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Racial and Ethnic Differences in Extended Family, Friendship, Fictive Kin, and Congregational Informal Support Networks

This study examined differences in kin and nonkin networks among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks (Black Caribbeans), and non-Hispanic Whites. Data are taken from the National Survey of American Life, a nationally representative study of African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites. Selected measures of informal support from family, friendship, fictive kin, and congregation/ church networks were utilized. African Americans were more involved in congregation networks, whereas non-Hispanic Whites were more involved in friendship networks. African Americans were more likely to give support to extended family members and to have daily interaction with family members. African Americans and

Black Caribbeans had larger fictive kin networks than non-Hispanic Whites, but non-Hispanic Whites with fictive kin received support from them more frequently than African Americans and Black Caribbeans. The discussion notes the importance of examining kin and nonkin networks, as well as investigating ethnic differences within the Black American population.

Involvement with kin and nonkin is an essential component of daily life for the vast majority of Americans. Family and friendship support networks are important for coping with the ongoing stresses of daily life (e.g., Benin & Keith, 1995), providing a place to live when confronting homelessness (Taylor, Chatters, & Celious, 2003), and in coping with physical and mental health problems (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000; Lincoln, 2000). This study explores differences between African Americans, non-Hispanic Whites, and Caribbean Blacks (Black Caribbeans) on several measures of family, friendship, fictive kin, and religious congregation-based informal support networks, using data from the National Survey of American Life. The literature review begins with a discussion of the family solidarity model as the theoretical perspective framing our analysis of

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kin and nonkin relations and social support. This is followed by a review of research findings on Black – White differences in family and nonkin support networks and a review of available information on informal support networks within the Caribbean Black population in the United States. This article concludes with a description of the focus and goals of this investigation.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY AND NONKIN RELATIONS: FAMILY SOLIDARITY MODEL

The conceptual framework guiding this study is the family solidarity model (McChesney & Bengtson, 1988). As the name suggests, the family solidarity model views the connections and bonds between members as an important and fundamental organizing feature of the family. The family solidarity model further states that understanding family functioning in a particular domain (such as support provision) requires an appreciation for other factors that characterize family members' attitudes, behaviors, and the qualitative aspects of family relationships (e.g., expressed closeness, interactions). The family solidarity model (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002; Nye & Rushing, 1969) identifies a set of dimensions that characterize family relations that focus on family interactions, affect (e.g., feelings of closeness to family), and behaviors (receiving and giving support). The family solidarity model moves beyond an exclusive focus on enacted support exchanges (e.g., receiving and giving support) which are often narrowly defined (i.e., monetary exchanges) and constrained by factors such as poverty and geographic distance. Instead, family dimensions such as interaction and affection are incorporated that are also relevant and important in characterizing family relationships. Further, despite some debate in the literature, the family solidarity paradigm also incorporates assessments of conflict within families (see Bengtson et al., 2002; Connidis & McMullin, 2002).

The family solidarity model is also well suited for examining nonkin networks. For instance, research on congregation support networks among Blacks and Whites identifies the presence of several dimensions including frequency of interaction with church members, degree of affection for church members, and frequency of negative interactions with church members, in addition to frequency of giving

and receiving support (Krause, 2002; Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). The family solidarity paradigm thus allows for an assessment of social support network structure and function across a diverse set of dimensions within kin and nonkin networks. Consequently, the family solidarity model is appropriate for examining race and ethnic differences in various dimensions of family, friendship, fictive kin, and congregational support networks.

Family Support Networks

Research on Black – White differences for receipt of support from family members has yielded mixed results that can be characterized by three general collections of findings (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). One set of studies indicates that Blacks are more likely than Whites to give and receive assistance from their support networks (e.g., Benin & Keith, 1995; Gerstel & Gallager, 1994; Johnson & Barer, 1995). This finding was especially evident in research studies conducted in the 1980s through the early 1990s (e.g., Hatch, 1991; Hogan, Hao, & Parish, 1990; Mutran, 1985). Another set of studies indicates that Whites are more likely to give and receive support than Blacks (e.g., Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993; Jayakody, 1998). Finally, a third set of studies found either no Black – White differences in kin support networks or that depending on the measure used, Blacks or Whites had greater levels of involvement in kin network (Eggebean, 1992; Kim & McKenry, 1998; Peek, Coward, & Peek, 2000; Peek & O'Neill, 2001; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004, December; Silverstein & Waite, 1993). A related body of research on caregiving for older adults with dementia indicates that though African American caregivers report more positive appraisals of caregiving than Whites, there are no significant differences in the amount of informal support received (Dilworth-Anderson, Williams, & Gibson, 2002).

Discrepant findings for Black – White differences in support networks are attributable to several factors (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004), including differences in (a) the age of the populations studied (e.g., young mothers, adults, elderly adults), (b) the life circumstances of study populations (e.g., poverty, single mothers), (c) whether support was examined in relation to crisis versus commonplace situations (e.g., emergencies, serious health problems,

caregiving), (d) the types of support examined (e.g., instrumental, emotional), and (e) the specific kin groups examined (e.g., parents, adult children, grandparent, siblings, other relatives). Finally, a variety of methodological issues in this literature include differences in the conceptualization and measurement of social support (see Cohen et al., 2000). The goal of this study is to provide insight into Black–White differences in family support by examining several aspects of these support networks, in addition to receiving and providing assistance (enacted support). Further, our analysis also focuses on Black–White differences in nonkinship support networks.

Friendship, Fictive Kin, and Congregation Support Networks

Friendship Networks. Surprisingly little research focuses on racial differences in friendship networks, or exclusively on African American friendships. Available findings on racial differences are mixed, but the preponderance of evidence indicates that Whites are more involved in friendship networks than are African Americans. This includes findings from a study involving midlife women (Waite & Harrison, 1992) and a nonprobability sample of women residing in Boston (Griffin, Amodeo, Clay, Fassler, & Ellis, 2006). Further, research on support network composition indicates that in comparison to Whites, African Americans have more kin than friends in their networks (Ajrouch, Antonucci, & Janevic, 2001; Keith, Kim, & Schafer, 2000; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998) and rely more on kin-centered networks (Peek et al., 2000; Perry & Johnson, 1994).

Fictive Kin Networks. Ethnographic research documents that fictive kin are important members of the informal networks of African American families (see review by Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994). *Fictive kin* are defined as individuals who are unrelated by either blood or marriage but regard one another in kinship terms (Sussman, 1976). Fictive kin are accorded many of the same rights and statuses as family members and are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family (Chatters et al., 1994). Ethnographic research identifies different types of fictive kin including peer group members among adolescents, godparents, and church members (Chatters et al., 1994).

For instance, people frequently describe members of church networks using kinship terms in which fellow congregation members are called ''Brother'' or ''Sister'' and church members are regarded as one's ''church family'' (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Consequently, in some instances, members of fictive kin networks and congregational support networks may overlap.

The majority of fictive kin research is based on small ethnographic studies. Evidence from qualitative studies suggests that non-Hispanic Whites engage in fictive kin relationships. However, because very few studies examine fictive kin networks within this group, this issue has yet to be fully explored (Chatters et al., 1994; also see Mac Rae, 1992). To our knowledge this study is the first investigation of Black–White differences in fictive kin networks.

Congregation Support Networks. A large body of research documents the prominent role of religion and churches in the lives of African Americans (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). Despite the importance of religion to African Americans and Whites, only a handful of studies examine the role of congregation members in informal support networks. This work documents that congregation members are an important source of informal assistance, and the majority of African Americans indicate that they receive some level of assistance from church members (Taylor et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2005). For individuals who do not have family or who are estranged from their family, church members are an alternative source of assistance (Chatters, Taylor, Lincoln, & Schroepfer, 2002). Congregation members provide similar types of aid that family and friends provide, such as financial assistance, advice and companionship, as well as assistance in addressing spiritual and moral issues. Finally, in the only major race-comparative study of support from congregation members, Krause (2002) found that among elderly adults, Blacks were more involved in activities with their church networks and significantly more likely than Whites to give and receive assistance from church members.

Caribbean Blacks in the United States

Recent growth in the size of Black immigrant populations from Caribbean countries underscores the significant, but often unrecognized, ethnic group variation in the Black

American population. Caribbean Blacks make up fully one fourth of the Black population in New York, Boston, and Nassau-Suffolk (NY); more than 30% of Blacks in Miami and West Palm Beach-Boca Raton (FL); and 44% of Blacks in Fort Lauderdale (Logan & Deane, 2003, Table 2). Despite this growth, race and ethnicity are traditionally viewed as interchangeable for Black Americans. As a consequence, ethnic heterogeneity within the Black racial category remains largely unexplored, particularly in relation to Caribbean Blacks. The use of the broad term *Black American* conceals this ethnically defined subgroup and differences related to their ethnicity, nationality, and life circumstances (Logan & Deane, 2003).

Research on Black Caribbeans in the United States indicates that extended families are the primary social unit (Basch, 2001). One of the unique aspects of Black Caribbean extended families is that they are often geographically dispersed across several countries or transnational (Basch, 2001; Foner, 2005). As such, it is common for relatives to reside in locales as far-flung as Brooklyn (NY), London, and the country of origin. Kin and nonkin informal networks are a critical component of the migration process for Caribbean Blacks (Basch, 2001; Kasinitz, Waters, Mollenkopf, & Anil, 2002). Family members rely on extended kin for help in saving money to launch migrations and to care for property and personal belongings while the migrant is away. Once in the United States, Black Caribbean immigrants co-reside with sponsors and are provided a variety of aid including housing and meals, clothing (especially items like winter apparel that are not needed in the Caribbean), public transportation passes, and assistance in securing employment (Bashi, 2007).

Focus of the Present Study

This study examines differences between African Americans, non-Hispanic Whites, and Caribbean Blacks in several measures of family, friendship, fictive kin, and religious congregation-based informal support networks. The analysis is based on the National Survey of American Life, a nationally representative sample of these three race/ethnic groups. This analysis has several advantages over previous efforts. First, this study's inclusion of Black Caribbeans, a small but significant portion of

the Black population, is responsive to family researchers' call to explore the ethnic diversity of the Black population in the United States (Batson, Qian, & Litcher, 2006). Second, the study not only investigates family support networks but also examines several nonkin networks. Third, this is one of only a handful of survey-based studies to examine fictive kin networks and the first to examine Black–White differences in those networks. Fourth, the study investigates congregation support networks, an underexamined source of assistance in the social support literature.

Fifth, the receipt and provision of assistance to network members is explored, which adds to the limited research on support provision especially in relation to Black–White differences (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Finally, because this study uses the family solidarity model to examine family and nonkin networks, it is able to explore distinct dimensions of these networks (e.g., interaction, affection, support), as well as negative interaction (i.e., criticism, burden), an area with little research on racial differences (Krause, 2006, p. 195). Further, examining support relationships in relation to distinct population groups and using a common set of sociodemographic correlates helps to clarify the nature of group differences.

METHOD

Sample

The National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century (NSAL) was collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (Jackson et al., 2004). The field work for the study was completed by the Institute for Social Research's Survey Research Center in cooperation with the Program for Research on Black Americans. A total of 6,082 interviews were conducted with persons age 18 or older, including 3,570 African Americans, 891 non-Hispanic Whites, and 1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent. The NSAL includes the first major probability sample of Caribbean Blacks ever conducted. For the purposes of this study, *Caribbean Blacks* are defined as persons who trace their ethnic heritage to a Caribbean country but who now reside in the United States, are racially classified as Black, and who are English speaking (but may also speak another language). The geographic

distribution of the NSAL sample reflects the geographic distribution of African Americans and Black Caribbeans. African Americans are mostly located in the South and Northeast and North Central regions, and Black Caribbeans are mostly located in the Northeast and some areas in the South (i.e., Florida).

The NSAL sample has a national multi-stage probability design with an overall response rate of 72.3%. Respondents were compensated for their time. The data collection was conducted from 2001 to 2003. Response rates for individual subgroups were 70.7% for African Americans, 77.7% for Caribbean Blacks, and 69.7% for non-Hispanic Whites. Final response rates for the NSAL two-phase sample designs were computed using the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR; 2006) guidelines (for Response Rate 3; see Heeringa et al., 2004; Jackson et al., 2004 for a more detailed discussion of the NSAL sample).

Measures

Dependent Variables. In total, there were 24 dependent variables representing selected measures of involvement in extended family, friendship, fictive kin, and congregational informal social support networks. There were eight dependent variables each for family and congregational support networks and an abbreviated set of variables regarding friends and fictive kin. The exact question wordings of these items and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. A portion of respondents, when asked how often they receive assistance from a specific group, volunteered that they have never needed assistance. Five percent (5.16%) of respondents volunteered that they never needed help from family members, 6.10% volunteered that they never needed help from friends, 5.54% volunteered that they never needed help from fictive kin, and 17.76% of respondents volunteered that they never needed help from church members. Previous analyses indicate that persons who report that they have never needed assistance are conceptually and empirically distinct from respondents who either receive assistance or who indicate that they do not receive help (Taylor, 1990; Taylor & Chatters, 1988). Consequently, those who volunteered that they never needed help were excluded from the present analyses.

Two items, emotional support and negative interaction, were assessed for family and congregation members using an index of three items. Emotional Support from Family generated a Cronbach's alpha of .75; Emotional Support from Congregation Members generated a Cronbach's alpha of .76. Negative Interaction with Family produced a Cronbach's alpha of .73; Negative Interaction with Congregation Members produced a Cronbach's alpha of .72.

The congregational support items were not asked of respondents who attended religious services less than once a year. Eighteen percent of African Americans (18.2%), 20.91% of Black Caribbeans, and 28.08% of non-Hispanic Whites indicated that they attended religious services less than once per year. Finally, respondents who indicated that they did not have fictive kin (10.8% of respondents) were not asked the question concerning frequency of support from fictive kin.

Independent Variables. Several socioeconomic status and demographic factors were utilized as independent variables: education, income, material hardship, public assistance, age, gender, marital status, parental status, number of children age 12 and younger in the household, number of adolescents (age 13 – 17) in the household, and region. Education and income were measured continuously. Missing data for family income were imputed for 773 cases (12.7% of the NSAL sample). Missing data for education were imputed for 74 cases. Imputations were completed using Answer Tree in SPSS (version 15). Imputations were conducted using an iterative regression-based multiple imputation approach incorporating information about age, sex, region, race, employment status, marital status, home ownership, and nativity of household residents. Material hardship is a summary score comprising seven items assessing whether respondents could meet basic expenses, pay full rent or mortgage, pay full utilities, had utilities disconnected, had telephone disconnected, were evicted for nonpayment, or could not afford leisure activities in the past 12 months. A higher score on this item indicates higher levels of economic hardship (Cronbach's alpha = .76). Public assistance was measured by the question, ''Are you (or your family) currently receiving public assistance (i.e., welfare, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, General Assistance, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)?''

Table 1. *Question Wording and Descriptive Information for the Indicators of Informal Social Support Network Involvement*

Variable		Range	Mean	SE
Number of family helpers	How many people in your family would help you out if you needed help?	0 – 97	8.5	0.19
Family support received	How often do people in your family—including children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, in-laws and so on—help you out?	1 – 4	2.81	0.03
Family support given	How often do you help out people in your family—including children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, in-laws and so on?	1 – 4	3.21	0.02
Family contact	How often do you see, write or talk on the telephone with family or relatives who do not live with you?	1 – 7	6.05	0.03
Family daily contact	Contrasts people who have contact with family nearly every day with those who say less than nearly every day.	0 – 1	0.45	0.01
Closeness to family	How close do you feel towards your family members?	1 – 4	3.63	0.02
Family emotional support	How often do your family members (a) make you feel loved and cared for? (b) listen to your problems? and (c) express interest and concern in your well-being?''	1 – 4	3.27	0.02
Family negative interaction	Other than your (spouse/partner) how often do your family members: (a) make too many demands on you? (b) criticize you and the things you do? and (c) try to take advantage of you?	1 – 4	1.78	0.02
Friendship contact	How often do you see, write or talk on the telephone with your friends?	1 – 7	5.72	0.04
Friendship daily contact	Contrasts people who have contact with friends nearly every day with those who say less than nearly every day.	0 – 1	0.39	0.01
Friendship support received	How often do your friends help you out?	1 – 4	2.61	0.02
Friendship support given	How often do you help out your friends?	1 – 4	2.84	0.01
Closeness to friends	How close do you feel towards your friends?	1 – 4	3.32	0.01
Number of fictive kin	How many people are close to your family who are not really blood related or marriage related but who are treated just like a relative?	0 – 100	7.54	0.23
Has fictive kin	Contrasts people who do not have any fictive kin with those who have at least one fictive kin.	0 – 1	0.87	0.01
Fictive kin support received	How often (do they/that person) help you out?	1 – 4	2.75	0.03
Number of congregation helpers	How many people in your church (place of worship) would help you out if you needed help?	0 – 97	18.6	0.67
Congregation member contact	How often do you see, write or talk on the telephone with people in your church (place of worship)?	1 – 7	3.54	0.64
Congregation member daily contact	Contrasts those who have contact with people in their church nearly every day with those who say less than nearly every day.	0 – 1	0.18	0.01
Congregation support received	How often do people in your church (place of worship) help you out?	1 – 4	2.38	0.04
Congregation support given	How often do you help out people in your church (place of worship)?	1 – 4	2.53	0.02
Closeness to congregation members	How close do you feel towards people in your church (place of worship)?	1 – 4	2.84	0.03
Emotional support from congregation	How often do people in your church (place of worship): (a) make you feel loved and cared for? (b) listen to your problems? and (c) express interest and concern in your well-being?''	1 – 4	2.91	0.03
Negative interaction congregation	How often do people in your church (place of worship): (a) make too many demands on you? (b) criticize you and the things you do? and (c) try to take advantage of you?	1 – 4	1.44	0.01

Characteristics of the Sample

African Americans make up 58.91% of the sample, non-Hispanic Whites make up 14.7% of the sample, and Black Caribbeans make up the remaining 26.39%. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 94 ($M = 43.57$, SE = .69), and a slight majority were women (54.13%). Forty percent of the respondents were married (40.25%), one fourth had never been married (26.81%), 1 in 10 were divorced (12.31%), and the remainder were separated, widowed, or living with a partner. Seven out of 10 respondents (70.3%) were parents, 27.9% of respondents had a child age 12 or younger living in their household, and 17.4% of respondents had an adolescent (13 – 17) living in their household. The mean number of children in the household is .49 (SE = .03) and the mean number of adolescents in the household is .23 (SE = .01). Slightly more than one half (54.48%) of the sample reside in the South. With regard to socioeconomic status, the average imputed family income was $42,418 (SE = 2059), and the average number of years of education was 12.89 (SE =.156). The range of scores for material hardship was 0 to 7, and the mean was .77 (SE = .03). One in 20 respondents (4.4%) was currently receiving welfare or some other form of public assistance.

Analysis Strategy

Regression analyses were conducted to examine race and ethnic differences in informal support networks controlling for sociodemographic characteristics. Logistic regression was used with the four dichotomous dependent variables (daily family contact, daily friend contact, daily contact with a congregation member, and have fictive kin); linear regression was used with the two emotional support and two negative interaction variables; negative binomial regression was used with the count variables (number of family helpers, number of congregational helpers, and size of the fictive kin network). Ordered logit regression was used for the remaining dependent variables. Odds ratio (OR) estimates and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) are presented in addition to the regression coefficients for logistic and ordered logit analysis. For the negative binomial analysis, incidence rate ratios and 95% CIs are presented in addition to the regression coefficients. Two sets of regressions are conducted in which race/ethnicity is represented by a set of dummy variables. In the first, African American is used as the excluded or comparison category, whereas in the second, Black Caribbean is the excluded or comparison category. All of the analyses incorporate the sample's race adjusted weights. Weights in the NSAL data account for unequal probabilities of selection, nonresponse, and poststratification such that respondents are weighted to their numbers and proportions in the full population (Heeringa et al., 2004). In addition, all analyses were conducted using STATA 10 which uses the Taylor expansion technique for calculating the complex-design – based estimates of variance (Lee & Forthofer, 2006). This was done to correct for the fact that most statistics are based on the assumption of a simple random sample but the NSAL (like most national probability samples) has a complex multistage sample design. Consequently, not adjusting for the complex design in the NSAL would lead to biased and misleading results (Lee & Forthofer, 2006).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the regression coefficients for the effects of race/ethnicity on the informal social support variables. Race/ethnicity is represented by a dummy variable with African Americans as the excluded category in regression results reported in Column 1; Black Caribbeans are designated as the excluded category in regression results reported in Column 2. For each dependent variable, the regression models assess the impact of race/ethnicity, while controlling for the effects of sociodemographic factors (i.e., age, gender, marital status, education, family income, parental status, number of children in the household, number of adolescents in the household, material hardship, public assistance, and region).

Family Network

There were no significant differences between African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites for frequency of receiving support from family, frequency of emotional support, frequency of negative interaction, degree of subjective family closeness, and the number of family members who would provide assistance if needed. African Americans reported significantly more frequent contact with

Table 2. *Race and Ethnic Differences in Involvement in Informal Social Support Networks*

	African Americans Excluded Category			Black Caribbeans Excluded Category		
	OR (95% CI)	b (SE)		OR (95% CI)	b (SE)	N
Family Network						
# of family helpers						
Black Caribbeans	.93 [.76, 1.14]	−.069 (.10)	African Americans	1.07 [.88, 1.31]	.069 (.10)	5,838
Whites	.98 [.90, 1.07]	−.016 (.04)	Whites	1.05 [.85, 1.30]	.053 (.11)	
Family support received						
Black Caribbeans	.94 [.71, 1.23]	−.064 (.14)	African Americans	1.07 [.82, 1.40]	.064 (.14)	5,638
Whites	1.05 [.86, 1.28]	.049 (.10)	Whites	1.12 [.80, 1.56]	.113 (.17)	
Family support given						
Black Caribbeans	.87 [.67, 1.13]	−.138 (.13)	African Americans	1.14 [.88, 1.49]	.138 (.13)	5,827
Whites	.76 [.63, .93]**	−.270 (.10)**	Whites	.88 [.62, 1.23]	−.132 (.17)	
Family contact						
Black Caribbeans	.69 [.51, .91]*	−.377 (.14)*	African Americans	1.45 [1.09, 1.94]*	.377 (.14)*	5,914
Whites	.86 [.71, 1.06]	−.143 (.10)	Whites	1.26 [.88, 1.80]	.233 (.18)	
Family daily contact						
Black Caribbeans	.68 [.50, .95]*	−.374 (.16)*	African Americans	1.45 [1.05, 2.00]*	.374 (.16)*	5,914
Whites	.76 [.60, .96]*	−.268 (.12)*	Whites	1.11 [.74, 1.67]	.107 (.20)	
Closeness to family						
Black Caribbeans	1.07 [.73, 1.58]	.075 (.19)	African Americans	.93 [.63, 1.35]	−.075 (.19)	5,910
Whites	.82 [.59, 1.15]	−.196 (.17)	Whites	.76 [.45, 1.29]	−.272 (.26)	
Family emotional support						
Black Caribbeans	NA	.025 (.05)	African Americans	NA	−.025 (.05)	5,908
Whites	NA	.062 (.04)	Whites	NA	.036 (.06)	
Family negative interaction						
Black Caribbeans	NA	.042 (.07)	African Americans	NA	−.042 (.07)	5,912
Whites	NA	−.053 (.03)	Whites	NA	−.095 (.07)	
Friendship Network						
Friendship contact						
Black Caribbeans	1.03 [.78, 1.37]	.035 (.14)	African Americans	.97 [.73, 1.28]	−.035 (.14)	5,948
Whites	1.19 [1.06, 1.34]**	.174 (.06)**	Whites	1.15 [.87, 1.52]	.140 (.14)	
Daily friendship contact						
Black Caribbeans	.91 [.67, 1.23]	−.096 (.15)	African Americans	1.10 [.81, 1.49]	.096 (.15)	5,948
Whites	1.09 [.93, 1.29]	.088 (.08)	Whites	1.20 [.88, 1.63]	.184 (.15)	
Friendship support received						
Black Caribbeans	1.11 [.91, 1.38]	.112 (.11)	African Americans	.89 [.72, 1.10]	−.112 (.11)	5,472
Whites	1.45 [1.25, 1.67]***	.369 (.07)***	Whites	1.29 [1.03, 1.61]*	.257 (.11)*	
Friendship support given						
Black Caribbeans	1.12 [.89, 1.41]	.116 (.11)	African Americans	.89 [.71, 1.13]	−.116 (.11)	5,689
Whites	1.29 [1.14, 1.48]***	.262 (.07)***	Whites	1.15 [.94, 1.41]	.145 (.10)	
Closeness to friends						
Black Caribbeans	1.02 [.72, 1.44]	.019 (.17)	African Americans	.98 [.69, 1.38]	−.019 (.17)	5,806
Whites	1.01 [.88, 1.16]	.009 (.08)	Whites	.99 [.71, 1.38]	−.010 (.17)	
Fictive Kin						
Has fictive kin						
Black Caribbeans	.90 [.58, 1.39]	−.107 (.22)	African Americans	1.11 [.72, 1.72]	.107 (.22)	5,806
Whites	.46 [.36, .59]***	−.771 (.13)***	Whites	.51 [.32, .83]**	−.66. (24)**	

Table 2. *Continued*

	African Americans Excluded Category			Black Caribbeans Excluded Category		
	OR (95% CI)	*b* (SE)		OR (95% CI)	*b* (SE)	*N*
Number of fictive kin						
Black Caribbeans	1.12 [.78, 1.63]	.117 (.18)	African Americans	.89 [.61, 1.29]	−.117 (.18)	5,806
Whites	.67 [.60, .75]***	−.400 (.05)***	Whites	.60 [.40, .88]**	−.517 (.20)**	
Fictive kin support received						
Black Caribbeans	1.09 [.86, 1.40]	.090 (.12)	African Americans	.91 [.71, 1.17]	−.090 (.12)	4,849
Whites	1.48 [1.22, 1.77]***	.397 (.09)***	Whites	1.36 [1.02, 1.79]*	.304 (.14)*	
Congregation Networks						
Number of congregation helpers						
Black Caribbeans	.91 [.76, 1.10]	−.092 (.09)	African Americans	1.10 [.91, 1.38]	.092 (.09)	4,493
Whites	1.12 [.98, 1.28]	.116 (.07)	Whites	1.23 [.95, 1.59]	.208 (.13)	
Congregation member contact						
Black Caribbeans	.83 [.69, 1.02]	−.176 (.10)	African Americans	1.19 [.69, 1.22]	.176 (.10)	4,817
Whites	.71 [.52, .97]*	−.349 (.16)*	Whites	.84 [.59, 1.81]	−.173 (.17)	
Congregation member daily contact						
Black Caribbeans	.82 [.59, 1.15]	−.195 (.17)	African Americans	1.21 [.87, 1.70]	.195 (.17)	4,817
Whites	.85 [.59, 1.15]	−.161 (.19)	Whites	1.03 [.66, 1.62]	.034 (.23)	
Congregation support received						
Black Caribbeans	.78 [.57, 1.07]	−.248 (.16)	African Americans	1.28 [.93, 1.76]	.248 (.16)	3,753
Whites	.92 [.72, 1.17]	−.083 (.12)	Whites	1.17 [.82, 1.68]	.165 (.18)	
Congregation support given						
Black Caribbeans	.79 [.64, .97]*	−.228 (.10)*	African Americans	1.27 [1.03, 1.56]*	.228 (.10)*	4,518
Whites	.63 [.52, .77]***	−.455 (.10)***	Whites	.80 [.63, 1.03]	−.216 (.12)	
Closeness to congregation members						
Black Caribbeans	.81 [.61, 1.09]	−.206 (.15)	African Americans	1.23 [.92, 1.64]	.206 (.15)	4,810
Whites	.52 [.39, 0.69]***	−.655 (.14)***	Whites	.64 [.45, .91]*	−.448 (.17)*	
Emotional support from congregation						
Black Caribbeans	NA	−.143 (.06)**	African Americans	NA	.143 (.06)**	4,771
Whites	NA	−.079 (.06)	Whites	NA	.06 (.09)	
Negative interaction congregation						
Black Caribbeans	NA	−.088 (.03)***	African Americans	NA	.088. (03)***	4,745
Whites	NA	−.122 (.03)***	Whites	NA	−.034 (.14)	

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error.

Multivariate analyses control for the effects of age, gender, marital status, education, imputed family income, material hardship, current welfare status, parental status, number of children in the household, number of adolescents in the household, and region.

Logistic regression was used with the dichotomous dependent variables (family daily contact, friendship daily contact, congregation member daily contact, and has fictive kin); negative binomial regression was used with number of family and congregation helpers as well as number of fictive kin; linear regression was used with the measures of emotional support and negative interaction; ordered regression was used with the remaining measures of informal support network involvement. For the negative binomial regressions, incidence rate ratios are reported instead of odds ratios.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

family members than Black Caribbeans and were more likely to have daily interaction with family members than Black Caribbeans and non-Hispanic Whites. African Americans also reported that they gave help to family members more often than non-Hispanic Whites.

Friendship Network

Several significant race and ethic differences were noted for the friendship network variables. Non-Hispanic Whites interacted with their friends more frequently and gave support to their friends more frequently than African Americans. Additionally, non-Hispanic Whites received help from their friends more frequently than African Americans and Black Caribbeans. There were no significant differences between African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Hispanic Whites in the level of subjective closeness to friends and reports of daily interaction with friends.

Fictive Kin Network

Several significant differences in involvement with fictive kin were found. African Americans and Black Caribbeans were more likely to have fictive kin than non-Hispanic Whites. African Americans and Black Caribbeans also reported having a significantly larger number of fictive kin than did non-Hispanic Whites. There were no significant differences between African Americans and Black Caribbeans in the probability of having fictive kin in their family or the number of fictive kin. Non-Hispanic Whites received support from fictive kin more frequently than both African Americans and Black Caribbeans.

Congregation Network

Several significant race and ethnic differences for congregation network variables were observed. African Americans gave assistance to members of their congregation more frequently and had more frequent negative interactions with them than either Non-Hispanic Whites or Black Caribbeans. In comparison to non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans interacted with their congregation network more frequently and, in comparison to Black Caribbeans, indicated receiving emotional support from congregation members more frequently. African

Americans and Black Caribbeans reported being subjectively closer to the members of their congregation than non-Hispanic Whites. There were no significant ethnic or racial differences for rate of daily contact with church members, the number of congregation helpers, or the frequency of receiving support from congregation members.

DISCUSSION
Family Support Networks

Turning first to findings for family support networks, four significant differences were observed in this analysis. African Americans gave assistance to their family members more often than non-Hispanic Whites, were more likely to have daily contact with their extended family members than non-Hispanic Whites and Black Caribbeans, and had more frequent interactions with their family than Black Caribbeans. Three general conclusions can be drawn from these findings for family assistance and interaction. First, these findings are consistent with prior work indicating that African Americans have similar or higher levels of involvement with kin than non-Hispanic Whites, but are inconsistent with reports that African Americans have lower levels of family support than Whites (e.g., Hogan et al., 1993). As noted in previous reviews of this literature (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004), comparisons across studies are problematic given important differences in the dependent variables used. This study's investigation of several dimensions of family support relationships (e.g., enacted support, emotional support, contact, negative interaction) in diverse groups of the population and using a common set of sociodemographic correlates clarifies the nature of race/ethnic differences in these relationships.

Second, these findings refute the notion that African American kinship networks have significantly weakened. Several researchers argued that, during the 1980s and 1990s, African Americans' kin support networks declined as a result of high unemployment, high poverty rates, and other structural issues (e.g., Roschelle, 1997). For instance, Hogan et al. (1993) argued that, ''The effective kin network that provided support to multigenerational, matrifocal black families in past decades appears to be of limited relevance today'' (p. 1454). The current findings clearly indicate that African American kin remain involved in family support networks

despite the historical and contemporaneous challenges faced by this group.

Finally, Black Caribbeans had less frequent interaction and were less likely to have daily interaction with family members than African Americans. This finding is consistent with ethnographic work in which high levels of geographic dispersion among many Black Caribbean extended families (Basch, 2001; Foner, 2005) result in less frequent contact with family members. However, despite less frequent interaction among Black Caribbean families, they were no different than African Americans with respect to reported levels of family support that was given or received.

Further, despite more frequent contact and support provision to family members, African Americans were no different from other groups in receiving aid from family. This may be the case for several reasons. First, despite strong norms for reciprocity in support relationships, these exchanges may in fact be asymmetrical, with respondents giving more than they receive. The related finding that African Americans have greater daily contact with family members would provide the opportunity for support needs to be voiced and acknowledged. Second, there may be a bias to underestimate support that is received from family. When family members see each other on a very frequent basis, things like companionship, meal preparation, and assistance when ill may be viewed as expected activities and, thus, underestimated. Finally, related to this, African Americans may be somewhat more likely to provide what has been termed ''invisible support'' (see Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). That is, support that is provided in an unobtrusive manner such that it is invisible to the recipient. Racial and ethnic differences in perceptions of support (given and received) is an area where future quantitative and qualitative research is needed.

Friendship and Fictive Kin Networks

Several significant differences in friendship networks were observed in this analysis. Non-Hispanic Whites interacted with their friends and gave support to their friends more frequently than African Americans. Additionally, non-Hispanic Whites received support from friends more frequently than African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Many of the differences between African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites could reflect basic differences in their levels of involvement in friendship networks. For instance, 16.7% of African Americans, 16.1 % of Black Caribbeans, and 9.7% of non-Hispanic Whites report that they never receive help from friends. Similarly, African Americans (11%) were twice as likely as non-Hispanic Whites (4.7%) to indicate that they hardly ever or never interact with friends. Lower levels of involvement with friends among African Americans could be due to estrangement from friends, isolation from friends, or exclusive involvement with kinship networks (Ajrouch et al., 2001). Collectively, these results and previous research (Griffin et al., 2006; Waite & Harrison, 1992) indicate that non-Hispanic Whites are more likely than African Americans to interact with friendship networks and to identify friends as an important source of support.

Turning to fictive kin, ethnographic research on Black families clearly notes the importance of fictive kin in support networks (see review by Chatters et al., 1994). Consequently, fictive kin are thought to play a more prominent role in the informal support networks of African Americans than non-Hispanic Whites. However, ethnographic accounts of White families also note the importance of fictive kin, although in most cases, the term *fictive kin* is not used to describe these relationships. In the current analysis, 9 out of 10 respondents indicated that their family network had a fictive kin relation. Overall, African Americans and Black Caribbeans were more likely to have fictive kin and a larger number of fictive kin in their networks than non-Hispanic Whites. However, non-Hispanic Whites reported receiving informal support from their fictive kin more often than either African Americans or Black Caribbeans. Given the paucity of research in this area, an additional variable for frequency of support was created which includes both respondents who had and did not have fictive kin in their family. Additional analysis did not find any race or ethnic differences in the frequency of receiving support from fictive kin (analysis not shown). The findings suggest that although non-Hispanic Whites are less likely to have fictive kin in their networks, those with fictive kin may have stronger ties to them. Collectively, these findings indicate that, across race and ethnic groups, fictive kin are a common feature of family networks and their role as sources of support is more nuanced than previously thought.

Congregation Support Networks

Overall, the most notable race and ethnic differences were observed for congregation support networks. In comparison to non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans interacted with their congregation members more frequently, were subjectively closer to their church members, and gave assistance to their church members more often. Collectively, these findings are consistent with research indicating the importance of religion (Taylor et al., 2004) and church support networks (Taylor et al., 2005) to African Americans, as well as Krause's (2002) work indicating that older African Americans had higher levels of involvement with their congregation-based networks than older Whites. Collectively, these findings indicate that church support networks play a more prominent role in the daily life of African Americans than non-Hispanic Whites.

Ethnic differences indicated that African Americans gave overall support and received higher levels of emotional support from their congregation members than did Caribbean Blacks. Black Caribbeans also had less frequent contact with congregation members than African Americans, but this relationship only bordered significance ($p = .07$). Collectively, these findings indicate higher levels of involvement with congregation support networks among African Americans than among Black Caribbeans.

African Americans also indicated having significantly more frequent negative interactions with their congregation members than non-Hispanic Whites and Caribbean Blacks, which may be a consequence of the higher levels of contact they have with this group. That is, the more a person interacts with the members of the support network, the higher likelihood of encountering negative interactions. The present findings, in conjunction with previous work (Akiyama, Antonucci, Takahashi, & Langfahl, 2003), indicate that more frequent interactions with support network members increases the opportunity for the receipt of assistance (Taylor, 1986: Taylor et al., 2005) as well as negative interactions. Conversely, not participating in family and congregation networks decreases the potential for negative interactions but also decreases opportunities for provision of assistance.

Kin and Nonkin Networks

Several general conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, to fully understand the composition of informal support networks, it is important to examine kin and nonkin sources of informal support. Second, despite a continuation of and, in some cases, a worsening of serious structural problems (i.e., employment rates, poverty rates) for African Americans, informal support networks remain critically important in providing assistance to individuals. Third, this analysis of global, general support found that, overall, African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites have somewhat different configurations of informal support networks. African Americans and Black Caribbeans were largely similar in network configurations with no significant differences in friendship and fictive kin networks and only one significant difference in family networks. African Americans and Black Caribbeans had a support advantage relative to non-Hispanic Whites for the likelihood of having fictive kin and the size of fictive kin networks. In contrast, non-Hispanic Whites had a support advantage with regard to receiving assistance from fictive kin. African Americans were more involved in congregation support networks than both non-Hispanic Whites and Black Caribbeans, whereas non-Hispanic Whites were more involved with and received more support from friendship networks.

Fourth, irrespective of race or ethnicity, overall a greater percentage of respondents received help from and were involved with family than was the case for either friendship or congregational networks. Although lower percentages of respondents received assistance from congregation members, congregation-based informal support should not be underestimated. Recent research indicates that among Black Americans, receiving emotional support from congregation members was positively associated with life satisfaction (Krause, 2004) and is a protective factor against suicidal behavior (Chatters, Taylor, Lincoln, Nguyen, & Joe, 2011). Fifth, the study's use of constructs from the family solidarity model allowed the exploration of multiple dimensions of kin and nonkin relationships (e.g., interaction, closeness, given/received support) and provided a multifaceted perspective on these relations. Overall, the findings provided important information about commonalities and divergences in kin and nonkin support networks across and within race/ethnicity groups.

Practice Implications

This study's findings point to several important implications for practice with racially and ethnically diverse families. First, the focus on four different types of informal networks—extended family, friendship, fictive kin, and religious support networks—attests to the range and breadth of supportive relationships and resources that are available to individuals. Social welfare and human services practice with individuals and families primarily relies on identifying and utilizing kin relations and networks and, indeed, this study confirmed a preference for family sources of aid. However, it is clear that individuals interact with and receive substantial aid from nonkin sources that remain largely unrecognized in psychosocial assessments and underutilized in intervention planning. Identification of nonkin networks and sources of aid (church networks, friends) is particularly important for individuals who may be emotionally or geographically distant from kin networks. In these circumstances, nonkin networks may function as supplemental sources of assistance. Second, kin and nonkin relationships and networks are characterized by different factors (e.g., assistance given and received, interaction/contact, emotional support, affective closeness, negative interaction) that are important for assessing their accessibility, suitability, and viability with regard to support provision. Information of this sort is crucial in developing profiles of specific support networks (e.g., high interaction/low support provision) and identifying those that have the greatest potential for the development of interventions involving kin and nonkin networks that are sensitive to individual preferences and appropriate to the circumstances.

Third, the findings for congregation-based networks of African Americans provide practitioners several insights into this important community institution. African Americans are deeply embedded in these networks as providers and recipients of general assistance and emotional support. However, practitioners should be aware that African Americans may also have conflicted relationships with church networks as reflected in negative interactions. Church networks often place great demands of time and effort on members which may lead to interpersonal conflict. Further, clients who are experiencing problems in socially sensitive areas (e.g., family and marital difficulties, substance use) may come under intense scrutiny by other church members and be subject to criticism and sanctions. Consequently, any assessment of church networks as part of an overall plan for developing informal supports for clients should evaluate the interpersonal dynamics of these networks to ensure that they can be helpful resources.

Limitations and Conclusion

The study has several limitations which are worth noting. First, the full battery of social support measures was not asked of friends and fictive kin. Second, the non-Hispanic White sample does not reflect the regional distribution of the White population and instead reflects the regional distribution of the African American population. Consequently, the design of this sample maximizes the overlap in geographic distribution with the African American sample for the purposes of Black–White comparisons, but not for subgroup analysis of Whites. Last, the Black Caribbean sample excludes individuals who do not speak English (i.e., persons who only speak Spanish, Haitian-French, or Creole dialects); consequently, the study findings are not generalizable to these groups of Caribbean Blacks. Despite these limitations, the significant advantages of the sample and the examination of several sources of informal support provided a unique opportunity to examine race/ethnicity differences in support networks across these three groups.

This study's attempt to develop a more nuanced understanding of differences between African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites in informal social support networks represents only a preliminary effort in appreciating these relationships. Although this investigation addressed questions of basic group differences, it is also critical to supplement this information with research focusing on within-group differences in the structure and functioning of informal social support networks. A limited focus on between group differences provides little information beyond the fact of dissimilarities in the basic features of support networks and relationships. Further, using a solely comparative framework overlooks the inherent heterogeneity that exists within these groups (Taylor, 1985). Ultimately, studies examining the correlates of informal social support, within and across Black Caribbeans, African Americans, and Whites, will help to disentangle the complex associations between

race, ethnicity, and social support within and across these important population groups.

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