

# Unique and Protective Contributions of Parenting and Classroom Processes to the Adjustment of African American Children Living in Single-Parent Families

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The unique contributions that parenting processes (high levels of monitoring with a supportive, involved mother–child relationship) and classroom processes (high levels of organization, rule clarity, and student involvement) make to children’s self-regulation and adjustment were examined with a sample of 277 single-parent African American families. A multi-informant design involving mothers, teachers, and 7- to 15-year-old children was used. Structural equation modeling indicated that parenting and classroom processes contributed uniquely to children’s adjustment through the children’s development of self-regulation. Additional analyses suggested that classroom processes can serve a protective–stabilizing function when parenting processes are compromised, and vice versa. Further research is needed to examine processes in both family and school contexts that promote child competence and resilience.

## INTRODUCTION

Although migration from the South to the North has concentrated large proportions of the African American population in northern cities, several million of these families still live in southern communities (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). Many of them are faced with adverse environmental conditions and are at risk for unemployment, low wages, low educational levels, substandard housing, and high infant mortality rates (Lick, 1986; O’Hare & Curry-White, 1992). Poverty is the greatest problem facing single African American mothers and children living in the South (Edelman, 1985; Rodgers, 1987; Smith & Smith, 1986), with over 50% of these families living at or below the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). This pervasive poverty reflects the dominance of low-wage labor and resource-intensive industries in this area. The poor in the South have access to fewer services and amenities than do the poor in the Northeast, and African Americans living in the South must cope with what Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) have termed “an oppressive social structure.”

In this article, we present data from a sample of African American 7- to 15-year-old children from single-mother-headed families living in the South, most of whom live in poverty. The primary purpose of this study was to delineate the social–contextual processes in homes and classrooms that contribute to adjustment among African American children. In this study, adjustment was conceptualized as a high level of self-regulation with low levels of externalizing and internalizing behaviors. This combination of characteristics in middle childhood forecasts low levels of behavioral

and emotional difficulties during adolescence and young adulthood (Caspi, Bem, & Elder, 1989; Hawkins et al., 1997), as well as low risk for poor academic performance (Bergman & Magnusson, 1997) and school dropout (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989). The time that children spend in the home and classroom contexts is presumed to contribute uniquely to children’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Elder, 1992; Rutter, 1983); however, little evidence is available with which to evaluate this hypothesis. Previous studies have focused primarily on family processes, typically the contributions of proximal parenting processes to children’s adjustment. Few studies, however, have examined the relation between classroom processes and children’s adjustment net of parenting processes (Rutter, 2000), especially for African American children (McLoyd, 1990, 1993). In conducting this study, two specific hypotheses were tested: (1) parenting processes and classroom processes make unique contributions to children’s self-regulation and adjustment; and (2) classroom processes can function as protective–stabilizing forces when parenting processes are compromised, and vice versa.

## Parenting, Classroom Processes, and Adjustment among African American Children

The hypothetical model (see Figure 1) that guided our examination of the unique contributions that

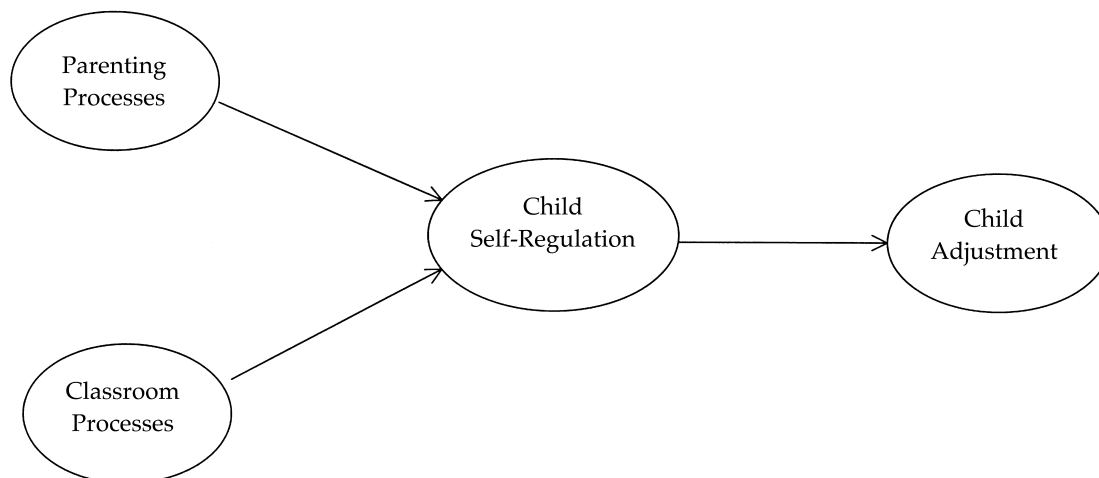


Figure 1 Hypothetical model.

parenting and classroom processes make to adjustment among African American children is described first, and then the rationale for the predictions it includes is presented. Parenting processes were assessed using two indicators: involved, supportive mother-child relationships; and mothers' monitoring of their children's behavior. We postulated that parenting characterized by high levels of involvement, support, and monitoring would be linked indirectly with child adjustment by promoting children's self-regulation. Self-regulation includes the ability to refrain from engaging in problematic behaviors and to consider the consequences of one's behavior. This aspect of self-regulation is prominent in the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and in life-span theories of personality development (Clausen, 1976) and successful aging (Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996). Brody et al. (1994) found that differences in self-regulation differentiated academically and psychosocially competent youths beyond the influence attributable to social class. Youths who are self-regulated despite living in challenging environments have been found to achieve more academically and to experience fewer externalizing and internalizing problems (Brody & Flor, 1998; Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999). Similarly, we expected classrooms that are well regulated, in which teachers clearly communicate their expectations for appropriate behavior and encourage student involvement in classroom management, to enhance children's self-regulation and adjustment (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Eccles et al., 1993).

Our theoretical and conceptual analyses of parenting processes that promoted self-regulation were based on Young's (1970, 1974) anthropological analy-

ses of child socialization in southern African American families. Young's observations led her to suggest that mothers' behaviors were governed by their beliefs that very firm and vigilant parenting practices used within affectively positive relationships would help their children to develop into self-reliant and self-regulated adolescents and adults. The mothers in Young's ethnographic analyses believed that such parenting practices would protect their children from dangerous surroundings and involvement in antisocial activity as well as promote their development of self-regulatory competencies (see Allen, 1978; Bartz & Levine, 1978; Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1996). African American scholars (Peters, 1988; Peters & Massey, 1983; Staples, 1979) have called this style of childrearing "no nonsense" parenting. Empirical analyses of this parenting style have revealed positive associations with self-regulation, academic achievement, and psychological adjustment in African American children and young adolescents (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Cole, 1990; Brody & Flor, 1998; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Lamborn et al., 1996; Murry & Brody, 1999; Taylor & Roberts, 1995). Furthermore, in qualitative studies, Lee (1984, 1985) found that strong parental direction and control combined with moderate family openness were associated with positive developmental outcomes among African American adolescents.

In response to Bronfenbrenner's (1989) call to go beyond social address-oriented models to more process-oriented models of influence, educational psychologists increasingly have directed attention to classroom processes that foster self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000). Although the current literature is more theoret-

ical than empirical, common themes run throughout. Elementary and middle school classrooms in which clear rules and expectations are established in advance, daily activities are organized and predictable, and students are involved in classroom decision and planning processes are hypothesized to enhance self-regulatory skills (Almeida, 1995; Brophy, 1998; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Good & Weinstein, 1986; Lynn, 1994; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Zimmerman, 2000). Consistent with these conjectures, Baker (1998) and Cabello and Terrell (1994) found that African American elementary school children's academic motivation and achievement were enhanced in classrooms in which regular formats and routines were established and student involvement in classroom procedures was encouraged. Eccles and colleagues (Eccles et al., 1993; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998) obtained similar findings with a sample of middle school students, two thirds of whom were African American and one third of whom were European American. Clear teacher expectations and student involvement in decision making were associated with students' beliefs about their competence, their school motivation, and their emotional functioning. We predicted that these classroom processes would be positively associated with children's self-regulation and, indirectly, with children's adjustment, even after controlling for associations between parenting processes and child outcomes.

#### Protective Contributions of Parenting and Classroom Processes

Researchers interested in resilience seek to understand how children and youths can experience adaptive developmental outcomes despite the challenging, high-risk circumstances in which they live (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1999). Since the 1970s, this research has focused on individual and contextual processes that counteract the influence of conditions that can disrupt development (Luthar, 1999; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Children confronted with chronic and periodic stressors are more likely to maintain normative developmental trajectories when they have access to at least one context that functions as an "arena of comfort" (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Such contexts are organized and predictable, and the adults within them value children's input into decisions that affect the children's lives (Felner, Aber, Cauce, & Primavera, 1985; Lewis, Dlugokinski, Caputo, & Griffin, 1988; Masten & Wright, 1998; McLoyd, 1998; Rae-Grant, Thomas, Offord, & Boyle, 1989; Simmons & Blyth, 1987).

From this perspective, not all children who experience suboptimal parenting or classroom processes

will evince low levels of self-regulation and poor adjustment. Many children develop self-regulatory competence and display few externalizing and internalizing problems despite their exposure to family or classroom environments that do not promote competence (Masten & Curtis, 2000). Because protective factors arise from multiple levels of influence, competence-promoting processes in one context can serve a protective function for children experiencing non-competence-promoting processes in the other context. In resilience research (Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 1985), such effects are termed "protective-stabilizing" because competence-promoting parenting or classroom processes contribute to stable child functioning despite the presence of risk. We tested the protective-stabilizing hypothesis that children who experience low levels of competence-promoting processes in either the family or the classroom environment will evince higher levels of self-regulation and better psychological adjustment when the other context features high levels of those processes. This hypothesis has seldom been addressed, particularly with African American children. In the following analyses, the unique and protective contributions of parenting and classroom processes were empirically evaluated using a multi-informant research design.

## METHOD

### Participants

A sample that included 277 African American single-mother-headed families with a 7- to 15-year-old child ( $M =$  age 11.40 years) was recruited from metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties in two southeastern states. Only counties in which 25% or more of the population was African American were sampled to ensure that a viable African American community existed in the county. Families were recruited through community contacts. An African American staff member contacted African American community members, such as pastors and teachers, and explained the research project to them. After the community members understood the purposes of the project and developed trusting relationships with the staff member, they contacted prospective participant families and informed them about the purposes of the project. Each community contact gave the names of families who expressed interest in the project to the research staff, and a staff member then contacted the families. Of the families who were contacted, 67% agreed to participate in the study. Each family was compensated \$100 for their participation.

Of the 277 families, 97% received public assistance.

This percentage reflected our interest in working with families who were at high risk due to economic stress. Almost all of the families had a per capita income of \$3,800 or less. According to criteria established by the Census Bureau (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992), this figure placed these families in the first quintile for household income, which the bureau defines as poverty status. In the counties from which the sample was drawn, 75% of single African American mothers with school-age children live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). The families who participated in this study were at a somewhat higher risk for economic stress than were families in the population from which they were recruited. Of the mothers in the sample, 42% had less than a high school education, 38% had received a high school diploma, and 21% had some college or trade school education; 43% were employed for at least 32 hours per week, 19% were employed for less than 32 hours per week, and 38% were unemployed.

Serving as interviewers were 16 African American and 5 European American community members and students. Prior to data collection, the interviewers received 1 month of training in administering the interviews. The training involved role-playing scenarios as well as practice sessions with African American parents and children.

### Procedure

Two data collection sessions, each of which lasted about 2 hr, were scheduled with each family. During the first session the mother completed informed consent forms, consenting to her own and her child's participation. The mother also provided the name and location of the child's school and authorized the child's teacher to provide the researchers with information concerning the child's self-regulation at school. A research assistant contacted the teachers individually and informed them of the purpose of the study, then personally delivered to the teachers the instruments that they were to complete. The teachers who agreed to participate (90% of those contacted) mailed the completed instruments to the research assistant.

At both data collection sessions, self-report questionnaires were administered to the mother and the target child in an interview format. Each interview was conducted privately between the family member and a researcher, with no other family members present or able to overhear the conversation. At no time during the presentation of the self-report instruments did the researchers assume that a family member could read. This literacy concern was one of the reasons for presenting the questions in an interview format.

### Development of Measures

The accurate assessment of the population to be studied was a concern because most instruments used to evaluate family processes, classroom processes, and children's outcomes have been developed for use with and standardized on European American, middle-class families. Consequently, the available measures may not describe validly family and classroom processes among the African American participants in the study. This issue was resolved through the formation of focus groups composed of African American community members in the states from which the sample was drawn. These groups included a total of 60 people who were representative of the population targeted in this study.

The focus groups evaluated each instrument to determine whether it was appropriate for use with African American families. Group leaders presented each instrument one at a time, described its purpose, and asked the focus group to review the measure and indicate in a group discussion whether the instrument was a valid assessment for African American families. The focus group members agreed that all the instruments were appropriate for the study population. The groups then reviewed each item on each scale and suggesting wording changes, as well as the deletion of items that they perceived as unclear or irrelevant to families and children in their communities. After the data were collected, confirmatory factor analyses were executed to ensure that each scale was composed of a coherent set of items for this study population. Items were retained if they attained a factor loading of .40 or above.

### Measures

*Supportive-involved mother-child relationships.* The level of support and involvement in the mother-child relationship was assessed using mothers' reports on the short form of the Interaction Behavior Questionnaire (IBQ; Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979). The short form includes the items with the highest phi coefficients and the highest item-to-total correlations from the 75 items in the original form. It is correlated at .96 with the long form. The 15 true-false items included questions such as "You listen when your child needs somebody to talk to"; "You understand your child, you know where he or she is coming from"; "You enjoy spending time with your child"; and "You think you and your child get along well." Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this scale was .85.

*Monitoring.* Maternal monitoring of children's activities was assessed using mothers' responses to the

17-item Monitoring Questionnaire, which Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber (1984) developed and validated. It measures parents' knowledge about various areas of their children's lives, as well as how much they try to influence their children's lives in those areas. Items such as "choice of friends, who they are, what they are like"; "activities outside of school" (e.g., sports, jobs, clubs, etc.); "health habits, such as amount of sleep, diet, exercise"; "use of tobacco or cigarettes"; "who the child's teachers are and what they think of him/her"; and "where child is and what she/he is doing when away from home" are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this scale was .91.

*Classroom processes.* The Classroom Environment Scale (CES; Moos, 1979; Trickett & Moos, 1973) was used to assess classroom processes. Children responded to three subscales—order and organization, rule clarity, and student involvement—that measured processes hypothesized to be associated with self-regulation and psychological adjustment. Children in elementary school (approximately 70% of the sample) reported on their self-contained classrooms, and youths in middle school (the remaining 30% of the sample) reported on their language arts classes. Youths who were not enrolled in language arts reported on their social studies classes. The children responded to true–false items such as "Your class is well organized," "Activities in the class are clearly and carefully planned," and "Your class hardly ever starts on time" (reverse scored) for the order and organization subscale; "In the first few weeks of the school year your teacher explained rules about what students could and could not do," "When your teacher makes a rule she/he means it," and "My teacher sticks to the rules she/he has made" for the rule clarity subscale; and "I really enjoy my class," "Most of the students in my class really pay attention to what my teacher says," and "If I want to talk about something my teacher will find time to do it" for the student involvement subscale. Children, rather than teachers, were chosen to rate classroom qualities for two reasons. First, individual children in the same classroom often experience the classroom environment differently, and these experiences and perceptions ultimately influence the children's behavior. Second, teachers are often reluctant to report low levels of desirable classroom qualities (Maehr, 1991; Rutter, 2000). Consistent with past studies in which  $\alpha$  coefficients ranging from .59 to .78 were found for the CES (Fraser, 1982; Fraser & Fisher, 1983), in the present study  $\alpha$ s were .68 for order and organization, .55 for rule clarity, and .45 for student involvement. The low  $\alpha$ s were produced by the relatively small number of

items that comprise each subscale ( $n = 6$  per scale); and the subscales' true–false format, which is known to attenuate  $\alpha$  levels (Nunnally, 1967). When the three subscales are aggregated into one, the  $\alpha$  increases to .85. For theoretical reasons, however, it was important that distinctions were maintained among classroom processes. We therefore decided to use the subscales as separate indicators in the analyses presented later.

*Child self-regulation.* Self-regulation was assessed using the 5-item self-control subscale from the Children's Self-Control Scale (Humphrey, 1982). Using a 5-point Likert scale, mothers and teachers indicated how often the target child (1) thinks ahead of time about the consequences of her/his actions, (2) knows when she/he is misbehaving without being told, (3) gets into arguments or fights with other children, (4) talks out of turn, and (5) has trouble keeping promises to improve her/his actions. Mothers' and teachers' ratings of self-regulation on this subscale were linked to psychological adjustment among African American children in other samples (Brody & Flor, 1998; Brody et al., 1994). These studies also indicated that mothers and teachers rate children's self-regulatory skills more accurately than do the children themselves. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were .85 for mothers and .87 for teachers.

*Psychological adjustment.* Three indicators made up the psychosocial competence latent construct. The first two indicators were the child's self-report of externalizing problems using the aggressive and delinquent behavior subscales from the Youth Self-Report form of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991). These measures were reverse scored so that higher scores indicate better adjustment (fewer externalizing behaviors). Acceptable reliability and validity data have been presented for these subscales; however, they were not standardized on 7- to 11-year-old children. Consequently, a confirmatory factor analysis, specifying two factors, was conducted. For the aggressive behavior subscale, all 19 items were retained, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .87. For the delinquent behavior subscale, 7 of the 11 items were retained, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .72.

The third indicator was the child's self-report of internalizing problems using the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1981). The CDI also was reverse scored so that higher scores indicate better adjustment (fewer depressive symptoms). Adequate reliability and validity data derived with similar samples have been presented (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 1993). The CDI consists of 27 items, each of which is rated on a 3-point scale. Standardization data are available for children 7 to 17 years old. For the current project, one item pertaining to suicidal thoughts was omitted, re-

sulting in a scale of 26 items with an  $\alpha$  coefficient of .76. A mean score of 9 ( $SD = 7$ ) has been reported across various samples (Fitzpatrick, 1993; Kovacs, 1981).

## RESULTS

The associations of three demographic variables—maternal education, monthly income, and child age—with the study variables were examined. Maternal education was correlated with maternal monitoring and control levels,  $r(276) = .26, p < .01$ , but monthly income and child age were not correlated significantly with any of the study variables. Thus, out of 30 possible associations (3 demographic variables  $\times$  10 study variables), only 1 emerged as statistically significant. Accordingly, the demographic variables were not controlled in the structural equation modeling analyses that follow. An additional set of analyses was executed to determine whether child gender, school structure, or their interaction were linked with the study variables. The results of the 2 (child gender)  $\times$  2 (school structure: elementary or middle school) analysis yielded two significant main effects: Children in middle school reported engaging in more delinquent behaviors than did elementary school students,  $M = .76$  versus  $.42, F(1, 273) = 4.33, p < .04$ ; and girls were rated as more self-regulated than were boys,  $M = .10$  versus  $-.07, F(1, 273) = 9.20, p < .003$ . No other main or interaction effects attained statistical significance. Analyses were also conducted to determine whether child gender or school structure moderated the hypothesized paths depicted in Figure 1 or the compensatory effects of parenting and classroom processes; these results are discussed later.

To determine whether parenting and classroom

processes made unique contributions to children's self-regulation and adjustment, latent variable structural equation models were constructed to test the hypothetical model presented in Figure 1. Maximum-likelihood estimates of the model coefficients were derived using LISREL 8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Chi-square values and Goodness-of-Fit Indexes were obtained. Table 1 presents the correlation matrices, means, and standard deviations for the variables used in the analyses, all of which were consistent with the hypothesized links depicted in Figure 1.

The model was estimated by examining the measurement and structural models simultaneously. The first indicator within each construct was fixed at 1.0. Figure 2 presents the factor loadings of the measured variables on the latent constructs and the standardized structural coefficients. The factor loadings were all significant.

After the measurement model was found to fit the data as specified, the proposed structural model was then tested. This model evinced a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(32) = 57.79, p < .003$ , Goodness of Fit Index = .96, Comparative Fit Index = .95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = .05. The model explained 31% of the variance in the endogenous child adjustment construct. We hypothesized that parenting processes and classroom processes would be associated with children's adjustment via their links with children's self-regulation. The results of the LISREL analysis were consistent with this hypothesis. Parenting and classroom processes were associated with self-regulation, which was linked with children's adjustment: for parenting,  $\beta = .86, p < .01$ ; for classroom processes,  $\beta = .37, p < .01$ ; for children's adjustment,  $\beta = -.55, p < .01$ .

**Table 1** Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations among the Study Variables

Study Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Interaction Behavior Questionnaire										
2. Monitoring	.24									
3. Classroom organization	.11	-.19								
4. Classroom rule clarity	.07	-.15	.39							
5. Student involvement	.08	-.14	.65	.35						
6. Child self-regulation: Mother report	.43	.12	.23	.12	.17					
7. Child self-regulation: Teacher report	.10	.06	.15	.12	.16	.22				
8. Child aggression	-.18	-.14	-.15	.03	-.06	-.22	-.21			
9. Child delinquency	-.26	-.22	-.07	-.06	-.04	-.21	-.11	.43		
10. Child depressive symptoms	-.23	-.17	-.13	-.03	-.07	-.26	-.11	.44	.25	
<i>M</i>	10.82	45.60	4.48	5.01	3.91	11.14	16.68	7.78	.56	7.61
<i>SD</i>	3.28	7.25	1.91	1.15	1.56	4.08	5.77	6.56	1.36	6.38

Note:  $N = 277$ .

$r(276) > .12, p < .05$  for all values.

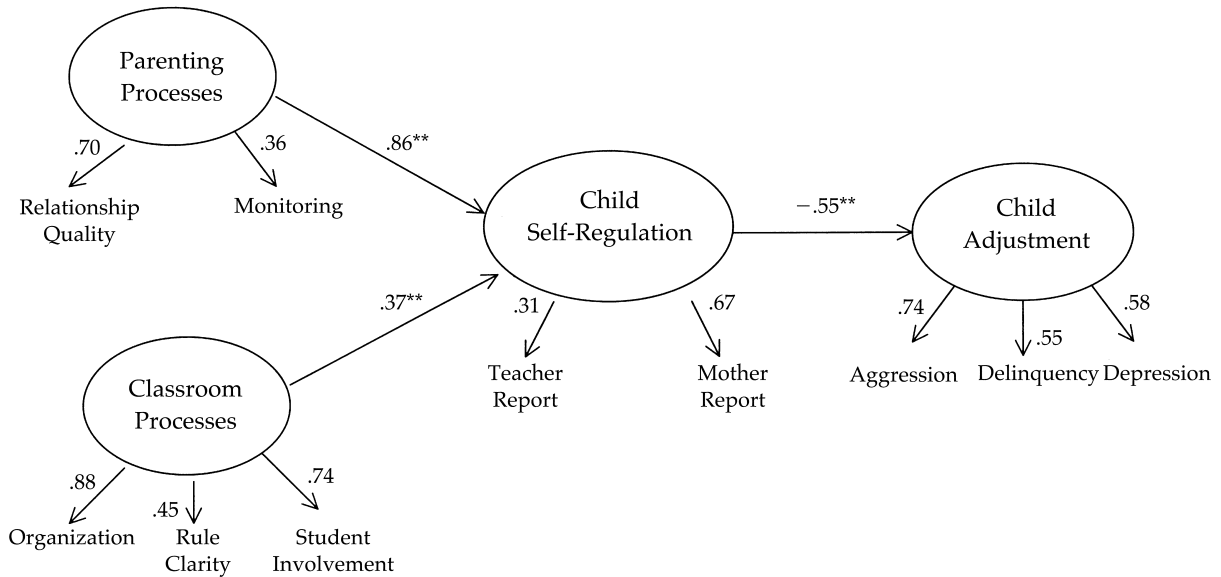


Figure 2 Factor loadings of the measured variables on the latent constructs and standardized structural coefficients. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

The parenting and classroom constructs' indirect and total effects in the full model were examined next to ensure that the postulated indirect effects were statistically significant. The  $\beta$ s for indirect effects, through children's self-regulation, of parenting and classroom processes on children's adjustment attained statistical significance: for parenting,  $\beta = .32$ ,  $t(276) = -3.04$ ,  $p < .01$ ; for classroom processes,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $t(276) = -3.64$ ,  $p < .01$ .

To evaluate more fully the fit of the theoretical model, an incremental fit test was conducted to compare our model with a fully recursive model within a nested comparison framework (Bollen, 1989). A fully recursive model is one in which all directioned paths from prior constructs are estimated. This model was used to test for any significant improvements over the hypothesized model when direct paths were added from parenting and classroom processes to children's adjustment. Neither direct path attained a  $t$  of 1.8, indicating no significant improvements over our hypothesized model. With a sacrifice of 2  $dfs$ , the reduction in  $\chi^2$  was only 1.87, which was not statistically significant. Consistent with our examination of the data, these results supported the hypothetical model's validity.

LISREL 8 multigroup comparison procedures (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) were used to determine whether child gender or school structure moderated self-regulation's links with parenting and classroom processes. We first constrained the two models for

boys and girls and the two models for elementary school structure and middle school structure to be invariant, and then relaxed the equality constraint for each coefficient. By calculating the change in  $\chi^2$  for the constrained and unconstrained models, the significance of the difference was statistically tested. A statistically significant change in the  $\chi^2$  values indicates that either gender or classroom structure moderated hypothesized links. None of the changes in  $\chi^2$  was significant, indicating that neither child gender nor school structure moderated self-regulation's links with parenting and classroom processes.

#### Protective–Stabilizing Analyses

To determine whether classroom processes can serve a protective function when parenting is compromised and vice versa, competence-promoting parenting and classroom indexes were created. Each index was designed to provide a more refined analysis of the levels of competence-promoting parenting and classroom processes to which the children and youths were exposed. Following prescriptions by Jessor et al. (1995) for detecting protective contextual influences, children were assigned values on each measure that were designed to differentiate among high, moderate, and low levels of competence-promoting parenting and classroom processes. We hypothesized that high levels of each dimension that comprised the parenting and classroom constructs would be necessary to

serve a protective function for low levels of either construct. The competence-promoting parenting index was created by ranking, from highest to lowest, each mother's scores on the IBQ and Monitoring Questionnaire. Each distribution was divided into high (top third of the distribution), middle (central third), and low (bottom third) groups. A score of 3 was assigned to scores in the high group, a score of 2 was assigned to scores in the middle group, and a score of 1 was assigned to scores in the low group. Each mother thus received a score ranging from 6 (high group in both distributions) to 2 (low group in both distributions). The same procedure was followed for the creation of the competence-promoting classroom index, using children's ratings of order and organization, rule clarity, and student involvement. Classroom scores ranged from 9 (high group in all distributions) to 3 (low group in all distributions).

In this study we hypothesized that children experiencing high levels of competence-promoting processes in one context (the home or the school) would evince better adjustment than would children and youths who were exposed to low levels of competence-promoting processes in both contexts. To test this hypothesis, distinct groups of children who were exposed to high or low levels of competence-promoting parenting and classroom processes were formed by executing median splits on the indexes. This procedure yielded four groups: (1) high competence-promoting parenting and high competence-promoting classroom process group (high parenting/high classroom), (2) high competence-promoting parenting and low competence-promoting classroom process group (high parenting/low classroom), (3) low competence-promoting parenting and high competence-promoting classroom process group (low parenting/high classroom), and (4) low competence-promoting parenting and low competence-promoting classroom process group (low parenting/low classroom).

A 4 (group)  $\times$  2 (child gender)  $\times$  2 (school structure: elementary or middle school) analysis of vari-

ance (ANOVA) was then executed on three dependent measures: self-regulation (the sum of mothers' and teachers' standardized ratings), externalizing problems (the sum of children's standardized ratings of aggression and delinquency), and depressive symptoms (the children's CDI scores). Table 2 presents the means and number of participants for each group. The ANOVA on children's self-regulation revealed a group main effect,  $F(3, 261) = 16.89, p < .001$ . Newman-Keuls post hoc tests revealed that children in the low parenting/low classroom group were rated by mothers and teachers as less self-regulated than were children in the other three groups, all  $ps < .01$ . (Identical results emerged when the mothers' and teachers' reports were disaggregated and analyzed separately.) The ANOVA executed on the externalizing problems dependent measure also revealed a group main effect,  $F(3, 261) = 3.42, p < .02$ . Newman-Keuls post hoc tests indicated that children in the low parenting/low classroom group displayed more externalizing behaviors than did children in the other groups, all  $ps < .05$ . Finally, a group main effect emerged for children's reports of their symptoms of depression,  $F(3, 261) = 7.98, p < .001$ . The post hoc tests indicated that children in the low parenting/low classroom group reported more depressive symptoms than did children in any of the other three groups, all  $ps < .05$ . No main or interaction effects emerged for child gender or school structure. Taken together, the results were consistent in demonstrating that children experiencing competence-promoting processes in at least one context, either the home or the classroom, were more self-regulated, displayed fewer externalizing behaviors, and reported fewer symptoms of depression than did children who did not experience competence-promoting processes in either context.

## DISCUSSION

Few studies have addressed the associations between specific aspects of the family and classroom environ-

**Table 2** Means for Child Adjustment Measures

Group	Self-Regulation	Externalization <sup>a</sup>	Depression <sup>a</sup>
High parenting/high classroom ( $n = 56$ )	30.80	41.61	24.95
High parenting/low classroom ( $n = 76$ )	29.10	39.33	22.08
Low parenting/high classroom ( $n = 66$ )	29.10	40.41	23.48
Low parenting/low classroom ( $n = 79$ )	23.39	37.99	19.97

Note: "High" and "low" refer to levels of competence-promoting processes. For all adjustment measures, higher scores indicate better adjustment.

<sup>a</sup> Reverse scored.



ments and variations in developmental outcomes among African American children. In the present study, we determined how specific parenting and classroom processes suggested by theory and prior research were indirectly linked with children's self-regulation and adjustment. We hypothesized that parenting processes featuring high levels of involvement, support, and monitoring, and classrooms characterized by high levels of organization, rule clarity, and student involvement would be linked to children's ability to regulate their own behavior and, in turn, to their psychological adjustment. The analyses supported this hypothesis, indicating that parenting and classroom processes contribute uniquely to children's adjustment via their contribution to children's self-regulation, and that processes in the two contexts can have protective effects. These results highlight the importance of obtaining data from the different contexts in which children and adolescents spend appreciable amounts of time, and of identifying the operative mechanisms in those contexts that contribute to development.

This study was designed to determine whether social-contextual processes at home and at school contribute uniquely to adjustment among African American children and whether these processes are equally important for elementary school and middle school students. The findings add to a growing body of data indicating that classroom experiences have implications for children's and youths' social-emotional development and psychological adjustment (Baker, 1998; Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997; Eccles, Lord, & Roeser, 1996; Rutter, 1983). The identification of a common set of parenting and classroom experiences that were linked to self-regulation and adjustment for elementary and middle school children extends the existing literature. We propose that organized and predictable environments in which children are valued and their participation in the rules and procedures that govern their behavior is solicited contribute to the development and maintenance of self-regulatory skills. Parenting and classroom processes that create such contexts will, of course, take different forms for children at different developmental levels. Although child age was not correlated with these processes, the specific behaviors through which parents express high levels of support, involvement, and monitoring, as well as the ways in which teachers organize classrooms, clarify rules, and encourage student involvement, are likely to change as children grow older. The results serve as a reminder that despite developmental differences in the challenges they confronted, African American elementary school children and middle school youths benefited from parenting

and classroom practices that were organized, predictable, and affirming.

The findings about classroom processes raise an important issue. The results were equally robust for elementary and middle school students, even though the former attended only one classroom all day whereas the latter spent time in six classrooms each day. We attribute this consistency to within-school standards for normative classroom organization and processes. School principals typically have particular expectations about classroom functioning, which they expect the teachers in their schools to follow. These standards are communicated to the teachers and adherence to them is likely to play a role in merit-based salary increases (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1978; Rutter, 1983). We propose that the processes observed in a sampled middle-school classroom reflected those that were normative for all classrooms in the school. Although classrooms will display individual variation around these norms, the overarching expectations by which the school as a whole is governed nevertheless affect them.

The results of this study are pertinent to research on resilient children. Resilience research has consistently documented that some children experience many discrete and chronic stressors, but do not succumb to their effects. These children were found to have relationships with parents or extrafamilial adults who were supportive, not harsh, and who vigilantly monitored the children's whereabouts and knew their friends (Cowen, Wyman, Work, & Parker, 1990; Luthar, 1999; Masten, 1999; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). Our findings are consistent with this literature and extend it by demonstrating that positive classroom processes contribute similarly to children's stress resistance. Most of the existing research on the association between schooling and stress resistance has focused on the efficacy of preschool interventions in promoting long-term reductions in behavior problems and antisocial behavior (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1995; Johnson, 1988; Lally, Mangione, & Honig, 1988; Seitz, Rosenbaum, & Apfel, 1985). These interventions involve multiple components, including teaching the children school readiness skills and providing parents and other family members with services such as parent education and assistance with housing problems. The present results extend these findings by identifying the mechanisms through which classroom processes contribute to stress resistance during middle childhood and early adolescence.

The second purpose of this study was to determine whether classroom processes could serve a protective-stabilizing function when parenting processes are compromised, and vice versa. Children in

either the high parenting/low classroom group or the low parenting/high classroom group evinced more self-regulation, fewer externalizing problems, and fewer depressive symptoms than did children in the low parenting/low classroom group. As mentioned in the Introduction, researchers have conjectured that good experiences at school can serve a protective-stabilizing function when difficulties occur at home (McLoyd, 1998; Rutter, 1983); however, evidence for such an effect was lacking. The results from this study indicated clearly that classroom experiences can protect and stabilize children's psychological functioning, even when they experience little competence-promoting parenting. These results are consistent with resilience studies that have been conducted since the mid-1970s. They illustrate that specific processes functioning in specific contexts are associated with "better-than-expected" adjustment among children living under high-risk conditions. For the children in this study, competence-promoting parenting or classroom processes counteracted risks associated with living in poverty in the South.

Limitations of this study and some caveats must be noted. First, it is not known whether the results derived from the conceptual model or the protective-stabilizing analyses would generalize to lower risk single-parent or two-parent African American or European American families living in the same communities as the participants. Second, in the present study, adjustment was operationalized as high levels of self-regulation with few externalizing or internalizing problems. Future studies conducted with samples similar to the one in the present study could expand on the current findings by including assessments of peer relationships and academic performance. Third, the proposed model is not intended to be exhaustive. Models that include different parameters than those included in the present model could also account for the outcome assessments. Fourth, although the paths between variables in the structural equation model may imply causality, at this point it is possible only to test the extent to which the observed variables can be predicted without respect to direction of effects. Future research should include longitudinal assessments to build on the present results.

In conclusion, few studies have addressed the associations of specific parenting and classroom practices with variations in psychological adjustment among African American elementary and middle-school students. The results of the present study indicate that mothers' competence-promoting parenting practices and predictable, organized classrooms in which student input is valued contribute uniquely to children's psychological adjustment. Of particular importance,

classroom practices served a protective-stabilizing function for African American children when parenting was compromised, and vice versa.

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