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KINSHIP AND FAMILY

The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people.

—Ashanti proverb

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To be able to define the African American family
- To become aware of how the African American family has been historically studied
- To understand critical events affecting African American families historically and contemporarily
- To understand what the African American family looks like
- To become familiar with strengths and coping patterns of African American families
- To become aware of research and methodological issues when studying African American families
- To be able to identify best practices for working with African American families

MORE COMMITTED TO BABY MAMAS THAN A WIFE

BY DR. OBARI ADÉYE CARTMAN (2016, MAY 9)

Some cringe at the term baby mama. It connotes a low class, almost shameful position in Black communities where family structure has

transitioned over the past few decades. Black folk in this country have always had remixed configurations of extended family systems.

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The baby mama age was born from a decrease in marriage, increase in divorce, and no change in sex frequency. Although it literally means the exact same thing, saying “mother of my child” sounds more respectable. Beyond the semantics, and considering a wide variety of circumstances, I think we need to have more open conversations about healthy co-parenting, rooted in more sincere ways to celebrate mamas.

Let’s start with definitions:

co-par-ent

kōˈpe(ə)rənt/

noun: coparent

1. a divinely appointed assignment to engage in a long term relationship with another adult equally responsible for providing comprehensive care for one or more child.

Men invented “baby mama drama.” It’s a magician’s sleight of hand trick. We say ooh look over there → women are crazy, and hope you don’t see the mischief we tucked behind our ear. Baby mama drama becomes an asylum for male confusion, irresponsibility, miscommunication and selfishness. Replace that guy that with a man who presents his intentions with clarity, has the skills discipline and motivation to sustain himself and others, and is mature enough to make decisions like don’t not sleep with her because you’re lonely and she’s familiar—and voilá! Baby mama drama disappears.

Source: Cartman [2016].

Marriage is old school. I’d probably be married by now if I wasn’t afraid of forever. To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part. That vow makes so much more sense for our children. Why don’t we make vows to our children? Write them out. Have public ceremonies and ask the community to hold us accountable for maintaining them? One of the dangers of patriarchy is superficially (or not at all) valuing children and women. Societies that prioritize men function from a level of imbalance that will always diminish the potential of human achievement. Maybe it all stems from men’s envy of the power of women—and that resentment turns into control. I digress.

When I’ve asked myself why I’m not married (yet) I know it’s certainly not for lack of marriageable women in my life. It’s also not because I don’t think marriage is important. The only reason left seems quite simple—I’m not married because I don’t want to be. Our wants are informed by lots of things: community expectations, family pressure, fears, internal values, cost benefit analysis, but at the end of the day it’s a decision to make. Choosing to get and stay married is the base. Sure, you gotta add all the other ingredients to it: patience, wisdom, shared values, communication, community support, etc. but none of that matters without two adults choosing to do it. Which isn’t true for co-parenting. The choice is made (assuming the sex was consensual) the moment that child is conceived—no, actually, the moment the mother decides to give birth to it.

DEFINITIONS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

African American families are varied and diverse. The cover story highlights the importance of fathers’ coparenting, whether or not they are married to the child’s mother. Many disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, and psychology, are interested in the African American family and kinships. The family is the most

proximal influence for youth and the primary institution for socializing them. In this chapter, we examine structural (i.e., who the family consists of and what the family looks like) as well as functional (i.e., what purposes the family serves) aspects of the African American family. First, we provide definitions of terms relevant to family; then, we provide a historical overview of how African American families have been studied; and then, we describe the functional and structural characteristics of the social structures within which Africans lived in the New World during the period of enslavement. We provide a snapshot of what contemporary African American families look like. We also explore strengths and coping patterns among African American families. We review research and methodological issues relevant to studying African American families. Then, evidenced-based practices for working with African American families are discussed. Finally, we give a critique and summary of the main ideas of the chapter.

Definitions

More than half a century ago, the sociologist Murdock (1949) defined the family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. Murdock defined a family as a male and female cohabiting adults who had a sexual relationship, and one or more children, biological or adopted. Murdock described the nuclear family as the most basic family structure, which consisted of a married man and woman with their offspring. Murdock's definition captures what has been thought of within contemporary American culture and social science as a traditional family. As we will see, African American families differ substantially from the family described by Murdock. Reiss's (1965) definition of the family focuses on its functional aspects. According to Reiss, the one universal function of the family is the socialization of the young. Reiss defines the family as a small, kinship-structured group with the key function of providing nurturance and socialization of the newborn. He acknowledges that this group is commonly the parents in a conjugal relationship, but occasionally, it is the mother and/or other relatives of the mother. Robert Hill's (1998) definition of the Black family emphasizes both functional and structural aspects. According to Hill, the Black family is a household related by blood or marriage or function that provides basic instrumental and expressive functions to its members. Families serve instrumental functions by providing for the physical and material needs of the family members, such as providing clothing, shelter, and food. The expressive functions of a family take into account the emotional support and nurturance needs met by the family.

The family network can include biological relations as well as nonbiologically related members. The African American family is characterized as an extended family (Hill, 1998). The *extended family* is a network of functionally related individuals who reside in different households. The *immediate family* consists of individuals who reside in the same household, regardless of the number of generations within that household. Akin to the extended family is the notion of the *augmented family*. The augmented family is defined as a family group where extended families and/or non-relatives live with and provide significant care to one or more children. The presence of additional adult care providers distinguishes the augmented family from nuclear and single-parent families (Barnes, 2001).

Fictive kin are often included as members of African American families. *Fictive kin* are those members of the family who are not biologically related nor related through marriage but who feel as if they are family and function like family. Friends who are fictive kin are incorporated into the extended family network and are seen

socially and emotionally as kin. A person who is considered fictive kin may be seen as a father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, sister, brother, or cousin, depending on the role he or she plays (Scott & Black, 1989). Fictive kin may be referred to as play mother, play father, play cousin, play aunt, and so forth. The notion of fictive kin is also prevalent in African culture whereby all members of a tribe or community are considered family (Stewart, 2007). It is common in African culture for friends to refer to each other as brother or sister and use other terms denoting family relations.

Historical Approaches to Studying Black Families

Much of the early writings on the Black family are found in the domains of history and sociology. W. E. B. Du Bois authored the first books on the Black family, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) and *The Negro American Family* (1908). In these books, Du Bois draws on African and slave experiences in discussing differences between Black and White families. Du Bois disputes the then-existing myth that Africa was not a source of culture and civilization. He describes the cultural survival of Africans in the New World and discusses how their language, religion, and practices survived the Middle Passage to the United States (Gadsden, 1999).

Frazier's book, *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), is one of the first scholarly works to examine Black family life in the United States. In this book, Frazier describes the negative consequences of slavery on the disorganization of the Black family. According to Frazier, slavery created an unstable family unit that resulted in lasting damage to the African American family. During slavery, the biological family unit was not sacred. Children were sold from their biological parents, and male and female partners were kept from legal unions. The economic structure of slavery forced separations of male and female partners from each other and from their children.

The lack of family stability, with its resulting problems among African Americans, continued after slavery as Blacks began the migration from the South to the North. According to Frazier (1939), social welfare measures to combat poverty in the 1930s had many negative consequences for families. Families became dependent on welfare and handouts and did not achieve self-sufficiency. Furthermore, many of the practices that were grounded in African traditions and useful in Southern life were not functional in the urban North. Frazier recommended that these traditional African practices be eliminated. He believed that a different approach was needed for these families to survive in the urban North and that African American families could not progress until they changed their way of living. At the same time, welfare programs that were intended to help African American families in poverty were, in fact, detrimental to the well-being of the African American family. One such program was the man-in-the-house rule. The man-in-the-house rule denied payments to a child who qualified for welfare benefits if the child's mother was living with or having relations with an able-bodied man (Man-in-the-House-Rule, 2008; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). This rule was struck down in 1968.

The study of the African American family during the 1960s and 1970s was conducted in the context of the many social and economic barriers African Americans faced during this period. Two types of literature on the family were written during this period (Gadsden, 1999). One group of studies focused on the conditions and circumstances that prevented Blacks from social and economic upward mobility. Moynihan's (1965) commissioned paper, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," is illustrative of this approach. This paper portrayed Black families as pathological, with a structure that differed from the normative family structure within the United States. Normative family structure was based on middle-class European

American family structure. According to Moynihan (1965), in essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure, which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well (p. 7).

The theme in Moynihan's paper is congruent with Frazier's disorganization theme in accounting for the conditions of Black families. Moynihan's main point is that the deterioration of the Black family is responsible for the deterioration of Black society. Moynihan was assistant secretary of labor at the time this paper was written. By writing this paper, he advanced the notion that civil rights legislation alone would not guarantee racial equality since it was the breakdown in family structure that was largely responsible for poverty among Blacks. Moynihan went on to become an advisor to President Nixon and a senator representing New York for four terms.

The second type of literature that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s used a strength model to describe Black families. These writings used new ways of understanding the experiences of African American families (Billingsley, 1968). The patterns and styles that had come to be associated with African American families were seen as adaptive and functional for the survival and well-being of members of the family. This new work viewed flexible family structure, such as the extended family, as functional. Authors of this type of literature discussed the dynamic and positive interactional patterns and support systems within African American families (McAdoo, 1998, 2007). Robert Hill's work on the Black family began in the 1970s and, like Billingsley's, focused on resiliency and strength within the Black family. Hill's work is discussed later in this chapter. The strength-based approach to studying Black families started by Billingsley and Hill continues today.

Research on Black families in the 1990s and beyond also tended to focus on structural factors, such as the marriage rate of African Americans (Gadsden, 1999). These studies include studies of structural patterns and socioeconomic indicators, such as female-headed households, poverty, and adolescent mothers. Current research on African American families is diverse and spans several areas. These include topics on child-rearing and socialization practices, family communication and support, family strengths and resiliency, and African American fathers.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY STRUCTURE

Historical Perspective

Families in Africa

It is impossible to describe African culture without reference to the family. While African families are diverse (e.g., a few African cultures still practice polygamy while most do not), as with families of all cultural groups, there are key characteristic and unique aspects of the African family. The Ghanaian scholar Gyekye (1996) describes the role of the family in a communal society. According to Gyekye, when one speaks of the family in an African context, one is referring not to the nuclear family but to the extended family. The communal values of solidarity, mutual helpfulness, interdependence, and concern for the well-being of every individual member of society are most often expressed in the institution of the family. Each member of the family is responsible for maintaining the cohesion of the family; within the family system, children have obligations to their parents, and parents have obligations to their children.

On the topic of marriage, Gyekye notes that marriage is essential to the development of kinship ties, and every adult man and woman is expected to marry and procreate. In traditional Africa, marriage is not only an affair between two persons who may be in love but also is a marriage between the families of each. Marriage is contracted only after each family is satisfied regarding the worthiness of each of the marriage partners. Marriage, in effect, in many African societies is considered a union of families.

The importance of marriage is seen in African puberty rites, in which young people are educated on sex, marriage, and family life in preparation for marriage. An unmarried woman in Africa is almost an anomaly: Marriage is a requirement of the society and an obligation that every man and woman must fulfill.

In many African societies, when a young man has gained employment, he is expected to marry because marriage symbolizes respect and social status. In the traditional Akan society of Ghana, if a man who has reached the age at which he is expected to marry does not do so, he will be regarded as a *kwasia* (Akan translation is “fool”) and considered to be unwise and irresponsible.

Although, in general, the family unit is seen as a primary way of furthering the communal structure, there is variability. Western influences and new technology have begun to impact African families. The African family is seen as both resilient and troubled (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007). Akande, Adetoun, and Tserere (2006) describe some of the challenges, noting that the emerging South African family can best be described as a *saturated family*. The authors note that technologies (e.g., car, ill-gotten wealth, TV, cell phones) have contributed to family turmoil and a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation. The home is no longer a refuge of harmony, understanding, and peace but instead the site of disputes and violence between individuals of different ages and both genders.

Also of note is the impact of AIDS on the family system in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in 2011, in South Africa and Zambia, the prevalence of adults living with HIV/AIDS was 17.3% and 12.5%, respectively (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012). Because of the high incidence of HIV among families in some countries, family systems have been disrupted and torn apart. Women who are the care providers in Africa have higher prevalence rates of HIV than men; in South Africa, three women in the 15- to 24-year-old age group are infected for every one man (AIDS Foundation, South Africa).

Caring for children orphaned due to AIDS can be especially burdensome for members of the immediate and extended family (Govender, Penning, George, & Quinlan, 2012). Govender et al. compared caregivers of children orphaned due to AIDS with caregivers who cared for nonorphans. Participants included orphan (N = 224) and nonorphan (N = 395) caregivers. Caregivers of orphans (compared with nonorphans) tended to be grandmothers who were mostly unemployed, which added to financial strain. These caregivers were also more likely to care for more children and to have less help from other adults. Seventy-five percent of the orphan caregivers had been the child's caregiver since birth. Caregivers of orphans also reported more health problems for themselves, as well as for their orphaned children. One of the implications of this study is that the extended family in South Africa may not be able to provide the support needed because of the AIDS epidemic. A related change in family systems due to HIV/AIDS is that children in households affected by HIV have had to become involved in caregiving. This is because there may not be a responsible adult to perform the caregiving role (Olang'o, Nyamongo, & Nyambedha, 2012).

In overview, we see similarities and differences between African and African American families in contemporary society, with some similarity in how families are conceptualized. However, the HIV epidemic, along with technological changes, is affecting the structure and the well-being of the family in Africa.

Families During Enslavement

Although it has been assumed that there were no two-parent families during enslavement, Burgess (1995) writes that many families of African descent living in the United States in the 1700s and 1800s were two-parent households. By examining plantation records, Gutman (1976) observed the presence of nuclear families among enslaved Africans that resembled those of the slave masters. Using 1880–1885 census data collected from Blacks in several cities, Gutman found that the majority of Blacks of all social classes were in nuclear families. Gutman believed that slavery did not destroy the Black family and that, in fact, enslaved families were stronger than had been thought. Although there were nuclear families, other family forms also existed because enslaved families were often separated through sales.

Enslaved Blacks tried to provide for their families financially, as well as spiritually (Hallam, 2004). Prior to slavery becoming a legal institution, some slaves were able to make arrangements for their families (e.g., some contracted the release of children after so many years of service). As the plantation dictated how the South functioned, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, slavery became legalized in law, and it became very challenging for Blacks to form families as the laws forbade Blacks to marry each other. However, by the early 1700s, plantation owners became aware of the economic benefits of having slaves marry. Marriage led to less discontent among slaves, more stable unions, and, importantly, reliable reproduction cycles (Hallam, 2004).

The lives of the enslaved family depended on the needs of the agrarian region. In tobacco-planting regions, fewer slaves were needed, which led to families having different “owners” and living apart. Husbands in these unions would visit their wives and children once or twice a week. However, on large cotton plantations, which required many slaves, it was more common for families to live on the same plantation (Hallam, 2004).

During slavery, the mother–child relationship rather than the husband–wife relationship was primary to family life. Within slave communities, members helped to raise children of single mothers. When parents were sold to other slave owners, other adults in the slave community took care of the children left behind. The biggest fear of families was that a child would be sold.

Although enslaved families were able to function as adaptively as feasible given their circumstances, the consequences of slavery were nevertheless devastating to the African American family (Burgess, 1995). Enslavement had several pervasive, institutional, and long-term effects on the family. These included earlier ages of intercourse, childbearing, and establishment of a household. In African communities, natural spacing techniques, such as breastfeeding and polygamous unions, allowed women to space childbearing. Within the New World, there was an emphasis on increased economic production and, consequently, an emphasis on human reproduction. Therefore, enslaved African women began parenting at earlier ages and had greater numbers of children than did their foremothers in Africa.

Permanent unions and marriages were not possible because slaves could be sold at any time. Marriages between Africans in the United States received no legitimacy from slave owners. Enslaved Africans were required to get permission from their owners before they could marry, even though their marriages were not legally recognized.

Black Families During Emancipation and Reconstruction

During the period of emancipation, family life changed for African Americans. African American families could stay together, and legal marriage was possible. Fathers who had been sold and separated prior to emancipation reestablished relationships with their families. After slavery, there was an increase in two-parent households, as fathers rejoined their families, and couples were legally able to marry (Burgess, 1995).

However, most African Americans in the rural South lived in poverty, and economic conditions forced many to become sharecroppers. Sharecroppers paid rent by giving a portion of their crop to the landowners, who also often owned the house they lived in. Although education was now legal for Blacks, often children as young as 10 or 11 were unable to attend school because they had to work on the farm.

During the period from 1865 to 1898, African Americans began to own small businesses and farms and to develop Churches and some banking systems. Colleges were created, and some literacy was achieved. These advances helped to shape the African American family, as some children were able to get an education.

The Great Migration

From 1916 to 1970, African American families began to leave the South for what they thought would be a better life in cities in the North, Midwest, and West. These cities included New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Although there were harsh conditions and Blacks could only obtain menial jobs, for the most part, they were able to find some form of employment. Some African Americans developed businesses and were able to take care of their families (Burgess, 1995). Others were able to obtain jobs in factories, slaughterhouses, and foundries, although these jobs had very poor working conditions. Black migration declined during the period of the Great Depression in the 1930s but increased with the coming of World War II. When the Great Migration ended, in 1970, the geographical distribution of Blacks had changed considerably. In 1900, roughly 9 out of every 10 Blacks lived in the South. By 1970, the South was home to less than half of the country's Blacks. Today about 55% of Blacks live in the South (Black Demographics, n.d.)

The Black family migration and growing urbanization changed the makeup of the Black family (Staples, 1999). By 1925, Blacks in the urban North, Midwest, and West no longer had the cultural practices that had enabled them to survive in the South. During this time and the decades that followed, new phenomena surfaced: children reared by mothers only, welfare dependency, juvenile delinquency, and drug addiction. According to Staples, about 10% to 15% of all Black families experienced these problems in the 1950s. Social policies that included welfare and poverty programs were developed during the period of the 1950s. However, many of these programs did not consider other factors that affected the African American community. For example, social policies were based on a "breadwinner" model that assumed that husbands would provide the basic needs for their families. This model did not consider the low wages and the high level of unemployment among African American men that made it impossible for them to take care of their families (Burgess, 1995). Consequently, some of the early programs that were intended to benefit families may have encouraged fathers to be absent from the home. For example, public assistance requirements prohibited male presence in homes in which public assistance was received, as discussed previously (i.e., man-in-the-house rule).

WHAT DOES THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY LOOK LIKE?

Structural aspects of the contemporary African American family have been described by scholars (e.g., McAdoo, 2007; Vereen, 2007). These papers focus on the individuals with whom African American children live, the composition of the family, who

lives in the household, marriage and divorce, family structure and poverty, and differences between African American and White family structure. Other studies focus on social and psychosocial outcomes related to family structure. Vereen advocates the need for a paradigm shift in how African American family structure is categorized in order to meet the needs of this population. We discuss structural aspects of the family next.

Single-Parent-Headed Households

There has been an increase in single-mother families over the past few decades for both White and African American households. Reasons for the increase in single-female-headed households differ for African Americans and other ethnic groups. For example, among White women, there has been an increase in divorce and a decrease in remarriage. Among African American women, the increase in single-parent-headed households is due to the fact that there has been an increase in the number of never-married mothers. Never-married women tend to have less economic stability than married women because they are more likely to be younger and to have less education.

Family Structure of Households With Children

There has been a decline in the two-parent households among all racial and ethnic groups (Pew, 2015). In the 1960s, 73% of all children lived in a family with two married parents in their first marriage. By 1980, this percentage had dropped to 61%, and today, less than half (46%) live in this family arrangement. The decline in the number of children who live in the “traditional” family of the 1960s is due to children living with single or cohabitating (unmarried) parents.

The household structure of the family that the child lives in is important to consider; household structure has implications for the well-being of the child. For example, households with only one adult are more likely to be poor and to have fewer resources than households where there is more than one adult. Table 5.1 provides statistics on household structure by race and ethnicity.

As reflected in Table 5.1, slightly more than half (51.5%) of African American children live in mother-alone households, whereas 25.2% of Hispanic children and 18.1% of White children live in a household with a single mother as the only adult. A small proportion of African American children, 3.9%, live in single-father-headed families (U.S. Census, 2016b). The percentage of single-father-headed households is comparable across the three ethnic groups. Single-father-headed families tend to be more economically advantaged than single-mother-headed families and to have more support from others in the household than do single-mother-headed families (Mason, Skolnick, & Sugarman, 2002).

African American children are also more likely to reside in a home where one or more grandparents are present than are White children or Hispanic children (U.S. Census, 2016c). This was seen in the White House, where Michelle Obama’s mother, Marian Robinson, resided in order to help care for her granddaughters.

Family Structure and Childhood Poverty

Childhood poverty is linked to family structure. Poverty among children is highest among those who live in single-mother-headed families. Children who live with their mothers only are much more likely to be poor than are children who

TABLE 5.1 ■ Percentages of Children With Both and Single Parents by Race and Ethnicity

Characteristic	White	Black	Hispanic
Mother alone	18.1	51.5	25.2
Father alone	4.0	3.9	0.09
Two parents	74.3	38.6	67.2

Source: U.S. Census (2016b).
Note: Households are headed by a mother or a father but may include other adults. Black and White includes children whose race was reported only as Black or White and not in combination with one or more other races.

live with both parents (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). Across all racial and ethnic groups, 6% of married-couple families live in poverty, 16% of couples with male head of households live in poverty, and 31% of female-headed households live in poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015).

Table 5.2 provides information on child poverty among children by household structure and ethnicity (U.S. Census, 2016d). As seen in Table 5.2, both African American, White, and Hispanic children who live in married-couple families experience less poverty than those who live in single-parent households. For example, in 2015, 10.9% of African American children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 46.1% of children in female-headed households. These large differences in poverty rates for female-headed households are also seen for other racial and ethnic groups.

TABLE 5.2 ■ Families 100% Below Poverty by Family Structure and Race and Ethnicity

Type of family	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
All families	6.7	22.2	8.1	20.4
Married couple (with children under 18)	6.0	10.9	9.0	19.5
Female-headed household (with children under 18)	34.8	46.1	26.5	48.7
Male-headed household (with children under 18)	17.1	40.3	29.1	29.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2016b).

Consequences of Family Structure on Children's Outcomes

Although many children reared in mother-only households do well, there may be adverse consequences for others (Gonzalez, Jones, Kincaid, & Cuellar, 2012; Mather & Adams, 2006). Research suggests that children who live in single-mother-headed households do not do as well on several social indicators. For example, there is a higher school dropout rate among these children, and daughters are at higher risk of becoming teen parents themselves. Juvenile delinquency may also be higher because there may be less parental supervision. Research suggests that fewer resources, economic instability, and poverty, not family structure, account for these differences. Poor economic conditions led to parental stress, and it is stress that contributes to decreased well-being among children (Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005). Many of these adverse social indicators can be moderated by support from extended family and friends, community resources, and decent employment. Also, involvement of the child's biological father attenuates potential negative youth outcomes (Langley, 2016). About 26% of single mothers report that the child's biological father is the primary coparent, and others report that other adults help with parenting (Jones, Zalot, Foster, Sterrett, & Chester, 2007).

Births to Teen Mothers

Teen mothers may experience special challenges, in that they are more likely to have more economic problems when compared with older mothers. The teen years also involve significant developmental transitions relevant to a range of social, emotional, and physical factors. The birth rate for African American females between the ages of 15 and 19 is about 34.9 per 1,000, compared with a national rate of about 24.2 per 1,000. Teen births across all ethnic groups have declined substantially over the past 25 years (Table 5.3; Martin, Hamilton, & Ventura, 2015). The largest decline since 1991 within a racial group was for African American females. The birth rate for African American and Hispanic teens ages 15 to 19 was reduced from 118.2 and 104.6 per 1,000 in 1991 to 34.9 and 38 per 1,000 in 2014. The birth rates of both Hispanics and African Americans, however, remain higher than for Whites.

Foster Care and Adoption

When parents are unable to care for a child or should they decide that there may be family options that are in the better interest of their child, there are multiple family and living situations in which children might be raised. For African American

TABLE 5.3 ■ Teen Birth Rates by Race and Ethnicity for 1991 and 2014

Year	White	Black	Hispanic
1991	43.4	118.2	104.6
2014	17.3	34.9	38.0

Source: Martin et al. (2015).

Note: Rate per 1,000 women ages 15–19 years in the specified group.

children, these include placement of child with kin, placement in foster care, or placement for adoption.

Kinship Care

African American children are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to live in kinship care (Washington, Gleeson, & Rulison, 2013). Kinship care involves a relative caring for children who cannot remain in the home of their biological parents (Messing, 2006). Three types of kinship care are (a) informal kinship care, (b) formal kinship care, and (c) legal guardianship or adoption. Most children are placed in the home of a relative informally. Here, the relative caregiver takes on primary care for the child outside of the child welfare system. Children placed into formal kinship care are under the supervision of a child welfare agency. Another option for kinship care is legal guardianship, where the relative is appointed by the court to take on the legal rights, responsibilities, and decision-making power of a parent. Relatives are often reluctant to adopt the child in their care because of the possible conflict that may arise with the child's biological parents. Children placed with relatives are more likely to have contact with birth parents than are those in traditional foster care. In addition, kinship care arrangements tend to be more stable than nonrelative arrangements.

Kinship care has been seen as an important and culturally congruent way in which some African American families have been preserved (Messing, 2006; Murphy, 2008). There is a long history of extended kin networks within traditional African communities, during enslavement, and in the modern era. Therefore, the presence of these networks has been of particular benefit to children whose biological parents cannot care for them.

Child Welfare System: Foster Care and Adoption

Beyond family-based kinship care, children might be placed in foster care by public social service and court systems when their families cannot care for them. These placements are sometimes temporary and—depending on the situation, circumstances, and systems—sometimes permanent.

African American children are overrepresented at every stage of the child welfare and child protective service systems (Anyon, 2011; Knott & Giwa, 2012). The first level of involvement often involves removal of the child from the home because of abuse, neglect, or endangerment. Abuse or neglect among ethnic minority children are twice as likely to be substantiated as abuse or neglect among White children despite research findings that abuse or neglect risk is no greater for an African American child than for a White child (Sedlak & Schultz, 2001). Once child abuse reporting has been confirmed, African American children are more likely than children from other racial and ethnic groups to be removed from the homes of their biological families, and they are less likely to return. African American parents are also more likely than parents of other ethnic groups to have their parental rights terminated. African American children in the child welfare system are more likely to be older and to be a part of sibling groups or to have behavioral problems than are children from other ethnic groups. All of these factors contribute to their being less attractive to potential adoptive parents. Despite the adoption initiatives created by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, racial differentials still exist in the adoption timeline for minority children (McRoy, Mica, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2007).

African American children are 3 times more likely than White children to be in foster care. African American children compose 16% of the total population under the age of 18, yet the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families reported that

24% of the children in foster care in 2014 were African American (see Table 5.4a; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2015). Also, African American children experience longer stays in foster care than children from other ethnic groups (see Tables 5.4b, 5.4c; DHHS, 2015). As shown in Tables 5.4b and 5.4c, a disproportionately higher number of African American children do not exit the foster care system and are not placed in adoption.

There are several reasons why African American and other ethnic minority children are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Boyd, 2014; McRoy et al., 2007). First, there may be more socioeconomic needs as African American families experience higher levels of individual, household, and structural poverty and financial stress, along with more single-parent-headed households. Second, racial bias may play a role in decision-making processes within child welfare systems (i.e., removal of children from biological parents). Differential provisions of services to African Americans and

TABLE 5.4A ■ Children in Foster Care by Race

Race	Percentage
White (non-Hispanic)	42
Black	24
Hispanic	22
Two or more races	7
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2
Asian	1
Other	2

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2015).

TABLE 5.4B ■ Children Who Exited Foster Care by Race and Ethnicity

Race	Percentage
White	45
Black	23
Hispanic	21
Two or more races	6
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2
Asian	1
Other	2

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2015).

TABLE 5.4C ■ Children Who Were Adopted From Public Foster Care System by Race and Ethnicity

Race	Percentage
White	48
Hispanic	22
Black	19
Two or more races	8
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1
Asian	0
Other	2

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2015).

other families of color by caseworkers that affect placement and resources available is another factor. Still another reason for the overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system is the incarceration of parents. Approximately 1 in 9 (11.4%) African American children have an incarcerated parent, compared with 1 in 28 (3.5%) Hispanic/Latino children and 1 in 57 (1.8%) White children (Pew, 2010). The majority of incarcerated parents are fathers. Cultural competence has also been cited as contributing to these disparities (Boyd, 2014).

Transracial Adoption

Over the past 30 years, the adoption of African American children, especially their adoption by White parents, has been the subject of debate (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002). This interracial placement is a process referred to as transracial adoption. Most of the contention has focused on whether African American children are able to develop healthy racial and cultural identities within White families (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). The basis for much of this discussion is attributed to a position paper (Simon & Alstein, 1977) drafted by the National Association of Black Social Workers that opposed the placement of African American children with White families. The paper went on to refer to this type of placement as a form of “cultural genocide” (p. 202). The paper emphasized that the socialization process for African American children is best met within an African American home environment and that the absence of this environment is likely to lead to detrimental social and psychological well-being. Other scholars have also noted that some transracially adopted children may experience racial identity and adjustment problems (Adkison-Bradley, DeBose, Terpstra, & Bilgic, 2012; Goss, Byrd, & Hughey, 2017).

A report issued by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (Donaldson Report, 2008) also questioned whether transracial adoption is truly in the best interest of the child, igniting new controversy over transracial adoption. The concerns outlined in this report, consistent with the concerns of the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSA), were that White parents, no matter how well intended, may not be able to help African American children develop

the identity they need to live in a racist society. Most transracially adopted youth are adopted by middle-class or upper-middle-class White parents and reared in predominantly White neighborhoods. Racism continues to be central in the lives of the children but not in the lives of their White adoptive parents (Smith, Juarez, & Jacobson, 2011). White parents may not socialize their children to have a strong ethnic identity necessary to counter racism. In interviews with African American youth and their White adoptive parents, Smith et al. found that the socialization of White adoptive parents involved emphasizing the privilege of the individual (over the collective) and the notion that being White is good and right rather than that White does not have to be the norm.

Several studies on transracial adoption have been conducted over the past 30 years. The findings from these studies are equivocal but tend to show that African American adoptees adjust well in transracial home environments for the most part. However, these studies have been challenged on methodological, analytical, and interpretative grounds. One concern was that the adjustment of White youth was used as the norm. Other studies have shown transracial adoptees have problems with racial or ethnic identity during adolescence (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2012; Goss et al., 2017).

Butler-Sweet (2011) argues that class also influences the development of Black identity and that comparisons are often made between African American youth with middle-class White parents and African American youth who have grown up in poor households. Butler-Sweet explored Black identity among Black youth who were raised in middle-class families with two Black parents (monoracial), one White and one Black parent (biracial), and two White parents (transracial). Thirty-two Black young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 were interviewed. Butler-Sweet found some similarities between the three groups in that all three groups felt different from other Black youth while growing up. This difference was mainly due to enhanced academic achievement and acting White or not acting Black enough. Also, the racial socialization of acting White and acting Black were explained by class indicators, as the youth believed that “acting White” was associated with middle-class and suburban culture while “acting Black” was associated with urban poverty. One difference between the three groups was that biracial and transracially adopted informants tended to endorse racial stereotypes. Also, parents of biracial and transracially adopted children tended to involve their children in urban street culture activities (e.g., hip-hop dance classes) more so than Black middle-class organizations. Youth from middle-class monoracial families were involved in middle-class Black organizations (e.g., Jack and Jill) that focused on Black achievement. Youth from monoracial families were also exposed to middle-class Black role models more than biracial and transracial youth. Overall, the findings from the interviews suggested that youth with two Black parents developed a broader image of “Blackness” than youth raised in biracial and transracial homes.

The issue of the well-being of children from transracial adoption is not resolved and will likely continue. We have seen little to no research on African American families adopting White children and children from other ethnic groups.

Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation

Overall, marriage rates have declined for both African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups. Marriage rates among African Americans have substantially declined since 1950. In 1950, 64% of African American men and 62% of African American women were married, compared with marriage rates in 2016 in which 37.5% of African American men and 31.7% of African American women were

married (U.S. Census, 2016e). Slightly more African American males over the age of 15 are married than African American females.

There are substantial differences in the marriage rates of African Americans and other ethnic groups. Among women ages 15 and older, African American women are almost twice as likely to have never married as White and Asian women (see Table 5.5). See the “Contemporary Issues” text box for further discussion of lower marriage rates among African Americans. African Americans are also more likely than Whites to be separated or divorced. When African Americans do separate, they tend to wait longer than Whites before they divorce (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012). Only 30% of African American women divorce within a year of separating, whereas 59% of White women divorce within a year of separating (Copen et al.). On the other hand, 36% of African American men divorce within a year of separating, as compared with 69% of White men who divorce within a year of separating. The longer period of separation among African Americans may be because remarriage is not as likely to occur, so there may be less motivation to divorce. The chance of the first marriages of African American women lasting 20 years (37%) was significantly lower than White women (54%) (Copen et al., 2012). However there were no significant differences in the probability of first marriage lasting 20 years between White (54%) and African American (53%) men (Copen et al., 2012).

The African American Extended Family

The African American family is often extended and multigenerational, with a cooperative and collective family structure (Wilson et al., 1995). Historically, participation in extended kinship or family networks has been important to the survival and advancement of African Americans (Stewart, 2007).

TABLE 5.5 ■ Marital Status by Race and Ethnicity, 15 Years and Older (percentage)

Characteristic	Married	Unmarried	Never Married
Male			
White	55.8	44.1	32.3
Black	37.5	62.5	50.4
Asian	61.6	38.3	34.7
Hispanic	47.9	52.0	44.0
Female			
White	53.6	46.3	25.8
Black	31.7	68.2	47.8
Asian	62.76	37.2	26.3
Hispanic	49.8	50.1	36.3

Source: U.S. Census (2016e).

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

WHY ARE AFRICAN AMERICAN MARRIAGE RATES SO MUCH LOWER THAN OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS?

As the statistics in this chapter show, the majority of African Americans are not married, and many will never get married. The majority of African American children do not grow up in households with both parents present. The reasons for this situation are complex, and there are more questions than answers. However, accumulated wealth (or lack thereof) is likely to play some role. In an interesting study, Daniel Schneider of Princeton University found that African Americans and those with less than a high school education marry far less and much later (Schneider, 2011). Since African Americans have less education than Whites and are more likely to face discrimination in the job market, this accounts for some of the gap. However, a low level of accumulated wealth among African Americans is another reason for the gap.

Schneider examined if accumulated wealth (e.g., stocks and bonds, money in savings account, car ownership, home ownership,

other financial assets) played a role in marriage among African Americans. Wealth was defined as what people own, not just what they earn. If accumulated wealth plays a role, then existing inequalities in wealth between Blacks and other ethnic groups might account for the differentials in marriage rates. Schneider found wealth was a significant factor and a prerequisite of marriage, especially for men. African Americans have substantially less wealth than other ethnic groups. In 2011, Whites had 20 times more wealth than African Americans (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). The wealth for Whites was \$113,149, for Hispanics, \$6,325, and for African Americans, \$5,677 (Luhby, 2012). The recession of 2008 and the economic downturn are partially responsible for these differentials in wealth. Also, African Americans are less likely to inherit wealth and may be more likely to share what wealth they have with members of their extended family.

Included within the family network are immediate family members, extended members, friends, neighbors, fictive kin, and Church members. There is diversity in living arrangements that goes beyond marriage, parentage, and children to include other adults and children in shared residence situations. African American children may live in households with grandparents and other adults who are not members of the immediate family. Elderly African Americans are likely to be living with grandchildren. Young, low-income, and single mothers also are likely to be sharing a residence with other family members.

Stewart (2007) conducted a study on the definitions and understanding of family and kinship among African American participants. An ethnographic approach was taken with one African American family from a rural community. Questions that addressed aspects of family interaction, definition, and function were asked during 42 interviews of 38 family members and 4 community informants. The youngest family member interviewed was 15, and the eldest family member interviewed was 80 years old. The family was also diverse by socioeconomic status and education. The author found that the family reported a strong commitment to the extended family system. When asked who belongs, they were likely to say things such as, “anybody that’s a ‘B’ or ‘K’” (letters represent family or surnames). There were some differences in responses based on socioeconomic status. Those of higher socioeconomic status acknowledged all of their family connections but began by distinguishing

immediate (nuclear) family from other relationships. Members of families of lower socioeconomic status were less likely to make this distinction. The family members also acknowledged the importance of fictive kin, although this was not a term that they used. One of the respondents described fictive kin as people who are “grafted” into families. Once in the family, they became a functioning part of the group. Romantic relationships were sometimes the reason for a person to become fictive kin. Even when romantic relationships dissolve, fictive family members remained close to the family. Others become fictive kin when they moved to a new community and found family that functioned like their biological family. Although this ethnographic study included only one large family, it illustrated how African American families in contemporary society function as they did historically during enslavement and, before that, in Africa.

African American extended family members provide support to one another in several ways, including emotional and psychological support and economic and financial support, as well as tangible support (e.g., providing transportation, child-care). Support from the extended family is linked to better psychological well-being and fewer mental health problems (Chatters, Taylor, Woodward, & Nicklett, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2016b). Support from extended family members is reciprocal, and 80% of African Americans report involvement in reciprocal support exchanges (Taylor, Mouzon, Nguyen, & Chatters, 2016).

Richardson (2009) conducted research on one group of members of the extended family, uncles. His work highlighted the often neglected but vital role uncles play in the provision of social support to adolescent males living in single-female-headed households. Richardson collected data over 4 years using an ethnographic approach to study the social context of 15 adolescents who were around 12 at the beginning of the study. Richardson found that uncles played a vital role in supporting their sisters' children and fostered positive adolescent development by attending activities of the youth, providing adult supervision, and being surrogate fathers.

The Role of the Grandmother

As noted previously, grandparents are present in the homes of many African American families. Grandmothers may provide an especially important form of assistance in child-rearing (Robbins, Briones, & Schwartz, 2006; Sumo, Dancy, Julion, & Wilbur, 2016; Wilson et al., 1995). Grandmothers may be the primary caregiver of the children, as well as the secondary caregiver. Maternal grandparents are more likely than any other group to coparent with single parents (Parent, Jones, Forehand, Cuellar, & Shoulbert, 2013).

Grandmothers are a key source of support for their parenting adolescent children (Sumo et al., 2016). Sumo et al. conducted interviews with 20 African American maternal and paternal grandmothers about the type of support they provided. Grandmothers were, on average, 48 years of age, and their parenting children's age ranged from 16 to 19. Several types of support were provided by grandmothers to their adolescent child. These included babysitting support, providing advice and mentoring, daily caregiving to the adolescent child and the grandchild, financial support, and purchasing needed items for the grandchild and the child. Support from maternal grandmothers contributes positively to well-being, adolescent parenting skills and competencies, and completion of high school and vocational training of their daughters (Sumo et al.). Grandmothers' support for their adolescent parenting son also has a positive influence, resulting in more responsible fatherhood, including involvement in the child's life.

Grandparents also provide support that may help to increase cognitive competence of their grandchildren. In one study, researchers found that the presence

of grandparents increased African American children's cognitive scores at age 2 (Mollborn, Fomby, & Dennis, 2012); this increase in cognitive scores was not found for White children living with grandparents. The improvement in cognitive skills might be due to increased financial and social resources.

However, grandparents may feel some strain and resistance when they are solely responsible for rearing grandchildren. Ross and Aday (2006) found in a study of 55 African American grandparents with a mean age of 63 that 94% were significantly stressed. Grandparents often are placed in situations where they have to raise their grandchildren because of complex family problems, including drug abuse, neglect, and parental incarceration (Waldrop, 2003). Incarceration and drug use are of particular concern: Grandparents not only have to care for their grandchildren but also have to deal with special needs and circumstances surrounding their son or daughter. In interviews with 37 grandparents, Waldrop found that grandparents experience both burdens and benefits from their role as grandparents. In another study, Waldrop and Weber (2001) identified several burdens for grandparents. These include family stress such as marital problems brought on by exacerbated stress, work–family strain due to balancing the demands of a job with the needs of a grandchild, legal problems concerning parental custody issues for their grandchild, and financial burdens.

The findings from other studies also suggest that children raised by grandmothers alone may have more conduct and behavioral problems than do children raised by parents. Kelley, Whitley, and Campos (2011) studied 2,309 mostly African American children ages 2 to 16 who were being raised by grandparents in homes with no parent present. They found that almost one-third (31.3%) of the children scored in the clinical range for behavioral problems. Children's behavioral problems were linked to increased psychological stress among grandmothers, a less supportive home environment, and fewer family resources.

African American Fathers

There has been an increase in research on the role of fathers in families over the past 15 years (Behnke & Allen, 2007; Burns & Caldwell, 2016; Choi & Jackson, 2012). Traditional portrayals of African American men as husbands and fathers have often been negative, focusing on stereotypical images that include uninvolved and financially irresponsible fathers. Some research has been consistent with this portrayal. Many studies have been conducted on social problems of adolescent fatherhood, out-of-wedlock paternity, and child support enforcement, with a focus on young men or young fathers (Taylor & Johnson, 1997). This focus does not account for the broad diversity of family, spousal, and parental roles found among African American men.

A substantial line of research shows the diversity among African American fathers, including research on middle-income fathers (McAdoo, 1988). Research indicates that African American fathers are actively involved in the socialization of their children. A study by Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, and Cabrera (2012) found that Black fathers (compared with Latino and White fathers) provided the highest levels of caregiving, play, and visiting activities with their children. When African American fathers engage with their children, their children show higher academic achievement. Young children of fathers who engaged in home literacy practices, such as having books in the home, reading books with their children, telling stories, and singing, at 24 months had higher reading and math scores in preschool than children whose father was not engaged in literacy activities (Baker, 2014).

Other studies have shown that when African American fathers do not live with their children, they still remain emotionally involved in their children's lives (Behnke & Allen, 2007; Burns & Caldwell, 2016). African American fathers generally are more involved with their children when they are infants and again when they enter early adolescence, when compared with other developmental periods. Research has shown that adolescent sons engage in less risky behavior when nonresidential fathers are involved in their lives (Burns & Caldwell, 2016). Involvement includes providing racial socialization messages, monitoring their sons' whereabouts, involvement in school and extracurricular activities, and communication.

In interviews about parenting conducted with 30 African American biological fathers of preadolescent sons at risk for developing aggressive behaviors and poor mental health (Doyle et al., 2015), four major themes emerged that reflected African American men's views about parenting. One theme communicated by fathers was that it was important to assist their child in learning how to regulate and express emotions. Fathers encouraged their sons to verbalize rather than suppress their emotions. Fathers reminded their sons that challenging situations were temporary and of the importance of maintaining a positive outlook. A second theme was encouragement. Fathers encouraged their sons to develop interest and skills in sports and hobbies and to remain motivated in the face of setbacks. Fathers showed encouragement by "being there" and "being present." A third theme was discipline. Fathers viewed discipline as very important to helping their sons develop into healthy African American adults. They used a variety of discipline, including spanking; removing privileges, such as phones and computers; and providing rewards for desired behaviors. Other parents disciplined their sons by lecturing or explaining the consequences of their sons' negative behaviors. The fourth theme was monitoring. Fathers monitored their sons' activities in several ways. They monitored homework completion; television, video game, and cell phone usage; their sons' friends; and their sons' activities and whereabouts. Fathers reported that they knew their sons' friends and the parents of their friends and tried to influence the type of friends their sons had.

Some African American fathers also have personal challenges that may affect their relationships with and involvement with their children. These include low educational attainment and occupational success (Behnke & Allen, 2007). These barriers may be exacerbated when fathers do not contribute to child support, which may result in child support enforcement consequences. When fathers cannot contribute to the financial needs of their families, they may become isolated from their families.

African American fathers also face incarceration to a larger extent than fathers in other ethnic minority groups (Pew, 2010). Higher rates of imprisonment make separation from their children more likely and can make involvement in their children's lives difficult. However, incarceration does not mean that African American fathers do not desire a role in their children's lives. Fathers who had been previously incarcerated and who were part of a reentry program were interviewed to learn more about their experiences of fatherhood (Dill et al., 2015). These fathers spoke of wanting a second chance to be more involved in their child's life, acknowledging mistakes they had made and lessons learned. These fathers were very invested in forming positive relationships with their children and appreciated that they now had more time to spend with their children.

African American fathers returning from incarceration desire to be better parents but sometimes do not have the skills to do so. To address this concern, there has been an increase in parenting programs in prison, so when fathers leave prison, they will be equipped with better parenting skills (Purvis, 2011).

Parenting Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Couples

Although there has been more recent research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families, the amount of writing and research on African American LGBT families remains sparse. About 19% of same-sex couple households include children under the age of 18; this includes 27% of female couples and close to 11% of male couples (Gates, 2013). Parenting among same-sex couples is higher among racial and ethnic minority couples, including African American couples. About 34% of African American same-sex couples are raising children (Kastanis & Gates, 2013). The question has been raised as to whether children of same-sex parents can have successful child outcomes or whether a set of gender-neutral characteristics, such as nurturance, protection, and guidance, are critical ingredients for parental competence. In 2005, the APA reviewed 59 published studies on same-sex parenting and children's outcomes and issued a brief that stated, "Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents" (Patterson, 2005, p. 15). This brief suggested that the psychosocial outcomes of children raised by same-sex parents were similar to those raised by heterosexual parents.

However, this APA brief was criticized because the 59 studies used samples that were small and not culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse (Marks, 2012). Most of the participants in the research reviewed by APA were White mothers with high incomes and not ethnic minorities, including African Americans. Other researchers have noted that children of lesbian or gay parents have similar experiences of family life and that they are doing about as well as children normally do (Meezan & Rauch, 2005). There has been very little published on African American same-sex parenting. One challenge faced by children of same-sex parents is possible stigmatization by others. This may be even more of an issue among African American families, which tend to be less accepting of gay and lesbian relationships and parenting than other racial and ethnic groups (Newport, 2008).

Rural Families

The majority of the research on African American families has been conducted on urban and suburban families. Both minority status and being in a rural community are associated with increased risk among children and families. Thus rural minority families may be exposed to higher risk than nonrural families (Crockett, Carlo, & Temmen, 2016). In rural communities, there are fewer employment opportunities, and available employment may consist of minimum-wage jobs that do not provide for a living wage. Poverty rates tend to be higher in rural communities than nonrural communities, and poverty rates for minorities are even higher than for Whites (Crockett et al.). More than half of all rural African Americans live in high-poverty counties, mostly in the South (Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2012). Adults living in rural areas also tend to have lower levels of education than those in nonrural communities (Vernon-Feagans & Cox, 2013). The lack of financial stability may contribute to family strain and poor quality of family relationships (Cutrona, Clavel, & Johnson, 2016).

Ethnic minority individuals in rural communities sometimes have increased stress due to racism and discrimination (Crockett et al., 2016). African American families in these communities may be subject to racial segregation, less access to quality health care, social services, and recreational activities, which contribute to increased stress and mental health problems (Cunningham & Francois, 2016).

Higher teen birth rates among rural teens than urban teens is one indicator of how rurality affects youth well-being. In 2015, teen birth rates were highest in rural counties and lowest in large urban counties for White, African American, and Hispanic females (Hamilton, Rossen, & Branum, 2016). In 2015, teen birth rates among non-Hispanic black females ranged from a low of 29.1 births per 1,000 females in large urban counties to a high of 39.6 in rural counties. Rural youth are more likely to use alcohol and cigarettes and to drive after drinking than urban youth, although urban youth are more likely to use illicit drugs such as marijuana and methamphetamine (Jiang, Sun, & Marsiglia, 2016). In overview, research suggests rural African American families may face certain challenges over and beyond that of families in other geographical regions.

STRENGTHS, COPING, AND PARENTING PATTERNS

Strength and Resilience Among African American Families

Over the past few decades, family scholars have moved from a deficit view of African American families to a strengths-based view. Strengths are viewed as culturally based beliefs and values unique to African Americans. Hill (1998) defines family strengths as those attributes that enable the family to meet both the needs of its members and the demands made on the family by outside forces.

Hill (1971) describes five strengths of African American families: (a) strong achievement orientation, (b) strong work orientation, (c) flexible family roles, (d) strong kinship bonds, and (e) strong religious orientation. According to Hill, these attributes are functional for the survival, stability, and advancement of African American families. Although these attributes are found among other ethnic groups, they are likely to be expressed differently among African Americans because of their unique experiences in this country.

According to McAdoo (1998, 2007), there are several cultural attributes that support strong African American families. These include social networks that are supportive, flexible roles and responsibilities within the family, a high level of religiosity and spirituality, and extended family and fictive kin. McAdoo also believes that cultural attributes that have been historically present have diminished because of poor economic conditions. Given changes in the urban communities in which many African Americans live, the historical strengths of African American families described by Hill must be reassessed in contemporary times.

Coping and Adjustment Among African American Families

Strong support from the family can help family members who are experiencing stress. Support can be emotional, such as affirmation and acceptance; instrumental, such as lending money or helping with childcare; or cognitive, such as giving advice. Examples of these types of support are seen among African American families who assist family members to cope with chronic illnesses and disabilities (Ha, Greenberg, & Seltzer, 2011) or to care for an elderly family member (Dilworth-Anderson & Goodwin, 2005). Many African American families have developed successful mechanisms for coping with stress caused by environmental challenges.

The family is the most important system within which health is maintained, and health decisions are made for the African American elderly by their families (Bowles & Kingston, 1998). The family is the primary source of social support and care of the African American elderly. African American elderly represented 8.5% of the total U.S. population ages 65 and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

There may be fewer economic and social resources available for African American elderly because of restricted economic opportunities this cohort faced in their earlier life. African American elderly have less income and experience more poverty and more inadequate health care than do White elderly. In 2013, the poverty rate for those 65 and older was 22% for Blacks, 28% for Hispanics, and 12% for Whites (Cubanski, Casillas, & Damico, 2015). Informal social support from family and friends can attenuate poverty and other risk factors and contribute to the well-being of older African Americans (Nguyen, Chatters, Taylor, & Mouzon, 2016a).

There may be no greater strain on the family unit than caring for a member with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. African Americans are 2 times more likely to develop late-onset Alzheimer's disease than Whites and less likely to have the disease diagnosed (Alzheimer's Association, n.d.). A review of the literature shows ethnic difference in the caregiving experiences of African Americans, especially when compared with Whites (Na'poles, Chadiha, Eversley, & Moreno-John, 2010). Compared with White caregivers of family members with dementia, African American caregivers report better psychosocial health, more positive feelings about caregiving, and the use of spirituality and prayer. African American caregivers also reported more social support, a stronger sense of responsibility to extended family networks, and more of a dislike for institutionalizing relatives. Kosberg, Kaufman, Burgio, Leeper, and Sun (2007) examined differences and similarities in the experiences of 141 African American and White family caregivers of patients with dementia living in rural Alabama. White caregivers were more likely to be married and older, used acceptance and humor as coping styles, and had fewer financial problems. African American caregivers provided more hours of care and used religion and denial as ways with which to cope with the stress of caregiving. They also reported feeling less burdened.

Parenting Attitudes and Practices

African American parenting practices are both similar to and different from those of other cultural groups. For example, African American and White parents do not differ in the level of warmth and acceptance directed toward their children and in parenting inconsistency (Dexter, Wong, Stacks, Beeghly, & Barnett, 2013). Nor do they differ in limit-setting behaviors (LeCuyer, 2014). However, there are some differences. Some of these differences may be attributed to class differences, insofar as many studies have used African American samples comprising parents of low socioeconomic status. However, studies that have controlled for socioeconomic status suggest that some differences still exist between parenting practices of African Americans and other ethnic groups. Moreover, the relationship between parenting practices and child well-being may differ for African Americans and other ethnic groups.

Discipline

African American parents use a variety of disciplinary strategies. They are more likely than White parents to use authoritarian parenting and punitive methods,

such as physical punishment and assertion of authority (Gershoff, Lansford, Sexton, Davis-Kean, & Sameroff, 2012; Lorber, O'Leary, & Smith, 2011). Although African American parents use all forms of discipline, spanking is at least used sometimes by the majority of African American parents. Spanking is defined as striking the child on the buttocks or extremities with an open hand without inflicting physical injury (McLoyd, Kaplan, Hardaway, & Wood, 2007). The use of more physical and authoritative discipline among African American parents has its origin in slavery. During slavery, the responsibility of the parent or family was to instill in children that they were to be compliant and subservient slaves. The method for maintaining docility and obedience was shown by the White slave masters' methods of disciplining slaves. Punishment was swift, harsh, and violent, no matter what the infraction (Lassiter, 1987). Consequently, African American parents used harsh discipline as a survival strategy: In order to teach children how to avoid violent punishment at the hands of the White slaveholder, adults had to use a less severe but still harsh form of punishment with children.

Enslavement also impacted how children reacted to adverse conditions. Enslaved parents socialized their children to behave in ways that were sometimes age inconsistent in order to keep them alive. For example, children were not allowed to cry out loud when they were hurt or in pain. Children were expected to assume adult responsibilities, including caring for younger children and doing chores in the house and in the field. Following slavery, the pattern of harsh and physical discipline continued as a mechanism for maintaining docility and compliance so that the child could survive in a racist society. African American scholars have noted that the use of physical punishment can be purposeful, controlled, and appropriate and useful in protecting African American children and instructing them how to behave and survive within a racist society (Thomas & Dettlaff, 2011).

Earlier research suggested that physical discipline is not linked to externalizing problem behaviors, such as aggression and acting out, for African American children, as is the case with White children (Lansford, Deater-Deckard, & Dodge, 2004). However, more recent research suggests that there is a relationship between physical discipline, such as spanking and behavior problems, among African American children. In one study, maternal spanking predicted long-term internalizing (e.g., withdrawal, depression, anxiety) and externalizing (e.g., aggression, rule breaking, destructive behaviors) behaviors among African American children (Coley, Kull, & Carrano, 2014). Mothers' endorsement of spanking when their child was 3 years of age predicted increased internalizing and externalizing behaviors at 9 years of age. Another study found no differences among White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian American families in spanking and externalizing behavior. More spanking at 5 years of age led to externalizing behavior at 8 years of age among children of all ethnic groups (Gershoff et al., 2012). Thus, more recent research suggests a negative impact of parental spanking on children's problem behaviors.

Parenting Attitudes and Involvement

Studies on parenting attitudes have looked at factors such as parental support for their children, warmth, acceptance, and expectations. In general, the literature reviewed by Magnus, Cowen, Wyman, Fagen, and Work (1999) suggests few differences between African American and White parents in parental attitudes. One difference is on the variable autonomy. African American parents are more likely than White parents to value and stress autonomy among their children. One positive implication of this is that children may be socialized to function independently, which may be useful when parents are not immediately available. However, parents who stress autonomy may be less likely to attend to minor distress signals from their children.

Another ethnic or racial difference is how parents respond to their child's negative emotions. Research has found that African American parents (relative to White parents) may respond to their child's negative emotions with less explanation and encouragement and more control and admonishment (Nelson, Leerkes, O'Brien, Calkins, & Marcovitch, 2012). African American parents may also be more likely to minimize emotionally distressing experiences of their children and punish them for outward displays when compared with White parents. In a study by Nelson et al., African American and White parents' responses to their children's negative emotions were correlated in different ways with their children's academic performance and socioemotional competence. White children whose parents helped them to address the problem causing their emotional distress performed better academically and had better social skills. However, African American children who were encouraged by their parents to express their negative emotions had poorer academic performance and less positive social skills than those who were not encouraged (Nelson et al., 2012). The outward display of emotions may not be adaptive for African American children who live and attend school in racially biased environments.

African American parents are also more likely than White parents to make decisions for adolescent children. A study by Gutman and Eccles (2007) found parental decision making to be normative in African American families, particularly during early adolescence. In this same study, more White adolescents than African American adolescents reported more decision-making opportunities during early adolescence. However, the authors found that as adolescents matured, there was more opportunity for decision making among both groups.

Racial Socialization

The process of racial socialization is the process by which parents and families socialize African American children in how to function in this society. This process involves making children aware of their race and of themselves as Black or African American as opposed to simply being American. Parents who racially socialize their children assume that their children will be in a hostile environment, at least at some times in their lives, and that they must be comfortable with being African American. Racial socialization includes specific messages and behaviors that families provide children about being African American, including group and personal identity, intergroup interactions, and their positions within the social hierarchy. These messages are both implicit and explicit (Thornton et al., 1990). Hughes and Johnson (2001) use the term *cultural socialization* and define it as messages and practices that teach children about racial and ethnic heritage and provide them with a sense of ethnic pride (p. 983). See Chapter 3 for further discussion of racial socialization.

Certain demographic factors influence the extent of racial socialization (Thornton, 1998). Mothers more than fathers socialize their children about race issues. This is attributed to general levels of maternal responsiveness in preparing children to function in the world. Parents with higher levels of education are more likely to socialize their children than those with lower levels of education.

According to Boykin and Toms (1985), the socialization process is related to identity. African Americans are socialized through three experiences in order to acquire a racial identity. First, they must participate in mainstream American culture. In order to achieve this, African American parents teach their children that which is American. Within this context, parents teach their children necessary life skills, including personal qualities such as confidence, respect, and achievement. An example of this strategy is when parents teach children the importance of studying in school.

The second method of socialization used by African American parents is to teach their children about being an ethnic minority and to prepare them for an oppressive environment. African American parents prepare their children for what may be an unsupportive world by building their self-confidence and helping them learn how to cope with prejudice and discrimination. These parents also teach their children the value of a good education and that injustice may occur because of their skin color.

The final strategy identified by Boykin and Toms (1985) is to socialize their children within the Black cultural experience. These parents socialize their children to value and identify with what is African centered. An example of this is when parents discuss historical events in their family's life or discuss famous Blacks and Africans. Racial socialization can serve as a protective role for African American children because it provides support and affirmation for being Black in a racist world (Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002).

Racial socialization is linked to positive youth development and well-being, including higher competence, connection, and confidence (Evans, Simons, & Simons, 2012). Youth who report more racial socialization have more confidence in academic achievement, higher racial identity, and higher self-esteem. Racial socialization provides youth not only with awareness of racism but also with coping mechanisms for dealing with racism (Dunbar et al., 2017; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, Umaña-Taylor, 2012).

METHODOLOGICAL AND RESEARCH ISSUES

There are several methodological issues to consider when studying African American families. Many studies have examined African American families over a short period and have failed to consider historical perspectives when examining contemporary African American families (Hill, 1998). One cannot truly understand African American families without considering historical, cultural, social, economic, and political factors and institutional practices. The period of enslavement had a profound impact on the African American family, an impact that continues today; no study of African American families can be complete without considering that impact.

Another methodological problem is that socioeconomic class has been confounded with ethnicity in studies of the African American family and child-rearing (McLoyd et al., 2007). Research has oversampled low-income African American families and generalized findings to all African American families. Also, studies have tended not to consider within-group differences among African American families. But within-group differences among African Americans do affect child well-being. McLoyd et al. found physical discipline to be moderated by characteristics of African American mothers, such as whether the parent is stressed. Another study found African American mothers more likely to use intense disciplinary methods than African American fathers (Adkison-Johnson, Terpstra, Burgos, & Payne, 2016). Although a fair amount of research and literature was identified in this chapter, there remains a need for more research and programming on African American families. It is sometimes difficult to recruit African American families in studies, and the reason for this is not always clear. African American families may have other, more pressing needs and may be turned off to being "studied" by academic researchers. In our own work, it has been especially difficult to recruit and retain African American families, especially if their involvement is over several

weeks. A related issue is recruitment and study of African American families of all socioeconomic groups.

Breland-Noble, Bell, Burriss, and Poole (2012) provide a model of how to engage African American families in research. Breland-Noble et al. describe how they used a systematic community participatory research approach to recruit African American families for project AAKOMA (Breland-Noble et al., 2012). AAKOMA is a mental health intervention for African American females. Some of their strategies involved appointing an active and engaging community advisory panel that represented key stakeholders from the community (e.g., ministers, teachers, community advocates). They also used many recruitment sources that included community seminars, community liaisons, the university health system website, and participant-to-participant referrals. Using comprehensive recruitment strategies resulted in the recruitment of more African American families than the targeted number.

Typically, studies have focused on low-income families and families whose youth might be at high risk for a problem such as substance abuse and/or early sexual activity. But we also need to learn more about the challenges and strengths of working- and middle-class African American families.

EVIDENCED-BASED PRACTICES FOR STRENGTHENING AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

Over the past several years, there has been a stronger call for family-based programs. Advocates of family-based programs argue that youth outcomes will be better when the family rather than the individual child is targeted. Some of these programs specifically target African American families and attend to unique features of African American families in content and format. We discuss two family-based programs and an African-centered approach for African American families next.

Strong African American Family Program

As discussed in the section on rural families, poverty, financial strain, and unemployment are problematic for many rural African American families. African American youth from rural communities engage in risky behaviors, such as substance use, and risky sex at rates equal to or greater than their counterparts in urban and suburban communities. The Strong African American Families (SAAF) program was developed to provide a culturally congruent program for families in rural communities who were affected by poverty and financial distress (Brody et al., 2004, 2012a). The SAAF program is a skills training program for preadolescent (11–12 years) children and their caregivers. The program strengthens positive family interactions and increases parents' ability to help their children set and reach positive goals during the critical transition period between childhood and adolescence. Facilitators of the SAAF program are African American community members who are trained to teach the SAAF curriculum. Specifically, the SAAF curriculum is intended to (1) support parents and caregivers in learning how to use nurturing skills when interacting with their children; (2) teach parents and caregivers effective ways to discipline; (3) help youth to obtain a healthy future orientation and to increase

their appreciation of their parents and caregivers; and (4) to teach youth skills to deal with stress and peer pressure.

The SAAF program consists of seven weekly, 2-hour meetings. Parents and youth are engaged in separate skill-building sessions for 1 hour. This is followed by a family session in which parents and youth jointly practice the skills that they learned in their separate sessions. The curriculum is presented on videotapes that show family interactions illustrating key points. Parents are taught how to be involved in their children's life and to use vigilant caregiving practices. Youth learn how to respond when faced with racism, how to develop future goals, and how to resist peer pressure to use alcohol and other drugs. Jointly, family youth and parents learn and practice communication skills and engage in activities that increase cohesion and positive interactions. An evaluation of the SAAF program showed several significant findings for SAAF youth and parents when compared with youth in control groups. Youth who participated in the SAAF program reported fewer conduct problems (e.g., theft, school suspension) and significantly less alcohol use at a 29-month follow-up. They also increased in protective beliefs and behaviors (e.g., negative attitudes about alcohol and sex, goal-directed future orientation, drug resistance efficacy, acceptance of parental influence, negative images of drinkers). Among parents, there were increased positive changes in parenting communication and monitoring (e.g., involved-vigilant parenting, racial socialization, communication about sex, establishment of clear parental expectations) at follow-up (Brody et al., 2012a).

REAL Men

REAL (responsible, empowered, aware, living) Men is another example of an evidenced-based intervention program (Dilorio, McCarty, Resnicow, Lehr, & Denzmore, 2007). The program was designed as an HIV prevention intervention for African American adolescent boys. The study involved 277 fathers or father figures and their sons. The inclusion of father figures is consistent with a perspective in which fathers do not have to be biologically related or related through marriage. Father figures were eligible if they were ages 18 years or older, were identified by the boy's mother as a significant influence in the adolescent's life, and had at least a 1-year relationship with the adolescent and the mother. In this intervention, fathers and other supportive adult males were presented information on communicating with adolescents, parental monitoring, and improving adolescent peer relations; they were also presented information on HIV and the prevention of HIV and AIDS. The program provided videotapes of fathers talking to their sons about sexual topics. Fathers and father figures had the opportunity to practice communication behavior through role-plays.

The intervention consisted of seven 2-hour sessions for the adult males. Fathers and father figures attended the first six sessions alone and attended the last session with their sons. The last session also included a completion celebration, and fathers, father figures, and sons received certificates of completion. The control group participated in a seven-session nutrition and exercise program that met for 2 hours. Fathers and the supportive adult males in the control group also attended the first six sessions alone and with their son for the last session. The primary outcomes in this study were adolescent sexual abstinence and father-son communication about sex. The findings were consistent with the hypothesis. Boys in the intervention group had higher rates of abstinence at the 6-month follow-up than did boys in the control group. These boys also were more likely to use a condom each time they had sexual intercourse.

African-Centered Approaches to Strengthening African American Families

Parham, White, and Ajamu (1999) offer several recommendations for building healthy African American families derived from an African-centered perspective. The approach of Parham et al. is based on counseling and education work with African American families and does not involve a curriculum per se. According to Parham et al., current family structures differ from the family structure of the past in that modern families do not necessarily begin with marriage or living together. Therefore, building healthy families must start with appropriate socialization of African American youth. Parham et al. offer several tips that can be used when working with African American families:

1. Socialize youth to love themselves and to understand their relationship with the Creator.
2. Help youth to develop an identity and perspective of what it means to be a man or a woman that is culturally congruent and that affirms both males and females.
3. Teach youth to recognize and model healthy family functioning; youth are often exposed to dysfunctional family functioning that provides a distorted view of how a healthy family should function.
4. Teach youth how to be successful in male–female relationships; youth must be taught to relate to members of the opposite sex in a sincere, respectful, caring, and loving way and not to first focus on their own needs.
5. Teach children that relationships should be sustained through difficult periods; when relationships are challenged during stressful and difficult times, tolerance and perseverance are needed.
6. Teach youth to develop personal insights into themselves, and help them to understand how past experiences affect their current ways of behaving.

We have discussed two programs developed specifically for African American families. Both programs were developed to improve functioning across a number of parenting and youth domains, and both have shown improved functioning for parents and children. Parham et al. (1999) offer general guidelines for families to use when raising African American children.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

We provide our comments on the state of research and literature on African American family structure, parenting, the roles of father-husbands, and the inclusion of African American LGBT families in research.

Although there have been some changes, there continues to be a fair amount of literature and research published regarding the negative impact of African American family structure on family well-being, especially the well-being of children. This work has continued despite the fact that most scholars recognize that African American family structure differs from that of other ethnic

groups. Moreover, socioeconomic background is often confounded with family structure as single-parent-headed households tend to be households with less money and fewer resources. Two-parent households tend to have more income and resources.

Vereen (2007) studied more than 301 African American women and found no differences in three categories of family: married or living together with or without children or other family members in the household; single with no children or family members living in the household; and single with children or other family members living in the household. Vereen found no effects for family structure on social indicators (e.g., social support), psychological indicators (e.g., self-esteem), and economic indicators (e.g., income). According to Vereen, what appears to be true with regard to psychosocial outcomes seemed to have more to do with income and opportunities than with family structure.

More research on differing types of family structure is needed to more clearly elucidate what family structure looks like for the African American family. For example, Vereen included “single with no children or family members living in the household” as one type of family structure. Another type of family structure might be “adult children living with parents and/or grandparents.” Another might be to recognize coparenting by nonresidential fathers as a type of family structure as seen in the opening blog. Information on the differing ways in which African American families manifest themselves will help us better understand African American families.

In recent years, the focus on African Americans and other ethnic minority children has shifted away from looking at White and African American differences in developmental outcomes. More and more, we see research that focuses on an understanding of the positive and adaptive strategies African American families use. Research in the area of racial socialization is an example of this. This new paradigm recognizes the value of within-group analyses with African Americans as a legitimate research strategy and refocuses attention away from merely documenting group differences to an emphasis on understanding the processes that may account for differences in outcomes for different children in the same group.

Also, on a positive note, there has been some empirical research that has demonstrated that family- and parenting-based programs can improve parenting outcomes, youth outcomes, and family outcomes. These programs have been developed to be culturally specific and can be implemented in a variety of settings.

A growing body of research now focuses on African American fathers who remain with and are involved in the lives of their children. These studies show that African American fathers, including nonresidential fathers, desire to be and are a part of their children’s lives (Burns & Caldwell, 2016; Cartman, 2016). We applaud this work, and others may find that this research can be useful in understanding father roles and responsibilities within other ethnic groups. Additional research is also needed on African American family composition and function with regard to LGBT parents. Despite the fact that many children are raised in LGBT-parented households, there has been little published on what promotes optimal functioning for these children and their parents. We could find no published research on transgender African American families. Moreover, we could not identify any intervention studies that specifically supported parental programs for these families. Given some continued stigma for LGBT families, these programs may be indicated.

Summary

Hill (1998) defined the African American family as a household related by blood or marriage or function that provides basic instrumental and expressive functions to its members. The family is important in African culture, and communalism is most often expressed in the family. In this chapter, we have examined historical, cultural, and economic patterns as they affect African American families. For example, understanding that enslaved African women were made to procreate early helps us to set a historical context for understanding the earlier age of childbirth among contemporary African American females. Understanding economic conditions assists in explaining lower marriage rates among African American men and women.

African American family structure differs from the family structure of other ethnic groups and is likely to be extended and female headed, with a larger presence of grandparents. African American children are more likely to be in foster care and less likely to be adopted than are children from other ethnic groups. African American fathers are involved in their children's lives whether or not they reside with their children.

African American child-rearing practices are both similar to and diverse from other racial and ethnic groups. Compared to other ethnic groups, African American parents may use more discipline and a more authoritarian parenting style. Strengths of the African American family include the extended family and religious beliefs. African American families have been useful in supporting the care of children of younger parents, as well as elder family members and members with disabilities. African American families living in rural communities face unique challenges due to increased poverty and unemployment.

Some of the methodological and research challenges to studying African American families include confounding race with socioeconomic status and challenges in recruiting African American families in research and programming. The Strong African American Family and REAL Men are culturally sensitive programs that have shown effectiveness for increasing positive child and parent outcomes.

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