

Approved: Tom W. Dunolice Date: 12-23-08
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RESEARCHERS SHOULD CONSIDER OTHER PRE-EXISTING FACTORS WHEN
DEFINING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY?

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Inga Hooks-Jones

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ABSTRACT

The problem presented in this paper is to identify that there are several pre-existing factors that define the African American family. These pre-existing factors have always been identified but never considered as ethically sound factors that should be considered when researching African Americans families.

In order to clearly understand that researcher's cultural deviant model of research is ineffective, inadequate and discriminates against the African American family, one must examine how empirically different the European American family is in its comparison to the African American family.

The purpose of this paper is also to show how important it is to share the experiences hardships and circumstances that have consumed the lives of African Americans. Some of these important aspects include poverty, racism and the inability to secure the next generations success. This paper will describe the effects of each factor on the lives of African Americans. I will explain why many researchers believe that these factors have not been considered when defining the African American family. Many researchers believe these factors are irrelevant due to small reparations that may have been made to African Americans. However, this paper will show how these reparations have failed to right the wrongs of the past.

A review of literature shows how poverty and racism plays a large role in the African American family's worldviews of self and others. This paper will assist in showing how these perceptions have helped in the molding of the African American family unit.

Through all my reviews of literature it becomes evident that there are several pre-existing factors that are associated with the African American family. It is also evident that these factors have yet to be considered when researching the African American family unit.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Just like a gourmet soup, the secret ingredients and sauces are never revealed, America's melting pot continues to keep hidden the true essence and substance of its ingredients by feeding a false sense of reality and common normality to the races contained in the broth. As a result, the new generation of races fail to truly understand who and why they are. The who's and the why's go hand in hand in order to effectively understand their culture. If one knows who and why they are, the political and popular culture that has insisted upon the centrality of the races, will not be able to conform the races into believing that they should exhibit the values and behaviors of the normed group and depict this as the legitimate and highlighted model lifestyles. Unfortunately, for the cultures and races that make up America's melting pot the loss of their language, history and culture has been a strong factor in the decomposition of the races. Once the new generation becomes a natural citizen of this once foreign land; traditionally, the culture will adopt the language, beliefs, values and ethical codes of the common culture. The fact is that different people and different cultures evolved differently. Therefore, we will never be able to understand the life of one individual under the same principles of another.

People are very complicated. Therefore, it is a true misfortune to rationalize family and culture on the basis of one researcher's perspective of what a family is and should be. This ideal of family and culture portrays a false sense of normalcy. The African American family and culture is one of the oldest races in America. However, the acceptance and understanding of the "true" culture and the circumstances that define the

race have been lost for decades, even by the vary persons of the race. This lack of acceptance and understanding may be due to the lack of knowledge of the new generation, the denial of the past by the old generation or a way to move forward by both generations; whatever the case, the inability to acknowledge the very difference in the existence of the race has resulted in the and perceived acceptance by African Americans of the lifestyles, beliefs and ethics of the common culture.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are several pre-existing factors researchers should consider when defining the African American family. However, Carroll points out that models used to conceptualize and conduct family research for instance: cultural deviant and cultural equivalent use Eurocentric models of behaviors, attitudes and family structure to compare other racial groups. For centuries, the Eurocentric models have been used as the ideal standards by which all other groups should strive to live by. Cain and Combs-Orme (2005) further explain when race is the interest of research on parenting, between-group differences are paramount in analysis and researchers typically develop a code to follow. This code theoretically has been the European-American, middle-class values and practices as the ideal or norm, and compares African-American values and practices to that those of the European American. African-Americans that display similar values, standards and beliefs of the normed group or the European-American group are depicted as legitimate and are highlighted. “However, much of the “race-comparative” research encourages the documentation of unfavorable outcomes of African-American children and families, and conclusions often concentrate on how African-American children are abnormal, deficient, or incompetent when compared to the middle-class European-American mainstream”(Cain and Combs-Orme, 2005). Carroll similarly states, that when other races fall short of the standard deviance, pathology and other such, negative connections are used and applied to explain differences. Unfortunately, without the consideration of other factors most commonly defined within the African American

family such as racism, poverty and the inability to secure the next generation's success as factors affecting behavior and decision-making, a constant bias result will be reflected when researching the African American family.

Unlike the two models mentioned, Carroll further explains, the cultural variant model, does not assume one universal model of cultural correctness or moral success. It suggests that different cultures have different cultural codes and if nurtured and allowed to develop according to those codes, different cultures would exhibit a variety of functional patterns, behaviors, attitudes, and structures. This model takes the non-traditional approach of suggesting that different cultures are indeed different and that difference is "okay" not deviant, not on the bottom of the hierarchy ladder leading to Eurocentric heights, but on a different, equally valid path. Ultimately, to research the African American family the only logical way to effectively understand the family culture would be to use the culture variant model. However, Carroll also points out that cultural deviant models have taken over the research world. Unfortunately, for the African American family, research has not been concerned with understanding the truths as they relate to the African American culture and the actual everyday behaviors, attitudes, and coping mechanisms of African Americans within an ecological and functional environment, Carroll states. Therefore, the true validity of the research done on the African American family is next to none due to the lack of consideration given to the defining factors that exist within the race. The fact that researchers believe it is necessary to define the race and culture of African Americans, leads one to believe that these individuals may be culturally sensitive to the pre-existing factors that exist when defining African American families. However, little has been done to prove that these factors

exist, are relevant and should be considered. It is clear throughout history that African Americans have prevailed despite their circumstances. However, researchers tend to emphasize what tends to be negative characteristics of African American families and eliminate the true victories of the African American families from the context.

Racism

The day-to-day struggle of the African American community in dealing with the hidden and not so hidden realities of racism plays a major role in the stress factors of the race. Stress is a profound factor in how African Americans deal with the realities of life. What researchers choose not to consider when defining African American families includes the relevance of racism and the impact it has on the progression of the community as a whole. Racism has plagued the African American community in many ways. Examples of every day racism can be clearly illustrated by Dr. Chester Pierce, Harvard psychiatrist. Pierce (1970, 1974) states, African Americans are subject to stares assumed to be because of their color, ignored for service assumed to be because of color, assumed guilty of anything negative assumed to be because of color, treated as inferior assumed to be because of color, and singled out for being different assumed to be because of color during their daily life tasks. Not only are these stress factors common in part of the everyday experience of all African Americans but they have a harsh impact on the psyche and how African Americans view the world they live in and also their hierarchy in America. The fact is; racism will always be a factor in the lives of African Americans. Racism has been embedded so deeply in the minds and hearts of many people that it will never truly be absent in the lives of African Americans. This harsh reality is a hard pill to

swallow for many African Americans due to the fact that the race is a minority group that has the potential to impart great things into American. However, African Americans may never gain the equality, appreciation and notoriety that they deserve. The key to making this deception successful is to constantly hide the true reality of its existence. In today's America a true racist must be able to mask and be educated enough to use other ideals to explain their feelings and beliefs about other races. Today's America does not condone blunt, racist ideologies. However, the ability to change a few words and depict scenarios so that they are not viewed, as racist tends to be the trend widely used today in order to achieve the ultimate goal of continuing to infiltrate American with racism.

This racist tradition has manifested in the lives of all races for centuries. Not only have past generation's trained young European Americans and others how to effectively discriminate against African Americans but the other races and cultures that live among African Americans have also learned the traditions of discrimination. Carroll uses the cultural equivalent model to emphasize how one's belief can easily transform into the belief of another. Carroll also states, the symbolic tradition emphasizes the importance of societal influence upon an individual. Consequently, human behavior is a result of interactions with one's environment beyond direct reaction to it. With these racist perceptions of African Americans as the common ideals of society it is hard for even African Americans to stand firm on the strength and true essence of their race and culture. This is especially true when considering the economic hardships that African American families have endured. These hardships have prevented African Americans from acquiring a comparable education to European Americans and as a result African

Americans will never obtain comparable income, all which in America, are determining factors of self-worth and determine competitive ability.

An interesting fact about racism is that it is able to manifest itself through lies, assumptions and one- time experiences. Because children are not born racist they must be taught these ideals based on lies. A mother, father or parental figure must constantly flood a child's head with stories that may have been passed down from generation to generation about another race. These stories may not bear any truth but they must be told in order create ideals and beliefs that a child can understand. The idea that someone is inferior simply because of their race must be proven because many African Americans have "climbed their way to top." These lies help create understanding and reasoning for the child. The assumptions that must be made in order to breed a healthy racist must be generated from the lies passed down from generation to generation. For instance, a racist must believe that all African Americans continue to live in poverty because they, meaning the race, are lazy do not want to do any better and African Americans are not smart. This assumption derives from the lies told decades ago about African Americans and their ability to compete in American. A good racist must also be able to give real life experiences, examples and evidence that support their findings. It is imperative that the child is able to relate to these life experiences. The success of passing the information off to the child; is determined by the parent's or giver of information's ability to cover the information up as factual knowledge. This is often displayed when the mother, father or parental figure states that he or she is not a racist and has friends of the other race and believes that there are some good people of the race. Typically, these types of racist tend to be on the more politically conservative side. These individuals generally believe that

racism and discrimination do not exist. For instance, in the conservative magazine, "National Review," James Q. Wilson writes an article called "American Dilemma." This article gives a clear explanation of Mr. Wilson's belief about "poor blacks" in New Orleans. Mr. Wilson speaks of the "extraordinary efforts that the government and private enterprise have made to help the poor." He lists, welfare payments, Medicaid, food stamps, public housing, affirmative action and the compulsive search by firms and universities for any competent blacks that can be hired or educated. What Mr. Wilson fails to realize is that these corrective action plans and programs are a direct result of discrimination and racism against blacks in America. For instance, Affirmative Action wouldn't have been necessary if not for the racist ideologies that have plagued America for years. Employers couldn't have been forced to hire blacks if they had been hiring them in the past. Employers couldn't have been forced to provide equal opportunities for African Americans if opportunities had always been equal in the past. Mr. Wilson seems to suggest that these programs were created from the kindness of one's heart in order to give poor, African Americans a chance. Coincidentally, these programs were created as entitlements to help the poor, be they, Black, White or Hispanic; to supplement their resources in order to help families stay healthy and strong. Wilson goes on to state that these are some of the things that have been done for blacks to lower the extremely high rate of poverty amongst blacks in America. Unfortunately, this is a very common view amongst white, male conservatives, the controlling power in America today. This shows the profound stench of racism that still permeates throughout the air in America. These racist views and attitudes toward blacks are highly motivated by assumptions and lies that may have been passed down from generation to generation. Another factor that should be

considered when defining the African American family is the idea that poverty is a serious result of the effects of slavery and therefore it must be considered. The reality is; racism has directly affected African Americans. Racism has even affected African American's ability to rear children through the socioeconomic hardships of poverty. Poverty is a serious result of slavery and racism and poverty should be considered when defining the African American family.

Poverty

Because poverty amongst African American families, unlike European American families, is complicated by racism, it should be obvious to view this as a factor that may assist in understanding the African American family's cultural differences that effect their reality. Dunlap, Golub and Johnson (2006) redefine poverty as such; poverty can be much more than the absence of money or work or even motivation. For many, it is the effects resulting from a trans-generational social history filled with struggle against harsh conditions, structural impediments and limited opportunities as well as the continuation and evolution of cultural traditions, and the emergence of new sub-cultural norms in the face of these conditions. With this definition in mind it is not only not fair to compare African American families to European American families but it is theoretically ineffective. However, because racism and poverty are not directly associated to the European American financial strain, it is not considered as a factor when the most commonly used model for family research, cultural deviant model, is used in researching the African American family. Consequently, the African American's inability to care for

their own children due to the socioeconomic factors of poverty is evidence to support the relationship between poverty and negative family interactions.

According to Gutman and Eccles (1999), as a result of parents behavior responses to the socioeconomic defining factors it is evident that there is a link between certain variables to children's school performance including verbal exchanges between parents and children, parental expectations for achievement, positive affective relationships between parents and children, and discipline and control strategies which has also been linked to the societal affects of poverty. This indicates that when the parents of an African American family cannot control the environmental factors that keep them poor, the stress of feeling inefficient and worthless is reflected in the children reared in this culture. Carroll points out, when interviewing African American fathers, many emphasize how very important it is to be employed in order to fulfill successfully the father role in America. She also states, discriminating factors such as; lack of quality education coupled with lack of employment result in disproportionate numbers of African American men who are unemployed, underemployed or who just do not believe they can get a job and thus have given up. Consequently, this ideal displays the direct correlation between an African American father's self worth and how it compares to his ability to provide for his family. Imagine how it must feel for a father to not know where his child's next meal will come from. Imagine how it must feel for a mother to send her children off to school, knowing that they do not have appropriate clothing or supplies to participate in the daily lesson. How inadequate must a parent feel, to understand that due to his or her child's financial limitations and lack of access to other resources his or her child may never overcome these barriers that have been created at birth. Researchers

believe that with the help of public policies and programs, African American families should be able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and progress on. However, the actual ill factors that have caused so many African Americans to live in poverty cannot and will not be cured by food stamps and Affirmative Action. The root of this evil stems from racism in America. Racism has prevented African Americans from obtaining a quality education. Racism has prevented African Americans from obtaining due process under the laws of America. These are all important factors that can foreshadow a families potential of living in poverty. From African Americans early existence in America, they have been able to survive all the tragedies America has dished out to them. In spite of all the factors mentioned earlier, African Americans have sustained life. Unfortunately, poverty is one of the end results for African American families. African American families have been able to survive in spite of poverty. With poverty comes; depression, abuse (mental and physical) neglect, homicide, abandonment and the feelings of inferiority. The African American family has survived through depression from early on when a mother's child had been ripped form her bosom and sold into slavery. The African American family has survived through depression when a father in the deep, south had to go and identify his teenage son hanging from the branches of strong trees. The abuse wives have taken mentally and physically from depressed husbands in the African American family due to his inability to find work that will efficiently take care of his family is beyond belief.

However, poverty in many ways has strengthened the ties in African America families. Research shows that due to poverty, many African American families have learned to survive by investing in one family members success in order for all members

to live securely. For instance, “In Patillo (McCoy’s(1999) ethnographic study of Chicago community of “Groveland” an informant explained how the “first son” moved north to Chicago, purchased an apartment building to facilitate the migration of his extended family. Then, each family member moved to Chicago, lived in the apartment building and they all paid the mortgages together while the next family saved for an apartment building.” This is a clear example of how African American families have fought to survive through poverty. Interestingly enough, African Americans have found other ways to provide for their families despite the sources legality. As an end result, African American males, fathers and husbands due to incarceration, leave many African American families. Ultimately, these families are left to be headed by African American females, mothers and wives. Researchers wonder why there is a lower prevalence of marital nuclear families and the greater incidence of childbearing outside of marriage amongst low-income African Americans. One explanation is that African Americans have learned to function as families outside of marriage. For centuries, the African American male has been a huge target for individuals to discriminate against. Consequently, adult females of African American families have had to learn to independently care for their children without the help of their husbands or children’s father. Theoretically, as history continues to repeat itself African Americans become less sensitive to the importance of marriage. It is surprising to see the percentage of African American women who have successfully reared their children into adulthood despite the hardships and difficulties that they have endured. Even though African American mothers have triumphed through the hardships of raising children with no fathers, raising children with inadequate resources and have continued to be discriminated against

throughout history; researchers fail to acknowledge the African American women's fight to survive and give her the credit she deserves. Instead, she is criticized for being unwed, scrutinized for her children going unfed and seen as the epitome of America for not seeming thankful for what government has done for her poor black self.

The Inability to Secure the Next Generation's Success

Carroll reflects, over two centuries have elapsed: two centuries of African Americans victimized by false assumptions, misinterpretations, allegations and resulting policy: two centuries of unequal treatment, physical and psychological brutality; two centuries of massive rejection of what is African and upholding what is European, two centuries for African Americans to become accustomed to being in the shadow of White America. One would say if two centuries have gone by with little or no progression away from racism and discrimination, what would make one think the ideals and perceptions of Americans will ever change. However, many researchers believe that the future has never looked so bright for African Americans. Unfortunately, when evaluated, the same discrimination and racism that kept the past generations from obtaining equal educational opportunities and housing options continues to plague the world African Americans live in today. Therefore, the constant awareness that the past generation's children will still endure the past hardships fueled by discrimination and racism is a hard pill to swallow. However, in order to pacify this heart wrenching reality, African Americans have adjusted by fostering other avenues that may temporarily cater to the harsh realities of never truly being able to succeed. One avenue that is evident in the African American community is drug dealing and using. Dunlap, Golub and Johnson (2006) report,

numerous African American families have struggled for generations with persistent poverty. These conditions were further strained during the 1980s and 1990s by the widespread use of crack cocaine. For many, crack became an obsession; it dominated their lives, and superseded family responsibilities. African American's tend to excuse this failure to thrive notion, by justifying that their families; their success and their futures do not matter anyway because they will never be able to compete at the level of the European American. This response to the "facts of life" is quite similar to the family code during the enslavement of African Americans. African American families would refuse to love their children because they knew at anytime, like someone's property; their children would be sold away. In essence, like America's racist and discriminating perceptions that cause huge barriers between the African American community and success, the slave master and the ideals that slavery was founded upon made it impossible for African Americans to compete with or even fight for the lives of their family members. What may appear to be obvious signs of incompetence's, moral degenerate, insanity and menacing deterioration may actually be a coping mechanism used by African Americans to deal with the harsh realities of their life in America.

Such is similar today. The African American generations have taken great strides for a better life for their children. However, as Carroll states, there has been no quantum leap between the ideals and perceptions and policies of white leadership of the 1800's and those of today. Singleton states, "the best advice I can give to young people and to my own children, and that you ultimately, can give your children, is to be the best rung possible secured by hard work and achievement." "Be the best rung that your life has allowed you to be so that your children and your children's children will be sure-footed

as they step up to the top of the ladder.” “Only when we can conceptualize our accomplishments and achievements as rungs for our own as well as the successes of others that follow us, do we really begin to see the important role that family can and must play.” Maybe once this is achieved, then marriage will again become an important goal in the lives of African Americans. In Harrison’s speech, it is quite apparent that he believes today’s African American community can only be responsible for the decisions that they make as it relates to a step towards the next generations success. This constant reminder that times have not changed and one must make the best of what he or she has is a dangerous concept in the African American community. Although dangerous, this ideal rings true throughout the lives of African Americans. Comparatively, how does one’s physical growth continue to progress when their growth has been stunted at birth. This ideal can be compared to the reality that the races that hold and carry the power in America already have ideals and beliefs about African Americans therefore, an African American will set him or herself up to fail when trying to compete. The truth is that for African American parents it is hard to embrace the ideal that their children could one day compete with European Americans. Therefore, why bother to try and disappoint one. The “I don’t care” attitudes portrayed in today’s youth comes from centuries and generations afflicted with the same pre-existing factors mentioned earlier. The anger and resentment that the African American youth displays today is an outcry from the present, past and future generations. The interesting aspect of this fact is the method in which African American families are statistically prevented to succeed. First, researchers look at the statistics in which children of African American families are removed from their families and placed into foster care. As we review these numbers we see that the

numbers are very high when compared to non-African Americans. What some studies have shown is there is a direct correlation between poverty and the rate in which African American children are placed into foster care. If this theory is true, due to the extremely high rate of African American families living in poverty, the future of African American families is a very bleak one. These children may be removed from their biological families due to one caseworker's perception of "quality of life," as it relates to poverty. What is very apparent through this research is how important family is to the success of the next generation. Systematically, In order to destroy a race the oppressors must destroy and dismember the family. This was evident in the Jewish Holocaust when the families were separated and put into separate concentration camps. Another example is the enslavement of African Americans. Slave masters knew how important it was to separate the husbands from the wives. This would ultimately build a sense of despair and desperation. What may have been the family's willingness to fight and rise against their enemies with the strength of the entire family ultimately turns into solely the will to survive or not caring whether they survive or not? It is conclusive; the power is in the family. Therefore, this would be the first way to destroy the future of the African America family. In today's society, this begins at the head. Black males have the highest incarceration rate of any race in the country. However, it is perceived, this method of separating the family is one that is not new to African Americans. It is quite common and African American women especially, have been desensitized to its reality.

Researchers may say that if you commit the crime you must do the time. However, common crimes committed by African American males generally result in harsher penalties. For instance crack, a highly used and sold drug in the African

American community can result in a considerably higher punishment than the selling or usage of its brother cocaine. With these blatant differences in equal treatment it is seemingly difficult to believe that African Americans will ever be different but equal. The outcry in the African American community is that the governing powers will just find another creative way to cover up the discriminations and racist ideologies. As history continues to repeat itself, do African Americans have any other reason to believe that there will be a different outcome? Some researchers may say that there is no other answer other than America was built on racism and it will continue to thrive on hatred and discrimination against African Americans.

Ultimately, there are factors that make the African American family completely different from the often compared to European American family. Unfortunately, for the African American family, the pre-existing factors that should be defined when researching the race as a family have not yet been considered as a whole. This may be due to the time it may take to study the race and its complete internal diversity. Whatever the case, the African American family may never be clearly defined in order to present the truth according to lives of the African Americans. The same experiences and places of birth will never transcend the true reality of one race's differences compared to another. Therefore, in order to effectively define the African American family in research, one must always include the pre-existing factors associated with the culture and race; these factors include racism, poverty and the inability to secure the success of the next generation when researching the African American family.

Ultimately, African American families should be classified alone and should not be compared to European American families. It is clear that African American families

are unique in their own skin. They have experiences and circumstances that only they can share and explain how these experiences have defined the African American family. African American families must be praised for their resilience and their ability to adapt in a world that has been so cruel to them. African American families should be praised for their ability to prevail throughout history. Unfortunately, throughout history, African American families have been defined by the negative aspects of their lives and not celebrated for what they have accomplished.

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