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SPIRITUALITY AMONG BLACK AMERICANS:
A HIERARCHICAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE FAMILY STRENGTHS MODEL

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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Major: Child, Youth, and Family Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Yan Xia

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SPIRITUALITY AMONG BLACK AMERICANS:
A HIERARCHICAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE FAMILY STRENGTHS MODEL

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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There is a need for disaggregate data pertaining to the perceived strengths of Black American families. This study identified which traits are salient and dominant among African-American families according to the Family Strengths Model. Utilizing this model, a mixed methods study was conducted among Black Americans living in Connecticut who identify with belonging to a family (N=59) to investigate the importance of six family strength domains. Results found the hierarchical rank (from most important to least important) to be commitment, spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing, appreciation and affection, positive communication, time together, and the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively. Additionally, all family strength domains were of high importance to the participants. Emerging family strength traits included leadership qualities and qualities that lead to newness and awe. Results are consistent with previous family strength and resiliency literature; however, this study offers a new and focused family strength perspective from Black Americans.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background.....	1
Conceptual Framework.....	3
Statement and Purpose of the Study	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
Family Strengths Perspective and Model	4
Resiliency, Spirituality, and the Family.....	6
Chapter 3: Methodology	12
Introduction.....	12
Selection of Participants	13
Instrument.....	14
Data Collection	15
Data Analysis	16
Chapter 4: Results	18
Participants	18
Family Strength Rankings	18
Emerging Traits.....	26
Chapter 5: Discussion	28
Conclusion	35
Implication for Practice and Policy	35
Limitations	36

Future Direction.....	36
References.....	37
Appendices	41
Appendix A: Family Strength Domains and Key Concept	41
Appendix B: Belief Statements.....	42
Appendix C: Family Strength Qualities	43
Appendix D: Table of Codes	44
Appendix E: Table of Themes.....	47
Appendix F: Family Strength Questionnaire	49
Appendix G: Table 1 Demographic profile of participants by sex	54
Appendix H: Table 2 Assessment of family strength rankings by sex.....	56
Appendix I: Participant Consent Form.....	58
Appendix J: Official Approval Letter.....	59

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Overall importance of family strengths by frequency..... 23

Figure 2: Overall importance of family strengths by mean scores..... 23

Figure 3: Hierarchical ranking of family strengths using frequency and mean scores 24

Figure 4: Frequency of family strengths ranked most important by sex 24

Figure 5: Percentage of participants by sex who ranked family strengths most important..... 25

Figure 6: Comparison of top 2 and lowest 3 levels of importance for individual family strengths by percentage 27

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic profile of participants by sex	54
Table 2: Assessment of family strength rankings by sex.....	56
Table 3: Assessment of the importance of individual family strengths by sex	26

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The family is arguably the most fundamental institution in societies around the globe. Though family structures have changed over time, the value it provides its members and society remains. Researchers agree that these groupings continue to offer a sense of physical, emotional, and collective support (DeFrain & Asay, 2007). Furthermore, the family strengths perspective identifies family characteristics, behaviors, and thought patterns that make it possible for a family to successfully overcome obstacles and be resilient. For families that experience significant challenges, resiliency is an important component in their success.

Historically, African-American families have faced substantial injustices through the tragedy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the current discriminatory issues that are addressed through the Black Lives Matter movement. The generational injustices experienced by Black Americans is arguably greater than that of any other race or ethnic group in the United States. Hence, African Americans have depended upon their spirituality as a source of strength for overcoming these obstacles. Negro spirituals sung by enslaved African Americans support their reliance on God when enduring significant inequity. Likewise, Blacks have shared stories of their ancestors worshipping on the grounds owned by their white slave owners, and the exhilaration and

empowerment they have felt during these services. Some research has found that amid macro-level problems, families look to draw on their culture as a contextual foundation for managing these stressors (Deacon et al, 2011).

Spirituality as a contributing factor in enduring these experiences may have led Richard Allen, a man who was born into slavery, to establish a place of worship specifically for the Black community. In 1794, his flagship church became a hallmark of the first independent Black denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. Today in America, there are thousands of churches that are occupied by predominantly Black congregations, and many more with large percentages of Black congregants. Community activities, family dinners/reunions, and meetings begin with prayer in many Black environments. This supports findings by DeFrain (1999) provided in the Family Strengths Model that highlight spiritual wellbeing as an area that all strong families possess. Similarly, it is consistent with research that suggests religiosity or spirituality and kinship ties are a predominant source of strength among African Americans (Bell-Tolliver & Wilkerson, 2011). Finally, “spiritual beliefs help individuals make sense of suffering within the context of a supportive and loving higher power...[and] can aid in the creation of life meaning and purpose” (Gall & Florack, 2011, pg. 290). Oral and documented stories suggest that the spiritual wellbeing domain of the Family Strengths Model is particularly significant among African American families, and in the midst of systemic inequity and continued struggle; strong African-American families remain, and continue to emerge.

Know Thyself

Recognizing that past experiences and societal influence can create researcher bias, especially when interpreting qualitative data, a brief description is given of the primary researcher. As an African-American female raised in the inner city and born into a two-parent household, the primary researcher has enjoyed a close-knit family inclusive of extended family and friends. For the majority of her adult life, she has worked with children and families who have been exposed to abuse, neglect, and other traumatic life experiences. She has served this population both in the United States and abroad.

Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this study, a family is defined as a group of two or more people, who may or may not be, related by blood, marriage, or other kinship/legal bond, and engage in a reciprocal relationship that create social bonds utilizing communication, power, and affection. Fictive families also have a place among this definition. Considering the divisive and destructive history for families of enslaved Africans in America, the inventiveness of these families to retain a family unit as a response to this phenomenon, and the communal nature in child-rearing among families of African descent, this definition was found to be the most appropriate.

By taking a strength-based perspective to families, researchers have identified six universal domains of strong families around the world, which include the following characteristics:

1. Appreciation and Affection,

2. Commitment,
3. Enjoyable Time Together,
4. Positive Communication,
5. Spiritual Wellbeing, and
6. The Ability to Manage Stress and Crisis Effectively (DeFrain & Asay, 2007).

These six domains, as well as, a global measure for determining a family's strength are represented in DeFrain's American Family Strengths Inventory (2002), and is designed to assess a person's cognitive construction of how present these factors are in their life. By recognizing these strengths, legislators and NGOs are able to take a more informed approach to policy and program design. To further focus research that will improve areas of practice and policy targeted toward African-American families, this study utilized self-report rating scales to identify the strength-based characteristics of the Family Strengths Model that are considered to be the most important to the aforementioned population. Additionally, this research will identify any new traits that are emerging among families.

Statement and Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify which traits are salient and dominant among families according to the Family Strengths Model. The primary objective of this study is to explore the traits that African-American families possess, and what traits families view as most important. In this study, "family strength domains" and "family strength traits" are used interchangeably.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Strengths Perspective and Model

In the late twentieth century, DeFrain and his colleagues conducted a large global examination of strong families from the western and eastern hemispheres (Australia, Botswana, China, Greece, India, Mexico, South Africa, United States, etc.). Their research found there to be striking similarities among successful families from diverse backgrounds (DeFrain, 1999). Though families face varying struggles, how they prepare for and overcome them, as well as, sustain healthy relationships are relatively consistent cross-culturally. Some characteristics are evident and readily observable; however, others like spiritual wellbeing are harder to identify. Particularly in western cultures, spirituality can be a more private experience, while eastern cultures share a more public expression of religion and spirituality. Because the Family Strengths Model is built on the patterns within a diverse population that have been identified, it is intrinsically individualized; however, Peterson (2007) believes that, though debatable, those patterns do exist. A brief explanation of this model is described in *Appendix A*, Family strength domains and key concept.

The Family Strengths Model is precipitated by a family strengths perspective, which simply put, is a strength-based approach to working with a family. In this approach, the worker *first* identifies the unique internal and

external assets that the family can utilize to overcome their specific challenges. According to DeFrain and Asay (2007), the strengths perspective posits the following tenants:

1. All families have the capacity for continual growth, and therefore, hold the internal assets to overcome their current struggles;
2. All families are the experts on their life situation, because they understand what resources are needed when considering their family dynamic;
3. All families are worthy of collaboration with service providers, and are most successful when they are focusing on the areas within their family that are most important to them;
4. All families should focus on the positive behaviors, thoughts, and strategies that have helped them be successful in the past;
5. All families that engage with community resources will have a deeper connection to others and an increased sense of agency.

It is important to note that connection to natural and supernatural entities surfaces as a common theme among the strengths approach and the spiritual wellbeing domain of the Family Strengths Model. Furthermore, this model does not limit spirituality to an involvement with institutional religion. For this reason, the present study did not restrict its explanation of spirituality to religious doctrine, and have intentionally excluded such terminology from the belief statement for spiritual wellbeing in *Appendix B*, Belief statements.

Resiliency, Spirituality, and the Family

Little research has been conducted specifically exploring spirituality and its effect on families of African descent living in the United States. The research that was identified explores spirituality, as it relates to resiliency and the ability to cope with stress, trauma, and crisis. Resiliency is commonly defined as the ability or process to recover after adversity (Jacelon, 1997). As a trait (or ability), resiliency closely resembles one of DeFrain and Assay's family strength domains, "the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively." As a process, any or all of the family strength domains would be protective factors in resiliency. Hence, there are similarities in resiliency literature and family strength research, as resiliency is sometimes understood as a collective of strength-based traits. Dreyer (2015) suggests that a large percentage of population experiences at least one traumatic event, and resilient people and groups overcome those hardships by finding a healthy way through the stress. Many studies have identified one's spirituality as a protective factor towards resiliency. Furthermore, spirituality is almost always associated with connection, either towards a deity or mortal entity. Mahoney (2010) describes spirituality as a relationship with the divine that is transcendent and has the ability to impact various domains of a person's life. Similarly, resilience can also influence an individual's success within their micro and macrosystems.

In a qualitative study conducted by Greeff and Loubser (2008), 51 South African families answered open-ended questions on the contributing factors of resiliency. Spirituality emerged as a common theme, and could be separated into six different groupings—Gifts from God, Guidance, God's Works, God's Plan,

Prayer, and Faith. Findings from another study involving Native Americans showed that 89% of the participants agreed that strong Chickasaw families value physical and spiritual health (Deacon et al, 2011). Likewise, another study revealed that kinship ties and spirituality was identified by 30 licensed family therapists as strengths that their African-American clients utilize to overcome obstacles (Bell-Tolliver & Wilkerson, 2011).

Religiosity and spirituality as effective resiliency tools were identified in a study involving 331 participants, the majority identifying themselves as married with a smaller number over the age of 60 (Reutter & Bigatti, 2014). Langer (2004) and Ramsey (2012) also found that spirituality operates as a benefactor among elderly persons during periods of life transitions. The field of social work has also begun to encourage workers to explore spirituality with their clients in order to provide a holistic treatment experience (Farley, 2007). Additionally, research that addresses globalization suggests that spirituality is often at the root of motivation for international populations (O'Grady et al, 2016). Farley (2007) also explains that distinct similarities have emerged between resiliency behaviors and how spirituality is understood. These similarities include the following characteristics (Farley, 2007, pg. 4):

- Giving definition to who we are;
- Often providing a structure for understanding the world and events that occur;
- Providing a mechanism to transcend events of this life;
- Giving a frame of reference for understanding good and evil;

- Providing a mechanism for forgiveness.

A plethora of research supports the correlation between resiliency and spirituality having spirituality as a basis for a person's sense of agency, even when there are macro-level factors at play that affect groups disproportionately and threaten the development of strong families.

The strengths-based perspective takes a micro-level approach and encourages an increased sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. Keeping this in mind, Batswana families, many whom note significant health risks and marital division as their paramount challenges, explain that celibacy and prayer are strengths that can be utilized within this population (Mberengwa, 2007). Likewise, South African families, the majority of which are Black, have experienced the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, and attribute a deep sense of unity and connection with one another as the key component in managing harsh realities (Nkosi, 2007). Furthermore, Alfred (2015) explains that restoration and eventual success is intimately tied to spirituality, as defined by connection to one's ancestors and land. This is also a central value in many South African families, as they define their spirituality in very similar terms. Hence, they rely heavily on their spirituality to meet their needs and provide them with strength when faced with adversity. Greeff and Loubser (2008) conducted research that revealed that a family's spirituality acts as a "protective and recovery resource" (pg. 300).

Leitz and Hodge (2011) conducted a qualitative study involving 15 families who had been involved in the child welfare system, and had maintained

a reunified family for at least a year. Participants, the majority who were self-reported to be white single mothers, explained that their spirituality and religious community played a significant role in helping the family reach the goal of sustained reunification. This idea of cohesive community is a central theme in the Chinese belief system of Confucianism, which emphasizes that the whole is greater than its individual parts in order to maintain harmony (Dias et al, 2011).

Though the research directly investigating spirituality as a family strength is minimal, there is other family strength research that is important to note as it pertains to resiliency. Malini (2015) found that support groups in India for familial caregivers of stroke patients had a significant effect on the family systems strength due to the emotional support and physical help they provided. These findings suggest consistency with the importance of a family's ability to cope with stress and manage crisis as it relates to the Family Strengths Model. Likewise, a study involving 21 complete dyads (friends, spouses, or other family member) of African-American women battling stage 1-3 breast cancer consider their spirituality as a source for success during their illness/ treatment (Sterba et al, 2014).

Kim, et al (2016) also found similar results in a qualitative study regarding family spirituality involving 26 first-generation Korean- American elderly couples in Southeastern USA. Three common themes emerged from their research, which included family togetherness, family interdependence, and family coping. The positive aspects of these themes also contributed to participant's attributing family spirituality to strengthening family health.

Family commitment, improved emotional wellbeing, new healthy behaviors, and healing experiences were found to be spurred by their understanding of family spirituality.

A recent study, conducted by Jorgenson, Mancini, Yorgason, and Day (2016) exploring the effects of religiosity on family dynamics consisting of 500 families (333 married couples), the majority of which were Caucasian, measured religious beliefs, family time, family religious practices, parent-child involvement, observed family time variables, and demographic variables. In respect to this current study, of their three hypotheses, one is particularly important to note. "The more religion influenced a husband's and wife's identity, purpose, and life decisions, the more likely they were to help their child with homework, read books with their child, and report that spending time together over the weekend, enjoying family recreation, and attending and participating in cultural traditions were important" (pg. 170). This assertion shows how a family's religious and/or spiritual beliefs and behaviors impact the strength of their family according to the Family Strengths Model.

From this, and other, research, spiritual wellbeing is a foundational component of a strong family, as it directly aligns with the six domains within the Family Strengths Model (i.e. Commitment, Appreciation and Affection, Positive Communication, Time Together). Unfortunately, there still remains a gap in family strength research among Black-American families. Likewise, there has not been a study conducted to determine an overall hierarchical rank for the

family strength traits of the Family Strength Model. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Which domain holds the most importance for African-American families?
2. Are there any new traits that are common among Black- American families?

The research hypothesis of this study is as follows:

1. Black American participants will rank spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing among the traits of highest importance.
2. There are no new salient family strength traits that are reported by the participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted in order to identify domains of primary importance for African-American families. To accomplish this, both quantitative and qualitative methods were selected for use. To answer our first research question, "Which domain holds the most importance for African-American families," a hierarchical structure approach was determined to be the most appropriate method. Likewise, this approach was best suited for testing our first hypothesis, "Black American participants will rank spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing among the traits of highest importance." To help answer our second research question, "Are there any new traits that are common among

Black-American families,” open-ended questions were determined to be the best method. Furthermore, considering the prohibition of reading and writing among enslaved families of African descent, storytelling was a major way in which information was shared. Using storytelling, as a qualitative approach, was a practical and culturally appropriate way in testing our second hypothesis, “There are no new salient family strength traits that are reported by the participants.”

A short questionnaire was distributed to a target population of single and married adults. The survey was distributed electronically, and although there is little to no risk associated with this study, in keeping with ethical guidelines, it was accompanied by a consent form. Participants indicated their consent to join the study by choosing “agree” after reading the consent form (See *Appendix G*, Participant Consent Form).

Selection of Participants

For intended purposes of this study, a nonrandom sample was employed to investigate the target population. Since families are increasingly diverse, the target population for this study is identified as any legal African-American adult (19 and over) residing in Connecticut who identifies him or herself as belonging to a family. Likewise, because this study directly explores families of African descent, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford, CT were deliberately targeted due to the significant number of non-White families that fall within this population. According to the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), in 2015, Connecticut (CT) had an estimated population of 3,590,886; New Haven,

130,322; Bridgeport, 147,629; and Hartford, 124,006. Of CT's documented residents, in 2015, 19% were reported to be non-White. Among the aforementioned CT cities, in 2010, the non-White population of each city was 44.5%, 42.9%, and 46.3%, respectively.

A professional women's advocacy group and a charter school were particularly targeted for recruitment. There were two considerations for this purposeful sampling. First, the professional women of the advocacy group are likely to have a strong family. Secondly, the majority of students' families in the charter school are at or below the poverty line, identify as non-White, and parental and community involvement is strong according to the school website. Thus, soliciting their involvement for this study was appropriate.

An open call for CT residents to participate in this research study was made via social media platforms, and publicized via flyers at libraries and grocery stores. The approved recruitment flyer was uploaded to the Facebook and Twitter pages of the professional women's advocacy group and the charter school website with the proper approval. The post was public and the electronic link was included on both the recruitment flyer and in the body of the post. There were not private messages sent to individuals. All participants were included or excluded based on their questionnaire responses in Section 1.

Instrument

This study employed a mixed methods approach. Utilizing a questionnaire with narrative questions (See *Appendix F*, Family strength questionnaire), investigators have collected quantitative and qualitative data.

The questionnaire has several sections to most accurately determine consistency with the hypotheses. Section 1 collected participant demographics including family composition (consanguinal (blood ties), affinal (by marriage) and fictive (social ties). Section 2 (See *Appendix B*, Belief statements) employed terminology from the American Family Strengths Inventory (AFSI) (DeFrain, 2002) which explained each domain utilizing a belief statement adapted from the AFSI. A type of hierarchical classification system was also applied to this section, because this approach is used to rank items as they relate to other items. The family strength domains were ranked from (1) most important to (6) least important. To ensure a consistent understanding of terms, a definition utilizing key concepts of each domain (See *Appendix A*, Family strength domains and key concept) was included. Furthermore, a 5-point Likert-type scale was used to determine the level of importance for each individual domain. Participants ranked each domain from (5) Very much to (1) Not at all.

By using a qualitative approach through the use of open-ended questions, Section 3 allowed participants to elaborate on any or all domain(s) and offer an additional family strength that was not listed. Additionally, participants were asked to share personal stories that describing their family's strength. The researchers identified additional qualities, and determined whether or not they could be assigned to one of the six pre-existing domains of the Family Strengths Model (See *Appendix C*, Family Strength Qualities). The brief electronic survey was expected to take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Data Collection

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for this research project prior to the data collection (See *Appendix H*, Official Approval Letter by UNL IRB). The researcher collected data via an electronic survey created by Google forms. All responses were electronically collected and transferred into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on the primary investigator's personal computer. Participant names, social security numbers, and dates of birth were not collected or used for this study. Email and physical addresses were also not collected. The demographic information that was collected from participants included their age range, race, gender, marital status, and family composition. All submitted surveys were answered electronically, and were automatically time-stamped via Google forms, a password protected secure site for data collection.

Summaries and direct quote memos of key ideas and concepts were made, and organized in the first column of a table (See *Appendix D*, Table of codes). Then, the second column of the table was used to correct any notations, describe, classify, and interpret the data to get our initial themes (See *Appendix E*, Table of themes). This coding process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015) results in emergent themes, which depend on the data and the focus of the research. They further noted that having fewer themes help to arrive at a higher level of abstraction, and to a greater ease with which to communicate our findings further.

Data Analysis

Participant responses to Section 2 survey questions have been coded based on the order of ranking for the hierarchical classification system. A response of least important (position #6) was coded as “6”. Each subsequent response was coded as its corresponding ranking (i.e. If spirituality is placed in position #2, it will be coded as “2”). The same approach was used for the Likert-type scale coding responses from “5” to “1”. Data was analyzed for significance between levels of importance in participants’ Likert-scale responses for each domain, as well as, percentages and frequency counts for each ranking. The frequency and mean scores for each ranking position have been identified to determine the overall hierarchical ranking from most important to least important family strength.

In Section 3 of the questionnaire, participants were given the option to elaborate on any domain, as well as, identify a family strength that had not been listed. Qualities that were not consistent with pre-existing research (See *Appendix C, Family strength qualities*) were categorized as a new family strength. Merriam and Tisdell note, “Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read - it is the process of making meaning” (2015, p. 201). Researchers look for patterns and find relationships between two or more responses during the process of data analysis. The relationships might take the form of a table showing the patterns of relationship (Creswell, 2013). Responses to the open-

ended questions of this study were analyzed for common themes, and assigned to the preexisting domains where possible (See *Appendix D*, Table of codes).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Participants

The electronic survey generated 66 responses. After two responses from people who did not live in Connecticut were removed, the remaining participant demographics were reviewed to finalize who met the inclusion criteria. Since the study targeted Americans of African descent, but was an open call to CT residents with eligibility stipulations, five participants who reported their race as only “White” were excluded from the study. Hence, the final sample size was 59 individuals, 47 females (79.7%) and 12 males (20.3%). The frequency and percentage scores of the demographic profile of the participants are outlined in *Table 1: Demographic profile of participants by sex* (See *Appendix G*, Table 1 Demographic profile of participants by sex). The majority of the participants (27.1%) were 51 years of age or older, 84.8% of participants chose Black as the sole identifier for their race/ ethnicity, 62.7% were married, and 33.9% defined their family composition as including a spouse or significant other and children.

Family Strength Rankings

Participants placed six family strengths in order of importance from most important to least important. Participant responses placed their most important family strength domains as #1 (Commitment, 33.9%; Appreciation and affection,

17%, Positive communication, 8.5%; Time together, 3.4%; Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing, 28.8%; Ability to cope with stress and crisis, 8.5%). The least important family strength domains were ranked as #6 (Commitment, 8.5%; Appreciation and affection, 13.6%; Positive communication, 8.5%; Time together, 8.5%; Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing, 18.7%; Ability to cope with stress and crisis, 42.4%). Scores for each position are described in *Table 2: Assessment of family strength rankings by sex* (See Appendix H, Table 2 Assessment of family strength rankings by sex).

The data was analyzed to determine the frequency of responses and mean scores for each family strength domain (See *Figure 1*, All levels of importance for family strengths by frequency counts; See *Figure 2*, Overall importance of family strengths by mean scores). Out of all ranking positions, most important to least important, Commitment received the majority of responses ($n=74$, $\sigma = 12.33$). Frequency counts for Appreciation and affection were $n=62$ ($\sigma = 10.33$). Time together ($n=57$, $\sigma = 9.5$), Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing ($n=54$, $\sigma = 9$), Positive communication ($n=54$, $\sigma = 9$), and the Ability to cope with stress and crisis ($n=53$, $\sigma = 8.83$) clustered together. Frequency counts were also found for participant rankings of “most important” for each family strength domain by sex (See *Figure 4: Frequency of family strengths ranked most important by sex*). For females, Commitment received the highest scores for most important family strength ($n=15$), followed by Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing ($n=14$), Appreciation and affection ($n=9$), Positive communication ($n=5$), Ability to cope with stress and crisis ($n=3$), and Time

together ($n=1$). Males scored the most important family strengths as Commitment ($n=5$), Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing ($n=3$), the Ability to cope with stress and crisis ($n=2$), Appreciation and affection ($n=1$), and Time together ($n=1$), while Positive Communication received no scores for the most important family strength ($n=0$) (See *Figure 4: Frequency of family strengths ranked most important by sex*, See *Figure 5: Percentage of participants by sex who rank family strengths most important*).

To determine the overall hierarchical ranking for the participants, frequency and means were used to determine each position (See *Figure 3, Hierarchical ranking of family strengths using frequency and mean scores*). Position #1, the most important ranked family strength, was determined by the highest frequency count (Commitment, $n=20$). Position #2, the next important family strength, was determined by the highest mean value of position #1 and #2 excluding the domain(s) that had already been ranked (Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing, $\sigma = 11$). Position #3 was determined by the highest mean value of position #1, #2 and #3 excluding the domains that had already been ranked (Appreciation and affection, $\sigma = 11.67$). Position #4 was determined by the highest mean value of the top 4 positions excluding the domains that had already been ranked (Positive communication, $\sigma = 10$). Position #5 was determined by the highest mean value of the top 5 positions excluding the domains that had already been ranked (Time together, $\sigma = 10.4$). Position #6, the least important ranked family strength, was determined by the highest frequency count for the

last position excluding the domains that had already been ranked (Ability to cope with stress and crisis, $n=25$).

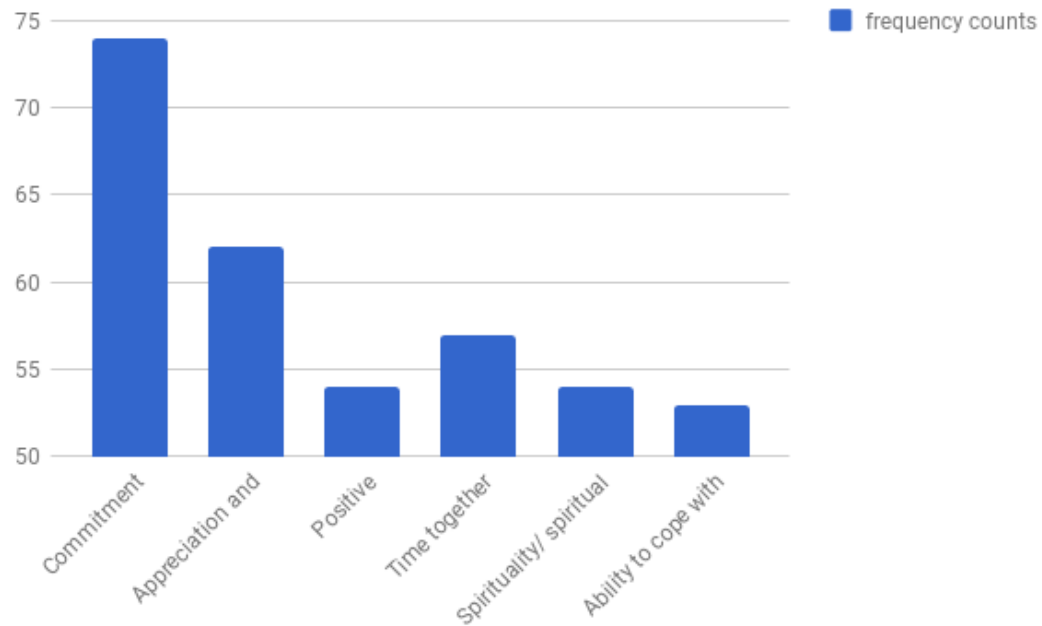


Figure 1: Overall importance of family strengths by frequency counts.

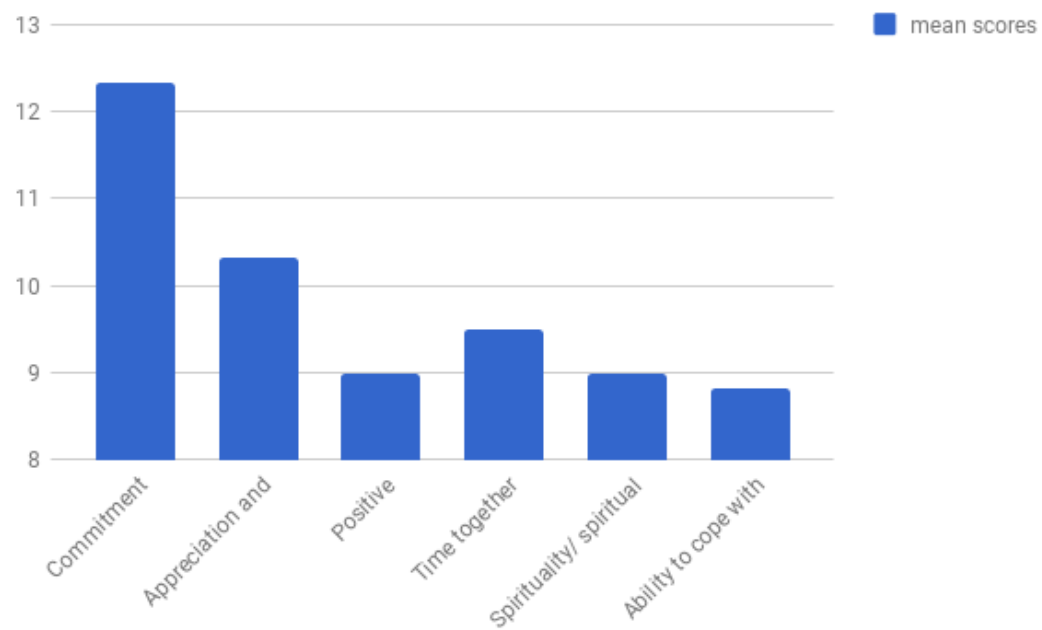


Figure 2: Overall importance of family strengths by mean scores.

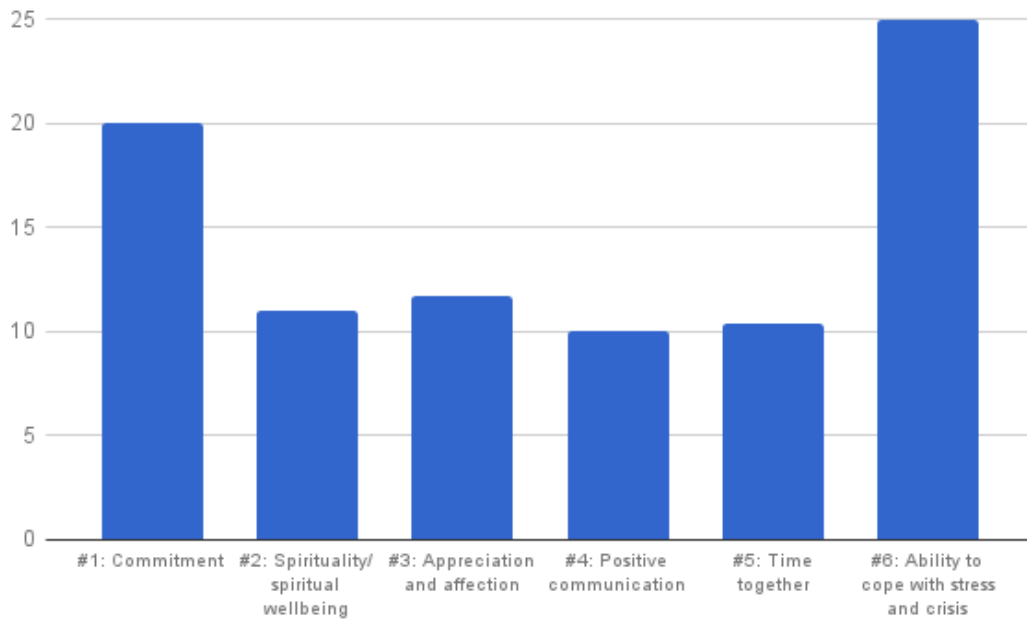


Figure 3: Hierarchical ranking of family strengths using frequency and mean scores.

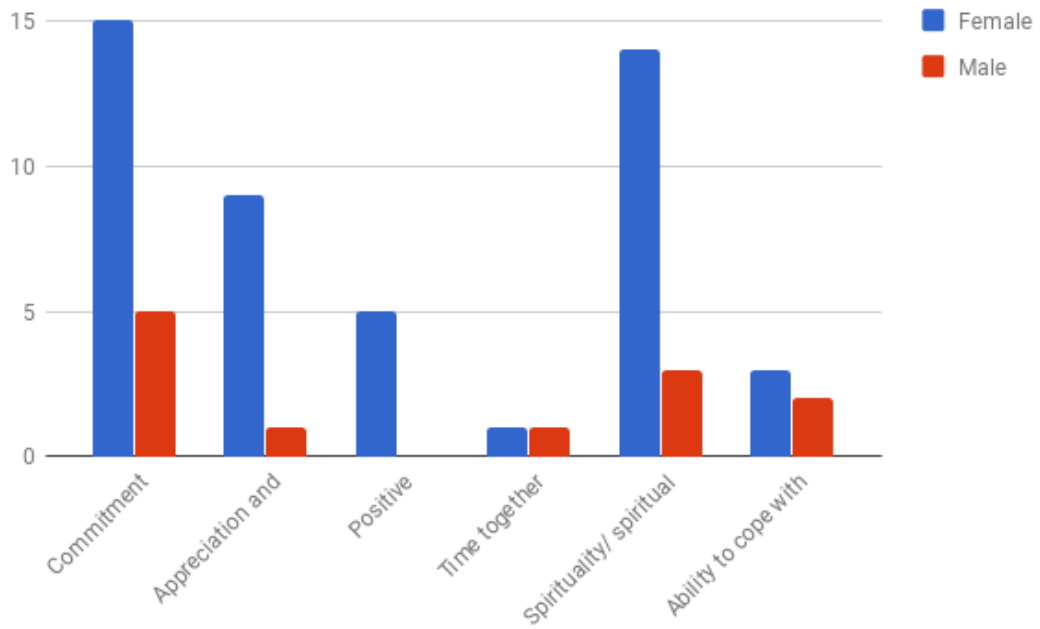


Figure 4: Frequency of family strengths ranked most important by sex.

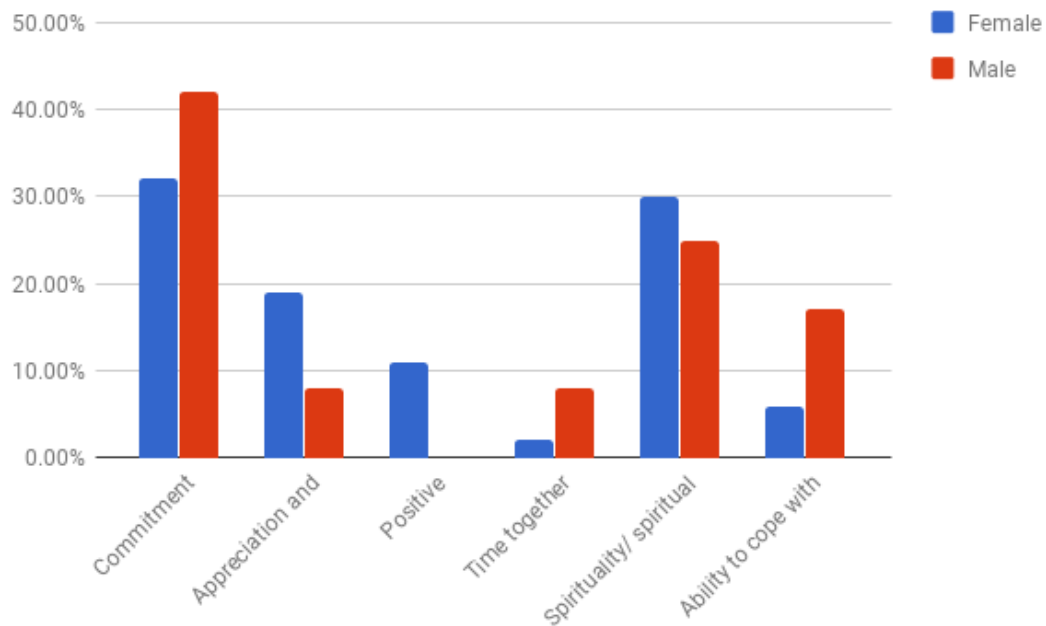


Figure 5: Overall importance of family strengths by mean scores.

Participants also determined the level of importance for each family strength domain using a 5-point Likert type scale. The majority of participants ranked each domain as “very much” important. The top two levels of importance, “very much” and “somewhat” received 86% or more of the responses for each domain (See *Figure 6*, Comparison of top 2 and bottom 3 levels of importance for individual family strengths by percentage). The highest scored domains as “very much” important were Commitment (80%), Positive communication (72%), and Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing (68%) (See *Table 3*, Assessment of the importance of individual family strengths by sex). The lowest scored three domains that the majority of participants ranked “very much” important were Appreciation and affection (66%), Time together (62%), and the Ability to cope with stress and crisis (58%). Additionally, there were no (0%)

participants that ranked Appreciation and affection, as well as, Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing as being “not at all” important (See *Table 3*, Assessment of the importance of individual family strengths by sex).

Table 3

Assessment of the importance of individual family strengths by sex.

<u>Variable</u>		<u>Female</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>%</u>
Commitment	Very much	30	60	10	20
	Somewhat	4	8	2	4
	Undecided	3	6	0	0
	Not really	0	0	0	0
	Not at all	1	2	0	0
Appreciation and affection	Very much	26	52	7	14
	Somewhat	8	16	2	4
	Undecided	2	4	2	4
	Not really	2	4	1	2
	Not at all	0	0	0	0
Positive communication	Very much	29	58	7	14
	Somewhat	8	16	2	4
	Undecided	0	0	0	0
	Not really	0	0	3	6
	Not at all	1	2	0	0
Time together	Very much	26	52	5	10
	Somewhat	7	14	6	12
	Undecided	1	2	0	0
	Not really	3	6	0	0
	Not at all	1	2	1	2
Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing	Very much	28	56	6	12
	Somewhat	7	14	3	6
	Undecided	1	2	2	4
	Not really	2	4	1	2
	Not at all	0	0	0	0
Ability to cope with stress and crisis	Very much	24	48	5	10

Somewhat	11	22	4	8
Undecided	1	2	2	4
Not really	1	2	1	2
Not at all	1	2	0	0

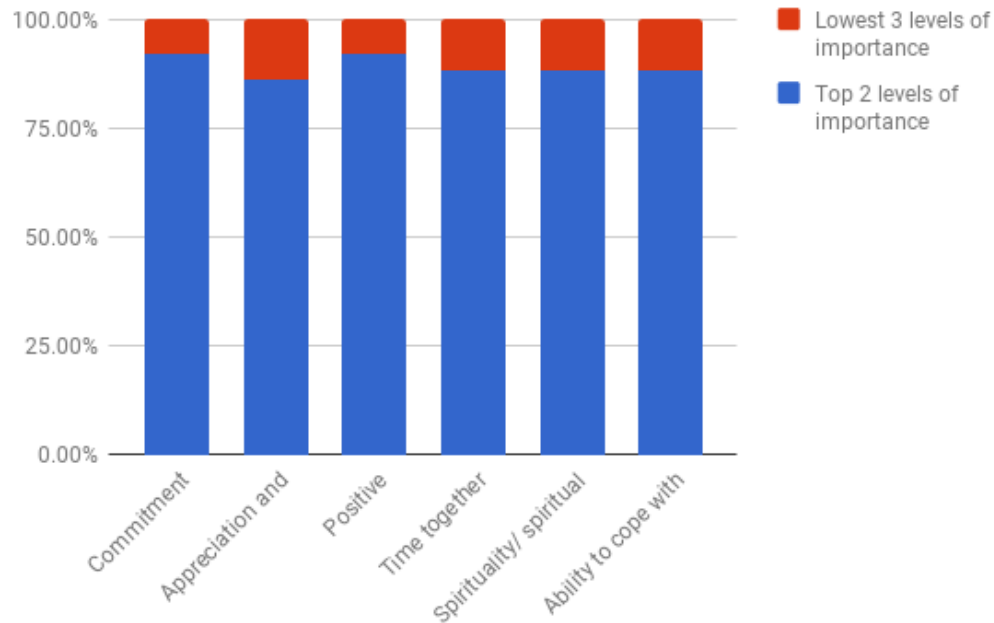


Figure 6: Comparison of top 2 and lowest 3 levels of importance for individual family strengths by percentage.

The majority of participants believed that each domain was “very much” important. Additionally, as previously noted, four of the six domains received responses for all levels of importance (“very much” to “not at all”) (See *Table 3, Assessment of the importance of individual family strengths by sex*). Responses revealed that all participants believed there to be some level of importance for only Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing and Appreciation and affection (See *Table 3, Assessment of the importance of individual family strengths by sex*).

Emerging Traits

In addition to cross-validating quantitative survey results, qualitative data of this study have revealed eight family categories, of which two are new categories. Participants reported additional traits that they felt contributed to their family's strength, and shared stories that highlighted family strengths (See *Appendix D*, Table of codes). To validate the research, the open-ended questions were summarized and coded, then cross-referenced with qualities found in DeFrain's Family Strengths Model. Any categories that did not fit into the existing six strengths were summarized and given a new category. Eight themes emerged from the data: Commitment, Appreciation and affection, Time together, Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing, Positive communication, Ability to cope with stress and crisis, Leadership, and Newness and awe. The first six themes, which were identified, correlated with previous family strength research; however, the two latter characteristics emerged as independent traits.

After cross-analyzing the data and comparing it to the previously established family strength traits (See *Appendix C*, Family Strength Qualities) the six pre-existing family strength domains were clearly still relevant. The majority of participants (59%) reported that there were no other additional traits, which contributed to their family's strength. Furthermore, 32% of participants shared qualities that are already highlighted within one or more of the pre-existing family strength domains. Participants offered family strength qualities like "sharing of financial resources," "honesty," and "loyalty" as responses that coincided with qualities found in the Commitment domain. Participant

responses that parallel with qualities found in the Spiritual Wellbeing domain included, “Our individual and joint focus on God,” “Community,” and “Connectivity.” Additionally, responses that coincided with qualities found in the Time Together domain included, “Participating in activities as a family,” “Regular yearly come-togethers,” and “Having fun and joking with each other and playing games.” One participant shared the following story:

I come from a family of sharecroppers and tobacco farmers that migrated to CT to make a better life for their families. Both of my parents had elementary level education. Their love for us was so overwhelming and had far reaching effects. Reading was very important and our spirituality keep us close-knit. I am a first generation college graduate. My parents fought hard and worked hard for me to have a way. I passed that story and the strength of family down to my children. We never take family for granted, we love, laugh and live.

This story highlights the participant’s appreciation for family history, educational attainment, and spirituality as important family strengths. “Safe space to be honest” and “Courtesy” were responses that aligned with qualities found in the Positive Communication domain. Lastly, one participant shared that “the ability of someone in the family to be able to lighten the mood when needed” was an important family strength, which parallels with the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively. When considering that Commitment, Spiritual wellbeing, Time together, Positive communication, and Appreciation

and affection enable the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively, the following participant quote illustrates that assertion:

My family is not rich with money, but we are rich in love, togetherness, support, etc. Our strength looks more like resilience, when in fact it is just our way of survival.

The two categories that emerged, which were not among qualities found within DeFrain's (1999) Family Strength Model were Leadership and Newness and Awe. Three ($n=3$) participants noted that leadership traits are contributors to family strength. "Providing space and time with friends" suggested a family dynamic that supports independence. Additionally, "leadership" was directly described as a family strength. Lastly, two ($n=2$) participants shared that "the arts" and "travel" contributed to family strength (See *Appendix D*, Table of Codes).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study set out to assess family strengths among Black-Americans. Considering the divisive and destructive history for families of enslaved Africans in America, the inventiveness of these families to retain a family unit as a response to this phenomenon, and the communal nature in child-rearing among families of African descent, family was defined as a group of two or more people, who may or may not be, related by blood, marriage, or other kinship/legal bond,

and engage in a reciprocal relationship that create social bonds utilizing communication, power, and affection. Created, or fictive, families also have a place among this definition. This definition was shared with participants, and “friends” were included among the list of people who participants could include in their family composition. This study revealed that 31% of Black American participants considered friends as part of their family, which supports our rationale for using the aforementioned definition. Close connections with others that employ positive communication, influence, and love transcend traditional family definitions for Black Americans.

The results from this study describe for the first time how Black Americans rank the importance of commitment, positive communication, spirituality, time together, affection and appreciation, and the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively found in the Family Strength Model, as well as, additional strengths they deem important in the 21st century. Additionally, the present study also investigated any new emerging family strength characteristics. The main findings revealed that Black-Americans rank commitment as most important to family strength, followed by spiritual wellbeing/spirituality, appreciation and affection, positive communication, time together, and the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively. Furthermore, emerging family strength characteristics included leadership qualities (i.e. “providing space and time with friends” and “purpose”) and aspects of newness and awe (i.e. “the arts” and “travel”). The results of this study are broadly consistent with other literature; however, these findings have identified a

hierarchical classification for Black Americans, which has not been previously explored.

Historically, Black families have struggled with cohesion in the face of systemic attempts to divide them. When children were born as a result of traumatic experiences, in many cases, the Black-American family and kin would collectively care for the young. They would also draw on their faith to sustain them during those times. This is the first study, to our knowledge, that has considered the systemic and historical injustices against Black-Americans, and the current socio-political climate, as it pertains to family strength. Though this study did not explicitly investigate the reasons for each ranking, these findings suggest that commitment to one another coupled with faith and hope in a divine entity may serve as the foundation for overcoming stress and crisis in Black American families. Furthermore, new considerations identified within this present study, show that Black-Americans, a group that has arguably had to cope with extreme social and economic traumas, ranked the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively as least important among the six family strength domains, and commitment and spirituality among the most important, a finding that is consistent with previous literature (Jacelon, 1997; Malina, 2015; Sterba et al, 2014; Malini, 2015; Lietz & Hodge, 2011). It may be due to the frequency and duration of stress and crisis experienced by Black-Americans, that these stressful experiences have become normalized, possibly expectant. In fact, the built-in reality of racial adversity for Black Americans, and the measures that are taken to cope with and prevent the anticipated injustices early on in life, may be

a strength that many Black-Americans take for granted. It is possible that participants ranked the Ability to cope with stress and crisis as the least important family strength simply, because coping with stress and crisis is simply an intrinsic part of the Black American experience.

Though there were similarities between male and female responses, there were also marked differences that are worth noting. To our knowledge, this is the first study to explore these differences between sexes. The majority of females ranked Commitment as the most important family strength, as did males. In fact, a higher percentage of males ranked Commitment as most important (See *Figure 6: Percentage of participants by sex who ranked family strengths most important*). Literature on relationship commitment explores this trend among males (Kurdek, 2007). Both males and females considered Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing as an important family strength, which is consistent with the overall hierarchical ranking for participants and Hypothesis 1, Black American participants will rank Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing among the traits of highest importance. Positive communication, which received the third highest number of scores for most important family strength among females, received no responses for most important family strength among males. Books like “Cracking the Communication Code” by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs and “Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus” by Dr. John Gray, describe in depth the communication differences between men and women. These findings parallel with the substantial amount of literature on this topic that discusses this phenomenon.

Religiosity and spirituality are two distinctly different terms that have similar socially constructed meanings. Likewise, religion and spirituality are often used interchangeably. For families of African descent, the idea of religion carries painful baggage due to the eradication of their root belief system and forced conversion to Christianity. For this reason, religion was excluded from the language used with participants. Furthermore, previous literature associated with aboriginals highlighted connection as a dominant aspect of their spirituality (Alfred, 2015; Deacon et al, 2011). The belief statement associated with spirituality used in this study was, "In our family, it is important that we have a hopeful attitude toward life; we feel connected to our ancestors, nature, and/or the world around us; we share and benefit from the belief in a higher power." All participants believed that there was at least some level of importance for spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing as a family strength. This was only true for one other domain, affection and appreciation, again suggesting the degree to which spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing is valued among Black-Americans. The overall importance of this trait, and the five others, is consistent with research involving other non-white groups (Kim, et al, 2016); however current findings offer a more focused perspective in family strength research for Black-Americans.

It is possible that Black-Americans draw on their family's commitment to one another for support, as well as, their faith and connection to a force outside of themselves to give them hope in times of crisis. The Holy Bible advises, "... when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great

joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing” (James 1: 2-4, The New Living Translation). For Black-Americans who consider the Holy Bible an instructional guide for daily living, they can find opportunity within crisis by employing the philosophy this scripture suggests. Likewise, Blacks can utilize commitment to one another, their spirituality, appreciation and affection, positive communication, and time together (5 of the 6 family strengths) as tools to helping them cope with stress and crisis, or in other words, be resilient.

In the present study, Black-Americans recognized pre-existing family strength traits like forgiveness, faith/ beliefs, spirituality, connection and commitment to others and nature, which are found in research by DeFrain (1999), Farley (2007), Greeff and Loubser (2008), Bell-Tolliver & Wilkerson (2011). New traits that emerged for Black-Americans within the present study included leadership qualities. There is no research to support the emergence of these qualities as a family strength trait. It is likely that our sampling population of professional women and age of participants led to these traits emerging. Furthermore, public commentary surrounding the United States’ last and current presidents, and presidential remarks, have prompted individuals to pay closer attention to leadership qualities. President Donald Trump stated in his inaugural address, “Because today we are not merely transferring power from one Administration to another, or from one party to another – but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the

American People” (2017). These types of ongoing comments, and the unprecedented rhetoric from America’s leaders, may have led Black-Americans who are displeased with the leadership of this country to pay particular attention to leadership within their families. Leadership characteristics that support another’s independence, give direction when needed, and are goal-oriented all parallel to qualities that our current President touts, and ones that he lacks by other’s perspectives. Additionally, the social climate and strong influence of Generation Y’s “outside of the box” philosophy may have led to emerging characteristics that highlight creativity and travel as family strengths.

Finally, considering the divisive history that Black American families have experienced, it is no surprise that Time together was among the domains that received the lowest number of scores ($n=1$) for most important family strength. We suspect that Black families have had to rely on other strengths in order to maintain a strong family when family cohesion and quality time together have been challenged.

Conclusion

The present study on spirituality in Black Americans as it relates to the six domains within the Family Strength Model was conducted to assess the importance of family strengths, determine a hierarchical ranking from most important to least important, and identify any new family strength traits. Commitment and spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing were among the most important domains, while the ability to cope with stress and crisis was clearly

last. Leadership traits, as well as, newness and awe emerged as new qualities that may contribute to family strength.

The current socio-political climate in the United States for Black Americans, people of color, and other marginalized groups has created a tenuous environment ripe for families to experience trauma and stress. Public rhetoric regarding the leadership of the country is evidence of the perceived importance of leadership on a macro level. This idea of the effective and qualified leader may have permeated the micro level for some people as evidenced in participant responses. Additionally, others may experience the most important family strengths as factors that contribute to their family's ability to manage trauma. In this way, family strengths serve as preemptive factors in coping with stress and crisis.

Implication for policy and practice

We hope that the data from this study provide a clearer understanding of the areas that are most important to Black American families, and help to better inform preventative program design and policy specific to Black American families. Furthermore, African-Americans continue to face significant inequities. As they continue to endure adverse experiences, it is important to understand the factors that can assist them *most* in preempting family crises and increasing their family's strength.

Limitations

The present findings contribute to our understanding of family strength among Black Americans, and begin to explore the differences in males and

females in this area. Our study is not, however, without limitations. Higher participant numbers would have given this study greater validity. Likewise, the majority of participants were females, and although the majority were married, there was a significantly fewer number of male participants. A greater number of males may have added a different outcome; however, some of our findings for males are on trend with past and present research in personal relationships.

Spirituality is greatly associated with religion. Despite our attempt to clarify our definition of Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing, the most prevalent definition, which was not used in our study, may have persisted for participants. Replacing spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing with a less “religious” term may impact the results of a future study. Finally, we made no attempt in this study to investigate the reasons for participant responses. Though the storytelling approach was moderately helpful, questions directly related to reasoning might give a more complete picture of family strengths among Black Americans.

Future direction

It would benefit our field to conduct another study using the same protocols, and correcting for the aforementioned limitations. To test the prevalence of emerging family strength traits, leadership qualities, as well as, aspects of the arts and travel should be added to survey questions. An interdisciplinary study with anthropologists specializing in evolutionary biology and socio-cultural history should be considered when researching families of African descent in the United States. Genetic information would be useful, and may increase the numbers of participants eligible for the study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Family Strength Domains and Key Concept

This figure represents the Family Strengths Model, its domains and the key concepts associated with each.

Family Strengths Model <i>(adopted from DeFrain, 1999)</i>	
Domain	Key Concept
Commitment	Prioritizing family needs at the exclusion of other responsibilities
Appreciation and Affection	Deep emotional connection that is demonstrated through regular positive interchanges
Positive Communication	Non-judgmental, direct, honest, and reciprocal conversation
Time Together	Large amounts of enjoyable activities
Spiritual Wellbeing	Public and/or private connection to a driving force(s) that informs behavior, thoughts, and emotions with others
Ability to Cope with Stress and Crisis	Taking a preventative approach and opportunistic perspective to challenges

Appendix B: Belief Statements

This figure represents the belief statements associated with each domain.

Section 2: Family Strengths Ranking	
<i>Please review the following family strength domains and their example. Utilizing a ranking system where position #1 is most important and position #6 is least important, rank the level of importance for the six traits below.</i>	
Domain	Belief Statement
Commitment	<i>"In our family, it is important that we value each other and are committed to our wellbeing as a family."</i>
Appreciation and Affection	<i>"In our family, it is important that we have appreciation and affection for each other, and let each other know this."</i>
Positive Communication	<i>"In our family, it is important that we listen to and share our feelings with one another in a respectful way."</i>
Time Together	<i>"In our family, it is important that we have adequate time for each other, and we enjoy the time we share together."</i>
Spirituality/Spiritual Wellbeing	<i>"In our family, it is important that we have a hopeful attitude toward life; we feel connected to our ancestors, nature, and/or the world around us; we share and benefit from the belief in a higher power."</i>
Ability to Cope with Stress and Crisis	<i>"In our family, it is important that we support one another, and work together to solve very difficult family problems, while looking at obstacles as opportunities for growth."</i>

Appendix C: Family Strength Qualities

Figure 3 represents the qualities associated with the six pre-existing domains of the Family Strength Model.

Qualities of Strong Families (DeFrain, 1999)	
Commitment Trust Honesty Dependability Faithfulness Sharing	Time Together Quality time in great quantity Good things take time Enjoying each other's company Simple good times Sharing fun times
Appreciation and Affection Caring for each other Friendship Respect for individuality Playfulness Humor	Spiritual Wellbeing Hope Faith Compassion Shared ethical values Oneness with humankind
Positive Communication Sharing feelings Giving compliments Avoiding blame Being able to compromise Agreeing to disagree	Ability to Cope With Stress and Crisis Adaptability Seeing crises as challenges and opportunities Growing through crises together Openness to change Resilience

Appendix D: Table of Codes

Invariant Structures (“Direct Quotes”)	Meaning Units (Summary)
Communication	Sharing thoughts and feelings
Participating in activities as a family	Time with family
Collaboration	Working together through compromise and communication
Providing space and time with friends	Supporting independence
Love	Holistic care and support
Honesty	Sharing truthfully
Respect	Acceptance and appreciation for one another
Leadership	Giving direction and servanthood
Sharing of financial resources	Financial support
Love	Holistic care and support
Devotion	Commitment to one another
Forgiveness	Moving past wrong-doing
Trust	Belief in one another
Our culture and families of origin	Inclusion and cultural acceptance
Connectivity	Oneness
The ability of someone in the family to be able to lighten the mood when needed.	Light-heartedness in times of stress
Love--of ourselves, each other, extended family, friends, community and nature	Holistic care and support for others and nature
Our individual and joint focus on God	Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing
Safe space to be honest	Truth-telling, positive communication
Love	Holistic care and support
Community	Connection
God	Spirituality
Integrity	Moral
Respect	Acceptance and

	appreciation for one another
Courage	Willingness in the face of adversity
Purpose	Goal-oriented
Courtesy.	Politeness
Regular yearly come-together	Time connecting with family on a regular basis
Memories	Previous time spent together
Faith	Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing
Hard working	Dependable work ethic
Respect	Acceptance and appreciation for one another
Trust	Belief in one another
Loyalty	Commitment to one another
Providers	Being dependable and able to give what is needed
The arts	Creativity
Travel	Going places outside of the norm
Family gatherings	Time together with family
Trust	Belief in one another
Honesty	Truth-telling
Community service- Voter registration hours in getting more voters	Doing meaningful things together matters.
Enjoying family time, discussing current events and dinner in the dining room	Fun, quality time together
Throughout my childhood my Family, both on Mother and Father side, we were taught to look out for each other no matter what.	Sticking together is important.
I come from a family of sharecroppers and tobacco farmers that migrated to CT to make a better life for their families. Both of my parents had elementary level education. Their love for us was so overwhelming and had far reaching effects. Reading was very important and our spirituality keep us close-knit. I am a first generation college graduate. My parents fought hard and worked hard for me to have a way. I passed that story and the strength of family down to my children. We never take family for granted, we love, laugh and live.	Appreciation for family history, educational attainment, and spirituality is important to family strength.
Having fun and joking with each other and playing games.	Humor, fun, and playing together are important.
We try to sit at the meal table together and commit to be present	Active listening and

in that moment. Truly listening and understanding one another is a constant goal.	empathy are important.
Our commitment to live our faith with each other , our children and our friends is our strength.	Living our faith and beliefs are an important commitment to one another.
Trust	Being trust-worthy is an important family strength.
My family is not rich with money, but we are rich in love, togetherness, support, etc. Our strength looks more like resilience, when in fact it is just our way of survival.	Our ability to overcome challenges is due to the care and commitment we have for one another.
God centered	Our spirituality is the center of our family's strength.
We get through a lot of difficult times	Ability to manage stress and crisis
We are strong enough to move forward after the death of our 3yr old daughter. She died from brain cancer and it was a long battle.	Ability to move forward after crisis
Our family is able to remain helpful to each other through times we have disagreements with each other .	Our commitment to one another remains despite disagreements.

Appendix E: Table of Themes

Themes	Meaning Units (Summary)
Commitment	Sharing truthfully
	Financial support
	Commitment to one another
	Belief in one another
	Dependable work ethic
	Being dependable and able to give what is needed
	Truth-telling
	Sticking together is important.
	Being trust-worthy is an important family strength.
	Commitment to one another remains despite disagreements
Time together	Time with family
	Time connecting with family on a regular basis
	Previous time spent together (memories)
	Doing meaningful things together matters.
	Fun, quality time together
	Humor, fun, and playing together are important.
Appreciation and Affection	Acceptance and appreciation for one another
	Inclusion and cultural acceptance
	Holistic care and support (for others and nature)
	Appreciation for family history, educational attainment, and spirituality is important to family strength.
Spiritual wellbeing	Oneness
	Spirituality/ Spiritual wellbeing
	Connection
	Moral
	Living our faith and beliefs are an important commitment to one another.
Positive communication	Sharing thoughts and feelings
	Working together through compromise and communication
	Positive, honest communication

	Politeness
	Active listening and empathy are important.
Ability to cope with stress and crisis	Moving past wrong-doing (forgiveness)
	Light-heartedness in times of stress
	Willingness in the face of adversity
	Our ability to overcome challenges is due to the care and commitment we have for one another.
	Ability to manage stress and crisis
	Ability to move forward after crisis
Leadership	Supporting independence
	Giving direction and servanthood
	Goal-oriented
Newness and awe	Creativity
	Going places outside of the norm

Appendix F: Family Strength Questionnaire

Family Research Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions from your own perspective.

* Required

Do you live in CT? *

- Yes
- No

Section 1: Demographic Information

Indicate the sex you identify yourself as: *

- Male
- Female

Your age range: *

- 18 - 23 years old
- 24 - 29 years old
- 30 - 35 years old
- 36 - 40 years old
- 41 - 50 years old
- 51+ years old

Indicate your race/ethnicity (Choose all that apply): *

- Black
- Latino/ Spanish speaking
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Other

Marital Status: *

- Single
- Married
- Living with significant other

Family Composition: *

Please indicate all those who make up your family. You will be answering the following questions based on this family composition. In this research, a family is defined as any group of people, who may or may not be, related by blood, marriage, or other legal bond, and share a mutual relationship that involves communication, power dynamics, and affection.

- Spouse
- Child(ren)
- Grandparent(s)
- Cousins/ Aunts/ Uncles/ Extended relatives

- Friends
- Other:

Section 2: Family Strength Ranking

FAMILY TRAIT	BELIEF STATEMENT
Commitment	<i>"In our family, it is important that we value each other and are committed to our well-being as a family."</i>
Appreciation and Affection	<i>"In our family, it is important that we have appreciation and affection for each other, and let each other know this."</i>
Positive Communication	<i>"In our family, it is important that we listen to and share our feelings with one another in a respectful way."</i>
Time Together	<i>"In our family, it is important that we have adequate time for each other, and we enjoy the time we share together."</i>
Spirituality/Spiritual Wellbeing	<i>"In our family, it is important that we have a hopeful attitude toward life; we feel connected to our ancestors, nature, and/or the world around us; we share and benefit from the belief in a higher power."</i>
Ability to Cope with Stress and Crisis	<i>"In our family, it is important that we support one another, and work together to solve very difficult family problems, while looking at obstacles as opportunities for growth."</i>

Ranking: *

Please review the following family strength traits and the belief statement associated with each. Utilizing a ranking system where position #1 is most important and position #6 is least important, rank the level of importance for the six traits below.

#1 (most important): _____

#2: _____

#3: _____

#4: _____

#5: _____

#6 (least important): _____

Please rank the level of importance for each family strength trait: How important do you believe the following traits are to your family's strength? *

a. Commitment

1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very much)
----------------	---	---	---	---------------

b. Appreciation and Affection

1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very much)
----------------	---	---	---	---------------

c. Positive Communication

1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very much)
----------------	---	---	---	---------------

d. Time Together

1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very much)
----------------	---	---	---	---------------

e. Spirituality/ Spiritual Wellbeing

1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very much)
----------------	---	---	---	---------------

f. Ability to Cope With Stress and Crisis

1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (Very much)
----------------	---	---	---	---------------

Section 3: Open-ended Feedback

List any other trait(s) that contribute to the strength of your family: *

If there are no other traits, write "none."

Please share any stories that describe your family's strengths.

Questions regarding this study? Email genese.clark@huskers.unl.edu.

Appendix G: Table 1 Demographic profile of participants by sex

Table 1

Demographic profile of participants by sex

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Sub-variables</u>	<u>Female %</u>		<u>Male %</u>	
Age	18-23	7	11.9	4	6.8
	24-29	2	3.4	1	1.7
	30-35	4	6.8	1	1.7
	36-40	9	15.3	2	3.4
	41-50	12	20.3	1	1.7
	51+	13	22	3	5.1
Race/ Ethnicity	Black	42	71.2	8	13.6
	Black/ Native American	2	3.4	0	0
	Black/ White	1	1.7	0	0
	Black/ Latino	1	1.7	2	3.4
	Black/ Pacific Islander/ White	0	0	1	1.7
	Black/ Native American/ Pacific Islander	1	1.7	0	0
	Other	0	0	1	1.7
Marital Status	Single	16	27.1	5	8.5
	Married	30	50.8	7	11.9
	Living with significant other	1	1.7	0	0
Family Composition	Spouse/ significant other	3	5.1	0	0
	Spouse/ significant other, child(ren)	16	27.1	4	6.8
	Spouse/ significant other, child(ren), extended relatives	5	8.5	1	1.7
	Spouse/ significant other, child(ren), extended relatives, and friends	6	10.2	2	3.4
	Spouse/ significant other, extended relatives, and friends	1	1.7	0	0
	Child(ren)	2	3.4	1	1.7
	Child(ren) and extended relatives	4	6.8	0	0
	Child(ren), extended relatives, friends	2	3.4	0	0
	Extended relatives	1	1.7	1	1.7
	Extended relatives and friends	3		2	3.4

Friends	2	3.4	0	0
Parent(s)	1	1.7	1	1.7
Parent(s), sibling(s), extended relatives	1	1.7	0	0

Appendix H: Table 2. Assessment of family strength rankings by sex

Table 2

Assessment of Family Strength Rankings by sex

<u>Variable</u>		<u>Female</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>%</u>
Commitment	#1: most important	15	25.4	5	8.5
	#2	18	30.5	5	8.5
	#3	6	10.2	3	5.1
	#4	5	8.5	2	3.4
	#5	9	15.3	1	1.7
	#6: least important	3	5.1	2	3.4
Appreciation and affection	#1: most important	9	15.3	1	1.7
	#2	6	10.2	4	6.8
	#3	12	20.3	3	5.1
	#4	12	20.3	1	1.7
	#5	4	6.8	2	3.4
	#6: least important	7	11.9	1	1.7
Positive communication	#1: most important	5	8.5	0	0
	#2	9	15.3	1	1.7
	#3	11	18.6	2	3.4
	#4	8	13.6	4	6.8
	#5	8	13.6	1	1.7
	#6: least important	4	6.8	1	1.7
Time together	#1: most important	1	1.7	1	1.7
	#2	7	11.9	2	3.4
	#3	10	16.9	2	3.4
	#4	9	15.3	4	6.8
	#5	12	20.3	4	6.8
	#6: least important	3	5.1	2	3.4
Spirituality/ spiritual wellbeing	#1: most important	14	23.7	3	5.1
	#2	5	8.5	0	0

	#3	4	6.8	0	0
	#4	8	13.6	1	1.7
	#5	7	11.9	1	1.7
	#6: least important	7	11.9	4	6.8
Ability to cope with stress and crisis	#1: most important	3	5.1	2	3.4
	#2	2	3.4	0	0
	#3	4	6.8	2	3.4
	#4	5	8.5	0	0
	#5	7	11.9	3	5.1
	#6: least important	23	39	2	3.4

Appendix I: Participant Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Form

IRB#

Title: Strengths Among African-Americans: A Hierarchical Classification of the Family Strengths Model

Purpose: This research project will aim to identify which traits are dominant among African-American families according to the Family Strengths Model. You are invited to participate in this study because you identify (in whole or in part) as African-American, belong to a family, live in Connecticut, and are at least 19 years old.

Procedures: You will be asked to complete a brief electronic questionnaire. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant; however, future African-American families and communities may benefit, as the knowledge we gain from the study may help strengthen African American families and communities.

Risks and/or Discomforts: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a password protected area on the personal computer in the investigator's office, will only be seen by the investigator during the study, and be stored for no more than 2 years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Compensation: You will not receive any compensation for participating in this project.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study by contacting the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking "agree," you certify that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep upon request.

Name and Phone number of investigator(s):

Genese Clark, Principal Investigator Mobile: (203) 850-4737

Yan Xia, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator Office: (402) 472-6552

"I have read the information above. I agree to participate in this study."

Agree

Disagree

Appendix J: Official Approval Letter



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #16769 - New Project Form

February 15, 2017

Genese Clark
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

Yan Xia
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
MABL 254, UNL, 68588-0236

IRB Number: 20170216769EX
Project ID: 16769
Project Title: Spirituality Among African-Americans: A Hierarchical Classification of the Family Strengths Model

Dear Genese:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Exemption: 2/15/2017

- o Review conducted using exempt category 2 at 45 CFR 46.101
- o Funding: N/A

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

