CHAPTER 8

Social Contexts in the Lives of African American Children: Family and Peers

OVERVIEW

This chapter examines the African American child in social contexts, such as the family and peers. Over the last several decades American families have experienced many demographic changes. The landscape for the typical middle-class American family has shifted from a nuclear two-parent household to an increase in single-parent families (particularly female-headed households), and grandparent-headed households. These demographic trends have unduly affected African American families, and they have important implications for African American children's socialization within family and peer contexts.

In this chapter, we describe several models which guide family research and note some demographic changes involving African American families. We review some of the demographic trends affecting the African American family structure, such as single-mother, single-father, and grandparent-headed households as well as African American foster families. Furthermore, the social world of African American peers is another focus in this chapter. In particular, children's peer relationships and friendships with same- and other-race peers are discussed.

Issues

Today, family researchers are much more responsive to the dearth of research on children within the African American family. Due to this increased awareness, research in this area is much more sensitive to African American communities. Historically, a number of issues have plagued this line of research. As previously mentioned in a number of chapters of this text, one major concern is that the limited scholarship on African American families mainly emanates

from a deficit perspective. Once again, the White American family standard was (and to a certain extent continues) to be used as a basis of comparison for the family lives of African American children. As a result much of the published work emphasized dysfunctional rather than positive characteristics of African American families. Fortunately, much of the new scholarship in this area emphasizes the strengths within African American families.

Second, several methodological issues negatively effect the research on African Americans. Design limitations may indirectly create a negative image of African Americans (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). Murry, Smith and Hill (2001) note that race and ethnicity are often confounded with socioeconomic assessments and community of residence. Thus, it is difficult to tease apart the authentic effects of culture and ethnicity.

Other methodological constraints include sampling issues and the underutilization of qualitative research designs (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). For a better understanding of the African American child within a family context, it is important that participants are recruited from a variety of socioeconomic, residential, and age levels. These recruiting efforts will represent a more balanced or less skewed understanding of child development within an array of African American structures. It is also important to use designs that are better suited to uncover the rich nuances of the African American family. One cannot deny the significance of quantitative designs, but they only provide a limited glimpse into the social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of African American family life. On the other hand, qualitative research designs may provide much needed insight into the family lives of African American children. It is important to note that both designs are subject to misinterpretation, but published work on the family based in each method provides a more thorough understanding and a greater appreciation of the diversity within and across African American families.

INSIDER'S VOICE: THE NEGRO AMERICAN FAMILY

Within the family, each new generation of young males learn the appropriate nurturing behavior and superimpose upon their biologically given maleness this learned parental role. When the family breaks down . . . this delicate line of transmission is broken. Men may flounder badly in these periods, during which the primary unit may again become mother and child, the biologically given, and the special conditions under which man has held his social traditions in trust are violated and distorted.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, The Negro American Family: The Case for National Action (1965).

BOX 8.1

The Moynihan Report

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan (assistant secretary at the United States Department of Labor) published a report called *The Negro American Family: The Case for National Action.* The report was a piece of research based on the work of the renowned sociologist, E. F. Frazier. The report described the ongoing disintegration of the African American family. It emphasized the weakened role of African American men and stressed the need that public policies be designed to strengthen the economic role for African American males.

The report raised questions about the ability of the African American family to continue its function as a positive socialization agent of future generations. Moynihan asserted that the problems in the African American family impinged on the entire nation. Thus, he reported that the United States was threatened by the cycle of social deterioration among American Blacks which contributed to illegitimacy, welfare dependency, crime, and poor education.

According to Battle and Coates (2004), Moynihan's report created a stir among social scientists and led to three assumptions in research conducted on African American families from 1965 to 1995. The first assumption was that African American children brought up by two-parent families headed by males are better off than children from a single-parent household. Second, African American single mothers are unskilled at parenting and are especially ill-equipped to take care of boys, which place them at a disadvantage. Finally, African American single-headed families are culturally deviant, and this pathology creates negative aspirations and distorted social roles for their children (Moynihan, 1965).

SECTION ONE: MODELS OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

The scholarship on African American families has endured many permutations over the past 50 years (Harry, Klingner, & Hart, 2005). It is not our intent to provide a detailed historical analysis of African American family life. In this section, we present some of the paradigms that have shaped this research over time.

Pathological Model

The *pathological* (or *culturally deviant*) model mainly focuses on the negative characteristics of the African American family and ascribes many of these

problems to inherent deficiencies (Barnes, 2001). This view emerged partly because of the highly controversial report by D. P. Moynihan (1965; see Box 8.1), which purported that matriarchal African American families deterred healthy masculinity for male children due to a lack of exposure to positive role models (Battle & Coates, 2004). Still others believe that pathology in the African American family is the result of the historical impact of racism and poverty, but more importantly, they purport that distinct cultural values and behaviors are the main causes of socioeconomic deprivation and family dysfunction (Anderson, 1999; Fine, Schwebel, & James-Myers, 1987; and Moynihan, 1965).

According to Barnes (2001), the pathological model espouses the following five assumptions:

1. A comparative analysis between African Americans and Whites in social, economic, and political development;
2. White family norms are universal and should be used as a standard of comparison for African American families;
3. Minimize the positive implications of African American family life;
4. Negatively represent the culture and life within African American communities;
5. Suggest that some African American cultural values be modified to match traditionally White values (Fine et al., 1987).

Furthermore, White and Parham (1990) cite a couple of shortcomings with the pathological model. First, the proponents of this model fail to examine the notion that an African American single parent can serve as an appropriate role model for both male and female children. Second, some researchers have inflexible views of what constitutes a family; thus, their writings perpetuate a myopic view of the African American family (White & Parham, 1990).

Cultural Equivalent Model

The cultural equivalent view of African American family life deemphasizes any negative characteristics and draws focus to the commonalities they share with White families after controlling for social class distinctions (Allen, 1978; Fine et al., 1987; Scanzoni, 1971). The African American family is viewed as adaptive as long as it conforms to the White middle-class standard of family life. Even though this type of standard is used to evaluate the functioning of African American families, followers of this approach often use it to focus on strengths rather than dysfunction (Bryan & Coleman, 1988).

Researchers (such as Barnes, 2001; Billingsley, 1992; Fine et al., 1987; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993) propose several strengths in the African

American family life. Children in African American homes as compared to some children from traditional middle-class White homes often witness more equality and gender role flexibility between African American parents, strong kinship networks, a strong sense of pride, a model of an unwavering work ethic, and an emphasis on achievement. According to Fine et al. (1987), African American families headed by a single mother are more effective than single-mother White families. In addition, it appears that the notion of illegitimacy may be more negative for White than African Americans families.

An additional strength among children in African American families includes a highly internalized sense of spirituality or religious affiliation, (Billingsley, 1992; Littlejohn-Black & Darling, 1993). African American children are socialized to use their spiritual beliefs as a mechanism for survival, thus this spiritual system becomes a foundation for inner strength (Boyd-Franklin, 1989).

Children from African American families often witness strong kinship patterns in their families. These strong ties emphasize collective survival and moral support in dealing with the daily hassles of life (Fine et al., 1987; White & Parham, 1990). The members of this strong kinship network often do not live in the same household. They function as a minicommunity in which any relative is readily available in a time of need. Also, African American children often witness informal adoptions in their families. Many African American families take care of their relatives' or friends' children (temporarily or permanently) when their parents are unable to care for them. Thus, African American children witness the flexibility and power of social-familial networks that have been a part of many African American families throughout history.

Some believe that African American and White families hold similar ideals, but the difference lies in ability to access these values in an American society. African American children are socialized to develop a dual identity. One identity manages the values of the dominant culture, while the other juggles the demands of what it means to be an African American (Burgest & Goosby, 1985). As a result, African Americans and Whites may take different paths to accomplish these goals. In conclusion, many of the negative characteristics evidenced in some African American families may be a direct response to the uphill battle to access these goals.

Emergent Model

This model does not have a great deal of empirical support, but it has received much attention theoretically and conceptually (Barnes, 2001). Unlike the pathological and cultural equivalent models, the *emergent model* emphasizes the underlying cultural connections between African American and African

culture. McAdoo (1988) posits that though there may be few "direct one-to-one carryovers" from Africa, there is nonetheless much continuity in family traditions. West African cultural values such as interconnectedness, collective responsibility, language, support, religion, and caretaking responsibilities for children continue to extend to African American families today (Barnes, 2001; Sudarkasa, 1997; White & Parham, 1990). It is also important to note that African American families are more rooted in *consanguinal* (blood) rather than *conjugal* (marriage) bonds than White families (Sudarkasa, 1997).

Ecology Models of the Family

Today, many researchers approach the study of the family from a *systems approach* (see Kreppner & Lerner, 1989). The systems perspective of human development examines the interaction of individuals within and between families and social environment, and assesses their influence on individual development and family functioning. The ecological paradigm posited by Bronfenbrenner (1986) can be useful to examine the impact of the environment on African American child development.

A systems approach to understanding families has several guiding principles, which are helpful in understanding their functional and interactive components (see Connard & Novick, 1996; Kreppner & Lerner, 1989). Some of these principles are described in the next section.

Guiding Principles of Family Systems Theory

Equifinity. Unlike the pathological and cultural equivalent models, this principle posits that there are many routes to healthy development. Two children may experience the same event, but their reactions may take different forms.

Interdependence. One part of the system cannot be understood in isolation from the other parts. African American children cannot be understood outside the context of their families. In this research bi-directional interactions within that child's family and between the family and its social environment are considered.

Subsystems. Each family is comprised of several parts or systems (such as parent-child, spousal, and sibling). The relationship between and across the subsystems are examined for potential influences on child development.

Circularity. There is constant change as children develop. As African American children develop they are likely to experience issues which are different from other races. This principle examines the constant change in individual family members. It also focuses on how this individual change influences the family system as a whole.

TABLE 8.1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of the Family as a Context for Human Development

Type of ecological model	Family environmental contexts
Mesosystem	• Ecology and family genetics • Genetics-environment interaction in family processes • Family and the hospital • Family and day care • Family and the peer group • Family and school
Exosystem	• Family and work • Parental employment and family life • Maternal employment and the family • Parental support networks • Family and the community
Chronosystem	• Range of topics (such as divorce, poverty, education, single-parent, etc.)

External Systems Affecting the Family

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986) ecological research paradigms can be examined as three external environmental models which affect the family: (1) Mesosystem models, (2) Exosystem models, and (3) Chronosystem models.

The *Mesosystem* models examine the relationships between the principal settings in African American child interacts. The *Exosystem* models refer to the settings in which children rarely enter, such as a parent's workplace or social networks; however, these settings indirectly affect child development.

Finally, *Chronosystem* models represent how time and chronological age within and across individuals and environments influence human development. Table 8.1 lists some common ecological models related to the family and the types of environments worth examination within each system (see Bronfenbrenner (1986) for additional information).

SECTION TWO: AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY STRUCTURE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

All parents are faced with the task of raising their children to function competently in society; however, for African American parents this task is often

confounded by discrimination or racism. The African American family structure has shifted from two-parent households in the 1960s to single-female-headed households today. Barnes (2001) proposed three basic family structures for African Americans: nuclear, single-parent, and augmented. These family types will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Nuclear Family

A *nuclear* family consists of a father, mother, and children. Today 7.5% of African American children under the age of 18 live in a two-parent married couple household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). For the past century marriage behavior in the United States has changed dramatically. In the 1950s there were small differences between African American and White American marital patterns. However, from the 1960s to the present, African American children's home lives have shifted from a majority being raised in a nuclear family to a new majority of being raised by a single parent.

Research on economically stable nuclear African American families is limited. Being raised in a nuclear family can have many potential advantages for African American children, as long as there is low conflict among the parents. Conflict is what typically undermines children's development (Hetherington, 1999). Two-parent families often have more financial and emotional resources, and time for their children (Seccombe, 2000). African American children learn gender role flexibility, as African American nuclear families are generally egalitarian in role division (Jackson, 1993; Staples, 1986); but the traditional gender-role divisions are prevalent as well (Brewer, 1988). Children living with two married parents have more daily interactions, such as eating meals together and talking or playing, than those living with unmarried parents. Other aspects of children's lives appear to be affected more by the number of parents available than by parents' marital status.

Unfortunately, an African American child being raised by two parents in the home does not always equate to economic prosperity (see Table 8.2 for poverty statistics). Many African American children are poor because of the prevalence of poverty in their households and communities. The poverty experienced by many African American children is the result of the complex interaction between politics, culture, economics, race, gender, and social class (Brewer, 1988). Unfortunately, we know very little about the influence of economic pressures on the development of African American children in nuclear families (Conger et al. 2002), as the majority of research has focused on single-parent African American families.

TABLE 8.2. Poverty Rates (Percent Below Poverty Level) in 1999 for Children Under 18 Years by Race and Hispanic Origin and Living Arrangements

Race and Hispanic origin	Living in married-couple family group	Living in mother-only family group	Living in father-only family group	Living with neither parent
Non-Hispanic White	4.7	28.1	14.1	18.45
Black or African American	11.4	47.4	27.5	38.8
American Indian and Alaskan Native	18.5	50.0	32.8	38.3
Asian	11.3	31.4	17.4	19.5
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	15.5	39.6	22.8	26.8
Two or more races	10.6	37.9	21.6	25.3
Hispanic (of any race)	19.5	47.2	27.8	31.1

(Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

The *family stress model* was originally based on economically disadvantaged White families in the rural Midwest (see Conger, Rueter, & Conger, 2000; Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999). Conger and colleagues (2002) extend this model out of a need to examine the influence of economic stressors on child development in two-parent African American households. As depicted in Figure 8.1, the model focuses on the mediated relationships among negative financial and economic pressures, caregivers' relationships and moods, parental involvement, and child adjustment.

The model posits that the amount of economic pressure within the family is related to two aspects of financial hardships (i.e., low family per capita income and negative financial events). These dimensions of hardship are hypothesized to indirectly influence the families in terms of emotions, behaviors, and relationships (Conger et al., 2002).

Even though a high number of African American children live in poverty, it is important to note that a large number of children live in economically stable two-parent homes. The number of highly educated, upwardly mobile African American families is the highest it has been than in any other period in U.S. history. According to the United States Census Bureau (2003a), 52% of African American couples earned at or above $50,000. Future research needs

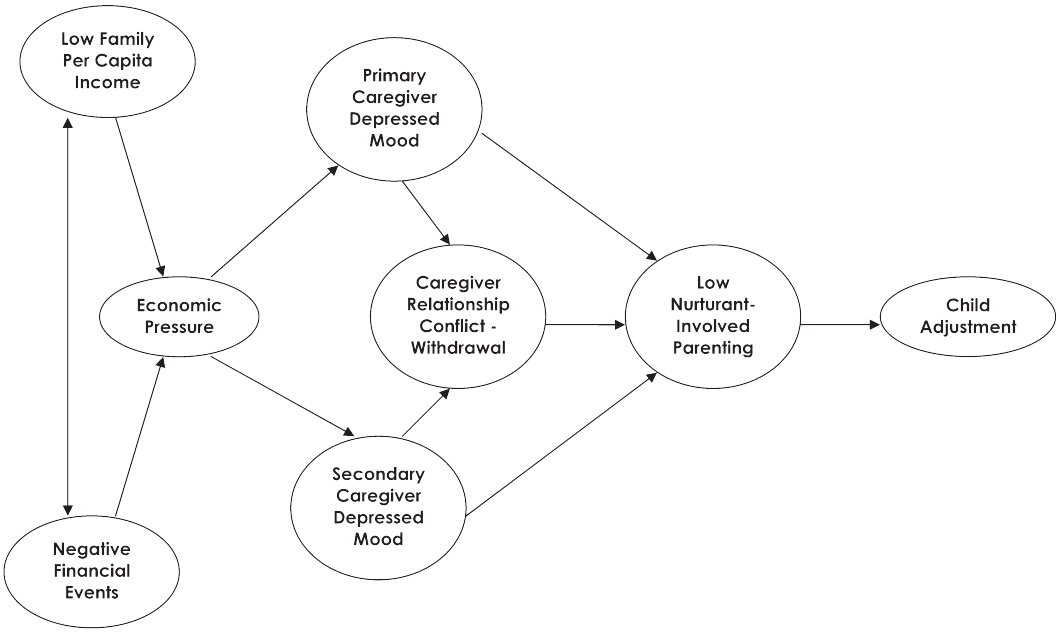

FIGURE 8.1 Family stress model.
Source: (Conger et al., 2002).

to focus on the economic diversity of African American families rather than dwell on economically disadvantaged households.

African American Single-Parent Families

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004) a single parent consists of a male or female parent who is not currently living with a spouse. Single parents may be married (not living with their spouse), widowed, or never married. The number of single parents and their children is increasing rapidly. There are conflicting perspectives as to what type of family living arrangements are best for children. As stated earlier in this chapter, it was common for research to view the single-parent household from a pathological perspective; however, today the single-parent family structure provides a viable option to the nuclear family. The majority of the research literature is on single mothers rather than single fathers. Children raised in single-parent living arrangements may have more additional stresses than children from nuclear homes, but nonetheless the majority of them find socially appropriate ways to adapt and flourish. The following sections will briefly examine African American families headed by single mothers and single fathers.

The number of single-mother households has increased dramatically over the past 40 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2003b) and the Children's Defense Fund (2005) the number of African American children under the age of 18 years living with a single mother and a single cohabiting mother was 48% and

TABLE 8.3 Percent of Children Under 18 Years With Single Parents and Cohabiting Parents

Race and Hispanic origin	Living with a single mother	Living with a single father	Living with a single cohabiting mother	Living with a single cohabiting father
All children	23	5	11	33
Non-Hispanic White	16	4	14	29
Black	48	5	6	30
Asian and Pacific Islander	13	2	11	40
Hispanic (of any race)	25	5	12	46

(Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

6%, respectively (see Table 8.3). Regardless of race, children living in mother-only family groups experience the highest rates of poverty (see Table 8.2).

There are many reasons why African American female households with minor age children have higher poverty rates than White female households with minor children. This chapter will not focus on the reasons why this may be, but a large part of it involves the economic deterioration of a segment of the African American community and the contextual stressors on these families (see Taylor, Tucker, Chatters, & Jayakody, 1997, for additional explanations).

Studies on African American children from two-parent homes compared to homes headed by single mothers show many differences, such as social difficulties and school dropout rates (McLanahan, 1985). On average, by 16 years of age, there is an increased risk of sexual activity (Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985), teenage pregnancy, and less representation in the labor force among daughters from African American female-headed homes regardless of social class. These trends merit further examination, as the female-headed household structure is more common and has become more acceptable over the past 20 years.

African American single, father-headed homes are not as prevalent as their female counterparts, but the numbers are increasing. Approximately 5% of African American children live with a single-parent father and another 30% live with a single-cohabiting father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003b). Many of the single, non-cohabiting fathers are single parents mainly because of divorce and out-of-wedlock births. A high percentage (27.5%) of African American children who reside with a single father also experience poverty (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2004). Economic hardship among single fathers examined in conjunction with the number of children in financially strained single-female African American headed households illustrates the high numbers of economically deprived African American youth.

Over the past 15 years, the role of the African American father has garnered much interest among social scientists. Despite the negative image portrayed in the television media of the African American father as uninvolved and absent in the lives of his children, the recent literature research does not support this image. Numerous studies from the fields of psychology and sociology highlight positive dimensions of African American fatherhood. Many African American fathers provide a sense of stability, academic achievement, and a nurturing environment for their children (Smith, Krohn, Chu, & Best, 2005).

Being a single parent requires a lot of hard work and commitment. African American single mothers and fathers need to establish strong supportive networks with friends or in their communities. Children living with a single parent often find that their parents are more respectful and value their individual viewpoints to various situations. Single parents, especially single-father households, often show an increased commitment to daily care, education, and moral development (Allen & Doherty, 1996).

Augmented Families

Augmented families is defined as families in which other relatives or unrelated friends reside in the home and care for the children (Barnes, 2001; White & Parham, 1990). While there are many conceptualizations of augmented families, we will focus on two types: grandparents as head of the household; and African Americans in foster care.

Children live with grandparents for many reasons. Grandparents serve as a source of child care and family assistance. The reverse is also true, where the elder may live with a child and grandchildren because they require support (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003b). The majority of households where a grandparent lives with children under the age of 18 are households in which the primary householder is the grandparent, while a smaller percent of grandparents live in someone's else's household (typically their children). The U.S. Census (2003b) reports that 9% of African American children are more likely to reside with a grandparent compared to Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, and Asian/Pacific Islander children (6%, 4%, and 3%, respectively). Also, compared to other groups, African American children are much more likely to reside with a grandmother, rather than both grandparents.

Grandparents who are the primary householder (that is, the caretaker of both the parents and grandchildren) often assist young mothers in child rearing; thus, they serve as *coparents* for their grandchildren. This multigenerational assistance may seem to have many advantages such as increased financial resources and closer kinship bonds, but some research has shown that it may be less than ideal. Stevens (1984) reports that a grandmother's attempts to coparent may be viewed as unwanted and seen as criticism. Some possible consequences of this assistance may cause many young parents to feel criticized and depressed (Kalil, Spencer, Spieker, & Gilchrist, 1998), and they may disengage from their parents and children in an attempt to regain a sense of privacy.

These data indicate that children who reside with their grandparents without a parent are often at a financial disadvantage. Many of these families have economic constraints, which force them to live without healthcare and insurance; thus, many grandparent-headed householders find it difficult to raise their grandchildren without some form of public assistance.

Many grandparents parent their grandchildren full time. This often is due to a particularly disruptive circumstance in the parents' lives, such as mental, drug, or emotional problems, HIV/AIDS, or incarceration (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994; Jendrek, 1994; Joslin & Brouard, 1995; Joslin & Harrison, 1998). The problems faced by the parents negatively impact family relations among grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. Many African American grandparents take on this responsibility as a way to keep the family together, as many children in situations such as this are sent to live in foster care (Terling-Watt, 2001). Kelly and Damato (1995) report that grandchildren often have a difficult time adjusting to the living situation with a grandparent due to issues such as (1) confusion about appropriate role models, (2) differences in ages, (3) children's limited comprehension of circumstances about the living arrangement, (4) lack of clear parameters surrounding parental visits, and (5) undue attachment to grandparents. These stressors may increase the risk of depression and poor health in grandparents (Fuller-Thompson & Minkler, 2000) and their grandchildren.

In September 2004, the number of children in foster care has increased to 517,000 (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System [AFCARS], 2006), as compared to 560,000 in 1998 (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System [AFCARS], 2000). In 2004, 34% of children in the child welfare system were African American compared to 40% White (non-Hispanic), and 18% Hispanic. Approximately 283,000 children exited the foster care system in 2004; the majority of children were White, non-Hispanic (45%), 29% were African American, and 17% were Hispanic.

African American children are more likely to live with non-biological caregivers more than other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. There is not much research available on foster care in the United States, mainly due to a lack of high quality data collection across many communities. It has been reported that African American children are three times more likely to have been in foster care (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). African American children are likely to remain in foster care and are placed in multiple homes due to longer stays in the welfare system, and they are often put in foster care as a result of parental neglect (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

In summary, the family helps shape the child's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Barker & Hill, 1996). Regardless of the family structure, parents strive to orient their children with a sense of motivation and direction in order to function effectively in society. As shown in Figure 8.2, some children raised in dysfunctional homes may display an array of negative emotional, behavioral, and social maladjustments (Barker, 1991). It is important that parents provide an adequate amount of nurture, structure, and socialization to African American children in a manner that ensures a strong sense of self, racial identification, and perseverance in order to achieve educational and economic success (Barker & Hill, 1996; Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002).

SECTION THREE: THE PEER GROUP

A substantial amount of research has shown that strong kinship bonds may be a buffer to stress and may elevate psychological heath (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). This section of the text examines the important roles of two additional social contexts—peers and friendships—in the lives of African American children. Over the years, there has been a steady increase in research on peer relationships and friendships among children. A much smaller literature has investigated peer relationships and friendships among African American children (Graham & Cohen, 1997; Graham, Cohen, Zbikowski, & Secrist,1998).

African American Children's Peer Relationships

Peer relationships are commonly examined as (1) *group evaluations*, a unilateral and group-oriented summary of a child's liking of each individual in a particular setting, and (2) *friendships*, unique, dyadic relationships (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). In general, peer relationships can provide social and emotional support (Berndt & Perry, 1986), assist in children's developing

Family Functioning Behaviors

	Healthy Families	*Troubled Families*
Nurture	Strong personality/ ego development	Weak ego state
	Secure	Fearful; inadequate; needy
	Affection/belonging	Sociopathic/psychopathic
	Accessible	Personality disorder
	Limit setting	Confused; intrusive
	Autonomy valued, encouraged, respected	Loss of self identity
	Supportive	Loss of self-esteem
	Clear, open expression of feelings	Abandonment; rejection; denial of emotions
	Strong boundaries	Chaos, vague and poorly defined boundaries
	Understanding	Lack roots; attachments
	Security	Marked absence of leadership
	Leadership	Poor socialization; poor survival skills
	Self determination	
Structure	Strong coalition	Weak coalition (dominance versus submissiveness)
	Rational problem solving	Internal conflict; lacks direction and decision making
	Input accepted (negotiation and problem solving)	
	Assigned task performance	Unable to perform and carry out tasks
	Creates social reality	Confused; inconsistent
	Open communication	Contradictory messages
	Clarifying	
	Clear role expectations	Lacks gender identity
	Unified; collaborative	Insufficient survival skills
	Identity	Confused self-concept; poor group identity
	Cultural heritage	Oppressed; confused loyalty; cultural incompetence
	Autonomy	Dependent; self-deprecating
Enculturation/ socialization	Self-reliant	Lack of focus; dependence among family members
	Liberated	Deprecated character; maladaptive behaviors; self-defeating behaviors
	Awareness and appreciation of lifestyle, values, and pluralism	Lacks understanding of socialization processes; political/ economic oppression

FIGURE 8.2. Barker and Hill's family functioning behaviors.
Source: (*Journal of Black Studies, 27(1),* 1996, p. 82).

self-awareness (Sullivan, 1953), and help build a solid foundation for developing and practicing social and cognitive skills (see Asher & Coie, 1990; Berndt & Ladd, 1989; Hartup, 1983, 1989; Piaget, 1932).

Research examining race awareness has shown that significant differences exist between African American and White children regarding racial attitudes or preferences. These disparities have been tested in psychological and educational research over the past 60 years using line drawings, dolls, and photographs (Clark & Clark, 1939, 1947; Morland, 1966; Radke, Sutherland, & Rosenberg, 1950). Regardless of race, children displayed an increasing awareness of racial differences starting at 3 years of age (Clark & Clark, 1939; 1947). Powell (1985) found that African American children often expressed a strong pro-White bias *and* a highly

favorable self-concept. It is important to note that this research documents stereotypical beliefs of children and may not reflect behaviors and attitudes in actual relationships.

Children's sociometric ratings and nominations have shown that same-race and same-sex biases against peers have changed over the years. African American children exhibit an increasing racial bias with age; that is, older African American children often rate children same-race peers higher than younger African American children (Singleton & Asher, 1979).

African American Children's Friendships

Unlike peer relationships which are based on group evaluations, children's friendships are characterized as mutual, dyadic relationships (Graham & Cohen, 1997; 1998). Friendships provide a base to practice social skills; they allow an individual to socially compare to others and to themselves; and they promote a feeling of group belonging, instrumental support, and emotional intimacy (Rubin, 1980; Way, 1996).

The *similarity-attraction hypothesis* posits that interpersonal attraction is largely driven by similarities (actual or perceived) between individuals (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996). These commonalities (such as demographic variables, behaviors, attitudes, self-concept, etc.) assist in creating a close bond between individuals by a) validating one's own attitudes and behaviors as well as b) providing contexts to exercise enjoyable activities (Graham & Cohen, 1998). For African American children, this similarity is a main function in friendship selection through childhood and adolescence.

Race is strongly linked with measures of children's friendships within a classroom context. Among elementary school-aged children same-race friendships are to a great extent more numerous than other-race friendships (Graham & Cohen, 1997; Hartup, 1983). African American children were less inclined to choose White classmates for best friends as they grew older; however, they still maintained a greater affability toward African American peers and other-race peers than did White children (Graham & Cohen, 1997; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987). This cordiality may partly be due to the amount of opportunity children have for other-race versus same-race interactions (Hallinan & Smith, 1985; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; Kistner, Metzler, Gatlin, & Risi, 1994).

There are notable differences between gender and age in friendships. Girls' friendship networks are more exclusive and intimate than boys' (Eder & Hallinan, 1978). Their relationships often vary in their styles of influence (Serbin, Sprafkin, Elman, & Doyle, 1984), activities, language styles (Maltz & Borker, 1983), and types of play (Maccoby, 1988; 1990). In terms of age,

African American adolescent males often develop a *bravado* identity (also known as hypermasculine). Cunningham and Meunier (2004) report that a hypermasculine persona can serve as a protective mechanism for many males in high-risk environments. This reactive attitude may be a way of dealing with discomfort among peers, and it may also be linked to a lack of exposure to positive role models. Belgrave and Allison (2006) recommend that prevention efforts and interventions should focus on creating positive relationships among African American males. They also recommend that interventions for African American females' friendships focus on reducing *relational aggression* (attempt to harm another through social manipulation/ostracism) and enhancing mutual cooperation, problem solving, and life skills (see Belgrave, 2002; Belgrave et al., 2004).

PERSPECTIVES ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Future research on the social development of African American children within social contexts should examine the diversity of complex relationships of African Americans within families and peer groups. In order to accomplish this task, some of the methodological limitations which have plagued past research in this area should be addressed. First, researchers need to be careful to eliminate confounds among race, ethnicity, socioeconomic assessments, and community of residence. For a better understanding of the African American child within a family context, it is important that participants are recruited from a variety of socioeconomic, residential, and age levels. Second, it will be useful to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative research designs. Such designs may be better suited to uncover the rich nuances of the African American family.

More specifically, future developmental scholarship should focus on stable African American couples, the elderly, and a single-parent family (mothers or fathers) structure to parenting processes and child developmental outcomes among African Americans of varying socioeconomic statues. Future research should also focus on the processes and outcomes of parents' involvement in school activities (such as homework), and provide suggestions for school practices to enhance the effectiveness of parental involvement in the educational setting of African American children.

The field will benefit from a more extensive analysis of the social relationships of African American children (e.g., peers, siblings, friendships, and teachers) particularly in terms of the quality, structure, behavioral, and affective dimensions. Finally, the role of family variables in child resiliency

and adaptation within samples of African American children needs further exploration.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on social contexts in the life of the African American child. The chapter starts with a discussion of some of the issues that are faced by many researchers in child and family studies. Section one presents some of the leading conceptual models used to examine African American families, including the pathological, cultural equivalent, emergent, and ecological systems. The next section explores African American family structures and child development. Specifically, we discuss three family types: (1) nuclear, (2) single-parent, and (3) augmented. We highlight the demographic shifts in the nuclear family structure, and discuss the characteristics of children raised in this family configuration. A critical analysis of the family stress model by Conger and colleagues (2002) is explored with African American nuclear families. We focus on single-headed households, as well. The number of single family households provides a sounding board for discussion about how African American children fare in homes headed by single mothers, as well as single fathers. In the subsection on augmented families, we provide a glimpse of the impact of African children being raised by grandparents or who are a part of the foster care system. The final section of the chapter aims to reveal the importance of social contexts in the lives of African American children, notably peer relationships and friendships.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

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Video

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