

Family Science Review

Special Issue: African American Families

Velma McBride Murry, Guest Editor

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Editorial Office:
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
University of Nevada
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Introduction To The Special Issue

VELMA MCBRIDE MURRY*

Over the past decade, considerable interest has been given to examining the nature of African American families. This growing interest has been fueled by researchers, practitioners, educators, and policy makers attempt to understand the problems and challenges confronting these families. Further, the phenomenal growth in interest can be attributed to the recognition, by a few scholars, of the need to increase our knowledge about the "multiple ecologies" of African American families (i.e., created by social strata, ethnoculture, family types, and geographic residence).

The goal in planning this special edition was to solicit and present conceptual and theoretical papers which illuminate issues confronting African American families at different income levels, different class levels, and at different stages of the life cycle. Though this goal was not accomplished completely, the papers in this issue do reflect a considerable degree of diversity among African American families. It is hoped that this special issue is useful to social scientists, educators, and practitioners seeking to broaden their understanding of family functioning and substantive issues of relevance to African American families.

This issue contributes to the development of the family field for several reasons. First, it reflects a growing interest in the lives of African American families. In addition, the articles provide an examination of research and writing that incorporate the relationship of macro- and micro-level influences on African American family functioning. Finally, it provides insight into the diverse approaches that may be used to further our understanding about African American families.

Using a life-course perspective as the organizational structure for this special issue, the lead paper focuses on the unique needs of biracial (of Black and White parentage) preschool children regarding racial identification and self-concept. Bryant and Morrison identify and describe unexplored factors that may impact the complex challenges confronting the biracial child. Attention also is given to examining the influence of parents and extrafamilial factors.

Three articles provide insightful information on African American adolescents. Murry identifies and delineates major themes in the research literature on the sexual behavior patterns of African American adolescent females. She explores how existing empirical studies can be linked to various theoretical principles and frameworks in understanding declining age at first coitus, increased premarital sexual activities, pregnancy, and childbearing among these females. The phenomenon of adolescent motherhood is examined further by Martin. Using oral history methodology, Martin provides narrative descriptions of the life experiences of African American adolescent

* Velma McBride Murry is an Assistant Professor in the School of Family Studies at The University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06269.

mothers. The evidence presented challenges some of the generalizations about the pernicious consequences of adolescent motherhood, as well as substantiate some of the findings noted by Frank Furstenburg, Jr., Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and S. Philip Morgan in their book, *Adolescent mothers in later life* (1987). Jackson explores issues of drug use and non-use among African American adolescent males by applying Travis Hirschi's social bonding theory. Jackson also illustrates how deviant behavior is linked to the social bonding process that occurs through family, peers, community, and church.

Finally, Hildreth and Dilworth-Anderson discuss conceptual and methodological concerns in the research literature on elderly African Americans. Specific attention is given to issues related to understanding the initiation and maintenance of family ties among these individuals.

I end this brief introduction with sincere thanks and appreciation to the reviewers who contributed their time, effort, and expertise. This issue would not be possible without their timely and critical reviews:

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This special issue is dedicated to the memory of one of the contributing authors, Z. Lois Bryant, whose death preceded the completion of this special issue.

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