

Effects of Parental Marital Status, Income, and Family Functioning on African American Adolescent Self-Esteem

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This study examined the effects of marital status, family income, and family functioning on African American adolescents' self-esteem. One hundred sixteen adolescents participated, 64% of whom were female. Compared with boys with nonmarried parents, boys with married parents had higher overall self-esteem, even when family income and family functioning were controlled. Parental marital status had no effect on girls' self-esteem. Family functioning was a very strong predictor of self-esteem for both sexes. However, family relational factors were more important to girls' self-esteem, whereas structural and growth factors were more important for boys. It was concluded that African American adolescent boys with nonmarried parents are at risk for developing low self-esteem compared with other African American adolescents, but a more controlled and structured environment may buffer the effects of having nonmarried parents.

A number of significant changes have occurred in African American families over the past 50 years (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). In 1950, married couples headed 78% of African American families. By 1996, this number dropped to only 34% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). The divorce rate has also increased dramatically for African Americans. In 1960, only 78 per 1,000 African American women's marriages ended in divorce. In 1990, this number jumped to 358 per 1,000 (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995). It is expected that 75% of African American children born to married parents will experience their parents' divorce before the age of 16 (Amato & Keith, 1991).

The number of children raised in mother-only homes increased from 25% in 1960 to 54% in 1993 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). These trends led some population experts to predict that by the year 2000 in major urban cities, 8 out of every 10 African American youths will have nonmarried parents (Savage, 1989).

Research on families may have profound effects on American public policy, social service, and African Americans specifically. For instance, understanding how these trends affect the well-being of African American youth may influence decisions regarding child custody, where funding is allocated, and the type of therapy families should receive. Unfortunately, there is still much confusion in the scientific and popular literatures about the actual effects these trends may have on African American children (Amato & Keith, 1991). The purpose of the present study was to help clarify this important issue by examining the effects these changing family characteristics have on African American youth.

Many theories have been proposed to explain and/or predict the possible effects of these trends on African American youth. The bulk of these explanations derive from three general theoretical perspectives: (a) the family structure perspective, (b) the family income perspective,

This research was supported in part by National Institute of Health Grant HD30614-02. We thank Daniel J. Ozer for his very helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. Special appreciation must also go to the families who graciously participated. Jelani Mandara recently changed his name from Dewayne Colbert.

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and (c) the family functioning perspective (Amato & Keith, 1991; Heiss, 1996).

Family Structure Perspective

The historical method of studying African American youth focused on the pathological or disorganizational aspects of the family (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). This focus led to the family structure perspective, which essentially states that two-parent homes facilitate a better environment for youths' well-being compared with single-parent homes (Erel & Burman, 1995). This theory suggests that adolescents and children from single-parent homes are severely handicapped. Accordingly, this perspective argues that all things being equal, the most salient effect of single-parent homes on children is the lack of the physical presence of two parents. Often the methodology employed either marital status or some other identifier of two parents in the home as the main independent variable for predicting outcomes (Florsheim, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 1998).

Recent studies of African American populations indicated that children from two-parent homes do better than children from single-parent homes on a variety of social indicators (Coley, 1998; McLeod, Kruttschnitt, & Dornfeld, 1994; Teachman, Day, Paasch, Carver, & Call, 1998). For instance, McLanahan (1985) found that African American children living with one parent were less likely to be in school at age 17 than their two-parent counterparts. In another study, a significant positive relationship was found between father presence and self-esteem (Alston & Williams, 1982). Father-present youths also exhibited stronger scholastic achievement and more stable peer relations. The researchers concluded that the father-son relationship facilitated the adoption of an adequate self-concept because boys were able to model their fathers. Another recent study (Pascall, Ennett, & Flewelling, 1996) found that living in a single-parent home was a significant risk factor for violent behavior in African American children. Another study of 107 low-income African American children found that children whose fathers were present had significantly higher adaptive functioning scores than did children whose fathers did not live with them (Dunn & Tucker, 1993). A recent longitudinal study found that African American children in two-parent homes had significantly

higher math and reading scores and lower behavioral problems than did children in single-parent homes. The results held up over a 4-year period for both older and younger siblings in the sample (Teachman et al., 1998).

However, some researchers highlighted the fact that not all studies show advantages for two-parent homes (Heiss, 1996; Phillips & Asbury, 1993). Also, even for the studies that do, the effect sizes may not be large enough to be socially relevant (Heiss, 1996). Many researchers also argued that the consequences of single-parent homes were mainly related to the economic deprivation of the single-parent home (e.g., McLeod et al., 1994; A. N. Wilson, 1979), and others argued that the studies did not account for important aspects of family functioning or extended kin (Dancy & Handal, 1984; Logan, 1996; Long, 1986; Partridge & Kotler, 1987; Scott & Black, 1989). For instance, Boyd-Franklin (1989) argued that the strength of flexible family roles in African American families has not been taken into consideration. In other words, many researchers have been interested in knowing whether the observed effects of family structure persisted when important sociodemographic and environmental variables, such as family income and family functioning were controlled (Demo & Acock, 1988; Partridge & Kotler, 1987). These assumptions and questions led to alternative theoretical perspectives.

Family Income Perspective

The economic deprivation perspective has been given enormous attention by researchers of African American family processes (reviewed in Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990), specifically with regard to single-mother homes (McLanahan, 1985; Wilson, 1979). Fifty percent of African American female-headed families live below the poverty line, which makes them the most impoverished group in America (Taylor et al., 1990).

The proponents of the economic deprivation perspective argued that the potential effects of single parents is not due to the physical absence of one parent but to the absence of the economic resources generated by the absent parent. Therefore, the effects of marital status on child well-being will be reduced when income is statistically controlled or when families are matched on income level. For instance, McLeod et al.

(1994) argued that parents who experienced income loss became more rejecting of their children and that their children were at risk for developing feelings of inadequacy associated with parental rejection. However, the empirical research on the effects of income has not been adequately tested (Amato & Keith, 1991) nor has it consistently supported these assumptions for African American children (Heiss, 1996).

Family Functioning Perspective

The limitations and small effect sizes found by family structure studies, as well as the income perspectives, led many researchers to criticize both approaches for several reasons (e.g., Murray & Fairchild, 1989; Scott & Black, 1989). For instance, M. N. Wilson (1992) argued that the major problem with pathological-based studies was not the harsh facts that described an important number of African American families but the failure to study how these families survived in extremely adverse conditions.

The family structure model fails to consider aspects of parent-child relationships (McAdoo, 1997; Partridge & Kotler, 1987) and socialization processes within African American families (M. N. Wilson, 1992). The family functioning model suggests that children may be better off in a cohesive single-parent home than in a conflictive two-parent home (Long, 1986).

Research on the effects of family functioning quality on African American children has generally been very supportive of the family functioning theory (Cooper, Holman, & Braithwaite, 1983; Heiss, 1996). Dancy and Handal (1984) found that family-environment quality significantly predicted African American adolescents' perceptions of family climate, psychological adjustment, and grade point average. Heiss (1996) also found that family structure had weak effects on academic variables for African American adolescents, but parental involvement had a very strong effect on the same variables.

Family structure effects may be limited to boys as well (Stephens & Day, 1979; Stevenson & Black, 1988). Numerous studies showed that fathers and mothers treated their girls and boys differently (Copeland, 1985; Jackson, 1993; Jenkins & Guidubaldi, 1997; Leve & Fagot, 1997; Mott, 1994; Seigal, 1987; Starrels, 1994). M. N. Wilson (1992) found differences in children's and mothers' perceptions regarding the

African American fathers' socializing strategies of their girls and boys. Specifically, mothers, grandmothers, daughters, and sons perceived the fathers of sons as using more controlling, demanding, and supporting parental behaviors than was perceived for fathers of daughters. Fathers of sons were also perceived as more involved with their children than were fathers of daughters. Other studies showed that fathers hold more masculine gender role attitudes toward their sons and more feminine attitudes toward their daughters (Price-Bonham & Skeen, 1982). In general, fathers appeared to be more strict with their boys than were mothers and more strict with boys than they were with girls. Therefore, the effects of parental marital status may be more apparent for boys than for girls.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem generally connotes the positive or negative value one places on one's own attributes (Freshbach & Weiner, 1991). Global and domain-specific self-esteem has been shown to influence a significant number of psychological and behavioral variables in children and adolescents. Some authors questioned the importance of self-esteem to African American populations, because it was shown to have negligible effects on academic performance (Demo & Parker, 1987). However, many studies found that self-esteem is crucially related to important outcome measures of well-being for African Americans. For instance, self-esteem has been negatively correlated with smoking frequency (Botvin et al., 1993), suppressed anger (Johnson & Greene, 1991), drug abuse (Unger, Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, & Johnson, 1997), and depression symptomatology (Caldwell, Antonucci, Jackson, Wolford, & Osofsky, 1997) in African American children and adolescents. Another recent study found that drinking level was negatively related to self-esteem in African American college students who had alcoholic parents (Rodney & Rodney, 1996). Thus, self-esteem is an important index of African American adolescents' well-being.

In the present study, we examined four hypotheses suggested by the three major theoretical perspectives and recent studies of gender effects on self-esteem. The family structure perspective suggested the first two. First, we predicted that parental marital status would affect the self-esteem of African American boys, but

not girls. Second, we predicted that African American adolescents with married parents would have a significantly higher quality of family functioning than their single-parent counterparts. This hypothesis stemmed from the family structure assumption that single mothers experience significantly more stress compared with married mothers, and this will be reflected in their family environment (Erel & Burman, 1995). The third hypothesis, which was suggested by the economic deprivation perspective, predicted that the effects of marital status on self-esteem would be significantly reduced when family income was statistically controlled. Finally, the hypothesis that family functioning would be a better predictor of African American adolescents' self-esteem than family structure was tested. This hypothesis was suggested by many studies that compared the effects of these two constructs. Family functioning has generally yielded a much stronger effect on well-being variables than has simple family structure (Dancy & Handal, 1984; Heiss, 1996), although not always (Florsheim et al., 1998). The possible effects of extended kin could not be examined because only a few of the families in the sample lived with people other than their nuclear family. This finding is consistent with the general urban African American population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Method

Participants

A sample of 116 fifteen-year-old African American students (64% of whom were female) from various high schools in Southern California and their parents participated in the study. Perceptions of self-esteem and family functioning were obtained from the adolescents, whereas their parents only provided family income and parental marital status information. Fifty percent of the parents were married, 38% were divorced, and 13% were continuously single mothers. No single fathers were in the sample. Approximately 28% of the parents had graduated from high school only. Thirty-eight percent had experienced some college, and roughly 12% of the sample had graduated from college. Only 9% of the parents in the sample did not graduate from high school, and 12% did not report any educational information. Income was obtained by asking parents to rate their levels of annual family income on fifteen \$5,000 intervals ranging from \$0-\$4,900 to over \$90,000. The average annual household income for the sample was \$27,500 ($SD = \$12,000$). Approximately 20% of

the sample made less than \$20,000, and 35% made over \$35,000 annually. As expected, families with married parents had higher annual incomes (\$35,000) than did single-parent families (\$20,000) on average. However, both married and nonmarried families had about two children each. Three of the single mothers were young grandparents. These demographics reflect the general trends for African American families in Southern California (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Procedure

The participants were part of a larger 4-year longitudinal project examining socialization and personality development in African American families. Participant recruitment was accomplished from lists of names and addresses of African American students provided by four school districts. Assessments were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants (e.g., school, home, or a Southern California university). Parental permission was obtained for each student prior to participation, and each student received \$10 for the single 2-hour session.

Instruments

A demographic measure, the Multi-Dimensional Self-Esteem Inventory (MDSEI; O'Brien & Epstein, 1988), and the Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos & Moos, 1990) were the instruments used in this study. The following demographic information was obtained from parents and their adolescents: age and sex of participant and parent, relationship with parent, parental marital status (married or not married), family annual income, and parental educational status.

MDSEI. The MDSEI is a 116-item instrument that assesses Global self-esteem and seven domain-specific aspects of self-esteem. Adolescent participants indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale how accurately 61 of the items described them and how often they experienced the thoughts and feelings described in 55 of the items. The seven domain-specific subscales are Feelings of Competence, Personal Power, Lovability, Likability, Self-Control, Moral Self-Approval, and Body Functioning. The coefficient alphas for the present sample ranged from .64 to .85. In addition, the instrument has an Identity Integration factor (i.e., the degree to which a person has a clear sense of identity) and Defensiveness factor (i.e., the degree to which a person denies ubiquitous human weaknesses). Cronbach's alphas for these two factors were .85 and .78, respectively. We also examined separate alphas for boys and girls, and both groups averaged .72 for the 10 subscales. For more specific details of the domain content and reliabilities

of the subscales for other samples, see O'Brien and Epstein (1988).

FES. The FES is a 90-item true-or-false test that assesses perceptions of family environment across 10 subscales. The subscales are factors of three family environment dimensions. The relationship dimension consists of the Cohesion, Conflict, and Expressiveness subscales. The personal growth dimension consists of the Independence–Autonomy, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual–Cultural Orientation, Active Recreational Orientation, and Moral–Religious subscales. The systems maintenance dimension consists of the last two subscales, Family Organization and Control.

The norms for the FES were derived from 285 families sampled from predominately middle and upper socioeconomic status European American families. The 10 subscales show intercorrelations averaging around .20 and exhibit adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas range from .64 to .79). Eight-week test–retest reliabilities ranged from .68 to .86 (Moos, 1990). For the present sample, alphas ranged between .20 and .75. A 1-year lag test–retest showed an average reliability of .52. The FES has been used on African American samples many times and has consistently shown excellent predictive validity (Dancy & Handal, 1984).

Results

Overview and Preliminary Analyses

The results of this study are presented in two sections according to the ordering of the hypotheses. The multivariate effects of family structure, income, and functioning on self-esteem were examined for the total sample and then for boys and girls separately. The next section of the results compared the effects of family structure and family functioning by two different methods.

Before tests of the hypotheses were performed, the variables were screened for multivariate assumptions according to the procedures outlined by Tabachnik and Fidell (1996). The Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic and a Lilliefors significance test assessed univariate normality. A Mahalanobis distance measure assessed outliers. The variables were also examined for boys and girls separately. Because of the presence of outliers and slightly skewed distributions, we performed square, square root, or logarithmic power transformations on the following variables: Global Self-Esteem, Self-Control, Body Functioning, and the composite total self-esteem. In all subsequent analyses using these

variables, the transformed versions were compared with the untransformed versions. There were no differences in multivariate or univariate results when the transformed or untransformed versions were used. Therefore, the untransformed variables were used in all analyses.

Family Structure Effects on Self-Esteem

The first hypothesis predicted that male adolescents in married two-parent homes would have higher overall self-esteem compared with male adolescents from single-parent homes. No differences were expected between groups of female adolescents. To test this hypothesis, we computed a 2×2 (Family Structure \times Gender) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the 10 self-esteem subscales. The multivariate effect of family structure was nonsignificant, Wilks's lambda = .899, $F(10, 88) = .986$, $\eta^2 = .101$, but gender had a significant effect, Wilks's lambda = .741, $F(10, 88) = 3.07$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .259$, indicating differences in self-esteem between girls and boys. The univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed that girls were significantly lower in defensiveness, $F(1, 97) = 6.66$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .245$. Defensiveness was reversed, so that the higher the score, the less defensive the participant was. Boys were significantly higher in perceptions of body functioning, $F(1, 97) = 3.97$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .196$. The multivariate interaction between family structure and gender was also nonsignificant, Wilks's lambda = .899, $F(10, 88) = .984$, $\eta^2 = .101$, indicating that the effects of marital status were not significantly different for boys and girls.

We then computed MANOVAs separately for boys and girls. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, univariate tests of significance, and effect sizes of the self-esteem dimensions for boys and girls separately. For girls, the MANOVA was nonsignificant, Wilks's lambda = .955, $F(10, 45) = .213$, as were all the univariate tests. For boys, this was not the case; family structure had a significant multivariate effect, Wilks's lambda = .610, $F(10, 34) = 2.17$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .390$. As can be seen in Table 1, boys with nonmarried parents were found to have significantly lower self-control, feelings of personal power, self-competence, and perceptions of body functioning compared with boys who had married parents. Although not used in the MANOVA, boys

Table 1

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Measures of Self-Esteem for Boys and Girls by Parental Marital Status

Measure of self-esteem	Boys						Girls					
	Parental marital status				<i>F</i> (1, 43)	η	Parental marital status				<i>F</i> (1, 54)	η
	Married		Single				Married		Single			
	(<i>n</i> = 23)		(<i>n</i> = 23)				(<i>n</i> = 29)		(<i>n</i> = 27)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Total	3.60	0.37	3.32	0.35	6.72*	.368	3.57	0.47	3.51	0.40	0.27	.072
Global	3.88	0.62	3.47	0.80	3.48	.274	3.79	0.83	3.65	0.84	0.40	.086
Self-Approval	3.50	0.48	3.43	0.43	0.21	.070	3.65	0.55	3.57	0.69	0.23	.066
Lovability	3.50	0.57	3.31	0.64	1.09	.157	3.59	0.65	3.56	0.69	0.04	.028
Likability	3.67	0.52	3.43	0.50	2.27	.224	3.66	0.42	3.56	0.69	1.00	.135
Self-Control	3.79	0.48	3.30	0.60	9.16**	.419	3.68	0.73	3.55	0.53	0.59	.105
Self-Identity	3.60	0.54	3.41	0.61	1.10	.158	3.59	0.71	3.52	0.55	0.18	.059
Power	3.83	0.55	3.44	0.37	7.35*	.382	3.79	0.66	3.81	0.49	0.02	-.023
Competence	3.73	0.44	3.35	0.50	7.23*	.380	3.69	0.40	3.70	0.47	0.00	-.010
Defensiveness	2.55	0.41	2.53	0.38	0.02	.021	2.79	0.56	2.76	0.39	0.02	.023
Body Functioning	3.94	0.57	3.47	0.58	7.57*	.387	3.47	0.70	3.45	0.57	0.02	.019

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

with nonmarried parents were also significantly lower in the composite total self-esteem.

To get a more detailed view of the specific effect sizes, see Figure 1, which graphically illustrates the self-esteem profiles for the four groups. Boys with nonmarried parents had lower total self-esteem ($r_{pb} = .308$), self-control ($r_{pb} = .304$), feelings of personal power ($r_{pb} = .294$), and self-competence ($r_{pb} = .339$) compared with girls with married parents. Even more surprising was that boys with nonmarried parents had lower total self-esteem ($r_{pb} = .258$), feelings of personal power ($r_{pb} = .389$), and self-competence ($r_{pb} = .360$) and more defensiveness ($r_{pb} = .289$) than did girls with the same family structure. Another interesting finding was that boys with married parents had higher perceptions of body functioning than did girls with married parents ($r_{pb} = .352$) and girls with nonmarried parents ($r_{pb} = .360$). Although girls with married parents were not significantly higher than girls with nonmarried parents on any one of the self-esteem dimensions, their multivariate profile was consistently higher. This may be the reason the interaction between family structure and gender was not statistically significant.

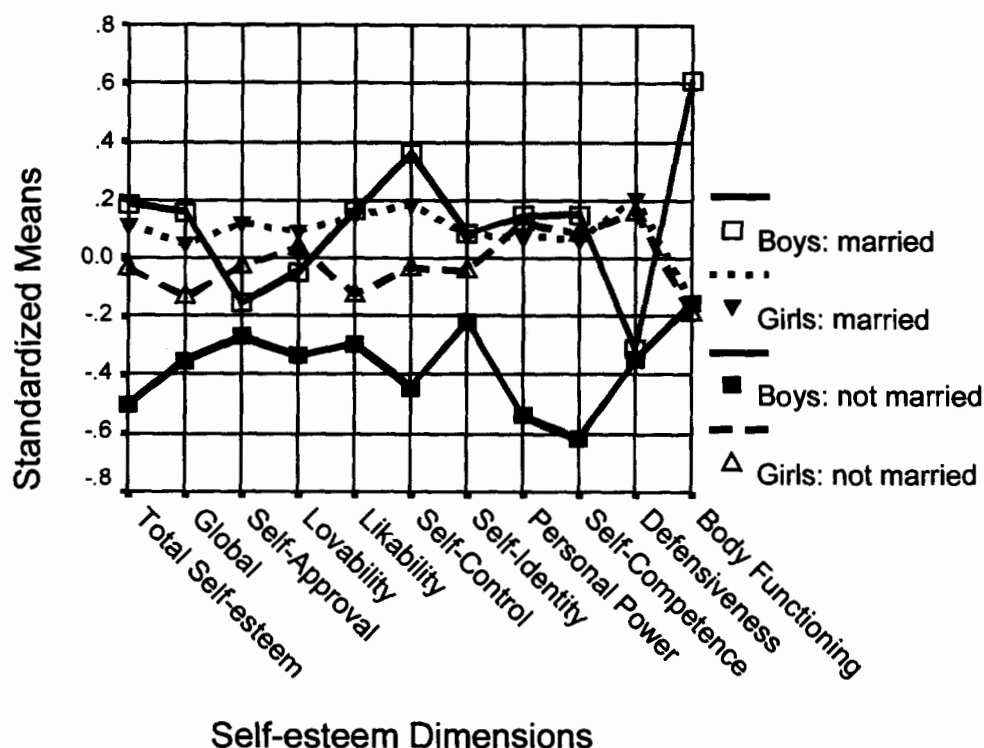
In sum, these descriptive statistics and the multivariate and univariate tests supported the first hypothesis because boys with married parents have significantly higher overall self-esteem than the boys with nonmarried parents, but parental

marital status had no significant effect on girls' self-esteem. Figure 1 also highlights the fact that girls in both groups had higher self-esteem on various dimensions compared with boys who had nonmarried parents.

Family Structure Effects on Family Functioning

To test the hypothesis that adolescents with two married parents in the home will have a better quality of family functioning compared with those with only one parent in the home, we computed another 2×2 (Family Structure \times Gender) MANOVA on the 10 family functioning variables. The multivariate effects of family structure, Wilks's lambda = .843, $F(10, 88) = 1.64$; gender, Wilks's lambda = .937, $F(10, 88) = .58$; and the interaction, Wilks's lambda = .856, $F(10, 88) = 1.41$, were nonsignificant. None of the ANOVAs reached significance either.

As with the previous analyses, we then computed MANOVAs for boys and girls separately. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, univariate tests of significance, and effect sizes of the family functioning dimensions for both sexes by parental marital status. The MANOVAs for girls, Wilks's lambda = .852, $F(10, 45) = .78$; and boys, Wilks's lambda = .664, $F(10, 34) = 1.71$, were both nonsignificant. However, two significant univariate tests



Self-esteem Dimensions

Figure 1. Mean self-esteem profile for boys and girls by parental marital status. Married = parents are married; not married = parents are not married.

did emerge. Because these results may help highlight the mechanism by which family structure affects boys' self-esteem, and because the relatively small sample size significantly re-

duced the power of the MANOVA, these results are discussed.

Boys with married parents reported higher levels of achievement orientation in their homes

Table 2

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Measures of Family Environment for Boys and Girls by Parental Marital Status

Measure of family environment	Boys						Girls					
	Parental marital status						Parental marital status					
	Married (n = 23)		Single (n = 22)		F(1, 43)	η	Married (n = 28)		Single (n = 27)		F(1, 54)	η
	M	SD	M	SD			M	SD	M	SD		
Cohesion	1.67	0.21	1.62	0.24	0.49	.107	1.69	0.21	1.67	0.26	0.11	.046
Achievement	1.78	0.15	1.66	0.16	6.48**	.362	1.73	0.16	1.74	0.15	0.04	-.030
Expressiveness	1.41	0.16	1.54	0.20	5.63*	-.340	1.52	0.19	1.47	0.19	0.99	.135
Independence	1.58	0.14	1.57	0.15	0.04	.032	1.55	0.16	1.54	0.15	0.05	.032
Intellectual	1.57	0.24	1.58	0.15	0.00	-.015	1.60	0.26	1.61	0.20	0.03	-.025
Recreation	1.65	0.19	1.65	0.24	0.00	.013	1.61	0.25	1.61	0.26	0.00	-.005
Moral	1.73	0.15	1.68	0.21	1.05	.155	1.75	0.21	1.67	0.18	2.48	.209
Organization	1.70	0.19	1.59	0.20	3.41	.271	1.66	0.22	1.62	0.21	0.35	.081
Control	1.71	0.18	1.62	0.18	2.81	.248	1.61	0.15	1.69	0.15	3.45	-.245
Conflict	1.37	0.20	1.47	0.23	2.10	-.216	1.38	0.25	1.47	0.26	1.63	-.171

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

compared with boys in nonmarried-parent homes ($r_{pb} = .362$). However, boys with married parents reported lower levels of family expressiveness compared with boys in single-parent homes ($r_{pb} = .340$). These trends suggest that the perceptions of family functioning may differ according to marital status for boys, but the data are not conclusive.

Income Effects

To examine the effects of income on self-esteem, we computed a general linear model multivariate regression analysis using income, gender, and the interaction as predictors on the 10 self-esteem subscales. The general linear model multivariate procedure provides regression analysis for multiple dependent variables. The results are interpreted in the same fashion as a categorical predictor MANOVA (SPSS, 1997). There was a nonsignificant effect of income on self-esteem, Wilks's lambda = .840, $F(10, 88) = 1.64$, $\eta^2 = .160$, whereas gender continued to have a significant effect on self-esteem. The interaction of income and gender was also nonsignificant, Wilks's lambda = .926, $F(10, 86) = .68$, $\eta^2 = .074$. The univariate tests revealed that family income significantly predicted the self-esteem dimensions of lovability, $F(1, 97) = 3.93$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$; likability, $F(1, 97) = 6.33$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .062$; and self-control, $F(1, 97) = 5.08$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The results imply that income may be positively associated with some self-esteem factors in African American adolescents, but conclusive evidence can not be determined from this sample. The same analysis was computed for girls and boys separately, and the multivariate effect of income was similar and nonsignificant for both girls and boys.

To examine the effects of income on family functioning, we performed another general linear model multivariate regression analysis. Family income, gender, and their interaction again served as the predictors, and the 10 family functioning dimensions were the dependent variables. The effects of income on family functioning were significant, Wilks's lambda = .802, $F(10, 88) = 2.17$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .198$. The effect of gender was nonsignificant, Wilks's lambda = .938, $F(10, 86) = 0.57$. However, the multivariate interaction between income and gender was also significant, Wilks's lambda = .817, $F(10, 86) = 1.93$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .183$. As

with previous analyses, the multivariate effects of income were then examined separately for girls and boys.

For girls, income did not significantly predict family functioning, Wilks's lambda = .722, $F(10, 44) = 1.69$. For boys, income had a significant multivariate effect on family functioning, Wilks's lambda = .582, $F(20, 33) = 2.37$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .418$. The univariate tests showed that income predicted boys' perceptions of family cohesion, $F(1, 42) = 4.00$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .087$; family expressiveness, $F(1, 42) = 4.97$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .106$; and family recreation, $F(1, 42) = 3.93$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .086$. These results imply that family income is important to boys' perceptions of family functioning, but not girls' perceptions.

To test the hypothesis that controlling for income would change the relationship between marital status and self-esteem, we computed a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) using family income as the covariate, marital status as the factor, and the 10 self-esteem dimensions as dependent variables for boys. Counter to the income hypothesis, controlling for family income did not significantly reduce the multivariate effect of family structure, Wilks's lambda = .629, $F(10, 32) = 1.88$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .371$, or any of the univariate effects. Although the multivariate effect of family structure was no longer significant, the probability did not significantly decrease from its original value.

As a further test of possible demographic mediators, the MANCOVA was repeated using parents' education and number of people in the home as covariates. As before, no significant changes in the multivariate or univariate effects of marital status changed. This suggests that income and other demographic factors do not mediate the relationship between marital status and self-esteem for boys. However, this does not insinuate that nothing mediates this relationship.

Family Functioning Effects on Self-Esteem

To test the hypothesis that family functioning would be positively related to self-esteem, we computed another multiple dependent variable regression analysis using family functioning, gender, and their interaction as the predictors and self-esteem as the criterion. Significant ef-

fects for family functioning, Wilks's lambda = .620, $F(10, 99) = 6.06$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .380$; gender, Wilks's lambda = .727, $F(10, 99) = 3.71$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .268$; and a Gender \times Family Functioning interaction, Wilks's lambda = .821, $F(10, 99) = 2.15$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .179$, were found. Although the interaction accounted for approximately 18% of the variance in self-esteem, the only significant univariate interactions were for self-approval, $F(1, 108) = 4.22$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .038$; competence, $F(1, 108) = 3.421$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$; and defensiveness, $F(1, 108) = 5.12$, $p < .025$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The interaction revealed that, compared with boys in both groups, girls had equal self-esteem when in homes with low levels of family functioning quality and higher levels of self-esteem when in homes with a high quality of family functioning. Therefore, although family functioning had a strong effect on boys' self-esteem, it had a greater effect on girls' self-esteem.

For descriptive purposes, the zero-order correlations between the three major family functioning dimensions and self-esteem for each sex are presented in Tables 3 and 4. The quality of family functioning significantly predicted 9 of the 10 self-esteem subscales for girls and 8 of the 10 subscales for boys. As can be seen, each dimension had a strong relationship with self-esteem in African American adolescents of both sexes, but the family systems and family growth dimension were the strongest for boys, whereas the effect of the family relationships dimension was the strongest for girls (see the Method section for the definitions of the dimensions).

The final hypothesis of the study was that

family functioning would be a better predictor of self-esteem than would marital status. To test this hypothesis, we used two different methods. First, dependent zero-order correlation t tests (two-tailed) were conducted for each of the self-esteem subscales and total self-esteem. This test is used to investigate the degree of difference between the correlations of two predictors with the same criterion. It takes into account the fact that the correlations to be compared are from the same sample by controlling for the correlation between the two predictors (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Compared with family structure, family functioning was a significantly better predictor of total self-esteem, self-approval, lovability, and self-control for girls (see Table 5). Even though family functioning was only significantly better for four comparisons, family functioning significantly predicted 10 of the 11 dimensions, whereas family structure did not significantly predict any for girls. For boys, family functioning did not predict any self-esteem subscales significantly better than family structure. However, family functioning did significantly predict 9 of the 11 self-esteem subscales, whereas family structure only predicted 6 of the 11.

The second method we used to test this hypothesis was comparing the R^2 changes attributed to family structure and family functioning when family income was controlled. The variables were entered into multiple hierarchical regression analyses in three blocks. Two analyses were computed for each self-esteem subscale. Family income was always entered first, whereas the other two variables alternated entry. This procedure assessed the proportion of

Table 3
Correlations Between Family Functioning and Self-Esteem for Girls

Measure of self-esteem	Total family functioning	Family systems	Family growth	Family relationships
Total	.525**	.128	.366**	.594**
Global	.372**	.052	.193	.517**
Self-Approval	.587**	.278*	.514**	.524**
Lovability	.451**	.117	.249*	.574**
Likability	.352**	-.031	.374**	.414**
Self-Control	.477**	.159	.399**	.443**
Self-Identity	.303*	.188	.140	.324**
Power	.251*	.053	.236	.262*
Competence	.273*	-.054	.306*	.331**
Defensiveness	.290*	.133	.145	.336**
Body Functioning	.210	-.030	.060	.377**

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

Table 4
Correlations Between Family Functioning and Self-Esteem for Boys

Measure of self-esteem	Total family functioning	Family systems	Family growth	Family relationships
Total	.471**	.400**	.411**	.193
Global	.320*	.163	.347*	.123
Self-Approval	.324*	.328*	.194	.129
Lovability	.455**	.225	.411**	.334*
Likability	.239	.251	.211	.035
Self-Control	.303*	.382**	.199	.115
Self-Identity	.464**	.432**	.348*	.174
Power	.278*	.306*	.260	.013
Competence	.523**	.474**	.512**	.120
Defensiveness	.122	-.065	-.277	.043
Body Functioning	.423*	.235	.430**	.187

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

unique variance (R^2 change) accounted for in each self-esteem dimension by family structure and family functioning while statistically controlling for the effects of family income. The results of these analyses were similar to that of the previous tests (see Table 6). For girls, quality of family functioning remained a significant predictor of 10 of the 11 self-esteem subscales. For boys, the results also remained the same.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of parental marital status, family income, and family functioning on African American adolescent self-esteem. The four major hypotheses suggested by these three theoret-

ical perspectives were tested. Following is a discussion of the findings for each hypothesis.

The first set of assumptions suggested by the family structure perspective argued that the effects of marital status alone would significantly affect African American adolescent boys' self-esteem, but not girls' self-esteem. Support was found for this hypothesis. As other studies have shown, parental marital status seems to have a minimal effect on African American girls' self-esteem. However, boys with married parents in the home were found to be higher in global self-esteem, self-control, feelings of personal power, perceptions of body functioning, and total self-esteem compared with boys who had only their mothers in the home. Girls in both

Table 5
Dependent Zero-Order Correlation Tests Comparing Family Functioning and Family Structure for Boys and Girls

Measure of self-esteem	Boys			Girls		
	Total family functioning	Marital status	$r(42)$	Total family functioning	Marital status	$r(53)$
Total	.461**	.371*	0.54	.512**	.072	2.70*
Global	.284*	.274*	0.06	.372**	.080	1.87
Self-Approval	.324*	.070	1.38	.587**	.066	3.36*
Lovability	.455**	.157	1.75	.451**	.028	2.51*
Likability	.239	.224	0.08	.352**	.135	1.24
Self-Control	.319*	.423**	-0.60	.447**	.105	2.03*
Self-Identity	.464**	.158	1.76	.303*	.059	1.37
Power	.278*	.382*	-0.59	.251*	-.023	1.52
Competence	.523**	.380*	0.88	.273*	-.010	1.58
Defensiveness	.122	.021	0.52	.290*	.023	1.49
Body Functioning	.357*	.390*	-0.19	.160	.019	0.77

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

Table 6

Unique Proportion of Variance in Self-Esteem Accounted for by Family Structure and Family Functioning, With Income Controlled, for Boys and Girls

Measure of self-esteem	Boys				Girls			
	ΔR^2		R^2	Adj R^2	ΔR^2		R^2	Adj R^2
	Total family functioning	Family structure			Total family functioning	Family structure		
Total	.143**	.091*	.289**	.236	.253**	.000	.294**	.253
Global	.086*	.065*	.176*	.114	.147**	.005	.158*	.108
Self-Approval	.051	.000	.080	.011	.387**	.001	.418**	.384
Lovability	.212**	.017	.241**	.184	.154**	.021	.267**	.224
Likability	.029	.028	.101	.034	.126**	.002	.207**	.161
Self-Control	.039	.109*	.221**	.163	.184**	.002	.228**	.183
Self-Identity	.162**	.012	.221**	.163	.074*	.000	.084	.030
Power	.038	.091**	.229**	.171	.060	.000	.060	.005
Competence	.214**	.097*	.359**	.311	.163**	.002	.168*	.119
Defensiveness	.037	.004	.044	.000	.087*	.000	.088	.035
Body Functioning	.108*	.105*	.262**	.207	.019	.000	.045	.000

Note. Adj = adjusted.

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

groups were also found to be higher than boys with nonmarried parents on several self-esteem dimensions.

These results illustrate one glaring reality: African American boys with nonmarried parents are at risk for developing low overall self-esteem compared with other African American adolescents. This illustrates the apparently valuable role of the African American father in raising his children, particularly his boys. The next set of results to be discussed may shed light on the mechanism by which his presence is particularly felt by his sons.

The subsequent hypothesis tested was that adolescents with married parents would have a better quality of family functioning compared with single-parent adolescents. As with self-esteem, parental marital status had no effect on girls' perceptions of family functioning or on any of the specific dimensions. Contrary to this, however, parental marital status had a marginal effect on boys' perceptions of family functioning. Given that fathers tend to be harsher disciplinarians than are mothers, especially toward boys, it is not surprising boys in married parent families perceived less opportunity to express their views and perceived a higher level of achievement orientation than did boys in single-parent homes.

Our findings indicated that boys with married parents had much higher perceptions of body

functioning than did boys with single parents and girls with single and married parents. The male model hypothesis, coupled with the gender identification hypothesis, supports this finding. The literature consistently has shown the tendency for girls to identify with their mothers (Brody & Flor, 1997) and boys with their fathers (Jackson, 1993; Mott, 1994; Siegal, 1987). Thus, when a father is present in the home the boy has a male model of manliness, which facilitates his developing a more stable identity and consequently higher self-esteem.

In addition, the theory that parents are more permissive with children of the opposite sex and stricter with children of the same sex (Wilson, 1992) was supported by the results as well. The fact that fathers are harder than mothers are on boys may mean fathers demand more from boys, and this may result in boys feeling that their parents have more confidence in their abilities. This assertion is also consistent with most major self-theories that emphasize the role of significant others in the development of self-esteem (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Vander Zanden, 1996). Therefore, it is not just the model of manliness that facilitates self-esteem; it may be that feelings of self-esteem in African American youths are partially developed from knowing that their parents have confidence in them. In a two-parent home, the balance between the mothers' and fathers' different so-

cializing patterns may be what keeps the self-esteem of both sexes relatively equal. Apparently, the absent father upsets this balance, which leaves the African American male adolescent in a family environment in which less is expected from him, and, consequently, he may not develop the positive feelings of self-esteem.

A test of the economic deprivation hypothesis revealed mixed support for the perspective. First, income had a marginal multivariate effect on adolescent self-esteem. This result indicated that adolescents with higher family income perceived themselves as more likable and lovable and as having higher self-control. These results can be explained by the high probability that parents with more income buy their children more necessities and gifts compared with poorer parents. This may increase the adolescents' feelings of being loved and liked by their parents.

Income also relates to perceptions of the quality of family functioning for African American adolescent boys, but not girls. The higher the family income, the more family recreation, family cohesion, and individual expressiveness was perceived by boys. This is an important set of results. Parents with higher income have more money to spend on outside activities with their children than do poorer parents. Also, many studies have shown a lack of financial resources can cause great stress to a family (McLeod et al., 1994; A. N. Wilson, 1979), which may result in many stress-induced family conflicts. However, the fact that only boys' perceptions are influenced by these factors may again speak to the effects of differential gender socialization. Fifteen-year-old boys, in both types of homes, may feel that providing needed income to the family is partly their responsibility. Therefore, when the family income is not adequate, African American boys at this age may be hypersensitive to it and perceive more problems associated with income than girls do. It may also be that the parents expect boys to contribute more financially and become more rejecting of boys during times of economic hardship (McLeod et al., 1994), which affects the boys' perceptions of the family environment. Some theorists even argued that many poor African American fathers desert or leave home because of severe economic pressure (Wilson, 1979). Therefore, African American men and boys in general may be more affected

by economic pressure than are African American women and girls.

The primary assumption of this perspective is that the effect of family structure is mediated by socioeconomic factors such as family income. This assertion was not supported, however. Marital status had a strong effect on self-esteem for boys, even when income, parental education, and number of people living in the home were controlled. Therefore, the father is important to his children for more than simply the added financial resources he brings.

The final sets of hypotheses were based on the assumptions of the family functioning perspective. First, this perspective argues that quality of family functioning will significantly predict adolescent self-esteem. As with a plethora of other studies (Amato, 1986; Cooper et al., 1983; Dancy & Handal, 1984; Heiss, 1996), the current study's results lend support to this theory. Family functioning significantly predicted 9 of the 10 self-esteem subscales for boys and girls. This suggests that the better the quality of family functioning, the higher the self-esteem of African American adolescents.

One interesting finding was that the effects of family functioning on self-esteem were moderated by gender. Girls had self-esteem similar to boys when the quality of family functioning was low, but their self-esteem was higher when the quality of family functioning was high. Just as boys may be more sensitive to family income, girls may feel more responsible for relationships between family members. Thus, their self-esteem is more affected by changes in family functioning than it is for boys.

Although family functioning resulted in a strong relationship with self-esteem in African American adolescents of both sexes, the effects of the family systems (organization and control) and family growth (recreation and intellectualism) factors were strongest for boys, whereas the effects of the family relational factors (cohesion, expressiveness, and lack of conflict) were the strongest for girls. This finding also reflects the general literature of gender socialization differences. Parents of boys reported a greater emphasis on achievement and competition, control of feelings, and conformity to rules (Bronstein, 1988; Weitzman, Birns, & Friend, 1985). Girls' parents, on the other hand, reported a greater emphasis on close interpersonal relationships, encouragement to talk about trou-

bles, and more frequent physical affection, comfort, and reassurance (Shapiro, 1990).

The final hypothesis tested was that family functioning would be a better predictor of African American adolescents' self-esteem than family structure. This hypothesis was supported for girls, but not for boys. For girls, family structure had no effect on self-esteem, but the quality of family functioning was very important to their self-esteem. For boys, parental marital status and the quality of family functioning were equally important predictors of their self-esteem.

Summary

One of the major results of this study was that even when family functioning and income were both statistically controlled, parental marital status still accounted for a large amount of variance in African American adolescent boys' self-esteem. This is very different from what would be expected considering the recent literature that often devalued the African American father's role for the purpose of rejecting the Moynihan report's thesis (Dickson, 1993). Therefore, the African American father's value in the home to his adolescent sons should not continue to be discounted. The data from this sample do not support such stereotypes.

This study has also shown that factors stressed for boys in African American homes seem to involve authority and control, whereas those for girls reflect relationships, protection, and support (Schaffer, 1981). Our data, coupled with the existing literature, seem to indicate that not only do parents socialize their children differently on the basis of gender, but, more important, positive adolescent male and female self-esteem is related to those practices.

In like manner, although the effects of sufficient family income on the African American adolescent have been devalued because of the voluminous research that shows that family functioning is statistically more important (Amato & Keith, 1991; Heiss, 1996), the value of sufficient income should not be downplayed either. The results of this study suggest that family income is related to the perceptions of family environment for African American adolescent boys.

Limitations

Although many important findings were revealed in this study, some limitations must be acknowledged. Even though this study was predominately multivariate in design, its correlational nature prevents definite assertions of causation. Therefore, the actual mechanisms that cause the relationships are still unclear. For instance, does the actual functioning of the family cause higher self-esteem, or does higher self-esteem cause adolescents to perceive their family environments as more positive? Because self-esteem and perceptions of family functioning were both reported by the adolescents themselves, this is even more difficult to discern. Future studies need to examine the relationship between self-esteem and someone else's perceptions of adolescents' family functioning to better assess the relationship.

Another limitation is the fact that all the families resided in Southern California and the adolescents were all 15 years old. This may affect the ability to generalize these findings to the larger African American population. Furthermore, it is not clear at this time if these results will apply to younger or older African American youths. Future studies need to use a cross-sectional and/or longitudinal approach to ascertain this.

Family structure can be defined in numerous ways, but this study used marital status because it has been the most commonly used variable (Florsheim et al., 1998) and because marital status implies a stability of family structure and male commitment to the socialization of the children. Future studies may need to examine several indicators of family structure, in conjunction with marital status. Also, the processes by which African American parents affect their adolescents' well-being within married and single-parent homes for both girls and boys need to be examined. Therefore, the actual mechanisms within the single-parent home that put the male adolescent at risk, and leave the female's self-esteem intact, should be revealed.

Implications for Application and Public Policy

The findings of this study illustrate the need for policymakers and granting organizations to increase funding for further, more comprehensive studies of family-related factors that affect

the well-being and normative development of African Americans. Single-parent families are no more homogeneous than are two-parent families. All male children living in single-parent homes are not suffering from low self-esteem, and not all children living with married parents are doing well. This study only illustrated what happens on average across those family structures. However, to explicate the processes within each family structure, samples many times larger than the present one must be used, so important higher order interactions can be examined. Also, future research no longer needs to compare the effects of family structure, income, and functioning, but instead to examine how these variables interact to facilitate or hamper adolescents' well-being in a variety of family, social, and economic settings.

The role of fathers in socializing their children is very important (Parke, 1996). However, increasing the quality of family functioning and focusing directly on adolescents' self-esteem with productive extracurricular activities may buffer the effects of having single parents. Furthermore, parents need to be alerted to the family factors that affect male and female children differently.

Public policy should be more focused on reversing the current trends of low marriage rates and high divorce rates. Free or subsidized family counseling before and during marriage may be needed to help reduce these trends. More important, previous research indicates that the unemployment and underemployment of African American men contribute to their low marriage rates and involvement in the lives of their children (Bowman & Forman, 1997; A. N. Wilson, 1979). More adequate employment for African American men would obviously reduce this problem, but educators and service providers should also help male clients cope more effectively with economic hardship.

Finally, policymakers and service providers have to increase their efforts to help single custodial parents deal with the stresses associated with raising children alone, while encouraging the noncustodial parents to take more active roles in the lives of their children. The current practice of granting visitation for only every other weekend to the noncustodial parent may need to be greatly modified.

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Received December 4, 1998

Revision received November 17, 1999

Accepted November 19, 1999 ■