



## ***Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies***

“Together, We’re Strong: A Qualitative Study of Happy, Enduring African-American Marriages,” by Marks et al.

### **Mothers of Autistic Children Susceptible to Depression**

*Ambiguity of Disorder’s Cause Leaves Mothers Blaming Themselves*

**Greensboro, N.C. – March XX, 2007** – A new study has found that mothers of children diagnosed with autism, are prone to developing depression, especially if they feel their child’s autism is having a big effect on their own lives. This study appears in the April issue of *Family Relations*.

“Because of the dramatic increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism in the U.S. (now estimated at 6.7 cases in every 1,000 children), many families are facing the difficult task of accepting that their child has a life-long disability,” says study author Marion O’Brien. “Autism is especially difficult for mothers to cope with, not only because the disorder and its cause is still largely misunderstood, but because they must maintain some element of hope while accepting their child’s permanent limitations.”

This emotional struggle, called ‘ambiguous loss’ by mental health experts, is especially taxing on mothers who have difficulty separating their own identity from that of their child. “The more mothers feel entwined with their child’s identity and well-being, the more likely they are to experience depression and stress,” says O’Brien.

“When people experience ambiguous loss, they feel confused, often blame themselves for things that are out of their control and may eventually become overwhelmed,” says O’Brien.

“Professionals can help by explaining ambiguous loss to family members so they come to understand that their feelings of distress have to do with the ambiguity of autism and are not signs of weakness in themselves.”

**This study is published in the April issue of *Family Relations*. Media wishing to receive a PDF of this article may contact [journalnews@bos.blackwellpublishing.net](mailto:journalnews@bos.blackwellpublishing.net).**

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