

WILLIAMS, KENNESHIA N., PHD. Protective Parenting and African American Adolescents' Decision-Making in the Context of Financial and Neighborhood Stress. (2021)

Directed by Dr. Andrew J. Supple. 65pp.

Deliberative decision-making has been identified as a key developmental milestone during adolescence. Parents play a central role in developing adolescents' deliberative decision-making. Parenting marked by increased control and strictness has been traditionally labeled as decision-making thwarting. However, these parenting behaviors have been labeled protective within African American families and associated with positive adolescent outcomes. The current study included a sample of 434 mothers and their adolescent (61% male) participating in a Boys' and Girls' Club intervention focused on early sexual initiation. This study examined if higher levels of maternal control and strictness would be associated with increased adolescent deliberative decision-making and if this relationship would be particularly promotive in contexts of increased financial and neighborhood stress. Findings indicated that in contexts marked by extreme financial stress, maternal control was related to higher levels of adolescent deliberative decision-making.

PROTECTIVE PARENTING AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' DECISION-  
MAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF FINANCIAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD STRESS.

By

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A Dissertation

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro

2021

Approved by

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who made this work possible. A special feeling of gratitude to my grandmother, Mary Robinson, whose words of encouragement and confidence in me fuel my ambition. Thank you for the foundation you provided me; you have always been my biggest cheerleader. Thank you for your continued understanding throughout my doctoral journey (for the limited visits and many times it took weeks for me to return phone calls) and for believing in me before I believed in myself.

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the writing of this dissertation I have received a great deal of support and assistance. For that, I would like to express gratitude to my dissertation committee, comprised of official and unofficial mentors throughout my doctoral journey. Drs. Andrew J. Supple, Anne Fletcher, Andrea Hunter, and Jocelyn Smith Lee, thank you for your mentorship and guidance. I would not be here without you!

I would also like to thank my village (Drs. Kathryn Adams, Susan Calkins, Daniel Rhodes, and Natalie Hengstebeck) who provided encouragement at every step of the way. I am lucky to have had you all in my corner. To my doctoral cohort (Domonique Edwards, Amanda Barnes, Amy McCurdy, Kiki Leis, Demi Siskind, and Sung-Ae Kim), words will never begin to express how lucky I feel to have ventured this journey with you all by my side. I cannot imagine doing this without you!

In addition, I want to thank my family and friends. To my husband, thank you for the many late-night conversations that inspired my studies and your continued encouragement and compassion as I worked tirelessly and was unavailable for activities and weekend fun. To my parents, thank you for your many sacrifices that laid the foundation for my life experiences and this journey. Finally, to my circle of support (Nicole Covington, Dr. Angela Cherubin, Tyla Ricks, and LaToya Powell, J.D.) thank you for providing listening ears, stimulating conversations, and happy distractions.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Parental behavioral control and strictness have been identified as protective parenting strategies utilized within African American families to shield youth from the deleterious impacts of discriminatory policies and practices (Dow, 2016). Within African American populations, these parenting practices have been associated with positive adolescent outcomes, especially in contexts of poverty (Voisin, Harty, Kim, Elsaesser, & Takahashi, 2017; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006). Deliberative decision-making is a skillset fostered by parents but to date, it is unclear how parental control and strictness work together to influence its development. In contexts of risk, deliberative decision-making positively impacts adolescent outcomes by decreasing engagement in delinquency (Wolff & Crockett, 2011); however, few studies have assessed how protective parenting practices, in the form of parental behavioral control and strictness, influence deliberative decision-making in these same contexts that are characterized as risky (e.g., stress). This study will examine the impact of protective parenting, via maternal control and strictness, on deliberative adolescent decision-making in a financially disadvantaged urban African American sample. The relationship between protective parenting and adolescent deliberative decision-making will be further examined when parents experience greater financial and neighborhood stress.

### ***Protective parenting strategies in African American families and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

Protective parenting has been defined as a mixture of behaviors that parents use to manage children's daily lives and in low-income African American families includes control, monitoring, and positive problem solving (Brody, Chen, Beach, Kogan, Diclemente, Wingood, Windle, & Philibert, 2014). Protective parenting, within this study, is classified as greater use of parental behavioral control and strictness to protect youth from contextual risks, while also increasing their deliberative decision-making (Kotchick, Dorsey, & Heller, 2005; Ponnet, 2014). As identified by McLoyd, Hardaway, Jocson, and Bornstein (2019), African American families often employ these parenting strategies to ensure youth's survival within their unique and sometimes challenging developmental niches. These authors specify that because African

American families are more likely to experience economic insecurity, single parenthood, and neighborhood disadvantage, compared to their European American counterparts, adaptations to their parenting strategies are required to ensure successful developmental outcomes.

Consequently, African American parents, relative to European American parents, endorse greater use of protective parenting strategies (Jarrett, 1999; Dow, 2016) and the use of these strategies has been associated with positive adolescent outcomes via decreased delinquency (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006; Jarrett, 1999), decreased externalizing (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999), and decreased health risk behaviors (Li, Feigelman, & Stanton, 2000). Protective parenting is more protective in contexts of poverty (Voisin et al., 2017).

To date, the relationship between protective parenting and adolescent deliberative decision-making has not been examined. The failure to explore this relationship gives way to missed opportunities to identify a putative mechanism by which African American parents positively impact youth outcomes. In contexts of risk, protective parenting can increase adolescent safety by equipping youth with the decision-making skills necessary to avoid danger and to act with agency across diverse contexts.

Deliberative decision-making is defined as the active weighing of all available options and consequences when making a choice and has been associated with positive adolescent adjustment (Wolff & Crocket, 2011; Fishbein et al., 2005). The literature on decision-making generally asserts that adolescents' deliberative decision-making is best supported in contexts of greater decision-making control (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). However, this work has failed to acknowledge the role of contextual factors on the decision-making process. The current study explored if protective parenting (indicated by high maternal control and strictness) would be promotive of adolescent deliberative decision-making.

### ***Parental stress, protective parenting, and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

Due to the relatively high prevalence of African American families living in poverty, African American parents often contend with fewer financial resources than necessary to cope with day-to-day survival when compared with their European American counterparts (McLoyd, 1990). This reality, combined with the conditions of poverty (i.e., dilapidated housing, community

violence, decreased extracurricular resources), increase parental stressors, impact parental health, and consequently influence parenting behaviors (Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005; Jarrett, 1997; McLoyd, 1990). Parental reports of financial and neighborhood stress undermine parenting and are subsequently linked with negative adolescent outcomes (Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

This study sought to examine the role of contextual stressors in shaping the development of adolescents' deliberative decision-making. As it relates to contextual stressors' impact on parenting, research has indicated that stress impacts parenting in ways that lead to differential adolescent outcomes. For example, Guttman and colleagues (2005) suggested that neighborhood stress can adversely impact (via increased anxiety, depression, and anger) parenting and lead to increased adolescent reports of depression; however, little is known about how protective parenting relates to adolescent decision-making in contexts of stress. This study explored if in contexts of stress (neighborhood and financial), protective parenting would be even more protective by promoting greater adolescent deliberative decision-making.

***Adolescent gender, protective parenting, and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

Protective parenting strategies have differential impacts on adolescent outcomes based on adolescent gender (Kapungu, Holmbeck, & Paikoff, 2006). For example, Borawski, levers-Landis, Lovegreen, and Trapl (2003) examined the impact of parental monitoring and perceived parental trust on adolescent health risks in urban high schools and highlighted that adolescent males reporting higher levels of parental monitoring also reported consuming less alcohol and consistently using condoms. Contrastingly, parental monitoring did not impact adolescent girls' health risk behaviors. With protective parenting demonstrating differential impacts on male and female adolescents, the current study included gender as an additional moderator to examine if the relationship between protective parenting and adolescent deliberative decision-making varied based on adolescent gender. It was expected that higher levels of protective parenting would lead to stronger deliberative decision-making for adolescent boys when compared to girls.

This study included a sample of financially disadvantaged African American mothers (mostly single) and their adolescent child (mostly male) to examine how parenting strategies and

contextual factors interacted to impact adolescent deliberative decision-making. In particular, maternal control and strictness were evaluated to assess their impact on adolescent deliberative decision-making with financial and neighborhood stress included as factors that might change that relationship. Further, adolescent gender was examined to see if it had differential impacts on outcomes for males compared to females. This study adds to the literature by acknowledging the role of context in shaping the relationship between protective parenting and adolescent outcomes. Furthermore, a counternarrative is offered regarding protective parenting negatively impacting decision-making development. This study suggests that for African American families, especially those contending with financial disadvantage and experiencing increased stressors, protective parenting can assist youth (particularly males) in developing deliberative decision-making.

## CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Self-determination theory and Cultural-ecological theory are used to frame this study. Research framed by Self-determination theory has purported that parents are critical to the development of adolescents' deliberative decision-making (either supporting or hindering its development) and has classified the development of deliberative decision-making as a key developmental milestone (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Marbell-Pierre, Grolnick, Stewart, & Raftery-Helmer, 2019). Studies guided by Self-determination theory have indicated that parental support of deliberative decision-making during adolescence, via encouragement and scaffolded opportunities for youth to practice making decisions, is related to less risky decision-making and more deliberative decision-making (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989; Wolff & Crockett, 2011). While deliberative decision-making is regarded as ideal and involves a methodological process when making a choice, risky decision-making has been regarded as suboptimal and often characterized as failing to avoid imminent threats due to impulsivity when making a choice (Wolff & Crockett, 2011; Fishbein et al., 2005). Self-determination theorists have emphasized the critical role of parents in fostering deliberative decision-making that shapes positive youth outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory will serve as the guiding framework for this study, highlighting the importance of adolescent agency, via opportunities to develop deliberative decision-making, as well as the role parents play in fostering it.

Missing from the Self-determination theory framework is a focus on how environmental factors shape the development and appearance of deliberative decision-making. Cultural-ecological theory will serve as a supportive theory in this study, addressing unique contextual experiences faced by African American parents as they support and negotiate the development of their adolescents' deliberative decision-making. Cultural-ecological theorists have emphasized the role of context in parenting beliefs and child socialization, which will be incorporated within this study to highlight various factors that African American parents contend with that influence differences in how adolescents' deliberative decision-making is fostered (Ogbu, 1985). This theory is further utilized to assert that differences in African American adolescents' deliberative

decision-making process should not necessarily warrant concern, as these differences are often adaptive within given contexts.

### ***Self-determination theory.***

Researchers using a Self-determination theory (SDT) framework have concluded that autonomy is one of three needs that must be met in order to achieve wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Autonomy is defined as the innate need for choice, initiative, and endorsement of one's activities (Véronneau, Koestner, & Abela, 2005). Increased autonomy during adolescence is associated with increased self-esteem and wellbeing, as well as better psychological outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While important at all stages of development, autonomy is especially critical during adolescence, as youth begin to form agentic identities (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Lens, Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Beyers, & Ryan, 2007).

Autonomous functioning is represented by how much control a person feels they have over their behaviors, which influences how much ownership they feel over their actions (Sheldon, Williams, & Joiner, 2003). Decision-making is a mechanism of autonomous functioning (Marbell-Pierre et al., 2019). People who feel autonomous classify their behaviors as being internally motivated (internal locus of causality) and feel a sense of responsibility for their decisions (Sheldon, Williams, & Joiner, 2003). Autonomous functioning is characterized by alignment between personal values and decisions made (Sheldon et al., 2003). Decision-making that represents SDT's characterization of autonomous functioning develops in supportive environments (Marbell-Pierre et al., 2019). Environments that support youth's deliberative decision-making development are classified as autonomy supportive, encouraging youth to make decisions that align with their personal goals and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy support is often studied within the family and thought to be driven by parents (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001). Studies with families have indicated that adolescents who perceive their parents to be autonomy supportive experience positive outcomes (Ferguson, Kasser, & Jahng, 2010).

In contrast to autonomy supportive environments, proponents of SDT have posited that environments marked by higher levels of parental control may hinder autonomous decision-making while increasing externally controlled decision-making (Sheldon et al., 2003). The

Cultural-ecological theory model helps with this disconnect by highlighting the adaptiveness of greater control in specific contexts, which can enhance the development of deliberative decision-making. Self-determination theorists have attempted to examine the role of culture in shaping differences in autonomous decision-making; however, in doing so, one of the draw backs to this literature is the focus on cross-cultural work in the exploration of cultural variability, as compared to within-cultural differences. For instance, research exploring variations in parental support and its influence on autonomous functioning via decision-making has been limited to cross-national examinations (Marbell-Pierre et al., 2019). In particular, cross-national research has focused on delineating differences in individualistic and collectivistic societies. Specifically, Marbell-Pierre et al. (2019) examined parental support of autonomous functioning in Ghana (i.e., collectivistic society) and the United States (i.e., individualistic society) and indicated that decision-making autonomy was only related to positive youth outcomes in the United States (i.e., individualistic society).

The work of Marbell-Pierre et al. (2019) demonstrated that decision-making autonomy support is associated with positive adolescent outcomes in the United States. However, a focus on within-U.S. differences will uncover contextual factors that influence the decision-making process via impacts on variations in parenting behaviors. To date, studies have failed to acknowledge the role that environmental factors play in influencing parental support of decision-making autonomy and the adaptive role of parental control over adolescent decision-making in different contexts for different cultures (Benito-Gomez, Williams, McCurdy, & Fletcher, 2020). The current study argues that for African American families, greater control over adolescent decision-making may prove protective for African American youth, in specific contexts. and increase deliberative decision-making. Currently, as it stands within the decision-making literature, decision-making is thought to be best fostered within environments marked by age-appropriate parental control (often thought to mean less control with age) (Sheldon et al., 2003); however, this stands in opposition to how African American parents foster decision-making (Daddis & Smetana, 2005).



Instead of emphasizing age, African American parents emphasize the environment as they foster decision-making (Daddis & Smetana, 2005). Environment-appropriate control over adolescents' decision-making is practiced by African American parents in response to the pervasiveness of discrimination and racism (Dow, 2016; Perez-Brena, Updegraff, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Research has suggested that in cultures facing discrimination, greater parental involvement in the decision-making process is related to improved adolescent outcomes, though this has not been reflected in SDT's framework (Perez-Brena et al., 2012). In practicing control, African American parents engage in an adaptive parenting strategy to account for anticipated discrimination and racism that children will face. Though not currently discussed within the SDT framework, African American families' environment focus demonstrates alignment between the families' goals and SDT tenets. Representing an alternative pathway by which deliberative decision-making is fostered, the use of environment-appropriate control over adolescents' decision-making aids parents in increasing adolescents' agency and protecting youth's well-being. Well-being is identified as the ultimate goal of SDT (Sheldon et al., 2003).

In African American families, environmental circumstances (i.e., discriminatory contexts, increased environmental risks) require greater parental control (Dow, 2016). In particular, the intersection of racism, inequality, lowered SES, and cultural factors (i.e., increased use of protective parenting strategies) is missing from the SDT literature, though critical components of any discussion about African American parenting. Self-determination theorists discuss decision-making in relation to positive adolescent outcomes but highlights this relationship occurring in contexts with less control (Sheldon et al., 2003). This work does not align with the realities of African American families, where families endorse support of African American adolescents' decision-making (Mann, Harmoni, & Power, 1989; Janis & Mann, 1977), but also practice control over the decision-making process. In this vein, greater emphasis must be placed on context to better understand how parental support of deliberative decision-making and control work together to influence deliberative decision-making's development in African American families.

A Cultural-ecological perspective is integrated to account for the role of environment on African American adolescents' deliberative decision-making process. Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that decision-making development can vary due to parenting goals and environmental practices (Marbell-Pierre et al., 2019) but this perspective has not been examined within decision-making studies focused on American cultural groups, or populations of color living in disadvantaged contexts. To date, dialogue addressing the role of environmental factors on childrearing practices and goals and its influence on African American adolescents' deliberative decision-making development is nonexistent.

***Cultural-ecological theory.***

Cultural-ecological theorists have posited that childrearing is a formulated cultural activity that is organized to ensure the survival of youth into competent adults who contribute to the survival and welfare of their social group (Ogbu, 1981; Garcia Coll, Crnic, Lamberty, Wasik, Jenkins, & Garcia, 1996). Within this model, childrearing practices are influenced by environmental factors, which determine the skills the group deems necessary for youth to develop into competent adults (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Ogbu, 1985). These skills are noted to develop as a result of the social positionality of families (e.g., class and race) interacting with systems that either enhance or impede their environments by way of stratification (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2011). Competencies within this model are labeled as the qualities parents (and other individuals that assist with childrearing) believe are important to foster within children.

Proponents of this framework argue that childrearing practices differ by culture, with cultural groups occupying different environmental spaces, with different cultural imperatives, that lead to different rules about what skills are necessary to produce competent adults (Ogbu, 1985).

It is imperative that researchers consider environmental factors faced by their population of interest, as well as how these environmental factors influence childrearing goals and practices. Research suggests that African American parents are more likely to contend with financial stress, neighborhood stress, discrimination, and racism throughout the childrearing process than their European American counterparts (The Urban Institute, 2009; Brody, Chen, Kogan, Murry, Logan, & Luo, 2008; Voisin et al., 2017). Discrimination and disadvantage are environmental stressors that influence parenting practices via their impact on parenting goals and strategies. In

the case of deliberative decision-making, these stressors can lead African American parents to use greater protective strategies (i.e., control and strictness), which influence the decision-making autonomy granted to African American youth (Dow, 2016; Jarrett, 1999). Within African American families, youth expect greater parental control over decision-making processes, as well as benefit from this control through late adolescence (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Daddis, 2004). Hence, though African American adolescents practice less decision-making autonomy, this finding should be interpreted differently than a similar finding with a European American sample, as the context, childrearing goals, and rules vary across the two groups.

Aside from greater control in their adolescent's deliberative decision-making process, research has also indicated that for African American parents experiencing financial disadvantage, parental resource seeking is a key strategy used to ensure that youth achieve set competencies, despite limited resources (e.g., time resources, money resources). Parental resource seeking involves the active identification of quality resources (local and extra-local) by parents within the limited options that exist and challenging those resources to take on specific roles that will aid in their child's development. Examples of parental resource seeking include a parent seeking tutoring services or after school program services (i.e., After-School Enrichment Services (ACES)) to provide children with additional academic support due to an unsatisfactory school curriculum or sending a child to school in a family member's neighborhood to ensure access to better academic and extracurricular opportunities. Another example, relevant to the current study's sample, is the enrollment of youth in after school programs (i.e., Boys' and Girls' Club, YMCA, YWCA, etc.) to provide youth with access to additional extracurricular and academic support, while also ensuring that youth are being supervised and fed while a single parent finishes out their workday.

Parental resource seeking has been labeled a protective parenting strategy (Jarrett, 1997). Typically, this parenting behavior is employed by single mothers, and serves to secure positive role models, as well as the support necessary to produce youth who will develop into competent adults (Roy & Burton, 2007). Family members and kin networks (typically males) are generally

recruited as role models but in situations where there are no viable options in the family or kin network, mothers often extend their search to community programs, where program staff fulfill this role (Jarrett, Jefferson, & Kelly, 2010; Burton & Jarrett, 2000; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Jarrett, 1999).

Mothers in the current study primarily identified as single parents (63%), raising adolescent males (60%), and experiencing financial disadvantage. Like many African American mothers experiencing financial disadvantage, the mothers in the current study were suspected to engage in protective parenting via resource seeking. Particularly, mothers in the current study were engaged with their adolescents in a prevention/intervention program with the Boys and Girls Club to prevent sexual risk behaviors (i.e., early sexual engagement). This study took place during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, beginning four years after HIV was identified as the leading cause of death for African American males ages 25 to 44-years-old and the second leading cause of death for African American females ages 25 to 44-years-old and just a year before the Minority AIDS Initiative was created to fund HIV prevention initiatives in Black communities. The mothers' participation in the current prevention/intervention program indicates one way the mothers engaged in protective parenting, via parental resource seeking, as they identified community resources to decrease their adolescents' (mostly males) vulnerability of contracting a deadly virus/disease (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Additionally, mothers were further identified as having youth who were regularly enrolled in a Boys and Girls club program. Work by Jarrett (1997) and Roy and Burton (2007) would suggest that, given the mothers' positionality (i.e., single mothers raising adolescent males), enrollment of youth in the Boys and Girls Club program and intervention were indicators of a protective parenting strategy, via parental resource seeking. It is likely that the mothers within the current study enrolled youth in the Boys and Girls Club to ensure that youth received the resources necessary to develop into competent adults. Moreover, mothers within the current sample were also likely to experience environments marked by increased discriminatory policies and practices, which could influence their childrearing behaviors (i.e., increased behavioral control and strictness). Mothers were expected to engage in protective parenting strategies with the goal

of ensuring youth health and safety, especially since many of the mothers were raising adolescent males. Mothers engagement in protective parenting strategies to ensure youth development into competent adults, aligns with the Cultural-ecological framework.

The Cultural-ecological framework was traditionally developed to account for differences within African American and European American's school success (Spencer, 1999; Foster, 2004; Ogunyemi, 2017; Ogbu, 1985). The theory has since been applied to the study of school differences in ethnic minorities in the Netherlands (Eldering, 1997), reasoning and school performance's interaction with economic status, ethnic identity, and self-esteem (Chapell & Overton, 2002), racial socialization and academic achievement (Friend et al., 2011), school climate (La Salle, Meyers, Varjas, & Roach, 2015), and language education in Roma (Kyuchukov, 2017). The current study adds to this literature by incorporating a Cultural-ecological framework to study the development of African American adolescents' deliberative decision-making.

The current study highlights the basic principles of Cultural-ecological theory within the decision-making literature, asserting that there is no universal formula for parental support of adolescent deliberative decision-making (Ogbu, 1981). Within the decision-making literature, as adolescents move from early to middle and late adolescence, it is assumed that greater parental support of adolescents' decision-making, via less parental control, is related to positive youth development. This belief stems from a traditional view of SDT, based on trends in white middle-class populations, which report an association between greater decision-making autonomy, lower parental control, and positive youth outcomes (Janis & Mann, 1977). This traditional view tends to conclude that families of color are less likely to provide their youth with decision-making autonomy, in comparison to European American families, and labels families providing less decision-making autonomy as controlling (Pérez & Cumsille, 2012).

In line with a Cultural-ecological perspective, this study highlights that social and economic factors impact the childrearing practices used by cultural groups (Aberle, 1961) and have an impact on the childrearing process (Ogbu, 1981). As such, the Self-determination and Cultural-ecological frameworks are used together to indicate that parental support of African American

adolescents' deliberative decision-making is valued but this process typically involves greater control and strictness than has been deemed adaptive in European American families. It is further argued that increased parental control and strictness serve as protective strategies for African American adolescents, improving their deliberative decision-making, especially in contexts of greater environmental stressors. In turn, using the basic tenant of SDT, this study will demonstrate that the development of agency, via deliberative decision-making, is an important child socialization goal for African American families. Cultural-ecological theory will be supplemented to demonstrate that environmental factors influence parenting, which influences child socialization, and suggest that the development of deliberative decision-making within African American families takes place in contexts that call for greater use of protective parenting but within these contexts protective parenting is adaptive to the decision-making process.

### CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

Decision-making involves making a deliberate choice in a situation requiring a selection, after alternatives and consequences have been weighed (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). This section will provide an overview on how decision-making develops, parents' role in its development, cultural variations, and gaps within the literature, as well as the role of contextual factors. The section will end with the goals of the current study, as well the research question and hypotheses.

#### *Adolescent deliberative decision-making.*

Decision-making is the process of selecting and committing to a course of action in a given situation (Janis & Mann, 1977). Decisions can range in gravity from deciding what restaurant to visit for dinner to deciding whether or not to resuscitate an ill family member. When making decisions, individuals are thought to go through a four-part process of 1) setting a goal, 2) thinking through several ways to accomplish the goal, 3) evaluating available options and their consequences, and 4) selecting the option that best meets their goals (Jacobs & Klaczynski, 2005). Decision-making involves decision control, defined as the process by which adolescents are given agency to engage in decision-making regarding matters concerning them (Mann et al., 1989). Decision-control is a prerequisite for mature and competent decision-making and is related to positive adolescent outcomes (Mann et al., 1989; Janis & Mann, 1977).

When decision-making is planful and considers several courses of action and their consequences, it is deemed deliberative (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). Adolescents who engage in deliberative decision-making are more likely to make decisions that decrease their engagement in risk behaviors (i.e., drunkenness, drug use, delinquency, risky sex) (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). Deliberative decision-making has been noted as a strategy for decreasing adolescent delinquency (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). To the contrary, decision-making is deemed risky when it fails to select options that avoid imminent threats and negative consequences (e.g., engagement in risk behaviors) (Fishbein et al., 2005).

***Deliberative decision-making development and adolescent outcomes.***

Decision-making develops with practice across childhood and throughout adulthood and can be improved through 1) personal experiences with the consequences of previous decisions, 2) observations of others' experiences, and 3) explicit instruction from close others on effective courses of action (Jacobs & Klaczynski, 2005; Byrnes, 2005). During adolescence, decision-making is highly relevant due to its tie to problem behaviors (Steinberg, 2004). In particular, adolescence is characterized by risky decision-making, which has been associated with delinquency (Steinberg, 2004). For example, Wolff and Crocket (2011) found that adolescents reporting higher involvement in risky decision-making (i.e., nondeliberative decision-making) were more likely to engage in delinquency (e.g., property damage). Adolescent delinquency refers to acts or behaviors completed by individuals under the age of 18 that do not adhere to social norms, values, or laws (Deng & Roosa, 2007). Hence, adolescents who engage in risky decision-making are also more likely to become involved in delinquent behaviors. Indicators of adolescent delinquency include engaging in acts of assault, stealing, substance use, skipping school, and vandalism (Han, Miller, & Waldfogel, 2010).

Much work has indicated the deleterious impact of youth engagement in delinquency. Specifically, engagement in delinquent acts during adolescence is associated with later crime (McCord, Widom, & Crowell, 2001). For example, Mason, Hitch, Kosterman, McCarty, Herrenkohl, and Hawkins (2010) examined delinquency in middle- and low-income adolescents and found that late adolescents engaged in delinquency (i.e., violence, vandalism) were more likely to report adult crime. Due to racism and discrimination, African American youth are most vulnerable to the deleterious impacts of risky decision-making. In particular, during the school-age years, African American youth receive harsher discipline for misconduct (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). For example, as early as preschool, African American youth are suspended at greater rates, with public data revealing that in 2014, though Black students only made up 18% of the preschool population, they represented 48% of the student population receiving more than one out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). These trends persist across the school age years,



leading schools to be the primary vehicle by which African American youth are funneled into the criminal justice system (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Much of this disproportionality in discipline stems from racist beliefs. For instance, DeMatthews, Carey, Olivarez, and Moussavi Saeedi (2017) examined principal perspectives on disciplinary practices and their relation to racial discipline gaps and found that behavioral problems and outcomes of African American students were often cast as an African American specific cultural problem, as compared to being explained by systematic structures that disproportionately impacted African American youth. For example, the authors noted that several principles blamed racial suspension gaps on Black students' culture, noting that Black students were more likely to be disciplined for misbehavior because as a culture they were more disruptive, lacked discipline, and were not raised with similar values as their White or Latino counterparts. DeMatthews et al.'s (2017) study reveals much of the racist ideology that African American parents must contend with, which influences harsher discipline of African American youth's misconduct, shapes racial profiling, and consequently increases the risks associated with African American adolescents' risky decision-making.

***Protective parenting and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

Due to the risks associated with risky decision-making, research has worked to identify factors that support the development of deliberative decision-making during adolescence. One such factor that promotes deliberative decision-making is supportive parenting. Supportive parenting has been recognized as a factor that increases deliberative decision-making during adolescence (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). Supportive parenting is defined by warmth, proactive teaching, inductive discipline, and positive involvement, and is related to positive youth outcomes (e.g., lower depression and delinquency; higher self-efficacy and academic achievement) (Juang & Silbereisen, 1999). Supportive parenting has been linked to less risky and more deliberative decision-making during adolescence, providing youth with opportunities to develop decision-making skills in safe spaces (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). Decision-making researchers note that parents who support their youth's decision-making contribute to their youth's positive wellbeing (Ferguson, Kasser, & Jahng, 2010).

Several factors have been identified to influence parental support of adolescent's decision-making, including: adolescent age and gender (Bush, Supple, & Lash, 2004), parental perceptions of adolescent's cognitive functioning (i.e., math skills) (Romich Lundberg, & Tsang, 2009), family structure (Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwall, Ritter, Leiderman, Hastorf, & Gross, 1985) and parent gender (Perez-Brena et al., 2012). As it relates to adolescent characteristics, boys receive greater decision control than girls and older adolescents have been viewed by parents as more capable of making decisions than younger adolescents (Bush & colleagues, 2004). In terms of family characteristics, adolescents in one parent families have been noted to make more autonomous decisions regarding personal matters than adolescents in two-parent families (Dornbusch et al., 1985). Additionally, in relation to parent characteristics, mothers allow their adolescents less decision-control when they have higher incomes, whereas fathers with higher incomes allow their adolescents to engage in greater decision control when it involves a parent in the decision-making process (Perez-Brena et al., 2012). Findings regarding parent gender may be especially important for the current study, as the current study is comprised of only mothers and their adolescents; though, it is unclear how gender might translate to this study, as Perez-Brena et al.'s (2012) finding regarding parent gender was discovered in a higher income sample, and this study includes families experiencing greater financial disadvantage.

Another factor that influences parental support of adolescent's decision-making is culture. In particular, culture has been suggested to influence decision-making by impacting whether or not decision-making is a form of parental support utilized to foster agency (Marbell-Pierre et al., 2019). In particular, Marbell-Pierre and colleagues (2019) demonstrated in a cross-national study that allowance of decision-making was a form of parental support most prevalent in individualistic societies and within these societies it was related to positive adolescent outcomes. The authors further highlighted that within collectivistic societies, allowance of decision-making was not related to positive youth outcomes. Although cross-cultural trends were indicated, the study did not provide insight on cross-cultural patterns within the United States.

While cross-cultural studies within the United States are limited, culture has been suggested to shape parental values and expectations about youth's decision-making (Jensen & Dost-Gozkan, 2015; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). For instance, culture has been found to influence youth's expectations for decision-making and parents' control of decision-making. For example, African American families have later timetables for adolescent decision-making (Smetana, 2005; Jensen & Dost-Gozkan, 2015). As it relates to African American families, contextual factors (i.e., increased instances of profiling within schools and neighborhoods that increase African American youth's exposure to the criminal justice system and disproportionate punishment) make it so that parental support of adolescents' deliberative decision-making is not as simple as increasing youth's experiences and opportunities practicing decision-making across middle and late adolescence. To the contrary, African American families have been noted to practice more parental control over youth activities, including controlling adolescent spaces, networks, and opportunities to engage in decision-making (Dow, 2016; Jensen & Dost-Gozkan, 2015). However, without an emphasis on delineating cultural patterns that influence parental support of decision-making, it is unclear if these parenting practices observed within African American families are due to culture or environmental factors.

Cross-cultural work would benefit from examining how decision-making is developed and utilized within different U.S. cultural groups as well as from delineating how decision-making develops differently across cultures. Understanding that different cultural groups within the United States espouse different levels of individualism and collectivism and contend with different environmental factors (i.e., discrimination), which could differentially influence the development of decision-making, it would be advantageous for a study to examine decision-making cross-culturally within the United States.

Though there exists a need for decision-making research on U.S. cross-cultural patterns, the work that does exist has identified that decision-making functions differently in African American populations when compared with European American families (Smetana, 2005). For example, research has suggested that African American parents communicate later expectations for adolescent decision-making than European American families, while African American

adolescents also appear to have later expectations for decision-making than their European American counterparts (Smetana, 2005; Jensen & Dost-Gozkan, 2015; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994). In particular, Daddis & Smetana (2005) demonstrated that while European American youth are provided with greater control over health and safety concerns during middle adolescence, African American parents maintain decision-making control over these matters until adolescents reach late adolescence (Daddis & Smetana, 2005). Moreover, within African American families, parents have been indicated to practice greater control over adolescent decision-making through middle to late adolescence, making decisions for or with adolescents as compared to adolescents making decisions on their own (Smetana, 2000; Richman & Mandara, 2013). As such, contrary to European American families, joint and independent parent decision-making is practiced more frequently through late adolescence in African American families and demonstrated to be adaptive, leading to positive adolescent outcomes (Smetana et al., 2004). These differences in American American families' decision-making control and support have been related to family culture but work has not examined what it is about African American culture that leads to these patterns. The current study makes the case that parental support of decision-making in African American families differs due to parental desires to protect youth from the deleterious impacts of environmental threats, influenced by more severe consequences of risky adolescent decision-making. As such, though African American parents demonstrate a desire to foster agency within youth, they are often confined by circumstances of disadvantage and stress that influence greater need for control and strictness over youth decision-making (Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015).

Research on parental support of adolescent decision-making in African American families, to date, has primarily focused on middle-class samples. This research has led to the conclusion that parental support of adolescents' deliberative decision-making impacts youth outcomes; differences in African American parents' support, as compared to European American parents, has also been documented. For example, Daddis and Smetana (2005) examined expectations regarding decision control in a middle-class sample of African Americans and found that while mothers and adolescents believed that adolescents should be responsible for making decisions about personal matters (e.g., hairstyle, clothing selection, friends) during early adolescence,

mothers had later expectations about what was deemed early adolescence. In other words, parents and adolescents differed in how early was too early for adolescents to make decisions about personal matters. Additionally, mothers and adolescents tended to disagree on what fell into different decision-making areas of the adolescents' lives. For instance, though parents and adolescents consistently believed parents to be responsible for decisions about social, health, and safety matters, there was discrepancy about who was responsible for personal and multi-faceted decisions, as well as what decisions fell into the different categories. Specifically, mothers interpreted decisions concerning sex and TV viewing as representing a health and safety issue, though adolescents viewed these decisions to fall within the personal scope. Daddis and Smetana (2005) demonstrated that African American parents often have differing perspectives on what decisions qualify as health and safety hazards, indicating that there are different factors that influence African American parents' support of their adolescents' decision-making.

Another study that suggested similar disagreements was conducted by Smetana (2000) who indicated that middle-class African American parents and their adolescents had disagreements about who was responsible for making decisions about personal issues impacting adolescents. Within this study, while most mothers viewed parents as responsible for regulating adolescent personal issues (e.g., hairstyle, clothing, and music selection), the majority of adolescents did not. The authors further asserted that what the adolescents indicated as falling into the personal domain appeared more restrictive than prior research examining a similar topic in a European American sample (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Again, this research highlights that parental support of adolescent decision-making functions differently within African American populations, having implications for decision-making development within this population.

As a whole, these studies indicate that African American parents and adolescents deemed parental support of adolescent decision-making important but discrepancy existed between adolescents and parents on what decisions adolescents should be allowed to control, with greater restrictions on what parents deemed to fall within the safety and health categories. Further, the studies indicated that greater parental control over adolescent decision-making, than what is experienced in European American families, is adaptive for African American adolescents and

related to positive youth outcomes. Considering that African American youth navigate racist contexts with more severe consequences for risky decision-making, it is reasonable that the literature suggests that less parental support of decision control is adaptive for this population. A similar trend has been documented in African American parenting research, demonstrating that when parents experience racial discrimination their strictness via monitoring strategies increased (Varner & Mandara, 2013).

Serving as a major gap in the decision-making literature, decision-making within African American families has primarily focused on middle-class samples. Considering that financially disadvantaged African American parents have been noted to practice greater parental control and strictness (Dow, 2016; Jarrett, 1999), it is critical that decision-making be examined within this population to understand how the use of more parental control and strictness influences adolescents' deliberative decision-making development. As parental control and strictness have been deemed protective for African American youth in financially disadvantaged contexts and associated with positive adolescent outcomes (Voisin et al., 2017; East & Hokoda, 2015; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006), it is expected that increased protective parenting (defined by increased parental strictness and control) will be associated with increased adolescent deliberative decision-making for the current sample experiencing financial disadvantage.

***Financial Stress, protective parenting, and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

Due to systems of oppression, many African Americans contend with financial disadvantage, increasing their visibility within low-income communities (Voisin et al., 2017). African American families have been identified as disproportionately more likely to experience economic hardship than their European American counterparts and African American parents who experience economic hardship are less likely to practice supportive, involved, and consistent parenting (McLoyd, 1990). It then follows that African American parents experiencing financial disadvantage are more likely to have their parenting undermined, with poverty being associated with increased parental stress (Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

One parental stressor that parents living in poverty contend with is financial stress (Ponnet, 2014). Financial stress has been defined as a combination of financial need (difficulties affording

more than basic needs), financial burden (expenses that influence financial burden) and financial insecurity (concerns about future finances) and suggested to adversely impact parenting (Gutman, McLoyd, & Tokoyawa, 2005) and adolescent outcomes (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, Guttmanova, Fomby, Ribar, & Coley, 2011). For example, Ponnet (2014) examined the impact of financial stress on parenting and adolescent externalizing in low, middle, and high-income families and found that in low-income families, financial stress was positively associated with adolescent externalizing behaviors. Clark-Lempers, Lempers, and Netusil's (1990) research supports the relationship between financial stress and youth outcomes, by revealing that parental reports of financial stress are positively associated with adolescent internalizing (i.e., depression).

Considering the impact parenting has on adolescent outcomes, little is known about how environmental factors influence this process via impacts on parenting (Kotchick et al., 2005). Assessing the relationship between protective parenting and adolescent deliberative decision-making, the current study will examine if protective parenting will be even more promotive of adolescent deliberative decision-making in contexts marked by greater financial stress.

***Neighborhood stress, protective parenting, and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

In addition to financial stress, neighborhood stress serves as an additional stressor that parents living in poverty contend with (Gutman et al., 2005). Neighborhood stress has been defined as social and physical signs of neighborhood disorder and neglect (Gutman et al., 2005) and has been negatively associated with parenting (Kotchick, et al., 2005) and adolescent health (Fan & Chen, 2012). In particular, Seiter, Lucas-Thompson, and Graham (2019) examined the impact of neighborhood stress on adolescent health and found that adolescents from more stressful neighborhoods reported poorer health. This work was supported by Kotchick and colleagues (2005), who examined the role of contextual factors on parenting and adolescent outcomes in a low-income African American sample and found that greater neighborhood stress negatively impacted parenting behaviors. Gutman et al. (2005) further suggested that adverse parenting, via neighborhood stress, is negatively associated with adolescent adjustment.

The current study, therefore, will examine if protective parenting will be even more promotive of adolescents' deliberative decision-making in contexts marked by greater neighborhood stress.

***Adolescent gender, protective parenting, and adolescent deliberative decision-making.***

Finally, in contexts of poverty, adolescent gender influences the effectiveness of parenting strategies (Kapungu et al., 2006). For example, Jacobson and Crockett (2010) examined the impact of parental monitoring on adolescent adjustment and found that gender moderated the relationship between monitoring and adolescent delinquency. In particular, this study indicated that parental monitoring became more effective in decreasing boys' engagement in delinquency as they advanced in grade and less effective for girls. This finding suggests that protective parenting strategies might be more promotive of adolescent boys' outcomes. As such, this study will examine if there are gender differences in protective parenting' impact on adolescents' deliberative decision-making.

***Present study.***

African American families within this study were recruited to engage in an intervention designed to decrease adolescent health risks in disadvantaged contexts (Dilorio, Resnicow, Thomas, Wang, Dudley, Marter, & Lipana, 2002). The sample primarily consisted of families who identified as low-income. Within low-income contexts, control and strictness have been identified to serve as protective parenting strategies (Voisin et al., 2017; East & Hokoda, 2015; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006; Jarrett, 1999); hence, parental control and strictness will be identified as protective parenting for the given population within this study. Considering the importance of parenting in shaping positive African American adolescent outcomes, especially in contexts of disadvantage, this study seeks to examine the impact of these protective parenting strategies on adolescent deliberative decision-making, as well as how this relationship changes with greater parental stress and as a result of adolescent gender. Considering that the majority of families within this sample were identified as financially disadvantaged (Dilorio et al., 2002) and protective parenting via control and strictness is thought to be more protective in disadvantaged contexts, it is expected that the sample will demonstrate patterns consistent with those predicted within the model.



Research question:

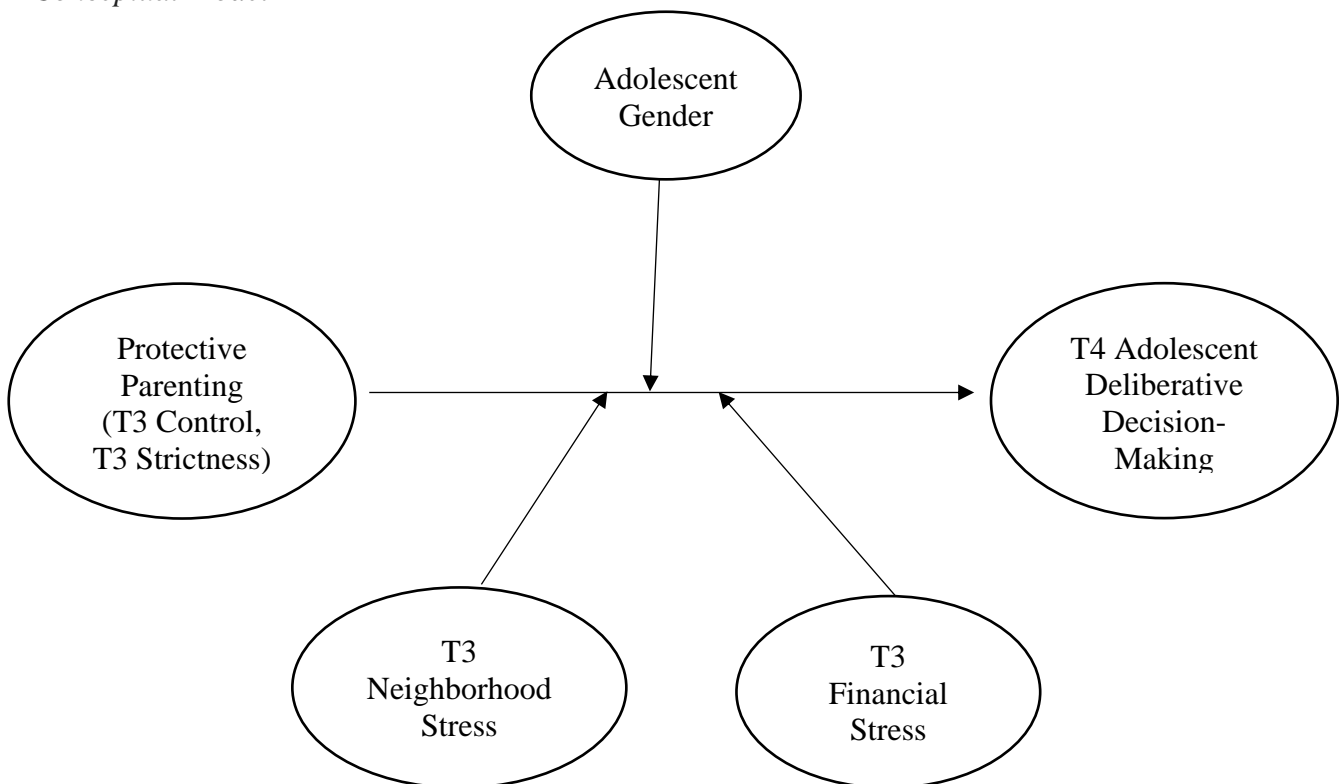
How does protective parenting, via maternal control and strictness, influence adolescents' deliberative decision-making in a sample experiencing financial disadvantage? How is this relationship further influenced by parental stressors (financial and neighborhood stress) and adolescent gender?

Hypotheses:

- (1) It is expected that protective parenting (via maternal control and strictness) will be positively related to adolescents' deliberative decision-making.
- (2) The relationship between protective parenting and adolescents' deliberative decision-making is expected to be stronger for adolescents whose mothers report greater financial and neighborhood stress.
- (3) The relationship between protective parenting and adolescents' deliberative decision-making is expected to be stronger for male adolescents.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Model*



## CHAPTER IV: METHOD

Analyses will consist of a secondary data analysis using the Keepin' It R.E.A.L.! (Responsible, Empowered, Aware, Living) (KIR) dataset (Dilorio et al., 2002). The KIR project was an HIV prevention program created for mothers and their adolescents to test the effectiveness of two interventions designed to promote delays in sexual intercourse among 11- through 14-year-old adolescents and to increase the mother's role in postponing sexual activity. Employing a longitudinal design, this study included 4 waves of data collection. Data was collected between 1997 and 2000 from affiliates of a community-based organization, serving disadvantaged youth, in a large southeastern city in the United States. A randomized cluster design was employed to randomly assign 12 out of 26 recruited sites to either one of the two intervention groups or the control group. Youth included were primarily from disadvantaged economic, social, and family circumstances (Dilorio et al., 2002).

### *Participants.*

The original Keepin' It R.E.A.L.! study sample consisted of  $N = 612$  African American adolescents and their mothers  $n=491$  (Dilorio et al., 2002). 121 adolescents within the study shared a mother with another adolescent within the study. The sampling criteria required that participating adolescents be between the ages of 11 and 14 years. At baseline, adolescents were age 11 (34.8%), 12 (25.5%), 13 (23.4%), or 14 (16.3%). 60.6% of the adolescents were male and 63% of adolescents were from single parent households. Almost 90% of adolescents reported living with their biological mother and 46.8% reported living with their biological father, stepfather, or adoptive father. Mothers were mostly under the age of 40 (65.8%) and reported having some high school or college education (71.7%). 33.2% of mothers reported being married, 25.9% reported being divorced, 11.4% reported being separated, 25.7% reported never being married, and 3.9% reported being widowed.

Data was collected at four timepoints: baseline, 4 months, 12 months, and 24 months. The current study will use data from the 12 month and 24-month timepoint. Of the 491 mothers included in the original dataset, many had several children included within the dataset for which

they reported. Adolescents were selected for inclusion within the current study based on which rows included mother data. Hence, adolescents for whom mother data was missing on the financial and neighborhood stress rows were excluded. As mothers who had several children included in the dataset, most often only provided complete data for one child, the final sample only has one child represented for each mother. The final sample size includes  $N = 434$  Black mothers and one of their participating children.

### ***Measures.***

*Protective parenting.* Using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012), a latent construct of protective parenting was indicated by parental control and parental strictness.

*Maternal Control.* Maternal Control was assessed at wave three via parental reports of mother's influence or control on their adolescent's behaviors. Sample items included "Choice of friends, who they are and what they are like" and "Where your adolescent is and what he/she is doing when you are not at home." Response choices were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very much*) to 5 (*not at all*). The 8-item scale demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .891$ ). Items were reverse scored, so that higher scores indicated greater maternal control.

*Maternal Strictness.* Maternal Strictness was assessed at wave three via parental reports of mother's efficacy monitoring their adolescents' activities, while also setting limits and influencing peer affiliations. Sample items included "You let your adolescent dress any way that he/she wants" and "You allow your adolescent to go out with groups of friends, without adults present." Response choices were on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Items were reverse scored, so that higher scores indicated greater maternal strictness. The 7-item scale demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .703$ ).

*Financial Stress.* The Adult Hassles Index was used to assess a spectrum of everyday stressors in mother's lives in the past 3 months (Dilorio et al., 2002). Items covered a range of topics, including financial, family, neighborhood, and relationship stressors. Mothers were asked to indicate if the items were stressors with yes or no responses. This scale was previously validated (Dilorio et al., 2002) but the number of factors within the measure had not been specified. To determine the number of factors, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted in Mplus; the

items were specified as categorical. Model fit indices confirmed that a 4-factor model best fit the data. The four factors loaded items around the following themes: financial stress, neighborhood stress, interrelation stress, and personal stress. With financial stress acting as a moderator variable in this study, a latent construct of financial stress was created using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012), indicated by four items. The items were specified as categorical and the latent variable was treated as a moderating variable. Sample items included “Not having enough money for food, clothing, housing, or other necessities of life” and “Being concerned about getting credit.” Responses ranged from 1 (*no*) to 2 (*yes*). Financial stress was assessed at wave three. This-item scale demonstrated high reliability (KR = .801).

*Neighborhood Stress.* Using items represented as neighborhood stressors in the EFA completed for the Adult Hassles Index (Dilorio et al., 2002), a latent construct of neighborhood stress was created using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012), indicated by four items. The items were specified as categorical and the latent variable was treated as a moderating variable. Sample items included “Being concerned about living in an unsafe area” and “Seeing homeless people in your neighborhood”. Responses ranged from 1 (*no*) to 2 (*yes*). Neighborhood stress was assessed at wave three. This 3-item scale demonstrated acceptable reliability (KR = .615).

*Adolescent Deliberative Decision-Making (Langer, Zimmerman, Warheit, & Duncan, 1993).* Adolescent Deliberative Decision-Making was assessed at wave four via adolescent reports of self-directed decision-making (Decision-Making Skills’ Index; Langer et al., 1993). Sample items included “How often do you consider your choices carefully?” and “How often do you compare the good things and bad things that might happen?” Response choices were on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*always*) to 4 (*never*). Items were reverse scored, so that higher scores indicated greater deliberative decision-making. The 7-item scale demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .778$ ). Using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012), a latent construct of Adolescent Deliberative Decision-Making was created, indicated by seven single items.

### ***Procedures.***

Employing a prospective design, this study included a sample size of N=434 mothers and their adolescents. The data utilized was collected across 4-waves, beginning in 1997, from affiliates of

a community-based organization, serving disadvantaged youth, in a large southeastern city in the United States. To be invited to participate in the Keepin' It R.E.A.L.! program, adolescents had to be 11 through 14 years of age at the time of baseline interview and had to have resided with their mother for the past year. Mothers and or female legal guardians of adolescents were required to participate, for adolescents to be eligible. Mothers and female legal guardians were eligible to participate if they had lived with the participating adolescent and performed in the mother's role for the previous year. Families were assigned to one of three conditions: Social Cognitive Intervention, Problem Behavior Intervention, or Control. Mothers and adolescents completed assessments at the following intervals: before the program, 4 months after baseline (for the control group) or after the intervention (for the intervention groups), 12 months after the baseline assessment, and 24 months after the baseline assessment. Assessments were completed individually with mothers and adolescents in one-on-one interviews with a trained interviewer, requiring roughly one hour to complete.

***Data Analytic Strategy.***

Mplus was used to run a Structural Equation Model (SEM) that examined the relationship between protective parenting (via maternal control and strictness) and adolescent deliberative decision-making, with financial stress and neighborhood stress included as moderating variables and intervention group included as a control variable (hypothesis 1). Next, interaction terms were added to examine their impact on the main effects model (hypothesis 2). Finally, adolescent gender was added as a grouping variable to examine if the main effects coefficients differed by adolescent gender (hypothesis 3).

## CHAPTER V: RESULTS

### *Preliminary Analysis.*

Before testing the main study hypotheses, a confirmatory factor analysis was run to confirm the proposed relationships between the measurement items (i.e., observed variable indicator) and the underlying latent constructs of interest. As such, a 4-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was specified and evaluated. The hypothesized model consisted of four factors: Protective parenting, Neighborhood Stress, Financial Stress, and Deliberative Decision Making. The 4-factor CFA was based on previous research and theory and was evaluated against the sample data to determine if there was adequate model fit.

A Maternal Control latent variable was specified as having 8 items while the Maternal Strictness latent variable consisted of 7 items; these two latent variables (maternal control and maternal strictness) were specified to load onto a higher order protective parenting construct. Three items were specified to load onto a Neighborhood Stress latent variable, while the Financial Stress latent variable consisted of 4 items. Finally, the Deliberative Decision-Making latent variable consisted of 7 items, which were loaded onto a Deliberative Decision-Making construct (see Figure 2). With the Neighborhood and Financial Stress indicators being categorical, the weighted least square mean and variance (WLSMV) estimator was used. WLSMV does not assume that variables are normally distributed and has been identified as a robust estimator that provides the best option for modelling categorical data (Brown, 2006).

In CFA analyses, model fit is used to evaluate how well the theoretical model fits the data. Model fit is examined using the model chi-square statistic, Comparative Fit Indices (CFI), Root Mean Squared Error Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). A good fitting model is typically indicated by a nonsignificant chi-square statistic, CFI values greater than .95, RMSEA values less than .05, and SRMR values less than .08. An adequate fitting model includes CFI values of .90 and RMSEA values between .06 and .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The chi-square statistic presents a major caveat to the interpretation of model fit. In particular,

chi-square is often regarded as the least useful metric for model fit, specifically because it is extremely sensitive to sample size (Shi, Lee, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2019). In particular, larger samples are more likely to yield a chi-square that is significant, whereas smaller samples are more likely to yield a chi-square that is not significant. With sensitivity to sample size being a limitation, the chi-square fit statistic is not regarded as providing much information about model fit and instead other model fit statistics are considered.

The results of the 4-factor CFA indicated that the model yielded excellent model fit to the data ( $\chi^2(369) = 476.945$ ,  $p = .0001$ ; CFI=.97; RMSEA=.03; SRMR=.06). Though the model demonstrated excellent fit, several issues arose. Firstly, the two latent variables on the protective parenting construct did not establish convergent validity. In particular, the factor loadings for the latent variables (Control= .026; Strict= .797) failed to demonstrate that the items fit onto the same construct. Hence, though maternal strictness appeared to have a strong correlation to the higher order protective parenting construct, maternal control did not.

Secondly, two items (items 3 and 4) on the financial stress latent construct had item intercorrelations above .95. To reduce item redundancy, low to moderate item intercorrelations are recommended to ensure breadth of a factor measurement (Boyle, 1991.) As such, item 4 (FinStr4; *Family not having enough money*), which measured financial stress stemming from family, was dropped. Item 3 (FinStr3; *Not having enough money*) was retained because it measured financial stress stemming from the respondent, similarly to items 1 (FinStr1; *Not having enough money for food, clothing, housing, or other necessities of life*) and 2 (FinStr2; *Being concerned about getting credit*).

Due to the lack of convergent validity with the latent variables on the higher order protective parenting construct in the 4-factor CFA, the higher order latent variable was eliminated and the CFA was rerun with 5 factors (Maternal Control, Maternal Strictness, Neighborhood Stress, Financial Stress, and Deliberative Decision Making) to examine model fit. The 5-factor CFA included changes to the financial stress latent construct presented within the 4-factor model. The final 5-factor CFA yielded adequate model fit to the data ( $\chi^2(340) = 471.314$ ,  $p = .000$ ; CFI=.94; RMSEA=.03; SRMR=.06). The final conclusion of the CFA was that the 5-factor model

adequately fit the data while ensuring the satisfaction of both convergent and divergent validity, providing the best representation of the constructs of interest (see Table 1 for factor correlations for the 5-factor CFA model.) This finding provided confirmation that the 5 constructs identified were acceptable to use in subsequent structural analyses as distinct constructs.

### ***Latent Moderation.***

To test the main hypotheses, a latent moderation model was attempted by using the Mplus XWITH command in conjunction with TYPE=RANDOM. The latent moderation model failed to converge, however, despite increasing the number of iterations within the analysis to impossibly high values. As an alternative, factor score estimates (generated by creation of previous latent variables) are used in subsequent analyses. The advantage of using factor scores is that scores are created without assuming unit weighting and avoid bias with using raw summary scores (McNeish & Wolf, 2020).

### ***Main effects: Hypothesis 1.***

To examine if maternal control and strictness had a positive impact on adolescent deliberative decision-making (Hypothesis 1), a structural equation model was run with adolescent deliberative decision making regressed on maternal control, maternal strictness, neighborhood stress, financial stress, with intervention group included as a covariate. The main effects test examined if maternal control and strictness had an impact on adolescent deliberative decision-making when all other variables were held constant. Results indicated that the main effects hypothesis was not supported as maternal control (Control;  $B = .035$ ,  $p = .370$ ) and strictness (Strict;  $B = -.012$ ,  $p = .825$ ) were not significantly associated with adolescent deliberative decision-making.

### ***Interaction effect: Hypothesis 2.***

Next, 4 interaction terms were added to the model to assess if increased financial and neighborhood stress strengthened the relationship between the explanatory variables (maternal control and strictness) and outcome variable (adolescent deliberative decision-making) (hypothesis 2). To create the interaction terms, the independent variables (maternal control and maternal strictness) and moderating variables (financial stress and neighborhood stress) were



multiplied together. The 4 interaction terms were defined as follows: 1) CNS, capturing the relationship between maternal control and adolescent deliberative decision-making across levels of neighborhood stress, 2) CFS, capturing the relationship between maternal control and adolescent deliberative decision-making at varying levels of financial stress, 3) SNS, capturing the relationship between maternal strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making at levels of neighborhood stress, and 4) SFS, capturing the relationship between maternal strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making at different levels of financial stress.

Interaction terms were then added to the structural equation model, regressing the outcome variable on the explanatory variables, moderating variables, control variable, and interaction terms. Findings from the one-tailed Z-test, provided in the output of the structural equation model, were examined for significance. Significance was determined by test statistics greater than or equal to the one-tailed Z-test's critical value (1.64). Significant one-tailed Z-tests indicated a positive increase in the main effects' coefficients of the structural model at higher levels of the moderator variable.

The one-tailed Z-tests for hypothesis 2 yielded one test statistic that fell above the critical region threshold to indicate statistical significance. In support of hypothesis 2, the interaction between maternal strictness and financial stress (SFS;  $B = .189$ ,  $p = .074$ ;  $Z = 1.788$ ) was significant. As demonstrated in Figure 2, a significant association between maternal strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making can be observed once the relationship passed through the .80 threshold value of the moderator. This finding indicated that when mothers reported extreme financial stress (.80 points above the mean) the promotive impact of maternal strictness on adolescent deliberative decision-making increased. Counter to the hypothesis, none of the other interactions yielded test statistics that were greater than the critical value. As such, the interactions between control and financial stress (CFS;  $B = -.064$ ;  $Z = -.828$ ), control and neighborhood stress (CNS;  $B = .108$ ;  $Z = 1.274$ ), and strictness and neighborhood stress (SNS;  $B = -.354$ ;  $Z = -3.086$ ) were not significant.

In summary, the interaction effects hypothesis was partially supported. Greater financial stress increased the promotive impact of maternal strictness on adolescent deliberative decision-making

(see Figure 2) but did not increase the promotive impact of maternal control on adolescent deliberative decision-making. Further, neighborhood stress did not have an impact on the relationship between maternal strictness and adolescent deliberative decision making or maternal control and adolescent deliberative decision-making.

***Multigroup analyses: Hypothesis 3.***

Finally, to examine if the relationship between the explanatory variables (maternal control and strictness) and the outcome variable (adolescent deliberative decision-making) was stronger for male adolescents (hypothesis 3), adolescent gender was included in the structural equation model as a grouping variable. The chi-square difference test was used to examine if by constraining the coefficient paths across groups to equal the model fit would worsen. A worsened model fit would be represented by a significant change in chi-square and would indicate that the paths varied based across male and female adolescents. Counter to the hypothesis, constraining the path coefficients did not result in a significant change in chi-square ( $\chi^2(18) = 25.683, p = .1072$ ). In other words, hypothesis 3 was not supported. The relationship between maternal control and strictness' and adolescent deliberative decision-making did not vary as a function of adolescent gender.

## CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Parenting is critical to the development of adolescent deliberative decision-making (Wolff & Crockett, 2011). Research often fails to acknowledge the role of context in shaping parenting behaviors, which go on to influence adolescents' development of deliberative decision-making. As a result, it is generally assumed that regardless of context, parents should engage in similar behaviors to foster deliberative decision-making in adolescents. This line of research does not consider environmental contexts experienced by ethnically diverse families that necessitate, for youth safety, greater use of parental control and strictness (Soenens et al., 2007; Sheldon et al., 2003). Research is needed that contributes to understanding the role context plays in shaping parenting within African American families as well as the promotive impact protective parenting can have on African American adolescents deliberative decision-making development (Wolff & Crockett, 2011).

Guided by Self-determination and Cultural-ecological theories, this study sought to fill a noteworthy gap within the Self-determination literature by exploring an alternative pathway by which decision-making autonomy is fostered. Using a sample of 434 mothers and their adolescent child, participating in a Boys and Girls Club intervention, the current study sought to investigate the promotive effects of maternal strictness and control on African American adolescents' deliberative decision-making in a financially disadvantaged sample experiencing neighborhood and financial stress. Maternal control and strictness have been identified as factors that protect youth from negative environment impacts, being more promotive in contexts marked by environmental stressors (Voisin et al., 2017, Dow, 2016; Elliott & Reid, 2019). Within the current study, three hypotheses were tested. Firstly, this study examined if protective parenting, via maternal control and strictness, would be positively related to adolescent deliberative decision-making. It was expected that maternal control and strictness would be positively related to adolescents' deliberative decision-making. Secondly, this study examined if the relationship between maternal control and strictness would be more promotive in contexts of increased financial and neighborhood stress. It was expected that the relationship between maternal control and strictness would be more promotive in contexts of increased neighborhood and financial

stress. Finally, this study examined if the relationship between protective parenting and adolescent deliberative decision-making would vary based on adolescent gender. It was expected that the relationship would be more promotive for adolescent males.

***Promotive effects of maternal strictness and control on deliberative decision-making.***

Counter to the hypothesis, maternal control and strictness did not demonstrate a significant positive main effect relationship with adolescents' deliberative decision-making. This finding stands in opposition to the current study's model specification and previous claims within the literature. As it relates to the model specification, the current sample was comprised of African American mothers experiencing financial disadvantage, who predominantly identified as single mothers raising African American sons. Parental control and strictness have been identified as adaptive for adolescent outcomes in African American samples, and more adaptive and promotive of adolescent outcomes for families experiencing financial disadvantage. (Dow, 2016; Voisin et al., 2017; East & Hokoda, 2015; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006). Within the current sample, protective parenting was conceptualized to be more promotive as mothers shared similar characteristics (i.e., financial disadvantage and single parenthood) with, and engaged in a similar practice as (i.e., resource seeking), a group of mothers described by Jarrett (1997) whose youth benefited from protective parenting. In particular, the mothers within the current study, similar to mothers described by Jarrett, engaged in the protective parenting practice of resource seeking, as evidenced by the mothers within this study signing their children up for a Boys and Girls Club program and sex initiation intervention. In addition to Jarrett's (1997) work, a body of literature exists that suggests a positive relationship between protective parenting and adolescent outcomes for African American families experiencing financial disadvantage (Bean et al., 2006; Voisin et al., 2017; East & Hokoda, 2015).

Given the congruence between the current study's model specification and literature, the null finding was unexpected. Despite limited research to guide interpretation, several explanations of the nonsignificant main effects' findings are worthy of consideration. Firstly, one distinction between the current study and previous literature is the reporter of parenting behaviors. In particular, research demonstrating a relationship between protective parenting and adolescent

outcomes has primarily relied on youth reports (Bean et al., 2006; Voisin et al., 2017). This work has demonstrated that adolescents' perceptions of parenting behaviors often have a greater impact on their outcomes (Maurizi, Gershoff, & Aber, 2012). Due to these differences in perceptions, mothers and adolescents often rate parenting differently (Maurizi et al., 2012; Pelegrina, Garcia-Linares, & Casanova, 2003). It is likely that the use of mother reports, compared to youth reports, as the sole indicator of mother behaviors resulted in null findings. Unfortunately, complete adolescent report data on the parenting constructs was not available and was therefore not included in the analyses. Future research should seek to examine how the relationship between protective parenting via maternal control and strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making may vary with the use of adolescent reports on mother behaviors.

Secondly, the use of only mothers within this study could have also influenced the null findings. In particular, research has demonstrated that parent gender impacts parenting behaviors, which influences adolescent decision-making. For example, African American fathers tend to encourage greater youth independence (except for when raising girls, in which case they practice more control), while mothers tend to practice a combination of independence encouragement and control (Julian et al., 1994; Perez-Brena & colleagues, 2012). African American fathers' encouragement of greater independence in youth could lead to earlier development of deliberative decision-making by providing youth with increased exposure to the process and opportunities to practice. This could lead youth to be more aware of the steps they take when making decisions and better able to report on those steps in a study with fathers than in a study with mothers. Considering that African American mothers practice a mixture of independence encouragement and control, it may be more difficult for youth to recall the steps they take when making a decision in a study with mothers. It is plausible that greater use of joint decision-making with mothers impacts adolescents reports of deliberative decision-making, especially in a study focused on sexual initiation, a topic in which adolescents (especially males, who also make up the predominant gender represented in adolescent sample within the current study) have reported difficulty communicating with mothers about (Dilorio, Kelley, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999).

Finally, it is also plausible that the specificity in the sample of mothers (i.e., predominantly single mothers raising African American males in financially disadvantaged contexts) restricted the range in their survey responses. For example, the characteristics of the mother sample could have resulted in a sample of mothers who were similarly strict and controlling. This limited variability in the mother sample could have led to low associations between the constructs of interest and influenced the null findings, with associational studies relying on high levels of variability in the measures to pick up significance.

***Differential impacts based on neighborhood and financial stress.***

Hypothesis two proposed that maternal strictness and control would be more promotive of adolescents' deliberative decision-making in contexts of increased financial and neighborhood stress. This hypothesis aligns with literature that suggests that while protective parenting is associated with positive adolescent outcomes, in contexts that are particularly stressful, this relationship is more pronounced (Voisin et al., 2017). In partial support of the hypothesis, maternal strictness was found to be more promotive of adolescents' deliberative decision-making in contexts of increased financial stress. As demonstrated in Figure 2, results suggest that in contexts where mothers are .8 points above the mean for financial stress, the hypothesized relationship between maternal strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making is significant. In other words, only at high levels of financial stress does maternal strictness significantly increase adolescent deliberative decision-making. This finding provides insight on the main effects' model specification. In particular, the moderation effect indicates that if the study were completed again, with a focus on mothers with higher levels of financial stress, the main effect between maternal strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making likely would have been significant.

The promotive impact of maternal strictness on adolescents' deliberative decision-making in contexts of increased financial stress is supported in the literature. Researchers have documented the positive impact of protective parenting strategies for African American families experiencing environmental stressors (Elliott & Reid, 2019). For instance, African American mothers have referred to maternal strictness as a promotive practice for adolescent outcomes in financially

disadvantaged contexts, marked by environmental stressors (e.g., poverty and violence) (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Such work suggests that the relationship between maternal strictness and adolescent outcomes is strengthened in contexts of neighborhood and financial stress (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Supported by similar research, Pittman and Chase-Lansdale (2001) found that protective parenting practices (e.g., supervisor/monitoring) were more promotive in contexts marked by environmental stressors (e.g., poverty).

Little work has considered how neighborhood and financial stress interact with protective parenting and adolescent decision-making. Despite limited research to guide interpretation, several explanations for the findings should be considered. Firstly, it is possible that the specific stress items used within this study were too general. Qualitative research has noted that when African American mothers report stress related to childrearing (e.g., stress about the ability to keep children safe due to neighborhood safety) this directly impacts their parenting (Voisin et al., 2017; Johnson, Finigan, Bradshaw, Haynie, & Cheng, 2013). Within the current study, the stress items were general (i.e., not having enough money), which could have influenced the null findings. It is possible that stress items focused on stressors related to childrearing (e.g., unable to pay for food for children) would have led to significant results.

Secondly, it is possible that the form of decision-making used within this study made it difficult to demonstrate a relationship between the variables. Differing from other studies that measure decision-making via behaviors (e.g., opportunities to make decisions or accounts of decision-making behaviors), this study examined decision making processes (Wolff & Crocket, 2011; Perez-Brena et al., 2012; Varner & Mandara, 2013; Perez & Cumsille, 2012; Romich et al., 2009; Smetana et al., 2004). The evaluation of decision-making processes could have influenced the results by making it more difficult to establish a relationship, as processes are generally more difficult to measure. Future studies should explore if the findings are different when decision-making behaviors are used as the proxy.

Finally, it is also plausible that the participating adolescents' involvement in the intervention restricted their range of responses on the decision-making measure. A restriction of range on the decision-making measure would have decreased the variability in decision-making scores and

influenced smaller associations between the constructs of interest. This could have impacted the findings, as associational studies depend on high levels of variability in measures to capture significance. If this were the case, it would be expected that if the adolescents in the current sample's results were contrasted with adolescents in a general community setting the results would be different.

***Differential impacts based on adolescent gender.***

Hypothesis three proposed that the relationship between maternal control and strictness and adolescent deliberative decision-making would be more protective for adolescent males. Counter to the hypothesis, maternal control and strictness were not more promotive of adolescent deliberative decision-making for male adolescents. This finding stands in opposition to previous claims that protective parenting behaviors differentially impact adolescent outcomes based on adolescent gender (Kapungu et al. (2006). For example, Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, and Miller (2000) found protective parenting via monitoring to be more promotive of positive adolescent outcomes (e.g., less alcohol use) for African American adolescent boys than girls, suggesting a relationship between protective parenting and adolescent outcomes via deliberative decision-making. This study is supported by literature that identifies maternal monitoring as more promotive of adolescent sex health, via decreases in sexual risk behaviors, for boys compared to girls (Kincaid, Jones, Sterrett, & McKee, 2012).

Counter to what the literature suggests, the multigroup finding was not significant. However, the null finding could be due to the current sample being comprised of adolescent males participating in an intervention program tailored towards improving decision-making. It is possible that the intervention conditions reduced gender differences that would have otherwise been discovered between male and female adolescents if they were not involved in the intervention.

***Limitations and Future directions.***

Although this study contributes to knowledge on protective parenting behaviors among African American families facing contextual stress, several limitations should be acknowledged. First,



data was limited to the inclusion of mothers. Future research is needed to examine whether these findings hold for African American fathers experiencing similar contextual stressors.

Second, data for this study was collected between 1997 and 2000. The time period in which this study was conducted influenced the measurement tools used to capture the constructs of interest. Future research that utilizes current measures for the constructs of interest are needed to examine how different measures may influence the study results. For example, current research uses behavioral indicators as a proxy of decision-making, compared to thought processes. Including a current measure of decision-making with a focus on behaviors could influence the results by showing significant relationships between the constructs of interest.

Moreover, the maternal stress construct included items that were not specific to parenting. Future research should seek to include stressor items specific to parenting. For example, mothers who experience stress related to their children's safety within their neighborhood (e.g., concerns with children being in danger) may engage in different protective parenting behaviors than if they have general stress about their neighborhood that does not involve their children.

Additionally, the present study included single reports of the constructs of interest because many of the measures were either solely provided to mothers or youth, not provided to both mothers and youth in the wave that data were used, or were provided to both mother and youth but included different questions. Research has detailed the benefits of using multiple informants for construct validity. Future research should seek to take a multiple informant approach by including both youth and parent reports of the constructs of interests and demonstrating how similar or different findings are based on the informant.

Finally, the majority of the hypotheses were not significant. Given these findings, it appears that the theoretical conceptualization of the hypothesized models was mis-specified. Future research should seek to examine this model using adolescent and parental (with the inclusion of fathers) reports of the constructs of interest to examine if this makes a difference on the findings.

### ***Conclusion.***

African American parents experience environmental stressors that impact their parenting and influence their adolescents' outcomes (Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Broadly, scholars have proposed that protective parenting, described by greater control and strictness, can positively impact African American adolescents' development in low-income contexts (Bean et al., 2006; Voisin et al., 2017; Pallock & Lamborn, 2006), and yet relatively little work has examined the promotive impact of these parenting practices, in contexts marked by environmental stressors. Findings from the present study contributed to this gap by demonstrating the uniquely promotive effect of maternal strictness on adolescent deliberative decision-making in contexts of increased financial stress. However, more work is needed to understand the nuanced nature of maternal strictness' promotive impact under conditions of broad maternal financial stress and financial stress specific to parenting.

These findings have several implications. In particular, as it pertains to theory, research on adolescent decision-making development has warned against the use of parental strictness and control, noting the potentially stifling impact they can have on adolescents decision-making development (Sheldon et al., 2003). Counter to this Self-determination theory narrative, this study highlights the importance of considering not only the parenting behavior but also the context in which the parenting takes place. With regard to future studies, the contextualization of parenting behaviors could make for more inclusive research when studying the development of decision-making and including youth and families facing different contextual challenges. Further, as it pertains to implementation, this counternarrative is also inclusive of mothers who seek to develop their adolescents decision-making skills while living in contexts marked by stressors. In particular, this study highlights that adolescent decision-making can positively develop in environments where mothers enforce protective parenting strategies due to the presence of environmental stressors, as these contexts are not particularly harmful to the development of adolescents' deliberative decision-making. This study also highlights that for African American mothers experiencing high levels of financial stress greater uses of strictness may promote the positive development of adolescents' deliberative decision-making. Hence, this

demonstrates that maternal strictness can serve as a protective parenting strategy within disadvantaged contexts and lead to positive adolescent outcomes.

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APPENDIX A: Factor Correlations for 5-Factor CFA Model

**Table 1**

*Factor Correlations for 5-Factor CFA Model*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Neighborhood Stress	—				
2. Financial Stress	0.461**	—			
3. Maternal Strictness	0.033	-0.159*	—		
4. Maternal Control	-0.010	-0.025	0.209**	—	
5. Deliberative Decision-Making	0.014	-0.071	0.032	0.036	—
<i>M</i>	3.557	4.039	28.000	35.609	19.812
<i>SD</i>	—	—	3.842	5.003	4.136

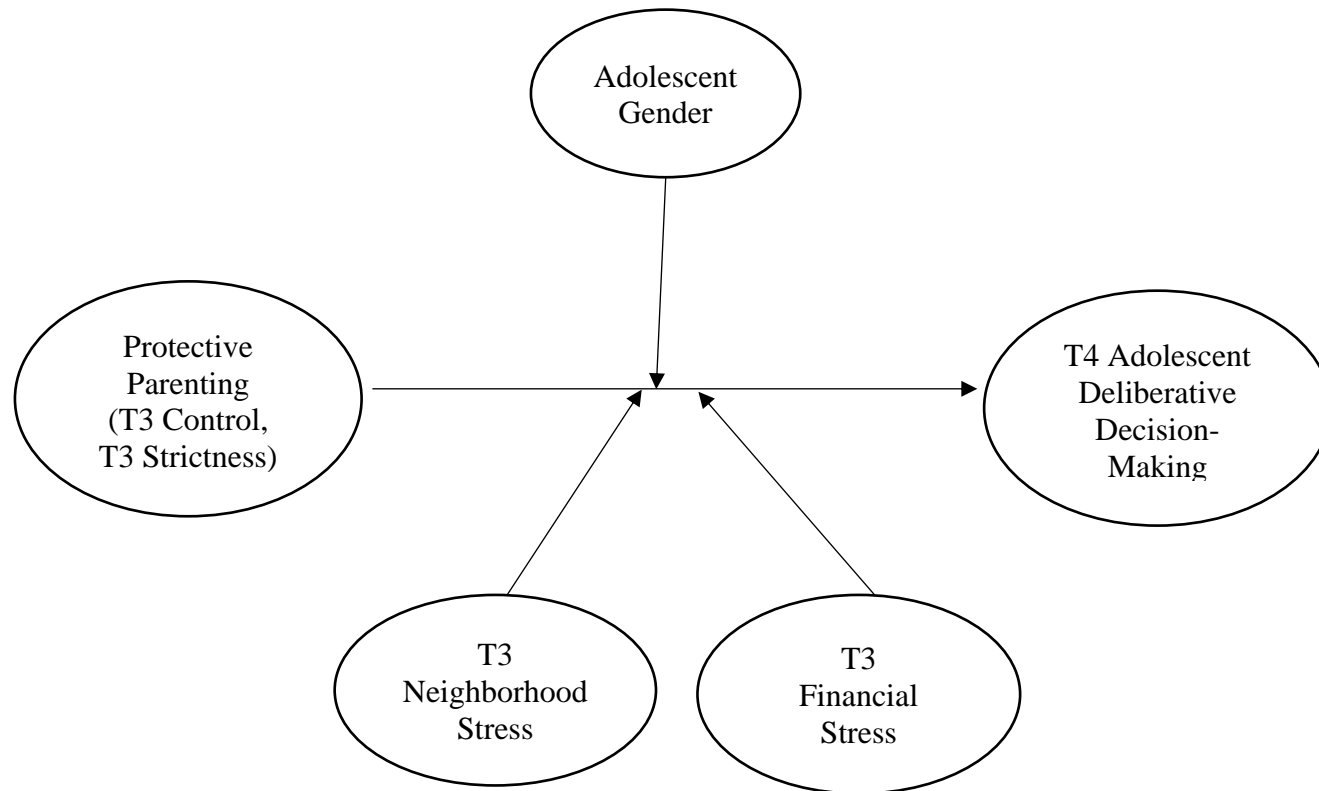
Note. Standard deviations not provided for categorical variables. Financial Stress; Neighborhood Stress.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

APPENDIX B: Conceptual Model

**Figure 1**

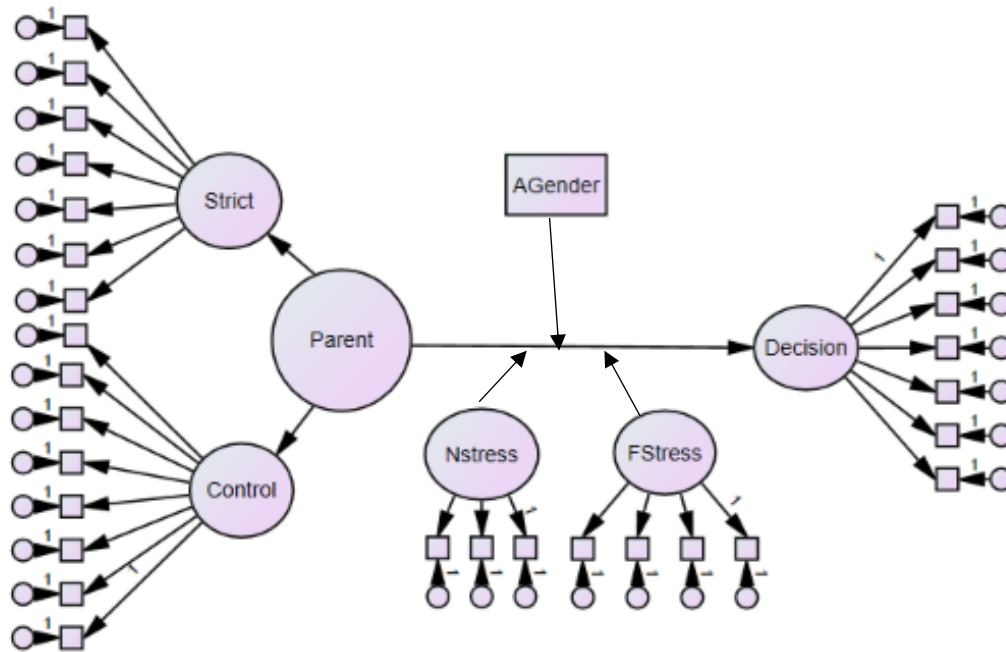
*Conceptual Model*



APPENDIX C: Latent Variable Structural Model

**Figure 2**

*Latent Variable Structural Model*

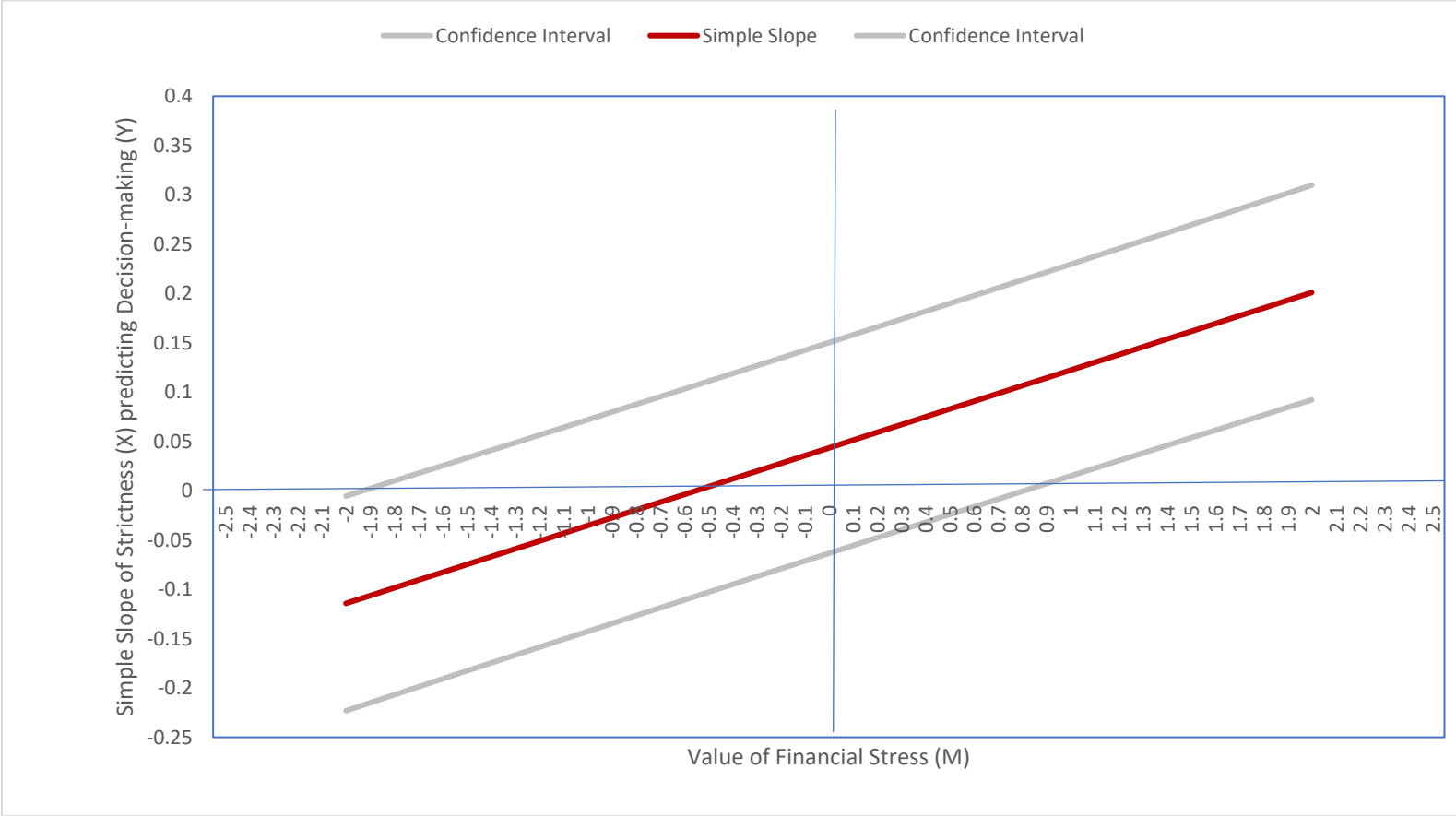


*Note. 4-factor structural model with higher order parenting construct.*



APPENDIX D: Johnson-Newman Plot

**Figure 3**  
*Johnson-Newman Plot*



*Note.* Johnson-Newman plot demonstrating the simple slope of maternal strictness on adolescent deliberative decision-making at values of financial stress.