problem-solving and coping is consistent with the literature (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000; Willis, 2007).

Consistent with the literature on the various racial identity models (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990), the participants noted that their experiences of discrimination and observation of the disparate treatment of Caucasians and African Americans made them aware of their minority status. Despite the salience of their racial identity, the participants struggled to identify the most important factor regarding their justice perceptions as evidenced by the contradictory statements made during the interviews. This phenomenon may be indicative of the favorable group identity noted by Tajfel (as cited in Allen & Bagozzi, 2001), indicating the difference between a strong racial or ethnic identity and the salience of religion and spirituality as a belief system (Carone & Barone, 2001), or religious problem-solving and coping (Pargament, et al., 2000; Willis, 2007). This cognitive dissonance may also reflect lower stages of racial identity development (Jefferson & Caldwell, 2002) and should be explored in future research.

Despite the limited number of participants for the present study, the researcher is confident in the results and ensuing generalizability of the findings as the coding structure for this study was based on a previous study with a larger sample size. Furthermore, the findings for the present study are similar to those noted by Berry et al. (2006). The participants from the Berry et al. study frequently described justice in terms of restorative justice in depicting a recent just or unjust event they recently experienced.

The themes of ultimate justice and spirituality were also noted by the participants from the previous study regarding their justice perceptions. Similar to the participants from the previous study, the participants noted that when confronted with unjust events that they attributed to their race, they experienced emotions such as frustration and anger. Future research is needed to continue the development of the theory of African Americans' justice perceptions as this research sought to provide a foundation upon which to further develop the theory.

Suggestions for future research

Further research should continue to explore African Americans' justice perceptions in order to gain further awareness of the importance of spirituality/religion to this group. This will allow for greater understanding of the richness of this factor and the important functions it has in the lives of African Americans. Future researchers should further explore the dichotomous relationship between justice and injustice as described by the participants in this study. Future research should employ qualitative methodology to explore the meaning of restorative justice for African Americans in understanding their justice perceptions. Future research should also be conducted with mixed methodology to further explore the interaction of racial identity, justice perceptions, and cognitive dissonance. Future researchers should examine the relationship between racial identity and spirituality as a coping resource in determining justice perceptions. Also, future research should focus on African Americans who have not been exposed to higher education. Many of the participants in this sample referenced how they gained information from their college courses which directly impacted their justice perceptions and their racial identity. Future research examining the justice perceptions of African

Americans should explore gender differences among this group. African American males have historically been viewed as aggressive and deemed a threat to society. Exploring the differences in African American males' justice perceptions compared to those of African American females might illustrate the weight of oppression African American males experience in the United States.

Implications

This research fills a gap in the literature regarding the personal experience of African Americans' justice perceptions. Additionally, it provides a taxonomy and definitions in which to add to the understanding of how this group perceives justice. The present study illustrates the complexity of African Americans' justice perceptions that are steeped in a sociocultural history of oppression. The prominent themes of spirituality identity, identity as a member of a minority group, and having an awareness of the historical oppression of African Americans all had a significant impact on how justice was defined. These multiple ways of being and knowing were intertwined and therapists working with African American clients would be remiss in not attending to the complexities of these identities.

The present study demonstrated the importance of spirituality/religion to African American clients. Due to the core value present in spirituality for African American clients, it is important that psychologists and counselors appropriately incorporate this aspect of the client's identity into the therapeutic environment. Also, the present study suggests that social justice and advocacy are further needed to reduce the effects of the oppressive forces of society. The definitions of injustice provided by the participants of this study further demonstrate the need for social justice.

The participants of the present study offered their own implications for mental health professionals working with African American clients. They expressed that everyone has a personal responsibility to effect change regarding the oppressive forces that continue to subjugate those who are marginalized. Their suggestions for effecting change are: to learn about African Americans, to not assume that any one person can speak for an entire race of people, to not impose one's own values or norms onto African American clients as this would be another example of oppressing the individual, and to be aware of how the past effects the present (slavery, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights).

Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of the present study. The researcher acknowledges that research is never entirely objective and value-free. The researcher also notes that the sample for this study is not ideal. However, due to financial constraints, the researcher was unable to continue collecting data for the present study. Despite the small number of participants enrolled in the study, saturation of the data was met as this was a follow-up study that used the coding scheme from a previous study.

A limitation of the present study is that data was collected from one urban university in the Southeast and therefore caution should be made in extrapolating these findings to African Americans from other regions. As the data was collected from an area commonly referred to as the "Bible Belt", the beliefs of individuals in this limited geographical area may be different from those in other areas of the country. Regarding geographical location, an awareness of the history of oppression experienced by African Americans in the South may have affected their justice perceptions.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to begin the formulation of a substantive theory of how African Americans define justice, and to learn about the factors involved in their justice perceptions for use in practice, research, and advocacy. Additionally, this research empowered the participants to give voice to their experience and to provide the implications they considered salient to this research. As such, this research can be seen as a social justice tool in that it brings awareness to the plight of a historically oppressed group in order to create change. Other social scientists are encouraged to view their research as a possible form of social justice and advocacy in order to reduce the oppressive barriers which add to the distress of African American clients. Furthermore, this research helps to fill a gap in the literature regarding African Americans' justice perceptions.

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TABLE 1

Code Frequencies

Code	Frequency
AWARHXOPP	10
BALJUST	10
COPEREL	10
DISCRIMRACID	10
DISCRIMINJ	10
EFFCHANGE	10
EXPRACJP	10
FAIRJUST	10
IDMINMEM	10
IMPRELJP	10
IMPRELRACID	10
MORAL	10
PREVINJUST	10
RACIDJP	10
RELSPIRIT	10
RESTJUST	10
UNEQUALU	10
UNFAIRTXU	10

BJWAAA<	10
MEDIA	10
B JWDAA>	9
EFFINJUST	9
IMPIJPSYCHWB	9
PERSRESP	9
AARI	8
DICHJUST	8
EQUALTX	8
LEGAL JUSTICE	8
SLAVEXCUS	8
EFFED	7
POWDEFINE	7
IMMORAL	6
GENDER	6
UNJTXAA	6
ALTEXP	5
BARJUST	5
CLASS	5
COMMUN	5
EFFJUST	5
ELEMJUST	5
HIPHOP	5
IMPJPSYCHWB	5

SOCCONSTRUCT	5
BLACK	4
COPEBJW	4
FORGIV	4
NWORD	4
SOUTH	4
JUMPCONCL	3
HARJUST	2
PRISON	2

APPENDIX A

Codebook

Code: AARI

Description of African American racial identity(born in America but can trace roots to Africa)

Code: ALTEXP

Reference to seeking alternative explanations to experiences of injustice

Code: AWARHXOPP

Reference to an awareness of the history of oppression

Code: BALJUST

Reference to balance as justice

Code: BARJUST

Reference to barriers to justice or effecting change

Code: BJWAAA<

Reference to agreement with BJW hypothesis or BJW research findings

Code: B JWDAA>

Reference to disagreement with BJW hypothesis or BJW research findings, based more on experience with discrimination

Code: BLACK

Description of racial identity as Black or Black American

Code: CLASS

Reference to class or SES

Code: COMMUN

Reference to importance of communication in (talking about racism, educating children about racism and oppression, notice nonverbal cues)

Code: COPEBJW

Reference to rationale why members of the Majority and African Americans would BJW

Code: COPEREL

Reference to religion and spirituality as a coping resource

Code: DICHJUST

Reference to the dichotomous relationship of justice and injustice

Code: DISCRIMINJ

Reference to discrimination as injustice

Code: DISCRIMRACID

Reference to discrimination in terms of affecting racial identity

Code: EFFCHANGE

Reference to how to effect change (Arts, elected officials, unification of African Americans, vote/voting process, exposure to other cultures)

Code: EFFED

Reference to the effect of education or classes on the awareness of the history of oppression, justice perceptions, and racial identity

Code: EFFINJUST

Reference to the effect of injustice (resentment, experience it longer, anger)

Code: EFFJUST

Reference to the effect of justice (such as achievement, pride, and satisfaction)

Code: ELEMJUST

Reference to elements of justice (consistent, measurable to action, fluid, reciprocity, etc)

Code: EQUALTX

Reference to equal treatment in definition of justice

Code: EXPRACJP

Reference to the experience of racism and its affect on justice perceptions

Code: FAIRJUST

Reference to definition of justice as fairness

Code: FORGIV

Reference to forgiving oppressors (can’t blame them, how raised)

Code: GENDER

Reference to gender

Code: HARJUST

Reference to harmony as justice

Code: HIPHOP

Reference to hip hop and its impact on racial identity and how others perceive African Americans

Code: IDMINMEM

Reference to awareness of identity as a minority group member

Code: IMMORAL

Reference to immorality of injustice (strips of human rights, defined by those in power)

Code: IMPJPSYCHWB

Reference to affect of justice on psychological well-being (good, happy, pride)

Code: IMPIJPSYCHWB

Reference to affect of injustice on psychological well-being (angry, frustrated, feel ignored, powerless)

Code: IMPRELJP

Reference to the affect of religion/spirituality on justice perceptions (belief in punishments, rewards, ultimate justice)

Code: IMPRELRACID

Reference to the affect of religion and spirituality on racial identity

Code: JUMPCONCL

References to African Americans jumping to conclusions regarding perceiving injustice (see racism, injustice where there isn't any)

Code: LEGAL JUSTICE

Reference to legal justice

Code: MEDIA

Reference to the affect of the media (negative portrayal of Blacks, responsible for prevalence of injustices) and current events (Genarlow Wilson, Pettaway Brothers, S. Atlanta elderly woman killed by police, Imus, Katrina, Shequanna Cotton, VA Tech)

Code: MORAL

Reference to moral justice

Code: NWORD

Reference to the negative affect of the use of the word nigger or nigga used in the media and the African American community

Code: PERSRESP

Reference to every individual's personal responsibility to effect change

Code: POWDEFINE

Reference to the belief that those in power define what is just and unjust (immoral

Code: PREVINJUST

Reference to the prevalence of injustices

Code: PRISON

Reference to the prison system (most often as modern day slavery)

Code: RACIDJP

Reference to the affect of one's racial identity on justice perceptions

Code: RELSPIRIT

Reference to religion, spirituality, Christianity, Karma

Code: RESTJUST

Reference to elements of restorative justice (restoration/restore, retribution, validated, vindicated, atone, correcting a wrong)

Code: SLAVEXCUS

Reference to the tendency for some African Americans to use slavery as an excuse not to succeed

Code: SOCCONSTRUCT

Reference to the social construction of concepts

Code: SOUTH

Reference to the south regarding justice perceptions

Code: UNEQUALU

Reference to unequal treatment as unjust

Code: UNFAIRTXU

Reference to unfair treatment as unjust

Code: UNJTXAA

Reference to receiving unfair treatment from other African Americans

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

What about the event you described resonate with you as a just event? (What comes to mind when you think about justice? How do you know when you have been treated justly?)

What about the event you described resonate with you as an unjust event? (What comes to mind when you think about injustice? How do you know when you have been treated unjustly?)

Presented findings from Berry, Hill, and Brack (2006) and asked how those definitions of justice compared to the definitions they provided. Do you agree with these findings (definitions of justice and injustice)?

Why do you think a third of the participants from the previous study (Berry et al.) wrote about an unjust event when asked to write about a just event?

Did you understand the wording of the cognitive appraisal instrument? Did you have any difficulty understanding the directions?

Presented participants with research findings regarding BJW which led to these questions: Do you agree with these findings? Why do you think that African Americans and people who are oppressed might respond this way (expressed less

belief in a just world and more belief in a just world than other racial/ethnic groups)? What are your thoughts about the relationship between racial/ethnic identity and the perception of oppressive situations? What are your thoughts about the relationship between those who are disadvantaged and the sensitivity to perceptions of injustice?

What history of African Americans are you aware of in the U.S.?

Does the history of oppression you have described impact how you think about what is just and unjust?

Are you a spiritual or religious person?

Do your spiritual/religious beliefs impact your justice perceptions?

How do you describe your racial/ethnic identity?

Why do you define yourself in this way?

How does experiencing justice affect your psychological well-being?

How does experiencing injustice affect your psychological well-being?

Can you please describe your experience of this process (participating in the study)?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Interview Questions

(FG1) Since participating in the individual interviews did you have anything that you wanted to add or change about our previous discussion?

(FG1) Most of the participants stated that they were aware of the history of oppression but often sought alternative explanations for their experiences. What are your thoughts on this?

(FG1) What prevents people from realizing they have personal power to effect change?

(FG1) How does the prevalence of experiences of discrimination affect you?

(FG 1 & 2) Presented findings from collective seven individual interviews and asked if these findings were accurate. Do you agree with these definitions of justice and injustice?

(FG1 & 2) Most of the participants believed that each person had a personal responsibility to effect change. How do we go about effecting change? What are some barriers to effecting this change?

(FG 1 & 2) Presented participants in with research findings regarding BJW which led to these questions: Do you agree with these findings? Why do you think that African Americans and people who are oppressed might respond this way (expressed less belief in a just world and more belief in a just world than other racial/ethnic groups)? What are your thoughts about the relationship between racial/ethnic identity and the perception of

oppressive situations? What are your thoughts about the relationship between those who are disadvantaged and the sensitivity to perceptions of injustice? (FG1) What are your thoughts about the BJW as a means to cope?

(FG1 & 2) Which is more salient in determining your justice perceptions your racial or spiritual identity?

(FG 1& 2) Do you have any further thoughts?

(FG2) What comes to mind when you think about justice? How do you know when you have been treated justly?)

(FG2) What comes to mind when you think about injustice? How do you know when you have been treated unjustly?)

(FG2) Presented findings from Berry, Hill, and Brack (2006) and asked how those definitions of justice compared to the definitions they provided. Do you agree with these findings (definitions of justice and injustice)?

(FG2) Does the history of oppression you have been talking about impact how you think about what is just and unjust?

(FG2) Are you a spiritual or religious person?

(FG2) Do your spiritual/religious beliefs impact your justice perceptions?

(FG2) How do you describe your racial/ethnic identity and why do you define yourself this way?

(FG2) There is literature that states that racial identity is the most important factor in justice perceptions. What are your thoughts about this?

(FG2) Is your racial identity development affected by experiences of injustice?