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Inner-City Parents Under Economic Pressure: Perspectives on the Strategies of Parenting

Using a sample of 429 inner-city families, this study traces the effects of economic pressure to the emotional distress and parenting behaviors of African American and European American parents. Both low income and unstable work/income enhance the risk of emotional distress and beliefs of parental ineffectiveness by increasing economic pressure. Among Black families, single-parent households and conflicted marriages magnify such effects by undermining parent well-being. Compared with White parents, a sense of parental efficacy among African American parents is more predictive of child management strategies that enhance developmental opportuni-

ties for children and minimize behavioral risks. These results are discussed in terms of the differential availability and use of neighborhood resources for parenting between the two racial groups.

The historical record of industrial societies documents the widespread consequences of economic hard times for families and children, including greater risks of marital breakdown, child abuse, and neglect (Eckenrode & Gore, 1990). These hardships are commonly linked to the recessions and depressions of economic cycles, but they also stem from an expanding economic inequality between families at opposite ends of the class structure. In the United States, this gap has significantly increased in recent decades, placing a large number of lower income families in more desperate straits.

Socioeconomic trends over the 1980s markedly reduced the size of the middle class (Duncan, Smeeding, & Rodgers, 1991) and placed lower income families under mounting economic pressures as their standard of living lost ground relative to that of upper income households (Bradbury, 1990). Featured among these declines are the younger heads of households and single par-

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ents. However, no families have experienced more disadvantages from this change than younger African American and European American families who are concentrated in the impoverished neighborhoods of America's inner cities (Jencks & Peterson, 1991; Wilson, 1987). Similar to inner-city families during depression eras of plummeting income and soaring hardship (Elder, 1974), these families face stark necessities with limited options.

What are the consequences of this rising level of economic pressure for parenting among inner-city families? Two complementary approaches are relevant to an investigation of this question. One approach traces the effect of macro sociodemographic and economic changes on families through their impact on characteristics of the neighborhoods in which the families and children reside (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993). These characteristics include social composition, cohesion, and control, as well as the presence of service institutions and family networks.

The other approach views parents and children as actors within the correlated constraints and options of their inner-city neighborhoods. This approach focuses on the within-neighborhood heterogeneity of families, as expressed in financial and psychological resources, perceptions of neighborhood, and family management strategies (Eccles et al., 1992; Furstenberg, 1993; Walker & Furstenberg, 1994). The central questions of this approach focus on modes of family adaptation, their variations and consequences. Both of these approaches are concerned with the extent to which families select themselves into the places where they live (Tienda, 1991).

This study follows the second approach in addressing the process by which economic hardship and pressures adversely affect both the emotional health and parenting behaviors of inner-city African American and European American parents. Building upon the insights of an ethnographic study of inner-city parenting in Philadelphia (Furstenberg, 1993), a team of senior researchers, working in conjunction with their membership in the MacArthur Network on Successful Adolescent Development in High-Risk Settings (see Jessor, 1993), developed survey instruments to investigate variations in parenting among inner-city neighborhoods. These instruments were then administered to a sample of nearly 500 Philadelphia families of lower middle-class to lower lower-class status with a young adolescent (ages 11 to 15) in the household.

In this study we test the hypotheses (a) that parental emotional distress represents an important bridge between family economic hardship and parental ineffectiveness in beliefs and actions, (b) that the process varies by family structure and social emotional support, and (c) that parents with a sense of efficacy tend to engage in family strategies that promote developmental opportunities and minimize risks. Emotional distress refers to a variety of uncomfortable subjective states, from forms of malaise to anxiety and depressed affect (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989). The first hypothesis is based on an accumulation of research findings that link socioeconomic decline or loss to emotional distress, which in turn undermines effective parenting (e.g., Conger & Elder, 1994; Downey & Coyne, 1990; McLoyd, 1990). Our model of family stress traces a sequence of steps from economic hardship to felt economic pressures, then to emotional distress and reduced confidence in one's efficacy as a parent. In theory, low family income and unstable work/income increase the risk of emotional distress by increasing the level of economic pressure, and this generalized emotional distress reduces parents' confidence in their ability to make a positive difference in their children's lives.

A similar causal sequence has been found in a study of rural Iowa families (Conger & Elder, 1994) and in other research by Voydanoff and Donnelly (1988). Among these Iowa families, all of the effect of economic hardship on the depressed feelings of parents was mediated through the parents' reports of economic pressure. Relatively low income, income loss, and unstable work increased the emotional distress of parents only among those who reported experiencing strong economic pressures. By using observer as well as self- and spouse reports of depressed mood (Conger et al., 1992), the Iowa study effectively challenged an alternative interpretation—that depressed parents are most likely to report economic cutbacks and strain. This research also showed that economic hardship (e.g., low income, etc.) significantly increases reports of economic pressure but does not directly influence depressed feelings.

As specified by our model, emotional distress resulting from economic misfortune undermines beliefs in the efficacy of parent behavior (Bandura, 1995). The sequence connects a generalized state, such as depressed feelings, to a set of specific beliefs concerning parental effectiveness. It does not relate such feelings to a general trait re-

garding personal mastery (see Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981). Economic constraints and cutbacks in standard of living together generate economic pressure and elicit feelings of loss and emotional distress, with their negative implications for effective parenting.

Whether this negative cycle unfolds depends upon many factors, both individual and social. The link between exogenous economic conditions and parent behavior may weaken when family members and neighbors help out with emotional support, loans, material gifts, and labor (Taylor, 1994). The support and confidence of an understanding spouse are known to moderate the depressive effect of hard times (Pearlin et al., 1981), and the same conclusion applies to the support of friends and relatives. Though generally deprived of a caring partner, single mothers frequently have access to the support and child-care expertise of their own mothers, older daughters, and other kin (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987). Consistent with House, Landis, and Umberson's (1988) findings, we assume that the perception of social-emotional support, whether from relatives or friends, will serve to minimize the psychological costs of economic pressures among adults in single-parent households.

The beliefs of inner-city adults about their effectiveness as parents do not tell us what they actually do. In this study we focus on the behavior that parents actually use to organize and arrange their children's social environment for promotive and preventive purposes (Eccles et al., 1992; Furstenberg, 1993). Promotive strategies are designed to create positive experiences or to help the child develop skills and interests; these strategies include assisting with the child's school work, encouraging the development of talents and interests, enrolling the child in special classes and programs, or getting an older sibling or other relative to help the child with homework. Preventive strategies are those behaviors that are intended to minimize behavioral risks and negative outcomes; these include careful monitoring of the child's whereabouts, enforcing strong curfew practices, involving the child in protective activities such as church groups, or discussing negative role models.

We assume that parents' use of such strategies will depend on their sense of parental efficacy, but the importance of such strategies also depends on the degree to which parents are able to rely upon and trust community agencies and institutions. From one generation to the next, European American families have learned that they can rely

upon such agencies to act on their behalf. Community leaders typically shared the families' racial status. Moreover, these families have generally lived in racially exclusive neighborhoods. By contrast, the personal experience of African American parents has favored a culture of distrust toward community institutions (Lareau, 1991; Ogbu, 1985). In their expectations, schools, social service agencies, city hall, and the police are less likely to act on their behalf. As a consequence, Black parents have often felt they had to do more than White parents to protect and guide their children. They could not count on community support. From this perspective, their family management initiatives are likely to be characteristic of the socialization style of efficacious Black parents, rather than that of their European American counterparts, though community barriers may obscure any difference of this kind.

In conclusion, we pose three questions in this study of parenting. (a) Does the model we have outlined depict processes linking economic hardship and a sense of effective parenting? (b) Does the model vary between Black and White families, between single-parent, conflicted households, and harmonious couples, and between different levels of perceived support from kin and friends? And (c) do African American and White parents with a high sense of efficacy more actively engage in promotive and protective family strategies with their children? We turn now to the sample description and to the measurements.

SAMPLE AND MEASUREMENTS

Sample

Through an interview and questionnaire, the 429 study families provided data on the primary caregiver and on the target adolescent (ages 11 to 15), along with an older sibling. The families were drawn from an existing sample of households in four inner-city areas of Philadelphia where neighborhood poverty rates vary from 10% to 40% or more. The sampling frame excluded families from middle- to upper middle-class areas as well as those from the most impoverished neighborhoods of north Philadelphia. To maximize the number of Black families, we chose to underrepresent other ethnic minorities, such as Hispanics.

Census tracts were identified in each of the four catchment areas. Four block groups were randomly selected from each tract. From an enumeration of all households, we identified 598 that

had an adolescent within our preferred age range, from 11 to 15 years. Eighty-two percent of these families completed the interviews, for a total of 489; 429 of the families are either African American or White. In each household, the primary caregiver, typically the mother, and a target adolescent were interviewed by a trained field worker. Both were also given a self-administered questionnaire to complete while the interviewer was at the house. When the older sibling was present and willing, he or she completed a self-administered questionnaire.

Two-thirds of the families in this sample are African American. Nearly 9 out of 10 of the primary caregivers are mothers; 6% are fathers, and 5% are grandmothers of the target youth. Eighty percent of the single mothers are African American. Forty-five percent of the families rank below \$20,000 in total family income. Twice as many Black as White families have incomes below the median, and the Black families are also concentrated in the poorer neighborhoods. Twelve percent of the mothers have a college education, and 52% report having a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Description of Measures

The socioeconomic measures include: (a) total family income for household in 1989, as reported by the head of household; (b) unstable work/income, identified by the head of household as at least one of six negative work/income events that happened in the past year—changed job for worse one, got demoted, laid off, or fired, stopped working for a time, or experienced a cut in wages or salary and suffered financial loss; (c) felt constraints (adapted from Pearlin et al., 1981), an average of standardized scores for “difficulty over paying bills,” “whether enough money is left over at end of month to pay bills,” and “worry over having enough money to pay for things” ($\alpha = .73$); (d) economic adjustments, a summated index of cutbacks in expenditures made over the past year—changed eating habits, reduced utility use, postponed medical or dental care, and fell behind in paying bills (responses = yes or no, score = 0–4); and (e) neighborhood problems, identified by the caregiver from a list of 27 neighborhood problems such as unemployment and vandalism, with responses varying from *big problem*, scored 3, to *not a problem*, scored 0 ($\alpha = .92$).

As measures of emotional and social behavior, we use an adult self-report measure of the fre-

quency of depressed affective states; items are adapted from the Symptom Checklist 90–Revised (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). The index consists of eight 5-point items—including felt hopeless, felt lonely, and felt like it’s no use—that are answered by the primary caregiver ($\alpha = .89$). Two scales were designed to measure parent beliefs on effectiveness or efficacy. Scale 1 emphasizes change in the child (14 items, such as “getting child to study” or “to stay away from danger”; $\alpha = .90$). Scale 2 focuses more on change in the environment (six items, such as “make child’s school a better place for child to learn”; $\alpha = .78$). The two scales are highly correlated ($r = .62$) and are treated as two indicators of a single latent construct of parental efficacy.

Marital quality is indexed by two measures, marital relations and marital adjustment. The former represents a composite of positive relations minus negative relations. Positive relations refer to such behaviors as “acted loving and affectionate toward each other.” Negative relations are illustrated by physical and verbal abuse (both alpha coefficients = .85). Marital adjustment taps the extent to which parents argue in each of seven areas, from child discipline to money. All scales were unit weighted and applied to partnerships as well as marriages. Unmarried parents who are currently living with a partner were included in the intact family sample ($\alpha = .77$).

Lastly, kin and friend support is measured by a sum of two indicators of support. The kin measure represents the number of relatives that the parents can count on either for favors or for monitoring and watching the children. The maximum number is five and each relative could provide one or both kinds of support (0 = none, 1 = one kind, 2 = both kinds). Friend support was measured the same way.

Four scales measure family management strategies (yes = 1, no = 0 on all items). These strategies are: (a) encouragement, an average of four items that describe the frequency of verbal feedback that parents use to encourage their children—for example, “point out how (activity) will help in future,” “point out how it helped a relative get ahead,” “discuss how to get better at it,” and “point out what will happen if you don’t get better” ($\alpha = .73$); (b) work with child, an average of two items that indicate supervision of child’s work by parents and joint activity with child ($\alpha = .67$); (c) involvement in outside activities, an average of four items that tap the extent to

which parents provide child with opportunities for getting involved in programs, such as an athletic team or choir—for example, “found out about programs that could help child get better,” “signed up child for classes or programs,” “took child to program,” and “arranged for someone to take child to program” (alpha = .68); and (d) proactive prevention, an average of three items reflecting preventive strategies for keeping children away from the destructive force of neighborhood dangers, such as “point out how dangers have destroyed the lives of people you know,” “getting child involved in good neighborhood activities,” and “getting child involved in good activities out of neighborhood” (alpha = .56). A full account of the parent measures and their development is reported in a forthcoming monograph (Furstenberg, Eccles, Elder, Cook, & Sameroff, 1995). We obtained some qualitative data from the adolescents about their perceptions of parenting, but not about the family strategies included in this project.

RESULTS

Living Conditions and Economic Strategies by Income and Race

Families in the Philadelphia sample are evenly distributed across four income levels: \$9,900 or less, \$10,000 to \$19,900, \$20,000 to \$29,900, and \$30,000 or more. Four out of five families with less than \$20,000 total income per year are African American, in comparison to slightly less than half of the highest income families. Whether Black or White, the lowest income parents typically find themselves at the end of the month with no money to pay bills; 92% reported this problem, in comparison with 53% of the highest-income families. Nearly half of the lowest income

parents experience great difficulty paying their bills, whereas this applies to only 16% of the highest income families, Black and White.

The major exceptions to this socioeconomic effect center on the prevalence of single-parent households and the perception of neighborhood problems among African Americans (for details on these and other variations, see Furstenberg et al., 1995). Single-parent households are more common among African Americans and they are also concentrated in the lower income brackets (approximately 62%). Lower income parents also tend to perceive more neighborhood problems, but on all levels African Americans tend to rate their neighborhoods lower on quality, from items on perceived dangers and impoverished living conditions to those concerning the lack of social control and services. This perception of the residential environment has special relevance to the belief of Black parents that they cannot count on the child-oriented beneficence of forces beyond the family. We shall come back to this issue on the topic of family management strategies.

Financial strain is virtually a way of life for the lower income families in the sample. We turn now to some family consequences of economic pressure, as indexed by financial constraints and downward adjustments in living conditions. Because these consequences may be expressed in different ways among African American and White families, we begin with correlations among key indicators for the two samples and then trace the effects of family hardship through economic pressure and depressed feelings to effective parenting.

Consequences of Economic Pressure

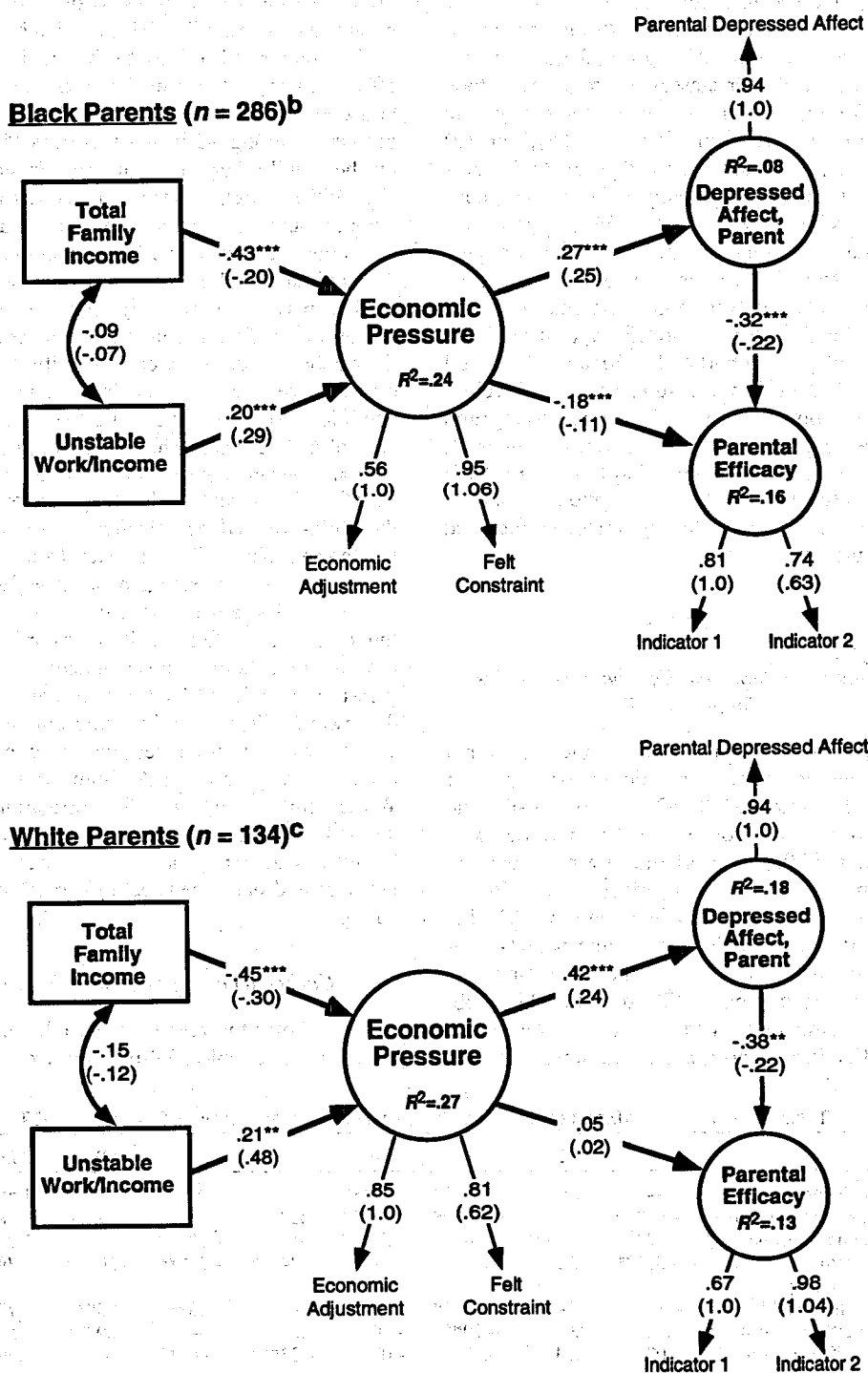
Table 1 shows the zero order correlations among the relevant variables. Results for African Ameri-

TABLE 1. CORRELATION MATRIX OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS IN PHILADELPHIA FAMILIES (n = 429)

Factors	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	SD	Mean
1. Family income	—	-.09	-.21***	-.43***	-.12**	.05	.11*	1.58	3.45
2. Unstable work/income	-.15*	—	.26***	.21***	.20***	.03	.07	.48	.37
3. Economic adjustment	-.42***	.24***	—	.53***	.14**	-.09	-.04	1.29	1.59
4. Felt constraint	-.38***	.22**	.68***	—	.24***	-.21***	-.20***	.79	.02
5. Depressed affect, head of household	-.11	.04	.33***	.36***	—	-.28***	-.25***	.70	2.00
6. Parent efficacy (Scale 1)	.12	.03	-.20**	-.10	-.23***	—	.60***	.57	2.88
7. Parent efficacy (Scale 2)	.07	.04	-.10	-.07	-.33***	.66***	—	.39	3.58
SD	1.65	.47	1.31	.86	.69	.55	.39		
Mean	4.49	.33	1.46	-.07	1.99	2.80	3.56		

Note: Correlations for Black parents appear above the diagonal, for White parents, below the diagonal. *p ≤ .10. **p ≤ .05. ***p ≤ .01.

FIGURE 1. INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP ON PARENT'S DEPRESSED AFFECT AND EFFICACY^a



^aUnstandardized coefficients in parentheses.

^b $\chi^2_{11} = 25.16$ ($p = .01$); GFI = .975, AGFI = .936.

^c $\chi^2_{11} = 9.24$ ($p = .60$); GFI = .981, AFGI = .950.

** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$.

can families are presented above the diagonal, with the coefficients for White families displayed below. A glance at the pattern of intercorrelations provides tentative support for the indirect effects of hardship conditions on a diminished sense of parental efficacy.

First, note that objective hardship, measured by low income and unstable work/income, is not highly correlated with beliefs regarding parental efficacy. These conditions do, however, increase the likelihood of subjective financial strain and sacrificial economic adjustments (e.g., economic pressure), which, in turn, are positively related to the risk of emotional depression. As expected, the efficacy scores of parents are negatively related to their reports of emotional depression.

In order to chart the sequential process, we begin with the effects of family hardship on economic pressure, then link economic pressure to emotional depression and parental efficacy, and finally explore the relations in families with different social structures, single parent and other.

Linking economic pressures and parental efficacy. Two models were compared on the mediating role of depressed feelings. The first excluded any mediation and assessed only the direct effect of economic pressure on parental efficacy. The second analysis introduced depressed feelings as a link in the model and thus enabled us to select the best fit to the data.

Economic pressure is indicated by two constructs: felt constraints and economic adjustments. Financial constraints measure the parent's financial worries and anxieties, whereas economic adjustments index what families actually do in order to ease economic strain. As expected, these two indicators of economic pressure are highly correlated ($r_s = .53$ for Black and $.68$ for White families) and can, therefore, serve as indicators of economic pressure in a measurement model (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). We also use two indicators of parents' efficacy beliefs. With both variables highly correlated ($r_s = .60$ for Black and $.66$ for White families), they are used as dimensions of a single latent construct, sense of parental efficacy.

A multigroup analysis by race, using LISREL (Bollen, 1989, p. 356), revealed that the factor loadings of the two latent constructs economic pressure and parental efficacy are statistically different for African American and European American families. For example, among Black families, economic pressure is more strongly related to the subjective component (felt constraints) than to

actual economic adjustments, possibly reflecting limited alternatives, given their already low income. Emotional responses are more possible among low-income families than are additional cutbacks in expenses. By contrast, both indicators represent the latent construct equally well for White families. Hence, the analysis was carried out separately for the two groups of families.

The first model on direct effects addressed the question of whether parents under economic pressure are likely to believe that they have less control over their child's development. Using a structural equation model, we found that economic pressure has a negative effect on the efficacy beliefs of parents, in both Black and White households ($-.26$ and $-.18$). However, this simple model did not fit the data well. The chi-square value for Black families is 62.6 and, for White households, 38.5. The fit is markedly better with depressed feelings defined as a proximal consequence of family economic instability, and as a source of perceived ineffectiveness in parenting. Figure 1 shows models of this formulation for African American and European American parents. For Black parents, the chi-square value decreased to 25.2 and, for White parents, to 9.2.

Heavy economic pressures among families in both racial groups enhance the likelihood of depressed feelings, and the latter increase the chance that adults perceive themselves as relatively powerless to make a positive difference in their children's lives. This link completely accounts for the perceived ineffectiveness of White parents. Those who felt depressed over their economic plight did not think they were effective as parents. However, depressed feelings are only part of the story for Black parents in deprived circumstances. Hardship also has direct, negative effects on their sense of effectiveness. Overall, the total standardized effect of pressure on parental efficacy for Black and White parents is $-.27$ and $-.11$, respectively.

Several tests of alternative formulations were carried out and none of them provided a stronger fit to theory and to the data than the model we have tested. First, hardship conditions, such as low and unstable income, do not increase the level of reported economic pressure by increasing depressed feelings. The various hardship conditions in the study show little relationship to such feelings, and that model did not fit the data at hand. Second, logically and in empirical data, parents' feelings of ineffectiveness do not link general feelings of emotional depression to strong economic pressures.

Variations by spouse and other support. All of the analyses up to this point document the adverse effect of economic pressure on the self-efficacy beliefs of parents, whether directly or through emotional distress. Does this process apply equally when social support is present or lacking, as in the support of a partner and/or relative? On theoretical grounds, parents in strong marriages should be more protected against the negative consequences of economic pressure than parents in weak partnerships. Through mutual assurance and understanding, a strong partnership would empower parents to manage stress and the negative emotions resulting from economic deprivation.

In this sample, the African American families provided the best opportunity to test these expectations. As a group, the families experienced more severe economic hardship than White families, and a significant number of the Black households were headed by a single parent ($n = 151$). The subgroup of European American families included a relatively small number of single-parent households ($n = 35$), too small for a multivariate analysis. We first divided all Black parents who were in partnerships at the median on conjugal conflict (measured by an average of scores on the marital relations and adjustment scales). To provide more specific information on the state of partnerships in each category, we compared them on a single interview item concerning marital adjustment: "How well do you and your spouse/partner get along?" Seventy-three percent of the respondents in strong relationships replied "very well," compared with 27% of the parents in weak relationships. Given this difference, we proceeded to

compare all three family types (strong marriage, weak marriage, single parent) on economic, social, and psychological measures (Table 2).

Results show that the three types of family structure are differentiated by socioeconomic factors and psychological attributes. Parents with a strong family structure have the benefits of partner support, as well as the support of relatives and friends. They score higher on the support they receive from people outside the immediate family or household. These parents also score lowest on depressed feelings. Both support from relatives and friends and parental efficacy are lowest among parents in discordant family circumstances, but the differences are not significant. These parents may not be able to count on the help of their partner and they have less to rely upon from family and friends as well. The differences observed in this table did not change when we restricted the single-parent category to only mothers.

We first performed a multigroup analysis in LISREL that revealed that the structural coefficients are not statistically different across the three family types. However, since we had predicted a moderating role of family structure, we ran the analyses separately for the different groups and found noteworthy differences. The separate LISREL solutions for the three family types are presented in Table 3. Unstandardized, as well as standardized, coefficients are shown because the variances of the measures are likely to differ across the groups.

As expected, African American parents in strong marriages are less negatively influenced by economic pressure than are parents with either a conflicted marriage or no partnership. When the

TABLE 2. SOCIAL STATUS AND BEHAVIORAL VARIATIONS BY STRUCTURE OF BLACK FAMILIES

	Type of Family Structure									Significance Level	
	Strong Marriage			Weak Marriage			Single Parent				
	<i>n</i>	<i>M.</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M.</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> Value	<i>p</i>
Social factors											
Total family income (% < \$30,000)	63	.62	.49	72	.64	.48	153	.92	.28	19.57	.00
Unstable work (%)	68	.29	.46	74	.41	.49	163	.40	.49	1.58	.21
Economic pressure (<i>M</i>)	68	-.27	.73	74	.16	.75	163	.10	.78	8.00	.00
Social relations											
Ever married (%)	68	.97	.17	74	.88	.33	163	.61	.49	24.33	.00
More than one marriage (%)	68	.25	.44	74	.22	.41	163	.12	.33	3.85	.02
Other adult in household (%)	68	.50	.47	74	.41	.49	163	.62	.49	5.64	.00
Kin and friend support	68	9.29	5.39	74	7.66	4.42	163	7.88	4.74	1.99	.14
Parent behavior											
Depressed affect (<i>M</i>)	67	1.56	.47	74	2.26	.73	161	2.03	.67	20.76	.00
Parental efficacy (<i>M</i>)	68	3.31	.36	74	3.17	.44	161	3.23	.45	1.86	.16

TABLE 3. LINKING PARENTAL EFFICACY TO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AMONG BLACK PARENTS BY TYPE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE

Parents	Types of Family Structure					
	Strong Marriage (n = 63)		Weak Marriage (n = 72)		Single Parent (n = 151)	
	Unstandardized	Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized	Unstandardized	Standardized
<i>Measurement coefficients</i>						
Economic pressure						
$\lambda_{y_{11}}$: economic adjustment	1.00	.58	1.00	.53	1.00	.54
$\lambda_{y_{21}}$: felt constraint	1.06	.99	1.06	.90	1.06	.95
Depressed feelings						
$\lambda_{y_{32}}$: depressed affect	1.00	.87	1.00	.95	1.00	.94
Parental efficacy						
$\lambda_{y_{43}}$: Indicator 1	1.00	.81	1.00	.88	1.00	.78
$\lambda_{y_{53}}$: Indicator 2	.63	.76	.63	.77	.63	.72
<i>Structural coefficients</i>						
ϕ_{21} : income and economic instability	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.09	-.14
γ_{11} : income to pressure	-.13	-.30**	-.19	-.49***	-.25	-.44***
γ_{12} : economic instability to pressure	.34	.23**	.32	.24**	.22	.15**
β_{21} : pressure to depressed affect	-.01	-.02	.28	.26*	.22	.24***
β_{31} : pressure to efficacy	-.07	-.11	.01	.01	-.19	-.29***
β_{32} : depressed affect to efficacy	-.18	-.19	-.32	-.45***	-.18	-.25**
<i>Model fit measures</i>						
R ² : pressure		.15		.31		.24
R ² : depressed affect		.00		.07		.06
R ² : efficacy		.05		.20		.18
χ^2_{13}		17.43		15.78		15.15
Probability		.18		.26		.30
Goodness-of-fit index		.936		.942		.971
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index		.862		.874		.939

* $p \leq .10$. ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$.

quality of the partnership is high, economic pressure does not have a negative effect, direct or indirect, on the efficacy beliefs of parents. Also, it does not increase the risk of emotional distress, such as depressed feelings. By contrast, and as expected, economic pressure in conflicted relationships has the predicted indirect negative effect on parents' efficacy beliefs through depressed feelings.

In single-parent households, the adverse effects of economic pressure are expressed directly, as well as indirectly, on beliefs of parental efficacy. The absence of a partner exposes single Black caregivers to greater risk of economic misfortune and pressures than exists for parents in either strong or discordant families. These findings for the single-caregiver subgroup did not change when we focused on mothers only and re-estimated the model. The LISREL analysis shows that we can explain the effects of hardship in single-parent families and weak marriages, but not in strong marriages.

The single-parent households vary greatly on resources that could make a difference in parental effectiveness. Indeed, a good many caregivers in these households feel as effective as parents in strong marriages, but they are more depressed. Does it matter whether another adult, such as an older daughter or the parent's mother, is in the household? Complex households may provide support in childrearing, but they also increase the likelihood of confrontations and actions that undermine authority. What about access to relatives and friends? Does this assistance protect mothers from the adversity of mounting economic hardship?

To explore these questions concerning single mothers, we used the multigroup option of LISREL. We first compared the causal model for the other-adult-present and other-adult-absent households, and then for households that were above and below the median on support from kin and friends. These comparisons did not produce the expected differences between levels of social and

emotional support. The presence of another adult does not insulate parents in single-parent households from the adverse effects of economic pressure. Indeed, the presence of other adults makes no difference in these effects. The availability of kin and friend support does not significantly lessen the adverse direct effects of economic pressure on parental efficacy, when compared with parents who lack such support, and the indirect effect through depressed feelings is not significantly reduced. As such, the total effects of economic pressure (both direct and indirect) are not reliably different under high and low support.

The missing element in these measures of social support is relationship quality. The presence of another adult may bring conflict rather than support, and even support from relatives and friends may be coupled with emotional tensions and conflicts. In this sample of Black families, strong ties protect women in partnerships and their children from the negative impact of economic adversity because they represent quality relationships and emotional support.

Parents' Beliefs about Efficacy and Their Management Strategies

Some parents in the Philadelphia sample believe that they can make a positive difference in their child's behavior and options. However, economic hardship and pressures lessen this belief to some extent, especially when parents foster a depressed outlook. Yet even in hard-pressed, single-parent households, we find parents who continue to believe in their ability as effective parents (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992). With these patterns in mind, we turn to what these confident parents do as parents.

Two types of family strategies apply to activities within the household: the encouragement of competence and working with the child on activities, such as a class project. Two types of strategies also focus on the world outside the household: the involvement of children in outside programs and parent verbal and nonverbal actions that warn the child about dangers and risks. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations of each management strategy and dimension of parental efficacy for Black and White parents, along with their intercorrelations. Black parents are shown above the diagonal and White parents below.

Three general themes emerge from this table. First, parents who engage in management activi-

ties inside the household also tend to be involved in such activities within the neighborhood and larger community. Second, even though Black and White parents are virtually identical on mean scores of parental efficacy, African American parents are slightly more involved in management strategies. This difference is consistent with differing racial views of the community environment and agency responsiveness. Black parents do not generally perceive the community to be responsive to their needs—hence the requirement to do more in terms of promotive and protective activities.

The third and last theme focuses on the connection between parents' efficacy beliefs and the use of management strategies. African American parents who feel efficacious as parents are more likely to be engaged in promotive and preventive strategies, but this is not true for White parents. The latter may be more supported by neighborhood resources when compared to Black parents, no matter what their efficacy beliefs are.

To explore further the link between parents' efficacy beliefs and management strategies, we put this connection to a test in a comparison of measurement models by race. Parental efficacy is measured by its two dimensions, in-home strategy (encouragement and working at home) and out-of-home strategy (outside programs and proactive prevention). To facilitate comparisons by race, Figure 2 presents the standardized parameters within parentheses and above the arrows for the measurement model for African American parents. The values for White parents are presented in conventional form below the arrows.

In-home strategies are a satisfactory latent construct for the strategies of encouragement and working with child; the factor loadings are substantial. The same conclusion applies to out-of-home strategies as a latent construct for outside programs and proactive prevention. However, the factor loadings for the two racial groups point to differences in the salience of particular strategies outside the household. Involvement in outside programs is the most salient strategy for both groups, whereas proactive prevention (parental warning about dangers and risks) loads more highly on this latent construct for Black than for White parents.

The major theme in this analysis concerns the strong link between efficacy beliefs and parents' use of management strategies among African American families, and its insignificance among European American families. Black parents do not differ significantly from White parents in

TABLE 4. CORRELATION MATRIX OF FAMILY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND PARENTAL EFFICACY

Indicators	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	SD	Mean
In-home strategies								
1. Encouragement	—	.49***	.38***	.31***	.27***	.23***	.57	2.30
2. Work with child	.49***	—	.43***	.36***	.33***	.21***	.55	1.88
Out-of-home strategies								
3. Outside programs	.36***	.36***	—	.52***	.27***	.13**	.54	1.87
4. Proactive prevention	.20**	.16*	.40***	—	.27***	.16***	.52	2.41
Parental efficacy								
5. Scale 1	-.02	.03	.06	.02	—	.60***	.57	2.88
6. Scale 2	.19**	-.02	.09	.16	.64***	—	.37	3.59
SD	.54	.53	.56	.49	.54	.37		
Mean	1.99	1.72	1.77	2.24	2.83	3.58		

Note: Correlations for Black parents appear above the diagonal, for White parents, below.
* $p \leq .10$. ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$.

their sense of efficacy, but the efficacious outlook of only Black parents is strongly correlated with the use of promotive strategies.

DISCUSSION

At a time of increasing pressure on the budgets of lower income families, this study addressed three issues: (a) the impact of economic stress on parenting beliefs and behaviors, with emphasis on its effects on a sense of parental efficacy, as mediated by feelings of demoralization or depression; (b) the extent to which types of family structure (strong and weak marriages, and single-parent families) and perceived support modify the effects of hardship and economic pressures; and (c) the link between efficacy beliefs about parenting and the use of family management strategies that minimize risk and maximize developmental opportunities.

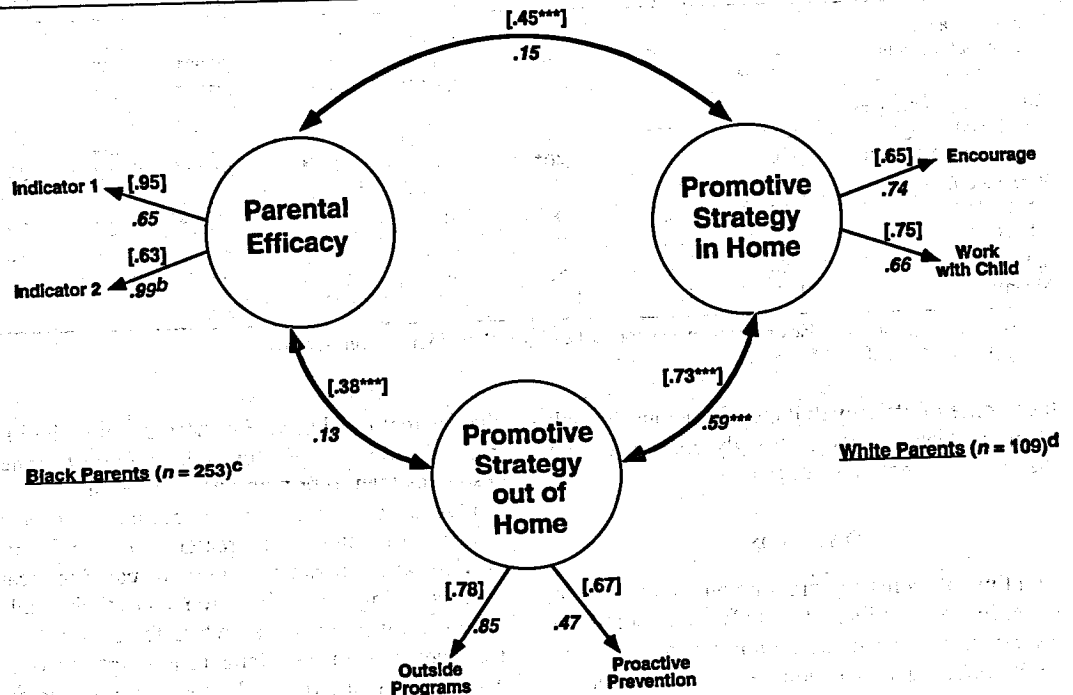
In line with expectations, family hardship and strong economic pressures diminish a sense of parental efficacy among Blacks and Whites, and it does so directly and indirectly through its impact on depressed feelings. Both effects, direct and indirect, were recorded among African American families, while only indirect effects were observed among White parents. Socioeconomic differences between Black and White families may help explain this ethnic difference. African American families in this sample had fewer economic resources to begin with, and therefore any loss of economic resources could have a very direct effect on parents' confidence in their ability to effectively manage their children's experiences.

By contrast, a depressed mood is key for European American parents, who become demoralized under economic pressure and lose confidence in

their parenting ability. For these parents, the impact of economic pressure relates more to inner resources than to bringing up children in a disadvantaged household, perhaps because European American parents have greater access to family services and programs than do African American parents. Using the families' reports of their neighborhoods, it is clear that White families believe that they live in less dangerous neighborhoods and in neighborhoods with more services and social control than do the African American families in the study. One plausible consequence is the realization by White parents that they need not rely upon their own resources in efforts to provide children with positive, growth-promoting experiences outside the household.

We expected that the presence of a supportive person would moderate the adverse effects of economic reverses on emotional distress, and that these effects would be most evident among parents who lacked a supportive partner, as in weak marriages or in single-parent households. Owing to the small number of single White parents, we used the multigroup option of LISREL to test this expectation for African American families. A strong relationship between married partners in the Black sample completely buffers the negative effects of economic hardship on emotional distress and parental efficacy. In discordant and partner-absent families, by contrast, we find parents whose loss of confidence in their parenting ability is more fully mediated by the link between economic pressure and depressed affect. Feelings of personal efficacy stem from the mastery of challenging or difficult situations (Bandura, 1995), and partnership support increases or protects morale under such conditions.

FIGURE 2. A MODEL OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PARENTAL EFFICACY AND TWO TYPES OF PROMOTIVE STRATEGIES, IN AND OUT OF HOUSEHOLD^a



^aOnly standardized parameters for Black parents (above arrows, within brackets) and White parents (below arrows, in italics) are shown.

^bUnstandardized parameter is fixed to value in Figure 1.

^c $\chi^2_6 = 3.37$ ($p = .76$); GFI = .996, AGFI = .985.

^d $\chi^2_7 = 16.90$ ($p = .02$); GFI = .952, AGFI = .857.

*** $p < .01$.

For the Black single-parent household, neither the presence of another adult nor social support from kin and friends protects parents from emotional distress. Over half of the households studied include an extra adult, ranging from a parent's mother to a brother, sister, older daughter, and niece. At least in terms of this study, caregivers in single-parent households are not characterized by the emotional support of partnerships. However, we were unable to index the actual quality of social and emotional support experienced by single parents, and this deficiency may well account for our inability to demonstrate a moderating or buffering effect of relationships with other adults in the household. A small number of the single-caregiver households are headed by grandmothers or other adults, but reanalysis of data that excluded these families did not produce different results.

It is well to keep in mind the histories of these families even though we do not have the longitudinal records to investigate them satisfactorily.

Life histories shape the choices parents make within the limits of their circumstances. Thus a sizeable number of the Black single mothers may have chosen "nonmarriage" as the most effective survival strategy when the alternatives entailed unemployed mates. Other Black mothers undoubtedly came to single status through the breakup of their marriages. One might expect differences in levels of personal competence, social resources, and adaptive strategies between these women. More information on the childhood family experience and early life course of these women would enable us to better understand differences in parental resourcefulness in single-parent households.

What do confident parents do in bringing up their children? In this study, home-based parental strategies feature the use of encouragement and joint activity between parents and children. Involvement in outside activities and prevention activities are elements of an out-of-home strategy

(see Furstenberg et al., 1995). We rely on the parent's or caregiver's report, and confidence in these measurements is buttressed by substantial ethnographic work that was carried out in the pilot stage of the project and after the survey data were collected. A field worker on the project returned to selected families in order to better appraise the validity of the quantitative measurements on parenting. The results of this ethnographic study were encouraging and led to refinements in some measures.

African American parents with a strong sense of efficacy as parents are more involved in promotive activities of one kind or another, but this link is relatively weak among White parents. Why do we find this racial difference? Aggregate level comparisons of the Philadelphia neighborhoods suggest that it may be related to ethnic differences in neighborhood support for effective parenting (Furstenberg et al., in press). These differences indicate that there is less need for active management strategies with adolescents in the White neighborhoods, owing to the presence of local collective support for parents. Under these conditions, even parents who lack confidence in their parenting ability are able to count on neighborhood resources.

Black parents may be less able than White parents to depend on neighborhood help and resources in raising their children. They may also be less able to count on their children's success in getting into positive programs within the community because such programs are less available. Walker and Furstenberg (1994, p. 8) noted that parents who live in neighborhoods where social cohesion is low and poverty is high must make sizable investments of personal energy and ingenuity to ensure a protective community for their children. Black parents in this study are most likely to live in such neighborhoods.

High levels of negative and risky opportunities for youth in African American neighborhoods add appreciably to the challenge encountered by family efforts to minimize risk and promote opportunity for children. Consequently, African American parents must be more vigilant and proactive to ensure that such experiences are available for their children. Michael Rutter (1993) noted that the positive impact of protective factors such as parental efficacy is likely to be demonstrated when the family or the individual is under extreme stress and must use individual resources for coping. We believe that this account applies most readily to the experience of African American

families in inner-city neighborhoods. However, future research is needed in order to investigate this hypothesis directly.

Examination of neighborhood influences is part of the overall objective of the Philadelphia project, but their assessment requires an understanding of family processes in children's lives. As such, we view this investigation as an early report from the field, an account that details our thinking concerning the interplay of socioeconomic forces and parent behavior in one inner-city area. The cross-sectional nature of our data place well-known limitations on what we can infer from family patterns. As a result, plans are underway to reinterview the parents and adolescents. Replication efforts are clearly needed to determine the generalizability of our findings, although some partial replications, as noted, have been obtained in both rural and urban America. Current research on the project is focused on elaborating types of family processes and their effects on children, with emphasis on the multilevel effects of neighborhood and family.

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