

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK FAMILY THEORY: A REVISED ABC-X MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING BLACK FAMILY STRESS AND BLACK FAMILY STRENGTHS

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Abstract

Based on a study of Black corporate managers and their families it was discovered that existing models of family stress were incomplete, or inadequate in their ability to help us understand the nature of stress for these families and how that stress is managed, and, the coping resources available to these families with which to do so. Existing models are limited for Black families in that they do not take into account the pervasiveness of racism in the life experience of these families, nor do they include the traditional/historical strengths for survival of black families that can function as crisis meeting resources. An alternative conceptualization of McCubbin and Patterson's (1981,1982,1983) Double ABCX Model, a revision of Reuben Hill's (1965) ABCX Model, incorporating racism, and, the five traditional Black family strengths identified by Robert Hill (1971) is suggested. It is argued that the inclusion of racism in understanding the nexus of Black family stress and the traditional Black family strengths that enable Black families to cope with the stresses associated with work would be most useful. Discussion of differences by race and sources of stress with emphasis on Black families, and examples of the persistence of racism for Black corporate families will be provided. Discussion of the uses and value of traditional Black family strengths, including examples, will be given. Black corporate families are defined as a subset of Black upper middle to upper class families whose life experiences are similar to those of other Black same class families.

Keywords: Black families, family stress models, ABC-X, Black family strengths, racial stress

Introduction

In this second decade of the third millennium race persists as a powerful barrier to greater achievement and full equality for Blacks, including those in the middle and upper middle classes. Had William Julius Wilson not been such a brilliant scholar and writer, and had America not been so anxious to hear that class (a more palatable notion) and not race was a more salient determinant of Black life chances, we might not have been distracted from the significant prevalence of the importance of race. Consequently, the prevailing paradigm and zeitgeist in social science disciplines regarding the study of African Americans have been to explore the plight of the Black underclass and Black poor and in so doing continue to ignore the experience and dilemmas of the Black middle and upper classes.

Excepting the work of Toliver (1998) McAdoo (1996), Staples (1994), Willie (1991) and a few others not withstanding, there is a serious void in the research literature on Black middle and upper class families. In fact, any stable and healthy Black family type of any class for that matter is virtually invisible. This begs some important questions. Was Robert Hill's (1971) *Strengths of Black Families*, more than 40 years ago, a lie? Billingsley (1968) in his *Black Families in White America* nearly half a century ago presented Black families as resilient family structures. What happened to these functional family structures in the literature since?

Despite the dire needs of the poor and black under class, it seems foolhearty for social science to neglect and ignore the more stable models of black family life.

Models of wellness might be developed from these more stable functional families to proscribe for less healthy families. Also, because Black middle class families too have their problems and issues to deal with, they are deserving of research focus like any family group or type. This paper attempts to address this void in the social science literature.

The gains of the Civil Rights Movement enabled a small number of African Americans to work toward and acquire an increase in their allocation of social, political, and economic resources. This contributed to the growth and development of the Black middle and upper classes. The progress and experiences of this group however remains daunted by the persistence of racism in this society.

This paper focuses on the persistence of racism as a major source of stress in the daily experience of African American corporate managers and their families, a special case among African American middle and upper class families. It also points to the importance of Black historical cultural strengths for dealing with the stress that these families encounter. The importance of understanding the impact of stress on all families, African American included, how they function, and their overall well-being has been

supported by the somewhat extensive body of literature focused on families and stress. However, in the case of African American families, examination of the existing models of family stress finds them to be incomplete and less than adequate 1) in their ability to help us understand the nature of stress and stress density for these families and how that stress is managed, and, 2) in identifying the coping resources available to these families with which to do so. In the following pages I will attempt to explore the pervasiveness of racism in the day to day and life experience of black corporate managers and their families. By reason of this pervasive influence I will argue for the inclusion of racism as a constant variable in models of family stress for black families. I will also explore the presence and function of the traditional Black family strengths and suggest that these resources be included as a constant variable in family stress models used to understand African American families.

The questions central to this discussion include the following: what are the sources of stress for Black corporate managers and their families? How does racism function as a stressor for these families? What are some of the resources that Black corporate families have for dealing with stress? How do the traditional Black family strengths function for these families?

Let us begin with a brief examination of selected research on stress.

Social Science Research and Family Stress

Social scientific inquiry focused on the phenomenon of stress and the family has ensued now for more than half a century. Most notable among scholars who took up this gauntlet is Reuben Hill whose ABCX model (1965), which has its roots earlier in the literature (Hill 1949), represents a major attempt in the field of family studies to provide a conceptual framework within which to understand how families define and respond to stressful situations.

In Hill's model, A (the stressful event) interacts with B (the family's resources for coping with such events) and C (the family's definition of the event). The nature of this interaction produces X (the crisis; p.32).

In their study of families in crisis, Parad and Caplan (1965) elaborated on what Reuben Hill had described as a family's "crisis meeting resources," that is, the B component of the ABCX model. They took into account "family lifestyle... value systems, communication networks, and role systems; intermediate problem-solving mechanisms... the family lifestyle in action; and the need-response pattern... the way... the family... perceives, respects, and satisfies the basic needs of its individual members" (p.57, emphasis in the original).

McCubbin and Patterson (1981, 1982, 1983) further evolved Reuben Hill's ABCX model, developing what they called the double ABCX model,

which takes into account the ripple effect caused by the initial stressor and the response to it, and accommodates the possibility of multiple stressors impinging on a family. They assess the nature of these stresses and the resources and modes a family has for dealing with them. Both the ABCX and the double ABCX model are widely used today.

The Double ABCX model has been used in application in a variety of ways to a broad range of substantive issues and questions in the social science. Hamon and Cobb (1993) use the model in a qualitative assessment of older adult's experiences with their children's marital dissolution. The Double ABCX model was used to frame the particular stresses encountered and the resources enlisted to combat them.

Orr, Carmeron and Day (1991) used the model in their work with families with mentally retarded children. They examined the relationships among the particular variables through the method of path analysis. Their examination and application suggested perspectives on increasing the effectiveness of available resources.

Plunkett, Sanchez, Henry and Robinson (1997) used the model in their research on children's post-divorce adaptation. They integrate the literature on children and divorce into the specific components of the model. The model functions as a framework for the experiences of these children as discussed in the literature, informing decisions regarding therapeutic interventions in post-divorce adaptation.

In a study using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, Volker and Striegel (1994/1995) used Hill's ABCX model to aid in the understanding of how parents manage stress and grief after the loss of a fetus or child due to miscarriage or stillbirth. They assessed gender differences, and the role of bonding of mothers and fathers with the fetus while in utero.

Cameron and Iverson-Gilbert (2003) used Hill's model as a major part of the theoretical basis of survey data collected from more than 300 clergy they focused on the relationship between stress from the professional role and the clergy's personal and family life. Their study examined the demands of the profession, social support, and perception of stressors created by the professional role.

Xu (2007) employs Hill's model to understand culturally diverse families. His specific focus was on families with young children with disabilities. He contended that the model can be useful in empowering these families.

Despite the broad range of problems to which this model has been applied it is limited in the comprehensiveness of its explanatory ability. In the case of each of the aforementioned studies inclusion of cultural particulars in the context of both resources for coping and stressors would

significantly enhance the power of the model to enhance our understanding of how families experience the phenomenon under study.

These studies of families and stress share an important feature: They all regard stress as an interactive rather than a static phenomenon -- a process rather than an event. That is to say, a family does not experience stress in a vacuum but rather in a social ecology of timing, various resources, and possibly other stressors. Researchers have taught us much about the complex nature of stress. However, the theories they have generated tend to be limited in that they apply to a specific setting, institution, or social group or category, thus failing to take into account that the lives of individuals span a number of different settings and roles, and that experiences in one setting necessarily influence those in another. Until recently, few studies, for example, have considered the mutual impact of stress at home and in the workplace. (Apter, 1994; Cameron and Iverson-Gilbert 2003; Hammer, Saksvik, Nytro, Torvatn, and Bayazit 2004; Hanks and Sussman, 1990; Henderson 2014; Kofodimos, 1993; Korunka 2015; Krouse and Afifi, 2007; Secret and Spring, 2002; Toliver, 1986; Voydanoff, 1980; Voydanoff and Kelly, 1984.)

It had been noted by Piotrowski, Rapoport, and Rapoport (1987) that while social scientists link the social institutions of family and the economy, family and work are still frequently treated as separate spheres. Only recently, in the past four decades, have we begun to see family and work linked together in research across the social science disciplines. Black corporate managers experience stress in the workplace (workplace stress), and, they and their families experience a type of stress secondary to their connection to corporate employ (family work-related stress), due to the nature of corporate work and the demands that it places on managers and their families. For example, relocation, time spent away from home due to long work hours and out of town business travel, are all potential sources of family work-related stress. (See Toliver, 1998; and Piotrowski et al, 1987 for fuller discussion). While there is only a limited body of research that focuses on black managers and stress, the source of stress for these managers and their families supports the idea that the area of work and family are decidedly linked. Furthermore, racism has been identified as a major source of both workplace stress and family work-related stress for managers and their families. (See America, 1978; Davis, 1955; Davis and Watson, 1982; Dickens and Dickens, 1982; Fernandez, 1975, 1981; Irons and Moore, 1985; Jones, 1986; McAdoo, 1979; Nixon 1985a, 1985b, 1985c; Staples and Johnson, 1993; Toliver, 1998).

The Literature on Racialized Stress

There is a new and growing body of literature in both the social sciences and biomedical research on racialized stress. While the study of racism is not new, the focus on racism as a major source of stress in the lives of African Americans and its impact on their physical health and psychological well-being is proliferating.

Included in this research and literature, Landrine and Klonoff (1996) measure racial discrimination and its negative physical and mental health effects on African Americans. In their research they administer the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE) to a population of African Americans. Their findings include the revelation that African Americans put up with racial discrimination almost constantly, and that racism has a negative impact on their physical and mental health.

Feagin (1991) examines anti black discrimination in public places against blacks in the middle class. He suggests, "the importance of the individual's and the group's accumulated discriminatory experiences for understanding the character and impact of modern racial discrimination" (p. 101), pointing to the importance of viewing any individual racial stressor as part of a context of racial stress.

Likewise, Carroll (1998) suggests that blacks experience an abundance of stress in day to day life merely as a result of being African American. That is, the societal reaction that they experience on a daily basis is racialized. Cockerham (1990) tests the relationship between race, socioeconomic status, and psychological distress in his work. Referring to African Americans, Derrick (1997) states that, "racism can also endanger our physical and emotional health". Krieger and Sidney (1996) in a comparative study of black and white adults found racial discrimination to have an adverse effect on blood pressure in some African Americans. David R. Williams (1999) found that everyday pervasive though mundane forms of discrimination have a more damaging effect on health than do major forms of racism, such as job discrimination. William's suggestion that everyday stresses can be more damaging than stressful major life events is consistent with other research findings. Dr. Harold W. Jordan, Chair, says, "... slavery is still evident in this country because of the shackles of racism, which is the primary source of stress for Black." (Jet, 1996). Dr. Robert Davis, past president of the Association of Black Sociologists, says that blacks face more stress than whites because blacks must put forth extra effort in the work force in order to prove themselves just as capable as their white colleague." Davis goes on to say, "Stress is heightened for Blacks as they move into the corporate world." Thompson and Dey (1998) suggest that racism imposes an emotional and physical cost on the health and well-being of African American college and university faculty. Sue et al 2007, shed light on the

pervasive stress of racial microaggressions in everyday life. According to Dr. Thomas Parham, a Past President of the Association of Black Psychologists: "It is always the oppressed person who will experience more stress than the oppressor." Parham believes that Blacks experience more stress because of their oppression by Whites.

An Alternative Conceptualization of Stress for Black Corporate Managers

Earlier in this chapter some conceptual models of the stress phenomenon were explored. We have also identified some of the typical sources of stress for corporate managers, further identified additional sources of stress unique to the experience of Black managers and their families, and have discussed the proliferation of research on racialized stress. If we use the double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson 1983), which is more satisfying than competing models for the earlier stated reasons, as a framework for reviewing stress for corporate families, the makeup of the components of the model should differ sharply due especially to racism and cultural factors for Black versus white managers and their families.

Specifically, the elements contained in Components A (the stressor) and B (the family's crisis-meeting resources) will be different. Differences in family situation, coupled with racism and tokenism, build a different stress component A for Black workers. But also, component B will be built differently, including especially traditional Black family strengths and other support systems.

Juxtaposed to a model for white corporate families, a model for Black corporate families would contain a stress Component A in which "family work-related stress" (the stress that families experience secondary to manager's connection to corporate employ) is outweighed by "workplace stress" (stress the manager experience in the workplace). A major factor in this reverse tipping of the scale whereby work problems overshadow family problems is the added key element of racism, which interacts with both types of stress. Further, because of the impact of racism, the nature of work and family problems is different between Whites and Blacks. And, finally, the family's crisis-meeting resources, Component B, would include elements unique to the cultural traditions of black families versus those of the American mainstream. We will explore the presence of racism as a Component A element in the lives of black corporate managers and their families. We will also look at identifying sources of strength that include traditional black family strengths, which would be included in Component B. Thereby, we will be revising and further specifying the double ABCX Model. In the next section we will turn our attention to family strengths.

Social Science Research and the Strengths of Black Families

Historically, the tone of social science literature suggests that black families and strengths is an oxymoron. Much of that literature until recent decades has been highly pejorative, focusing on family disfunctions, with little attention to family strengths and wellness. Since the 1970's scholars like Allen (1978, 1986); Barnes (1985); Davis (1995); Gershenfeld (1986); Greene (1995); Hill (1971, 1997, 2003); H. McAdoo (1988, 1993); J. L. McAdoo (1993); Peters (1978, 1981); Staples (1994); Staples and Johnson, 2004; Taylor, Jackson, and Chatters, 1997; Taylor, Leashore, and Toliver (1988); Toliver (1998); and Willie (1988, 1991b) replaced the overridingly negative view with a richer and often more positive view of Black family life and culture, moving the literature in the direction of greater balance.

Noted historians and social science researchers have talked of the existence of certain cultural traits or Black family strengths that have been key to the survival of blacks in the United States from the past to the present (see Blassingame, 1972; Genovese, 1972; Gutman, 1976; Hill, 1971). Some have argued that these traits are carryovers from African tradition (Nobles, 1974a, 1974b). Others have suggested that they are cultural adaptations that served as survival skills in the context of U.S. society (Gutman, 1976; Toliver, 1982). Whatever their origins, such strengths have been shown to exist and they are, to some extent, unique to Black families. (Henderson, 2014; Hill 1971, 1997, 2003; Toliver 1998).

Robert Hill (1971, 1997, 2003) identified five traits that facilitated the survival, development, and stability of Black families: strong kinship bonds, a strong work orientation, adaptability of family roles, a strong achievement orientation, and a strong religious orientation. Although Hill asserted that his list of strengths is not exclusive to Black families, nor is it exhaustive of the total list of strengths that Black families possess, he contended that the historical experience of racism has rendered the significance of these qualities unique among Blacks: "The particular forms that these characteristics take among black families should be viewed as adaptations necessary for survival and advancement in a hostile environment" and should, therefore, be identified as Black family strength" (Hill, 1977, p.4).

These are the strengths brought to the corporation - or at least the seeds of them, by the Black manager. How, when, or if they are called into play, and the particular form in which they manifest themselves, will be in response or reaction to the conditions of the corporate environment. That is to say these strengths serve as a repertoire of fluid responses available to bolster as needed. The strengths developed in childhood will be further developed in articulation with and reaction to experiences in the workplace. Many of these strengths are values orientations and values often are called on

to surface or may be solidified, reinforced, and transformed through social interaction.

The Case for an Interactive and Culturally Contextualized Model of Family Strength

A few researchers, most notably Robert Hill, regard Black family strengths as survival adaptations. While his model may appear stagnant in its allusion to a monotypical black experience, his work remains highly applicable and is refreshing to the extent that it suggests a relationship between the strengths a people possesses and the experiences that they have encountered.

There are several useful and valuable classic models of general family strengths and well being. (See Curran, 1983; Hall & King, 1982; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988; Otto, 1962, 1975; Sawin, 1979; Schultz, 1991; Spanier, 1976; Stinnett, 1983; Vance, 1989). These models define the concept of a strong family, identify the traits of healthy families, develop typologies of resilient families, and explore marital strengths and quality, and family strengths for prevention. They are informative in terms of understanding the strengths of any category of family, including Black families. And, Hall and King's (1982) is specific to Black Families. However, they are temporally static in terms of the importance of historical context and are usually devoid of reference to cultural context. They do not take into account the historical development and transmission of strengths, or the cultural context out of which they emerge and to which they are culturally relative. This is important because cultural factors can influence how a potentially stressful event is interpreted and what resources might be available for coping. Models should accommodate cultural context in these two ways. Robert Hill (1997) describes strengths as, "... cultural assets that are transmitted through socialization from generation to generation..." (p.48). Hill's description supports the importance of culture and the importance of history in viewing strengths as transgenerational.

Many though not all of these models view family needs as universals and therefore assume the existence of a universal set of family strengths that will assist all families. Existing models tend to ignore cultural differences that will affect what an individual family needs. They do not consider the sociocultural milieu in which any given family system is embedded.

What is needed, then, is a more culturally specific approach to the study and definition of family strengths. This is certainly not to say that the existing approaches are not important. Rather, I am suggesting the need to add to these models by way of incorporating into them the traditional Black family strengths. This would enhance their ability to help us understand how

stress is managed, and, the coping resources that are available with which to do so. There are similarities among families; however, there are also vast differences in background, experiences, preferences, and needs that must be taken into account to effect a more meaningful discussion of family strengths.

Methodology and Sources of Data

This research focuses on the sources of stress and strengths of Black corporate managers and their families. Data were collected on the basis of in-depth personal interviews and written questionnaires with 191 corporate managers and 102 of their spouses, most of whom were wives. Most managers were employed in middle and upper middle management positions and either lived or worked in the New York Connecticut - New Jersey tri state area. A few selected respondents were from major metropolitan areas beyond these geographic boundaries. Respondents were drawn with one exception from 8 Fortune 100 companies. Respondents were selected from among these, the most financially successful companies in the U.S., in an attempt to build a sample that included some of the best, brightest, and most successful in corporate America. All respondent families by virtue of the employment status and income of the husband and/or wife (manager) can be described as middle or upper middle class. The term "corporate family" is being used to designate a family that has one or both heads of household employed in management in a major corporation.

This research was conceptualized as an exploratory study. A qualitative approach to the study of Black corporate families was taken in an attempt to eke out the sentiments and views of managers, and their families in their own voices. Furthermore, it has been indicated elsewhere that there is only a limited body of research in the field of family studies in which qualitative analysis has been employed, (see Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner, 1995), and an even more limited amount of research on African American families using qualitative methodology (See Demos 1990). The mode of analysis chosen for this research therefore speaks to this limitation in social science research on African American families.

Racism as a Source of Stress in Black Corporate Families: *The Evidence*

In this study, workplace stress -- not only of the type experienced by corporate managers of all races and ethnic groups, but a stress created by the elements of racism and tokenism was commonly reported. Both individual and institutional racism, sometimes subtle, sometimes not, constitutes additional sources of stress for Black managers. Respondents stated that the experience of racism continues to be an inescapable part of being Black in corporate America. My findings-- that the workplace is a major source of

stress for Black employees-confirms the findings reported in the limited literature that exists on Black corporate workers. Other studies also identified racism as the root cause of much workplace stress (See Fernandez, 1981).

Racism was experienced by respondent managers in this study in a number of ways. Of the total sample of managers (N=191), 138 respondents stated that they were better educated than their White counterparts, and all but five reported that they were more experienced than Whites employed at the same level. Black women also made these assertions comparing themselves with White women. Many felt that they would be further along in their companies if they were White, and that race had been an impediment to their upward mobility in the corporate world. When asked the question directly, "Does racism persist in corporate America?", all responded with a firm or emphatic "yes". In the following paragraphs four problem areas identified are selected to illustrate the persistence and prevalence of racism for black corporate families and their individual members.

Racism or sexism

Black women in the corporate world face issues and dilemmas of racism and sexism. A question sometimes raised to these women (and about these women in social science circles) is, "Which is the bigger problem; racism or sexism?" One respondent talked about being Black and female in the corporate workplace. Her responses epitomize those of others of her sex and race in this study.

Question: What problems do you as a Black female corporate manager have that other managers do not have? "I think being a woman means you have to work harder to prove yourself. As a Black woman, it's only compounded by that fact. So, I do find that I have a certain standard of performance and it means putting unnecessary pressure and stress on myself because I want to excel. I don't want to make mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes, but you feel a lot more vulnerable when you do versus someone else. I think that you do have to work harder than your white male counterparts."

Question: Does sexism exist in your company?

"Yes, although it's not always blatant, but one would have to be incredibly naïve to say that it didn't."

Question: Which is the greater problem: racism or sexism? "Racism (emphatic response). I don't feel that there is the commitment or the interest in promoting minorities in my company or in most others. We tend to get to middle management, some a little above that, and that's generally where we plateau. We have no Black officers in the company and we do have one woman."

Question: Do you feel you have advantages over White women in the workplace because you are both female and Black? "No (emphatic response)."

In short, racism was seen the more potent stressor.

Relocation

Relocation, often a stressful event for families of any race or ethnicity, can render especially stressful experiences for Black families. This is so because of racism. The racism experienced by the manager in the corporate world often spills over to his or her family and their life experiences and concerns. While families may hope that their experiences with racism in the new community with prejudice, harassment, and differential treatment would be few, unfortunately, often times this was not the case. Most respondents had stories of experiences with racism, mild or severe, to share.

One middle-aged woman said, "I am so tired of people ringing my doorbell and asking me if the lady of the house is in." (They presume that she is the maid.) Another woman told of her next door neighbor's comments about her and her husband being so industrious based on their observation of the couple cutting the lawn and taking in the trash cans after trash collection. These usual activities for middle class homeowners were seen as remarkable activities for Blacks.

A woman ordering meats from the butcher shop reading from her shopping list ordered a particular cut of meat. When she was told that they were out of her selection she made another. The butcher told her that she had better check on that first because the two were very different. She asked him with whom should she check. He replied, "The lady that you are shopping for." She was outraged as she was shopping for her own family from her own list.

These everyday incidences of racism experienced in one's community were pervasive. The added element of racism made relocation for these families especially stressful. Racism was identified by managers and their spouses as a major source of concern.

Childrearing

Parents stress over protecting their children from racism. Since slavery they have exercised parental projective care parenting in anticipation of those pejorative experiences, especially experiences with racism, that their kids will need to be prepared to face. The data provide evidence that these fears are still well-founded today.

Many of the families in this study pointed to recent incidents of racism that their children had experienced. Although primarily reported among teenaged children, five and six year old also had such experiences.

Parents who relay their stories speak of their children's feelings of hurt, anger, shock, and disappointment, as well as their own in turn.

One respondent mother talks of her child's hurt feelings when she is not invited to a classmate's birthday party, when it appeared that all of the other children in the class were. The birthday girl told the youngster that her mother said that she could not invite her. The excluded youngster is the only Black child in the class.

One manager talks of his son's prep school experience of being called, "nigger" When the son engaged in a fist-a-cuffs with the name caller, the school was outraged at such violent behavior and sent for the Black teen's parents. The manager/father told the school that he had instructed his son to defend himself against such an assault in this way. The assistant headmaster, making no mention of the wrongness of the name-calling, much less offering an apology, said that the father would have to rescind his teachings or the son would be expelled.

Another manager tells of his children's shock at the family being denied lodging at a motel (allegedly there were no vacancies) only to witness a vacancy being found for a white family just moments later. The children were hurt by such a lack of unfairness. The parents used the experience as a teaching opportunity to instruct their children about racism and discrimination, and how to deal with same. Children's encounters with racism were prevalent in the childrearing experiences of Black parents.

Marginality and its dilemmas

Racism in our society which has afforded differences (limitations) in opportunity for blacks versus whites has often frequently relegated Blacks to lower positions in the occupational status hierarchy. In turn, the societal expectation that Blacks will only be found in low status positions and not those of higher status has emerged. Confusion arises on all sides when members of groups who typically occupy low status positions rise to high status ones. For example, when a Black man rises to the position of high level manager in the corporation does one treat him as a Black or as a manager? In turn, how does he interpret the responses received from others. When asked if he feels he is treated differently in the corporate work environment because he is Black, one manager responds: "Although I'd have to say yes, I must admit that at times it's hard to tell. Sometimes I walk into a meeting with people who are junior to me in the company and I'm not sure if they are responding to me as they do because I'm Black, because of my position, or both."

Furthermore, the manager is faced with the dilemma of trying to decide in which instances should s/he participate in the corporation as a Black versus as a manager. The dilemma is further confounded by sex for

Black female managers. Marginality will persist so long as such dilemmas exist in the minds of the marginal individual or in those of the people with whom s/he interacts.

The managers interviewed felt strongly that racism persists in the corporate world. Most felt that because racist attitudes persist they are treated differently by others in the corporation because they are Black, and even those who had achieved high levels of success in the corporate world felt that they would be further along in their careers if they were white. Many felt that they and other Blacks are not fully integrated into the corporate environment because of the race biases still held by many Whites. While confident in their abilities to perform successfully on the job, they remain insiders on the outside of the corporate world. This fact of their day-to-day work lives contributes to Black managers' work-related stress.

Although its nature has changed in recent decades, racism persists in the corporate workplace. Institutional racism may occur more often, though individual racism persists in our society. Both serve as sources of stress for Blacks in corporate America. Not only in the workplace, racism is part of the family's experience. It is confronted in communities, neighborhoods, and in schools, and is stressful for both adults and children.

The Nature of Racism

This treatise is in no way definitive in what it explores in terms of the pervasiveness of racism as a source of stress for middle class African Americans. It looks at racism on only one level. The indicators of racism included here involve racism of a more direct and personal type. However, in order to fully appreciate racism and its effects in the lives of lack Americans a more macro analysis is needed. This would enable us to point to the numerous ways in which the nature of social arrangements within the various social institutions and structures of this society, because they are permeated by racism, render a plethora of social experiences, for Blacks that are stressful. e.g. The imbalance in the mate selection pool and the shortage of viable African American heterosexual mates for successful Black females due to racism in educational and hiring opportunities for Black men. As a result Black women angst over their inability to fulfill themselves in accordance with the social prescriptions of the roles of wife and mother. eg.2 Blacks in the process of relocation in accordance with corporate expectations experience social isolation as these moves take them to albeit "nice" but all White neighborhoods and communities. They stress over new sources of friendship within culture, where to secure personal services for Blacks (hair care, etc.), and how to maintain access to various other forms of Black cultural capital. We might call these the macro level effects of racism.

Historical Black Family Strengths and Black Corporate Families

Because of the historical and cultural significance of the five Black family strengths identified by Hill I suggest that they be used as a criterion for assessing the success and well being of Black corporate families. These are not the only strengths to be found among these families (or other Black families for that matter), but they do play a key role in the life experiences of these families and assist them in managing their sources of stress.

To briefly illustrate the functionality of these traditional family strengths we will summarize how each of them is operationalized in the case of middle class corporate families. While many of the behaviors included in these illustrations are not unique to Black families, the point that I wish to emphasize here is that these strengths function as a historical context into which these experiences should be located. These strengths of experience provide a context for viewing how Black corporate families experience corporate demands on the family and the corporate family lifestyle.

Strong Work Orientation

One of the difficult to avoid demands of corporate employ is the reality of long work hours and corporate travel. However, such demands are consist with the historical pattern of Black fathers frequently holding more than one full time job to support their families. Many men and women in the sample reported this to be the case with their own fathers. The demands of the corporation in this regard then are not new for them.

A strong work orientation therefore was expressed across multiple generations and their value for and engagement in long hard hours of work. Of 191 managers 158 reported working late at least once per week. One hundred forty six did so more frequently; 84 said that they worked late four to five nights per week. All worked jobs that required out of town travel at least four times per year. Some (N=84) traveled out of town on company business every week. Managers of both sexes viewed their out of town travel and long work hours as a means to their enhanced family lifestyle. All of the wives reported that they were always or almost always understanding of their husbands time away from home due to company demands. Male managers supported their wives testimony in this regard.

Adaptability of Family Roles

Historically and for economic and cultural reasons black families socialize their children to be role flexible in the sense of taking on the role responsibilities of various family members. The term as it is used here is not confined to gender roles. Out of necessity as well as choice, Black couples historically have played less traditional roles as wives shared in the bread-winning function and husbands in childcare functions. Seventy percent of

respondents came from families in which women worked and continued to work. It is important to note that during the era in which many of the respondents were children it was still a non traditional behavior for U.S. women to work in the paid labor force, although this was not unusual for black women who often worked outside of the home out of economic necessity.

Both husbands and wives reported varying degrees of role flexibility in their own lives. Sixty-seven wives (N = 98) reported that husbands shared in female traditional household chores occasionally to often. About half of the husbands said they only engaged in traditionally male typed household chores (e.g. yard-work, household repairs) but about one fourth had regular responsibility for non male typed responsibilities (e.g. cooking and childcare). Few (18, N=98) reported anything approaching an equal sharing of domestic responsibilities. There was very little difference by age in any of the above behaviors. Of the wives, 89 assumed their husbands' household chores if job responsibilities prevented husbands from performing them at a frequency of sometimes too often. Wives seemed to exhibit greater role flexibility although husbands too exhibited the behavior.

One might conclude that male managers in particular can perform their jobs without worry about domestic responsibilities as they can feel assured that their wives will carry their load. For managers whose career and continued occupational success requires large amounts of time away from home, role flexibility is an essential support or strength within the family.

Strong Achievement Orientation

Given the history of racism in the U.S., one might assume successful blacks in this society to be above average in terms of the talents and skills and level of personal drive that they possess. This assumption is confirmed in this study of Blacks in corporate America, who have what is necessary for high level achievement and then some.

All but three of the respondents were college educated and, in fact, many reported that they were better educated than their white counterparts (138, N=191). Because many of their parents had expected them to go to college, they grew up with this goal already set for them. They firmly attested to having been encouraged in their educational pursuits by their parents, especially their mothers. As one manager said, "I owe a lot to my mother's push!"

Nearly all respondents (187, N=191) described their achievements in education, job, and income as greater than those of their childhood peers. They attributed their greater success to the fact that they are "self starters" -- they are hardworking; aggressive; highly motivated; personally driven; committed to excellence; desirous of success, monetary rewards; and willing

to seize opportunities. Most of the respondents (186, N = 191) aspire to further promotions within or outside their present companies. Their attitudes are best captured by one manager's response to the question, "Are you aspiring to further promotions or upward career moves within or outside of your company? He responded with determination and enthusiasm, "Always!".

Strong Religious Orientation

Beginning in childhood and on into adulthood religion plays a vital role in the lives of black Americans (see Henderson, 2014; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). In this study religion was assessed on the basis of three criteria: a family history of religious involvement, rates of church attendance, and self assessments of religiosity. Findings were consistent with the literature regarding the importance of religion among Black Americans.

As children, all respondents (100%) and their spouses attended church on a weekly or more frequent basis All but a few, on a scale of responses ranging from very often to never, responded that they now attend church sometimes to very often. Only four respondents said rarely or never. In three quarters of the families, the children also attend church. In those families where parents and children attend church, most do so together as a family The rate of church attendance was higher for managers with children than for those without children.

When asked, "Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?," all but three responded "yes". The group of non-church goers and those who reported themselves as being religious persons were not mutually exclusive. That is, some of those respondents who reported rare or no church attendance still considered themselves religious. Not attending church did not necessarily indicate a lack of religious belief. A possible explanation for this finding may lie in the fact that as children they were involved in the church, were brought up in the belief that religion was important, and were steeped in Christian values. Even within the group of infrequent or non-churchgoers, many indicated that Christian values influence how they live their lives and that they instilled these values in their children.

Strong Kinship Bonds

Strong kinship bonds were assessed along several dimensions. In terms of frequency of communication, on a 5- point scale, ranging from very often to never, most (153, N= 191) described their communication with family members residing outside of the household as very often to often. For most (148, N=174), communication was at least once per week. Visiting patterns could generally be described as frequent. Visits were more frequent with more geographically proximate kin and were as often as daily to a few

times weekly. Those who lived within 75 miles of relatives visited on an average of approximately once a month. Despite the distance in those cases in which it prevailed, relatives had frequent communication with one another.

Having achieved middle class status, with six exceptions, managers do not receive financial support from their kin, although most had when they were students (101, N=155). On the contrary, many now gave financial support to relatives. While relatives sometimes provided managers and their families with childcare, they were more likely to provide support of a psychosocial nature. Mothers were most frequently cited as a source of support. Support networks were described as reciprocal though not necessarily in kind. Many described their families as "close-knit" and considered their support to be very important in their lives.

Respondents expressed the importance of family and the type of involvement that they have with their spouse and children in the ways in which they spoke of their families. Parents appear to be highly child oriented even in reconstituted families. Fathers were highly involved with their children. Managers and their spouses spoke warmly of one another, and their words suggested a sense of pride in one's spouse. Both practically and ideologically all respondents highly valued their families. This is consistent with the literature on family support among Blacks. (See Jayakody, Chatters and Taylor, 1993; Stack, 1996; Taylor 1990).

Managers and their families in this study exhibited numerous strengths supportive of their family well being. They talked of the stresses that they had to cope with and the sources of strength that help them manage their stress. Support was found to varying degrees for the importance of all five of the traditional black family strengths (strong work orientation, adaptability of family roles, strong achievement orientation, strong religious orientation, and strong kinship bonds) identified by Hill.

Making the Connection Between Strengths and Stresses

It seems apparent that Hill's (1971) five traditional Black family strengths function to strengthen and support African American families in a general sense. That is to say, they are not stressor specific, each working to directly combat a particular type or source of stress. But, rather and perhaps more importantly, these strengths function to promote general family health and wellness and bolster the family and its ability to manage stress whatever its nature or source. So, in the case of Black corporate families, possessing these five strengths better enables them to cope with their stresses which include those stemming from racism and the myriad of problems related to race and the corporate experience and lifestyle inherent in marginality and tokenism, childbearing, and relocation concerns. The net effect of these

strengths is that they potentially affect an individual and family that can handle racism because of the power of these strengths to foster high levels of self esteem, a willingness to work hard and to be successful even in the face of adversity, an assurance that others (family members) are pulling with you and are willing to help you carry out your role functions if necessary, and a belief in the good in humankind. The five strengths manifest these elements in the individuals in families that possess these strengths.

Because of the importance and persistence of these black family strengths as operative in the resolution of stress, it is argued that they be identified and incorporated in models of family stress such as the double ABCX Model (Component B), (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983). These cultural strengths function as resources allowing the family to cope with the various crises of racism (Component A). These strengths are resources for combating the stresses that black families in corporate America face.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to point to the inadequacies of the existing models of family stress, most notably the Double ABCX Model, in understanding stress and strengths in Black corporate families, a subset of Black middle class families. The author contends that these models are limited for Black families in that they do not incorporate the element of racism as a source of stress, nor the traditional historical Black family strengths identified by Robert Hill, as constant variables. On the basis of data collected from Black corporate managers and their families, support was found for the pervasiveness of racism as a source of stress in the day to day experiences of Black corporate families, consistent with the literature on racialized stress. Also found was support for the existence of the historical Black family strengths among these families.

It is the author's view that so long as racism persists in the U.S., this fact of life for Black Americans must be included in any model that assesses stress or we will not fully understand the nature of stress for Black families. In addition, the importance of historical, cultural capital in understanding the strengths that a family has for combating stress must be embraced, as it is a potent resource within the family's coping and combative repertoire against the stresses that it will face.

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