The African-American family has trotted ain't been no crystal stair (Jackson, 1991). And life for me ain't been no crystal stair I'se still climbin', for I'se still going, honey, Don't you fall now—'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. Don't you set down on the steps where there ain't been no light. And turnin' corners, and reachin' landin's, —Bare and boards all torn up, and splinters, it's had tacks in it, Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. Well, son, I'll tell you: at Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia. in early childhood/elementary education Leon Rouson is an associate professor and director of community counseling Langston Hughes, 1994For the African-American family, life within the African-American Community functions to this society. creative ways to survive, retain some of its African values and structure, and fulfill its functions to this society. Therefore, in response Popenoe, we launch two criticisms of his stance. First, he failed to address or take into consideration the literature on the cultural differences existing among and between White families and families of color (e.g., Staples, 1999). Second, granted that there is evidence to support a decline in American families regardless of race or ethnicity during this critical period, nevertheless for African Americans and other families of color this phenomenon was not unprecedented (Billingsley, 1998; Staples, 1999; U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003).

Particularly disturbing to us as African Americans is that Popenoe provides no discussion on the damaging economic, social, and psychological effects of the migration experience of Hispanics and Asians, the relocation of and continuing saga against Native American Indians, and the compulsory immigration—involving over 400 years of enslavement—of African Americans (Akbar, 1979; Darfur & Herring, 1994; King, 1988; Mannix & Cowley, 1962; Yemen & Steele, 1975), as well as the modern-day apartheid in the form of massive incarceration of people of color, specifically African-American men and women. Popenoe's conclusion was that, in those three decades, in essence, "Families lost functions, social power, and authority over their members" (p. 528). Among the functions lost were changes in traditional marital roles and family structure, decreasing fertility and increasing divorce, and the socialization of children, including values and morals. All of those functions previously provided family members with nurturance, affiliation and care, and economic and financial support.

Popenoe's conclusion was that, in those 30 years, African-American families, like White families, underwent a rapid decline in the traditional family structure. He presumed that these changes, in particular the loss of functions, social power, and authority over their members, led to the rapid decline of the American family. We reply—nonsense. The massive changes that Popenoe is referring to may have begun 30 years ago for the majority of White families, but not for the African-American family and other marginalized families. The article employs an indigenous systems approach in describing the survival of the African-American family in the face of overwhelming adversity, or what Carroll (1998) refers to as mundane environmental stress. It identifies and describes the variety of indigenous systems within the African-American community and how they have helped to sustain the African-American family in today.

By challenging Popenoe's stance, one that is grounded in Eurocentric ideology, we aggressively question how African-American families have been treated in research on the African-American family and other marginalized families. We argue that the major thrust of the existing research on the African-American family has been written by others, from deficit models, and has focused on the pathology and dysfunction of the African-American family. Furthermore, early literature and data viewed (and still do view) the African-American family as pathological, that is, using descriptors such as damaged, weak, disadvantaged, devoid of American values, destructive, on welfare, a permanent underclass, and single-parent-headed household. It is portrayed as the most state crimes, being on drugs, dying like cattle in urban streets, becoming young parents too soon, having very large high school dropout rates, delinquents, murderers, uneducated, unemployed, having high rates of divorce, and being the newest and fastest growing victims of HIV/AIDS. According to Billingsley (1968, 1993), this type of research often contributes to the distortions and excessively negative characterizations of African-American family life. For that reason, like the lion in Billingsley's story, to win, African Americans must tell their own story. Therefore, for African Americans, the big question surrounding the decline of the African-American family is literature that highlights the environment in which African-American families must raise their children. Such information is critical to understanding the functions of African Americans. Further, such data must also
address the resiliency of the African-American family. In other words, over the last few decades, is there empirical research demonstrating that the African-American family adequately carries out its societal functions?

For example, researchers (e.g., Cain, 2007; Cherlin, 2006; Dean, 2007; Dunlap, Gelob, &Johnson, 2006; Murphy, Hunter, & Robey, 1998; Robey, 2008; Winton, 1995) in the field of family studies acknowledge the complexity of the historical, political, and socioeconomic realities to which West African families, including values and morals, and provided experience and knowledge in affilia-

tion, affiliation, and care, and economic and financial support.

African Americans have wrestled with these changes in family life since Africans first set foot on American soil as slaves some four centuries ago. At that moment, the very essence of the African family was assaulted. The African family lost func-
tional roles, the traditional family structure, and the value of its children.

This has continued with the high incarceration rates of African-Americans in the these changes in family life since Africans first set foot on American soil as slaves some four centuries ago. At that moment, the very essence of the African family was assaulted. The African family lost functional roles, the traditional family structure, and the value of its children.

Similarly, through an Afrocentric lens, there is a constant interplay among systems, structures, and subsystems in the African-American family. The first theoretical lens, structural functionalism, views families as merely one of many social systems (e.g., religion, education, politics, and economy) key to the survival of society (Parson, 1949; Winton, 1995). That is, families perform functional roles that are integrated into and through the socializing of children to the values of a society. The process of socialization (from a structural functional theory, similar to ethnicity, involves shared culture that binds people together. Rather than seeing the individuals in isolation, structural functional theory focuses on how people behave and interact with one another in group settings (Turner & Maryanski, 1979).

According to Winch (1967), the following are the requirements for an effective family: replacement of dying members, productive contribution of the labor force, maintaining law and order, educating and training members to conform to society’s norms, and the redistribution of the labor force dealing with group harmony, emotional crisis, and maintaining a sense of purpose. Thus, the modern family is influenced by the structural-functional theories that serve as a great introduction (though not by nature) for those who are not familiar with the tenets that underlie the Africano-
tropic worldview that undergirds the survival and interdependence of the African-American family. For this reason, we have chosen structural functional theory as the step forward for redefining family and its func-
tions from a Western/American idea of a nuclear family focusing for the survival of the African-American family. Structural functional theory is a set of frameworks that aggressively wrestles with interlocking agendas, identities, op-

tional realities, and maintaining an understanding of the African-American family.

Theoretical Lenses for Studying African-American Families

According to Sue, Iyie, and Pedersen, (1996), identity is embedded in multiple simultaneous social roles, and it is important to recognize the complexity of that system. Therefore, because of the complexity of studying culturally diverse families, we introduce a bifocal approach of Afrocentrism and structural functionalism, theories taken together as a more realistic view of the African-American family. In other words, over the last few decades, is there empirical research demonstrating that the African-American family adequately carries out its societal functions?

The principle of “survival of the group” as suggested by MCT theory, culturally sensitive and responsive counselors can and should utilize these indigenous systems in order to fulfill their function.

Although these kinds of help may be viewed by some clinicians as primitive and crude, primitive, and lacking scientific validity of the Western family, has had to make massive adjustments in order to fulfill its functions in society. From the Parsonian view of the role the family plays in society, the African-American family plays a vital role in the survival of the Black community. This is evident in the research in nearly every aspect of African-American life, that is, with adolescents (Watson & Protinsky, 1988), there are many other cultural factors in an African-American family.

The African-American family, unlike the White family, has had to make massive adjustments in order to fulfill its functions in society. From the Parsonian view of the role the family plays in society, the African-American family plays a vital role in the survival of the Black community. This is evident in the research in nearly every aspect of African-American life, that is, with adolescents (Watson & Protinsky, 1988), there are many other cultural factors that are essential for the maintenance of the African-American family.

This is evident in the research in nearly every aspect of African-American life, that is, with adolescents (Watson & Protinsky, 1988), and in many ways unable to carry out their roles and functions for dealing with group harmony, emotional crisis, and maintaining a sense of purpose. Thus, the modern family is influenced by the structural-functional theories that serve as a great introduction (though not by nature) for those who are not familiar with the tenets that underlie the Africano-
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The principle of “survival of the group” as suggested by MCT theory, culturally sensitive and responsive counselors can and should utilize these indigenous systems in order to fulfill their function.
American families are families that are still lagging behind White families in education attainment (earning high school diplomas and higher education degrees) and economics (household incomes, and living at poverty level) and leading in health disparities. The aforementioned studies and statistics bring to light the historical role indigenous systems play in the mental, physical, and intellectual development of African Americans. Following we present some narratives that provide real testimonies of the endurance of African-American families, exemplifying those indigenous systems and their goal to search, persistently or unorthodox manner, memorable moments from graduate school experiences. The following narratives serve as a representation of peer mentoring experiences. We offer these narratives as a technique (from a non-positivist perspective) rather than as a research method. Accordingly to Erickson (1968), what makes research interpretive or qualitative is substantive focus and intent, rather than a specific method or data collection. Hence, in an effort to share intuitive meanings of different indigenous systems and what they mean to us, each piece presents a descriptive narrative from a unique experience and perception. We hope to show that African Americans are active participants in a nonpositivist, interpretative approach to the importances of these historical African-American experiences. In the next three stories, we will take a three-pronged approach involving both firsthand and personal experiences that stretch across the African-American community utilizing indigenous systems (extended family, church, and the segregated school system) from the experiences of three African-American women, including those of one of the co-authors of this article. The African-American family has historically lagged behind White families in annual income. An income gap still exists between Black and White families regardless of family composition. Thus, the need for financial support has always been a hindrance to the development of African-American families, including middle-class families. In a study of middle-class families, McAdoo (1988) was able to demonstrate empirically that involve-ment with extended families was a help to upward mobility. In fact, the results of this study indicated that the education and achievement of the individuals were often impossible without the support of the extended family (p. 106).

An extended Family by Flaherty, Facette, and Garver (1987) of African-American adolescent mothers and their infants shows grandparents having a central place in the caretaking, nurtur- ing, managing, and coaching in poor Black families. Warner (1988) in a study of Black adolescents indicated that enrollment in Black families is positively correlated with educational success. Another study of African-American ad- olescents showed that gender differences also exist in the selection and utilization of social support systems. Coates (1987) found gender differences in the structure and support characteristics of African-American adolescent’s social networks. Some of the differences she found were: (a) males and females differ in the number of females and of males they identify as network members, in their estimates of the number of people they know, and in frequency of contact: (b) males and females differ in their criteria for choosing family members: (c) males and females choose parents to help with material resources and peers to help with emotional needs. In another study, Brown and Gary (1985) found that (a) the psychological traumas of racism, sexism, and having to cater to the needs of others, and (b) unemployed Blacks who are actively engaged in religious activities present a different profile (e.g. Morrison, 1991) are likely to have adverse psychological and health reactions. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1988), African Americans were the second larg- est ethnic minority group. Yet African-
The Delirious World of Modern Families

Diving into the world of modern families, the author explores the complexities and challenges faced by contemporary families. From the impact of technology on family dynamics to the changing roles of men and women, the book offers a comprehensive look at the evolution of family structures and relationships. The author also discusses the impact of globalization on family life, highlighting the diverse and multifaceted nature of modern families around the world. Through in-depth case studies and interviews with family members, the book provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that families face in the 21st century.

References


