The Relationship of Race, Socioeconomic Status And Marital Status to Kin Networks

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Data from a purposive sample of families of elementary school children in New Orleans regarding contact and assistance with extended family members was analyzed to see if race, socioeconomic status or marital status predicted involvement in a kin network. Analysis of variance revealed that black and lower class families had higher levels of contact and black families had higher levels on one of the assistance measures. However when the distance from the extended family was used as a covariate the relationship disappeared. Marital status had no ability to predict.

Awareness of the importance of kin networks to family functioning has increased during the past 25 years. Family researchers and theorists have moved from conceptualizing the isolated nuclear family as the modal American family form to embracing the term "modified extended" (Litwak, 1959) or "modified nuclear" family (Yorburg, 1975) as more descriptive of family unit functioning. This has meant the acknowledgement that kin living outside the household continue to have meaningful relationships, contact, and assistance in many families. As the importance of the extended family has been acknowledged, researchers have become interested in what variables might impact on the likelihood of an individual being part of a kin network. The effects of ethnicity and social class have received a great deal of attention in this regard, and with the rise in the divorce rate and concern over single parent families, marital status has been included.

Background

Socioeconomic Status

Parsons' (1943) postulation that kinship ties were weakest in the middle class with both lower and upper socioeconomic

groups having more extensive involvement with nonnuclear kin has not found consistent support. Among those who challenged Parsons, there has not been unanimity as to whether differences exist along socioeconomic lines. Some have supported Parson's contention that lower socioeconomic groups have stronger kin ties, while others have found middle class families to be more kin oriented, and still others have discovered no differences by SES. This last idea is typified by Sussman (1959) who found that working class families had more kin in the neighborhood, but that middle class families gave and received financial aid more frequently. Other authors (Croog, et al., 1972) found the occurrence of visiting and help during illness was not related to socioeconomic status. Additionally, socioeconomic status did not predict assistance in housing from parents to their grown children (Kennedy & Stokes, 1982). McAdoo (1980) found that middle class black families were as likely to be involved in kin networks as lower class black families.

Among those who found differences by socioeconomic status, Croog and Kong-Ming New (1972) supported their hypothesis that upper social levels (defined as more educated) are more kin oriented than their lower class (less educated) comparisons. Gordon & Noll (1976) discovered a linear relationship between overall kin contact and social class, but middle class families had the highest rates of face-to-face contact. Also, middle class neighborhoods in England had the highest rates of kin interaction with lower class neighborhoods having the least (Irving, 1975).

Race

Initial studies of kin networks usually focused on white families. The black family gained attention when researchers began studying their characteristics in order to refute Moynihan's (1965) contention of overwhelming pathology in these black families. Much of this early work concentrated on the centrality of the extended family (Aschenbrenner, 1973; Billingsley, 1968; Martin and Martin, 1978; Stack, 1974). These authors emphasized the substantial relationships and aid patterns with relatives outside the nuclear family.

The results of comparisons between black and white families in relation to extended family involvement have varied. For ex-

ample, Hays and Mindel (1973) concluded that black families had more interaction with kin even after controlling for socio-economic status, marital status, family size, and geographic mobility. However, Lopata (1973) found that black widows were not more involved in kin networks than their white counter-parts. Angel and Tienda (1982) determined that minorities were more likely to live in extended households, but this appeared to be a strategy for alleviating poverty rather than a choice made because of stronger contacts. Hofferth (1984) found that black families were more likely to live in extended households than white families but the latter were more likely to receive money from extended family. Importantly, when single parent family status is controlled for, the tendency for black families to be living in an extended household disappeared and thus the ob-servations of Hofferth reflect economic need and not stronger kin networks.

Allen (1970) found that blacks were more likely to be in-volved in extended households than whites. However differ-ences in family structure rather than socioeconomic status explained this observation. Specifically, female-headed house-holds which are more common in black families are more likely to be extended, and thus this tendency accounted for the appar-ent racial differences.

Marital Status

A number of authors have suggested that marital status is an important predictor of participation with and support of the extended family. Recently divorced women who were involved in family of origin networks were found to be secure, with a high sense of self-worth, and in no acute distress (McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981). Kin were the primary source of support network members of recently divorced women (Leslie & Grady, 1985). Also, Spicer and Hampe (1975) found that fre-quency of contact with consanguineal relatives stayed stable or increased after divorce. Single, black, middle class mothers were more likely to receive assistance from their kin group than their married counterparts (McAdoo, 1980).

The role of marital status and kin involvement was examined by Shulman (1975) who discovered that singles were least likely to be involved in close relationships with kin, and that formerly

married individuals whether separated, divorced, or widowed were most likely to name kin as significant in their relationships. Also, Rosenberg and Anspach (1973) found that unmarried respondents were more likely to visit with kin than the married.

Summary of Previous Research

Comparisons about the effects of the variables of race, socioeconomic status and marital status among studies have been difficult for several reasons. Definitions of inclusion in a kin network varied depending on the definition of contact. Some authors included only face-to-face contact while others included letters, phone calls, and cards. Similarly, support has been defined as only regular financial support, irregular monetary gifts, or in-kind assistance. Definitions of socioeconomic status and social class have also been inconsistent. Additionally, population samples have varied widely in size and representativeness which limits the generalizability of the findings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether the variables of race, socioeconomic status, and marital status successfully predict the tendency of a family to be part of a kin network. The groups chosen for study were black and white, lower and middle class, and single and married families. Married was defined as living with a partner irrespective of legal status or step-parenting. This definition was used because it is the absence of a co-parent which increases stress on a family.

The hypotheses to be tested were: (1) involvement in a kin network does not vary by race or socioeconomic status, and (2) involvement in a kin network does vary with marital status with single families being more involved in kin networks than two parent families.

Methods

Sample

The data for this study were obtained from a volunteer sample of families of children in selected New Orleans public elementary schools. Data on racial make-up and participation in federally supported free lunch programs were used to choose schools which contained substantial numbers of middle class

and white families in order to have all groups represented in the sample. A purposive sample was necessitated because New Orleans Public schools contain an overwhelming majority of black (87%) and working and lower class families (79.2% of students are eligible for free or reduced school lunch subsidy) (Orleans Parish School Board, 1987).

Letters were distributed to classes in eight elementary schools known to contain families in the targeted populations. Two hundred and forty-seven families volunteered to participate in the study and became the population from which a stratified random sample was obtained. In order to obtain this sample, the volunteer families were telephoned and asked if either or both parents would complete an in-person interview in which the nature of their extended family and their contact and assistance patterns with kin would be explored. At the time of the phone call, screening information regarding race, marital status and socioeconomic status was obtained to attempt equalization of participants in targeted groups. Eight families refused to participate when called; two families failed to keep their appointments, and one cancelled the interview. Sixty-eight families participated in the interview and became the sample for the study.

Instruments

The Kinship Relations Scale (Sussman and Slater, 1972) was used to measure involvement in a kin network. This instrument is a survey questionnaire which elicits information about lineage, location, communication, and mutual aid between kin. Reliability was checked in the authors' samples by resurveying selected initial informants and verifying selected answers with other household members. Both procedures produced substantial agreement.

To administer the Kinship Relations Scale, respondents are asked to name the relatives with whom they have had contact in the last year, where these relatives live, the degree of relationship, the number of telephone calls, visits, letters, the kind of help given and received, and the number of relatives with whom they have had no contact. Four contact measures are derived: The "Telephone Ratio Score" is the number of phone calls summed and divided by the product of the number of relatives

and fifty-two (weeks in a year). This ratio reflects the number of contacts of each kind per relative per week. The "Visiting Ratio Score" and "Letter Ratio Score" were similarly calculated from the number of visits and letters reported. The Total Communication Score was the sum of these three "Scores".

Measures of assistance are obtained by surveying the various kinds of assistance given and received between each family member. The "Score" is the total of the number of kinds of assistance actually given or received, divided by the product of 10 (the total number of kinds of assistance possible) and the number of relatives available. This calculation was performed separately to calculate "Help Received" and "Help Given" which are summed for a "Mutual Aid Score".

Several other important measures are generated by the use of the Kinship Relationship Scale. "Inclusiveness" is the percent of family with whom the respondent family has contact and "Propinquity" is the percent of relatives living in the local area (defined as living in an area accessible within an hour's drive). Propinquity is important since the distance from extended family is related to the kind and frequency of contact.

The Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status (1975) was modified to determine socioeconomic status. This index uses education, occupation, marital status, and sex to determine a score which groups people into one of five occupational categories. For the purposes of this study Hollingshead's five strata were collapsed into two: His two categories of (I) major business and professional (II) medium business and minor professional, and technical are considered to be "middle class" while his categories of (III) skilled craftsmen, clerical, sales workers, (IV) machine operators, semiskilled workers, and (V) unskilled laborers, menial service workers are considered "working class." Hollingshead (1975) compared his scores for occupational groups generated by his index with the prestige scores developed by the National Opinion Research Center in its General Social Survey and the correlation was 0.927.

Data Analysis

The ranges, means, and standard deviations were calculated for each outcome variable and a correlation matrix was generated. Analysis of variance was performed using race, socioeco-

nomic status, and marital status as the grouping variables and dependent variables examined were Propinquity, Inclusiveness, Size of Network, Telephone Ratio Score, Visiting Ratio Score, Letter Ratio Score, Total Communication Score, Help Received, Help Given, and Mutual Aid.

Propinquity had a significant correlation with five of the six outcome measures, and therefore, the data were reanalyzed with Propinquity as a covariate. A Neuman Kuels *post hoc* test of difference between cell means was used to determine differences between groups. Both Size of the Network and Inclusiveness were analyzed to see if they were related to the predictor variables.

Because the cell sizes were slightly unequal, a regression analysis with the grouping variables coded as dummy variables was done to verify the accuracy of the analysis of variance and covariance results. Initially, a simple regression was done with each outcome score as a dependent variable, and each grouping variable as the independent variable. In order to test for the importance of distance, Propinquity was added as an independent variable in the regression equation of those models in which the contribution of the grouping variable was significant, an addition which allowed determination of which variables actually contributed to the significance of the prediction. All analyses of variance and covariance were confirmed by the regression analyses. The positive correlation between the outcome variables mediated against the use of multivariate analysis of variance and covariance.

Results

Family size, contact, and assistance parameters varied widely (See Table 1) from one mother who reported that she had 180 relatives with whom she kept in touch to another who reported that she was the only child of an only child and had a family group of only three. Few of those surveyed communicated with their family members by letter. The positive skewness of the frequency distribution necessitated a logarithmic transformation to secure a more normal distribution.

Because the positive correlation between Size of the Kin Unit, Inclusiveness, and Propinquity could affect the final analysis, these were analyzed as outcome variables in analysis of

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on Outcome Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Maximum	Minimum
Size of network	27.4262	25.9159	180	3
Inclusiveness	0.6710	0.2679	1.0000	0.0680
Propinquity	0.5642	0.3757	1.0000	0.0
Telephone Ratio score	1.1110	1.7669	11.7400	0.0330
Visiting Ratio Score	0.5652	0.7795	0.0945	0.0060
Letter Ratio Score	0.0207	0.0306	0.1117	0.0
Total Communication Score	1.6980	2.4322	15.4290	0.0960
Help Received	0.0843	0.0748	0.4310	0.0
Help Given	0.1034	0.0859	0.4860	0.0
Mutual Aid	0.1890	0.1502	0.9170	0.0110

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Summary Table Propinquity

Source	DF	MS	F	P
Race	1	1.392	13.71	0.000*
SES	1	0.876	8.62	0.005*
Marital Status	1	0.049	0.48	0.492
Race × SES	1	0.488	4.80	0.032*
Race × MS	1	0.053	0.52	0.472
SES × MS	1	0.007	0.07	0.789
Race × SES × MS	1	0.055	0.54	0.465
Error	60	0.102		

variance. The highest correlations were with Propinquity and the outcome variables; the correlation coefficients ranged from 0.397 with the Telephone Ratio Score to 0.167 with the Help Received Score. This correlation accounts for 16% of the variance for telephone contact and might be expected to contribute to the outcome.

Analysis of variance (See Table 2) showed that black families and lower class families had significantly higher scores on Propinquity ($p = 0.000$ and 0.005 respectively) than white and middle class families. Thus black and lower class families have a

Table 3

Telephone Ratio Score

Source	DF	MS	F	P
	Analysis of Variance			
Race	1	0.346	7.52	0.008*
SES	1	0.204	4.44	0.039*
Marital Status	1	0.022	0.48	0.493
Race × SES	1	0.030	0.66	0.419
Race × MS	1	0.036	0.77	0.383
SES × MS	1	0.141	3.06	0.085
Race × SES × MS	1	0.002	0.05	0.824
Error	60	0.046		
	Analysis of Covariance Propinquity as Covariate			
Race	1	0.085	2.04	0.158
SES	1	0.051	1.23	0.272
Marital Status	1	0.039	0.93	0.338
Race × SES	1	0.000	0.01	0.934
Race × MS	1	0.019	0.45	0.507
SES × MS	1	0.127	3.05	0.086
Race × SES × MS	1	0.010	0.24	0.626
Propinquity	1	0.307	7.39	0.009*
Error	59	0.042		

higher proportion of their kin geographiclly accessible. White middle class families had significantly lower scores on Propinquity ($p < 0.05$) than white lower, black lower, and black middle class who did not significantly differ from each other. These white middle class families have a smaller percentage of kin at hand than any of the other groups. The correlations between Size of the Network, and Inclusiveness did not prove to be related to the predictor variables.

To determine the relationship between the predictor variables: race, socioeconomic status, marital status, and involvement with the extended family, their discrimination on any of the seven outcome variables: Telephone Ratio Score, Visiting Ratio Score, Letter Ratio Score, Total Communication Score, Help Received, Help Given, and Mutual Aid was assessed. Analysis of variance showed that both race and socioeconomic status suc-

Table 4

Visiting Ratio Score Summary Tables

Source	DF	MS	F	P
Analysis of Variance				
Race	1	0.121	5.66	0.026*
SES	1	0.108	5.08	0.028*
Marital Status	1	0.009	0.43	0.513
Race × SES	1	0.046	2.17	0.146
Race × MS	1	0.056	2.63	0.110
SES × MS	1	0.069	3.22	0.077
Race × SES × MS	1	0.022	1.01	0.318
Error	60	0.021		
Analysis of Covariance Propinquity as Covariate				
Race	1	0.024	1.24	0.269
SES	1	0.032	1.63	0.207
Marital Status	1	0.004	0.20	0.653
Race × SES	1	0.012	0.59	0.444
Race × MS	1	0.041	2.10	0.153
SES × MS	1	0.062	3.20	0.079
Race × SES × MS	1	0.012	0.64	0.426
Propinquity	1	0.134	6.92	0.011*
Error	59	0.019		

cessfully predicted scores on some of the outcome variables. Marital status had no ability to predict on any of the outcome variables. Specifically, black and lower class families had significantly higher Telephone Ratio Scores than did their white or middle class counterparts (p = 0.008, blacks vs whites, p = 0.039 lower class vs middle class) (See Table 3).

Similarly, black families (p = 0.026) and working class families (p = 0.028) had significantly higher scores on the Visiting Ratio Score by analysis of variance (See Table 4) than white and middle class families.

White middle class and black working class families did not significantly differ from each other in their Letter Ratio Scores but both groups had higher Letter Ratio Scores (p < 0.05) than did either black middle and white working class families. When

Table 5

Total Communication Score Summary Tables

Source	DF	MS	F	P
Analysis of Variance				
Race	1	0.544	9.12	0.004*
SES	1	0.325	5.46	0.022*
Marital Status	1	0.007	0.11	0.740
Race × SES	1	0.072	1.21	0.275
Race × MS	1	0.074	1.24	0.270
SES × MS	1	0.191	3.20	0.079
Race × SES × MS	1	0.007	0.11	0.740
Error	60	0.060		
Analysis of Covariance Propinquity as Covariate				
Race	1	4.204	0.89	0.376
SES	1	3.768	0.71	0.404
Marital Status	1	0.210	0.04	0.843
Race × SES	1	0.916	0.17	0.680
Race × MS	1	6.014	1.13	0.292
SES × MS	1	17.286	3.25	0.077
Race × SES × MS	1	0.634	0.12	0.732
Propinquity	1	16.134	3.03	0.087
Error	59	5.326		

the Total Communication Score was calculated, black and working class families had significantly higher ($p = 0.004$, and $p = 0.022$) scores and thus more communication with extended family members than did white or middle class families. (See Table 5).

In relationship to assistance to and from extended family members, it is only the Help Given Score that differed by race or socioeconomic status. Black families had significantly ($p = 0.037$) higher scores on this measure than did white families (See Table 6).

These results changed dramatically when Propinquity was used as a covariate. In each case the relationships which had been statistically significant in analysis of variance results, became nonsignificant under analysis of covariance (See Tables 3,

Table 6

Help Given Summary Table

Source	DF	MS	F	P
Analysis of Variance				
Race	1	0.00456	4.53	0.037*
SES	1	0.00002	0.02	0.885
Marital Status	1	0.00273	2.71	0.105
Race × SES	1	0.00000	0.00	0.952
Race × MS	1	0.00000	0.00	0.970
SES × MS	1	0.00008	0.08	0.777
Race × SES × MS	1	0.00007	0.07	0.782
Error	60	0.00101		
Analysis of Covariance Propinquity as Covariate				
Race	1	0.00151	1.55	0.219
SES	1	0.00019	0.19	0.661
Marital Status	1	0.00225	2.30	0.134
Race × SES	1	0.00015	0.15	0.701
Race × MS	1	0.00001	0.01	0.910
SES × MS	1	0.00005	0.05	0.818
Race × SES × MS	1	0.00001	0.01	0.905
Propinquity	1	0.00261	2.66	0.108
Error	59	0.00098		

4, 5, 6). Propinquity was the only significant predictor on Telephone Ratio Scores ($p = 0.009$) and Visiting Ratio Scores ($p = 0.011$). There were no successful predictors on the other outcome scores. Thus the results that appeared to be due to race and socioeconomic status were in fact due to the relationship of propinquity with these variables.

Conclusions and Discussion

The results support the first hypothesis that race and socioeconomic status are not related to involvement with extended families. Although black families and working class families had higher scores on telephone contact, visiting, and total communication, after controlling for Propinquity these relationships disappeared.

Propinquity has a significant relationship with race, socio-economic status and the interaction of race and socioeconomic status. Black families, and lower class families in this study have a higher percentage of their extended families living in the local area. The white middle class families who participated have a lower percentage of family members living close by than do the other groups. After controlling for propinquity in the analysis, the previous relationships between race, socioeconomic status, and contact become nonsignificant. It is propinquity that predicts the differences in contact with family rather than race or socioeconomic status.

The second hypothesis, i.e., that single families would have more involvement in a kin network than married families, is not supported with these data. Marital status is not significantly related to any of the outcome variables.

The results related to race are consistent with the researchers who did not find differences in involvement with extended families by race. These data demonstrate that black families have a higher percentage of their kin living within the local area than white families. Failure to appreciate this relationship might lead one to conclude that black families are more involved in kin networks, when distance rather than race, is determining the relationship. When black and white families who have kin in the area are compared differencces in contact do not exist.

Billingsley (1968) first emphasized the extended quality of black family life. This idea contradicts the previously held view that black families are pathological and without strong relation-ships as Frazier (1939) and Moynihan (1965) had espoused. Par-adoxically, emphasizing the existence and strength of black family bonds with extended family led some to presume that black families are more involved with kin than white families. To conclude that black families have meaningful and extensive re-lationships with their extended families does not mean that white families fail to have these relationships.

The results confirm that socioeconomic status is not related to participation in a kin network. In this study, middle class families live further from their relatives than do working class families, and thus they have fewer visits and phone calls. Race and socioeconomic status are interactive variables. White mid-

dle class families are less likely to have kin in the area than black middle or white or black working class families. It is likely that they have the fewest kin available because they are the most mobile. Middle class whites tend to be in occupational cate- gories that are more likely to be placed through national recruit- ing networks. They have more financial assets than the other groups and thus have more mobility for job placement or per- sonal preference than the other groups. If they are native to the area, they are more likely to have relatives who have moved for jobs or personal preference.

White middle class families in the study have an average of 21.3% (SD ± 26.9) of their relatives living in the local area; data which suggest much diversity in the number of family locally available to white middle class families. This gives support to Parson's contention that middle class families live relatively geo- graphically isolated from their extended families but kin are available as suggested by other researchers. Importantly, these families are not emotionally isolated from their extended fami- lies as suggested by Parsons: they maintained contact by phone and visited with their geographically separate families. This pat- tern of contact substantiates the revisionist position that middle class families are not isolated from their extended families and do maintain contact and assistance patterns.

Assistance patterns are the least likely to be affected by the predictor variables or distance. Black families have significantly higher scores on help given than white families before control- ling for propinquity. However this difference disappears when the data were controlled for the distancce variable. Since assis- tance includes providing transportation, helping with house- hold chores, and babysitting, it is reasonable to assume that distance would be important. The lesser importance than was anticipated is due, perhaps, to families living at a distance find- ing other ways to give assistance in order to compensate for being unable to help in ways which require proximity.

These data do not support the concept that contact with the extended family increases after divorce. This is difficult to in- terpret. Few data are available to assess the variable of marital status. Some of the studies were concerned with behavior shortly after divorce (Spicer and Hampe, 1975, and Leslie & Grady,

1985). The current study does not look at families immediately after divorce but single families (whether divorced or never-married). It is possible that contact with and assistance from the extended family may increase immediately after divorce and then diminish as the trauma of divorce subsides and other support networks are formed. It is also possible that the lack of relationship between marital status and extended family contact is an artifact of the local area, or this particular sample.

The interaction of race, socioeconomic status, and marital status do not predict scores on the help received variable. This contrasts to the finding that black single middle class mothers were more likely to receive assistance from their kin than their married counterparts (McAdoo, 1980). Again, this lack of agreement of outcomes might be a sample artifact due to the idiosyncratic differences between McAddo's Washington, D.C. metropolitan sample and this New Orleans sample.

On the basis of this study, it can be concluded that race, socioeconomic status, and marital status are not related to a family's likelihood of being involved in a kin network. Distance is the variable most likely to predict frequency of visiting and telephone contact. It is obvious that it is easier to visit relatives that live in the local area and since it is cheaper to make local phone calls, geographically close families are more likely to have frequent contact by phone.

Black families and working class families are more likely to have a high percentage of their family living in the local area than white middle class families. This results in the more frequent visiting between black and lower class families. Assistance between families is less likely to be affected by distance than visiting. Financial assistance, and advice giving are two kinds of help easily transmitted across distance, which allows families geographically separate to aid kin.

Thus the likelihood of a family being involved in a kin network is not race, socioeconomic status, or marital status. Families in all groups have both high and low scores on contact. Although distance is highly predictive of contact frequency, it does not explain what determines choices when families are close at hand.

This study does not address the affective component of in-

volvement. The comments of families who have high contact
with relatives reflected that they found it both rewarding and
stressful. Those who live a distance from relatives were likely
to comment on feeling as if they wished they had family closer.
The affective component is an important variable to study in the
future. What are the emotional components that determine a
family's propensity to have extensive involvement in a kin net-
work? Are they motivated by caring and concern, or out of guilt
and obligation? These would seem to be much more important
in determining involvement in a kin network than race, socio-
economic status, or marital status and must be the object of
further studies.

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