

“Nobody Got You Like You Got You”: An Intersectional and Relational Approach to Investigating Narratives and the Suggestions of Cultural Sociology: How Young Black Men Make Sense of Violent Victimization and the Prospects of Help-seeking.

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Abstract

Black men experience fatal and non-fatal violent victimization at a rate higher than any other dyadic group of race and gender in the U.S. (Harrell, 2009; CDC 2019; Rich 2009). However, there is not enough research focused on investigating how these men make sense of their victimization experiences and manage the consequences of exposure to violence. Therefore, using 55 interviews of young Black men, who came of age in New York City area, and self-reported recent serious violent victimization experiences, the present study details the results of an intersectional and relational approach to examining the suggestions of Cultural Sociology, to uncover how the young Black men make meaning of the relations embedded within their social network, including their relations and transactions with institutional systems and gatekeepers. I argue that “interactions” are actually relational transactions with implications for identity construction and maintenance.

First, I explore how the men make sense of the requirements around safety in the spaces they conceptualization as their neighborhood—spaces that are viewed as disproportionately violent and economically distressed. Second, I analyze the narratives provided by the young Black men detailing perceptions of—and accounts in encounters with—institutional gatekeepers; as first responders—particularly the police—and (physical and mental) healthcare professionals. Finally, producing the results of narrative analyses in the form of narratives/storytelling, I explore the life-story and event-story narratives of a few of the men’s accounts of the recent encounters with healthcare providers. The goal is to highlight the importance of relational, responsive, and respectful approaches to providing services to individuals/groups who historically mistrust institutional systems and providers—to provide equitable access to institutional resources.

Findings revealed that the young Black men held perceptions of personal responsibility to negotiate the spaces they must frequent for shelter and social activities, due to views that institutional systems engage in distorted responsiveness in relation to similarly situated young men. These processes are further complicated by hegemonic masculinity requirements outlining how potentially violent incidents must be managed by “real men”, which often result in the men making sense of “maze-like” complexities, while attempting to negotiate their safeties and security in dangerously violent spaces. Further, these processes are negotiated within a context where relations and transactions with “extended” others embedded in their networks, including institutional gatekeepers, are often perceived as complications—as opposed to resources. Finally, the young Black men revealed adverse views of the healthcare systems, along with accounts of differential, unresponsive and disrespectful treatment when in proximity to institutional systems.