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# Understanding Academic Achievement Among Low-Income, Urban, Black Adolescents: The Role of Father Involvement

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG LOW-INCOME,  
URBAN, BLACK ADOLESCENTS: THE ROLE OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
PROGRAM IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY  
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CHICAGO, IL  
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## ABSTRACT

Although the Black-White test score gap has improved over time, it still persists. Furthermore, this academic risk for Black youth is compounded by the disproportionate representation of Blacks among low-income families in the U.S. Thus, the present study aims to shed light on factors related to greater academic success among adolescents in low-income, urban, Black families. Overall, this study addresses the following question. How does the presence of a biological father and positive father involvement impact the academic achievement of their adolescent children? Data from the Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study (TCS) were analyzed in order to address this research question. Using multiple regression, analytic models tested for the main effects of father residence and quality of father involvement on behavior problems and academic achievement. Analytic models also tested whether the link from father residence to behavior problems and academic skills depends on the quality of father involvement. The only significant findings were detected by the mother-child bond, which predicted school grades and three behavioral items. Connections between the findings and the existing literature and future directions are discussed.

**Keywords:** *academic achievement; adolescents; behavior problems; Black; fathers; African Americans*

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The gap in academic test scores between Black and White students in America emerges before children enter kindergarten and persists across the life span (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). This disparity appears among tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence as well as vocabulary, reading, and mathematics skills (Jencks & Phillips, 2011). Black Americans have seen their well-being improve greatly since 1970, with one marker of this represented by the narrowing of this test score gap since this time (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). However, the typical African American child still scores below 75 percent of Whites on most standardized assessments (Jencks & Phillips, 2011). Findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and from other empirical work suggest that the gap might be narrowing (Berends, Lucas, & Peñaloza, 2008; NAEP, 2014). Furthermore, between 1990 and 2013 the dropout rates – signifying the percentage of youth aged 16-24 who have not attained a high school diploma or GED and who are not enrolled in school – for Blacks remained greater than the rates for Whites (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Not only are Black youth consistently performing far below their White counterparts, but they are also failing to attain high school diplomas/GEDs at greater rates.

These racial differences in academic scores and academic attainment deserve empirical attention because of their long-term implications for the lives of Black students. Academic achievement is positively linked to educational attainment (Hansen, Heckman,



& Mullen, 2004), and greater educational attainment is linked to higher socioeconomic status (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011; Pallas, 2000). In other words, academic achievement is closely and indirectly tied to career success (Brown & Trusty, 2005a). Given the disproportionate representation of Blacks among low-income families in the U.S., and the long documented Black-White test score gap, the present study aims to shed light on factors related to greater academic competence among adolescents in low-income, Black families.

Considering the racial achievement gap and its potential negative consequences for Blacks, there should be additional scholarship directed towards identifying and strengthening factors that can promote the school achievement of this disadvantaged group. One of these factors, as suggested by prior research, is the presence of two parents (Somers et al., 2011; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Bachman, Coley, and Carrano, 2010). The latest census suggests that 39.4% of African American families in the U.S. with children are led by two parents, compared to 66.9% for Hispanic children and 74% for White children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Yet, the specific ways in which father involvement might be beneficial to the academic skills of Black youth has been studied much less than the role of mothers. As such, the current study seeks to add to the body of knowledge on the protective role of father involvement in the academic achievement of their Black adolescent children in low-income households.

### Conceptual Framework

A useful theoretical framework in conceptualizing the situation of Black adolescents growing up in low-income, urban homes is ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela Morris (2006). Bronfenbrenner's theory

retains the hierarchical systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) of previous versions of this theory. One of these systems is the *microsystem*. The *microsystem* defines all activities and interpersonal relationships directly involving the youth in settings that are most immediate to the child and have a direct link to the child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The particular *microsystem* of interest in this study is the low-income, urban households of the focal African American adolescents. The current study, which examines resident and nonresident fathers in addition to mothers, analyzes these key members of the home *microsystem* and how these individuals help shape the academic achievement of the focal youth.

Within the microsystem of the home, these adolescents and their fathers are the primary subjects of this study. According to Bronfenbrenner, each person within a system has characteristics that they bring to bear on all other people within that system. These characteristics are accounted for via the *person* component of his theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). There are three *person* characteristics identified by the aforementioned theorists, but only two are pertinent to this study: resources and demand (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Resources describe ability, experience, knowledge, and skill that are required for the effective functioning of *processes*, which will be defined later (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The demand characteristic of the *person* dimension refers to aspects of the person that discourage or encourage reactions from the social context, reactions that can support or hinder *processes* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These *person* factors are directly associated with one of the key outcome variables within this study: behavior problems. Specifically, the particular constellation of person factors

within these adolescents – which is linked to the nature of the parent-child relationship – is associated with the presence or lack of behavior problems within the focal youths.

Finally, the most significant component of Bronfenbrenner's theory that is relevant to this study is the aforementioned construct called *process*. In this theory, Bronfenbrenner asserted that *processes* – which describe the increasingly complex and frequent interactions between growing children and important people in their lives (e.g. fathers) – are the primary focus of his theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In essence, *process* drives development. This maps on to the current study in that this study focuses on the child-father interaction and its association with the academic achievement of these youth. These proximal *processes*, the relationships between fathers and children, can play positive roles in youths' development when these relationships are strong and supportive. Each of these facets of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory – *microsystem*, *person*, and *process* – are featured in the conceptual aspects of this study.

#### Protective Factors Related To Academic Achievement of Black Adolescents: Parental Residence & Quality of Parental Involvement

##### Protective Factors

*Black mother residence & quality of mother involvement.* As of 2011, 49.8% of Black children lived in homes headed by a single mother and 89.2% live in households with the mother present (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Mothers have traditionally been the focus of much psychology research involving children and adolescents, and this trend is even more pronounced with regards to studying Black families, to the virtual exclusion of fathers (McAdoo, 1997). There is at least one major reason for this. Mothers are typically more accessible than fathers, primarily because they often reside in the same

household as the focal youths, and are much more likely to serve as the youths' primary caretaker (Baker, 2014). Therefore, most extant literature still focuses primarily on the role mothers have in fostering children's academic achievement (Morrison, Bachman, & Connor 2005; Lamb, 2010). Indeed, this is not always the case, and father involvement has increased. Furthermore, there are regions of the world, such as Taiwan, where father involvement is multifaceted (Pattnaik, & Srirarm, 2010), but most youth – particularly in America – are cared for primarily by their mothers (Baker, 2014).

How does Black mothering predict the academic competence of their children, as demonstrated in the literature? In one study, Baker, Vernon-Feagans and colleagues (2015) examined how mothers' interaction with their children related to the children's cognitive development, using the Family Life Project (FLP) data. Analyses revealed that aspects of mothers' speech predicted children's applied problems scores (Baker, Vernon-Feagans, & Family Life Project Investigators 2015). It must be noted, however, that these results might not be generalizable to low-income, urban youth, as this study focused on representative, low-income, rural children (Baker, 2014; Baker et al., 2015).

In another pertinent study, the link between maternal relationship status and the well-being of their children within primarily African American and Hispanic families was examined (Bachman et al., 2010). Their results suggest that beneficial outcomes of maternal marriage on low-income African American children are widespread, predicting various dimensions of child functioning (Bachman et al., 2010). More importantly, results provide evidence that both new and more stable marriages (to both biological and stepfathers) appear protective as well (Bachman et al., 2010). Specifically, children in married-parent households scored higher in reading and math skills and lower in

internalizing and externalizing problems than children in single-parent, households headed by the youths' mother (Bachman et al., 2010).

Using data from a subsample of African American single and non-cohabiting mothers, Choi and Jackson (2011) indicate that more frequent father-child contact and fathers' more adequate parenting were associated indirectly with fewer child behavior problems. Mothering linked father involvement and lessening of child behavior issues (Choi & Jackson, 2011). Finally, the quality of mothers' parenting was associated positively with the quality of the mother-father relationship and with both the quality and the frequency of father-child interaction (Choi & Jackson, 2011).

The existing data suggest that there are some protective factors concerning mother involvement. Examples of such protective factors include the following: aspects of mothers' speech (Baker et al., 2015), marital stability (Bachman et al., 2010), and adept parenting (Choi & Jackson, 2011). Mothers aid children's academic and behavioral development, directly and indirectly.

*Black father residence & quality of father involvement.* There is much extant scholarship that suggests many fathers do play a fundamental role in fostering numerous aspects of child development (Lamb, 2010; Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Furthermore, 42.9% of Black children live with their fathers, mostly within two-parent households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). (However, it is uncertain what percentage of these fathers are biological fathers versus stepfathers.) An ever-growing body of scholarly work posits that fathers' involvement with their children is related with positive cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children from infancy to adolescence (P. A. Cowan, Cowan, Cohen, Pruett, & Pruett, 2008; Pruett, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera,

2002). Furthermore, there are numerous negative ramifications of father absence on their children, including: poor school achievement, decreased involvement in the labor force, early childbearing, and increased levels of risk-taking behavior (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998). Father absence or negative engagement has many undesirable outcomes for children, particularly in the cognitive, social, and emotional realms (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). Given these facts, fathers' role in the development of their children within such families merits further study.

### Black Father Residence & Black Adolescent Development

#### Father Residence & Academic Achievement

What have scholars uncovered concerning the role of fathers, particularly resident fathers, in the academic achievement of their teenage children? Utilizing a sample of low-income Black youth, Gaylord-Harden (2008) found that positive parenting was related to higher academic achievement and lower behavior problems. Positive parenting was conceptualized as consisting of the following characteristics: acceptance, firm control, low psychological control, and high expectations (Gaylord-Harden, 2008). This can be seen as akin to the strict parenting that precipitated similarly positive outcomes in a well-cited work (McLoyd, 1998). However, it must be noted that fathers in the Gaylord-Harden (2008) study were only included in just over one-third of the sample (this subset identified as two-parent homes). The majority of homes included in this study were led by single mothers. In another related study of racially diverse nonresident fathers, Jethwani and colleagues (2014) cite evidence that children need their fathers and benefit emotionally, financially, academically, and socially from the active involvement of their

fathers in their lives. Much of these findings support what had been detected by other scholars, namely the positive role father involvement plays in the social, emotional and behavioral development of their children (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013).

Concerning resident fathers in Black families, Somers et al., (2011) found that when caregivers, most of whom were mothers, were married this was associated with greater paternal involvement and with higher GPAs among their adolescent children. Furthermore, these same teens also achieved higher scores on Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) subtests (Somers et al., 2011). Once again, marital status seems to be important with regards to the academic skills of adolescents, because of its association with greater paternal involvement (Somers et al., 2011). Even more telling, father involvement was the most influential variable regarding academic-related outcomes of all the variables examined in this study (Somers et al., 2011). This is not to diminish the importance of mothering, but rather intended to highlight the significance of fathering in these families.

Combined, these studies suggest that engaged fathers have positive roles with regards to their children in Black families. More specifically, this work provides evidence that engaged fathers help facilitate higher academic achievement (Gaylord-Harden, 2008; Jethwani, Mincy, & Klempin, 2014; Somers et al., 2011) and lower behavior problems (Gaylord-Harden, 2008) among their children. Thus, existing evidence points to the notion that fathers can play a key protective role in the behavior and academic achievement of their adolescent children, regardless of where these fathers reside. However, it must be reiterated that fathers were somewhat underrepresented in these studies, as fathers accounted for only approximately one fourth of parents in one study

(Somers et al., 2011) and one third of parents in another (Gaylord-Harden, 2008). Lastly, there is a need of current and future research to focus empirically on Black fathers, specifically regarding how these fathers influence the academic and behavioral functioning of their children.

#### Father Residence & Behavior Problems

What are the links between fathering and behavior problems of their children? African American youth are more prone to show signals of emotional distress (e.g., sadness or hopelessness which prevented usual activities) than their White counterparts (Cauce, Cruz, Corona, & Conger, 2011). This data was uncovered through a comprehensive database that compiled information on the mental health and problem behaviors of African American adolescents. A U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Eaton et al., 2008) study also found that African-American youth are more likely to participate in risk behavior related to violence and sexual activity. Overall, while the current research on the psychology and well-being amongst minority youth is not as robust as possible, results support the position that Black adolescents are not faring well. Indicators of a variety of socioemotional, behavioral, and physical markers – such as emotional distress, risk or problem behaviors, physical health, or school and job involvement – all suggest that Black adolescents are experiencing obstacles in their development (Cauce et al., 2011).

How can the role of fathers in the lives of these Black youth make a positive difference in the teenagers' behavior in order to help reverse these trends? Concerning linkages between father residence and more long-term behavioral outcomes of their children, there has been some valuable data presented. Researchers presented evidence



that patterns of father-child closeness might be viable predictors of psychosocial adjustment when these children reach young adulthood and beyond (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Regarding this last piece of evidence, it must be noted that the large scale survey study which produced this data relied heavily upon maternal reports of early father involvement and warmth, thus we must be careful in inferring paternal influences from these data (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013).

Indeed, certain types of parenting can be protective for Black youth. Some extant data suggests that warm and involved parenting can function as protective factors for adolescents. Black adolescents living in low-income households and underserved neighborhoods generally fare well developmentally when their parents utilize warm and strict parenting styles (Roche, Ensminger, & Cherlin, 2007). In fact, some data suggest that Black teenagers being raised in high risk areas by parents who employ these restrictive parenting measures fare better than their White counterparts, especially with regards to academic performance (Roche et al., 2007). This type of parenting can be protective, buffering youth from negative factors to which they are exposed in poor, under-resourced areas and educational institutions (Cauce et al., 2011).

Finally, another study investigated the effects of family context on racial and social class disparities of depressive symptoms among Black and White youth in grades 6-9 (Miller & Taylor, 2012). These scholars found evidence for two hypotheses: greater depressive symptoms in Black and lower SES respondents, and significantly greater depressive symptoms in youth in single-parent households (Miller & Taylor, 2012). This provides further evidence of the value of a two-parent household with regards to the psychological development of adolescent children in Black families.

To summarize, the existing literature suggests that mothers' and fathers' warm yet firm parenting practices can be protective for youth in low-income families (Roche et al., 2007), corroborating the evidence presented by others (e.g. Gaylord-Harden, 2008). Black adolescents in low-income families, as mentioned earlier, are more likely to experience increased incidence of risk behaviors. However, the literature suggests that those who have warm yet firm parents have a better chance to experience positive outcomes, such as lowered rates of depression (Miller & Taylor, 2012).

#### Quality of Black Father Involvement & Black Adolescent Development

##### Quality of Father Involvement & Academic Achievement

Additional evidence is provided by a pair of researchers. In this study, a diverse group of young children from low-income families was analyzed (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Across a group of studies, they found that positive father involvement, as demonstrated by the frequencies and quality of father engagements with their children, predicted the cognitive and language development of children from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

Moreover, there is data suggesting that fathers make unique and positive parenting contributions to their children's development. Thus, these contributions can be seen as protective. One group of researchers presented evidence that paternal involvement in schooling was linked to variations in children's performance above and beyond maternal and other contributions (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Furthermore, during the preschool years, fathers who are supportive appear to promote language and cognitive development (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Finally, children reported feeling more competent academically when they simultaneously

reported secure attachments to both parents than those who felt securely attached to only one parent (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013), typically the mother.

Studies examining the quality of father-child relationships within low-income families have demonstrated strong associations with children's language and cognitive outcomes (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Black fathers who assumed a supportive role with their young children had children with higher cognitive scores compared to children with absent fathers and father figures (Roopnarine & Hossain, 2013). Furthermore, increased positive paternal engagement of Black fathers reduced the risk of developmental delays at 2 years (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, & Cabrera, 2002). African American fathers' sensitivity, positive regard, and cognitive stimulation were related to higher MDI scores at 2 and 3 years and to higher Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) scores at 3 years (Roopnarine & Hossain, 2013). Lastly, among Black families, paternal nurturance during play was associated with children's receptive vocabulary scores (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999).

Work examining fathers' involvement in the lives of low-income children by Coley has been fruitful as well. Much of this body of work has been done utilizing data from the Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study (TCS). For example, Coley and colleagues' (2011) recent analysis of TCS data focused on father involvement in the lives of low-income youth during early childhood through middle childhood. This study provided evidence that greater adaptive involvement from fathers predicted higher reading and math scores in middle childhood (Coley, Lewin-Bizan, & Carrano, 2011).

While the research presented in this section hints at how fathers might affect the academic achievement of their teenage children, it doesn't adequately address the issue.

These studies suggest that Black fathers aid in their children's cognitive (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010) and language development (Roopnarine & Hossain, 2013; Black et al., 1999) and math skills (Coley et al., 2011). There is also some evidence that fathers are making unique and profound contributions to the development of their children. Thus, the question becomes, if actively engaged Black fathers in low-income areas have a positive impact on these intellectual aspects of their children's development at these earlier stages, could it also be the case that similar father involvement later on in the child's life has a related positive effect on adolescent children's academic achievement within Black families?

#### Quality of Father Involvement & Behavior Problems

How does the literature inform one concerning fathers' roles, via the nature of fathers' involvement with their children, in the behavior of these children in Black families? The role of co-parents in the behavior of their adolescent children was studied by Parent and colleagues (2013). Lower levels of adolescent internalizing behaviors was associated directly with higher quality relationships between African American single mothers and non-marital co-parents (Parent, Jones, Forehand, Cuellar, & Shoulberg, 2013). With only 11% of the co-parents in this sample identifying as fathers or father figures (Parent et al., 2013), this study does not allow for many conclusions to be drawn concerning quality of father involvement with their adolescent children. However, these findings are nonetheless important as they support the notion that quality relationships between co-parents, including the mother-father bond, is related to better behavior among their adolescent children.

## Black Father Residence, Quality of Father Involvement, & Black Adolescent Development

How does the quality of the father-child bond relate to the development of the focal youth as a function of whether or not the father resides with his child? An informative examination of how several components of nonresident father involvement are linked to different domains of focal child well-being can be found in King and Sobolewski (2006). Their analysis was based on children who lived with their mothers and had fathers living elsewhere. (Although Black youth were not the focus of this study, these researchers oversampled several groups, including minorities, single parents, and co-habitants). After controlling for family factors that were associated with patterns of fathering and the mother-child bond, non-resident fathers still contributed to their children's well-being (King & Sobolewski, 2006). Moreover, the quality of the father-child relationship and responsive fathering were related to decreases in externalizing and internalizing issues of focal adolescents (King & Sobolewski, 2006). Adolescent boys exhibited other benefits from high-quality father-child relationships: improved grades and less acting out at school (King & Sobolewski, 2006). Girls in King and Sobolewski (2006) did not experience this outcome.

In sum, the evidence from this study (King & Sobolewski, 2006) points to the positive role of fathering in the behavior and academic skills of their adolescent children. This study yielded this data even though these were nonresident fathers under investigation. Not only was the quality of the father-child relationship and responsive fathering related to fewer behavior problems for boys and girls, but they were also

associated with higher school grades and less acting out at school for boys (King & Sobolewski, 2006).

#### Black Father Residence, Quality of Father Involvement, & Academic Achievement

There is mixed evidence presented in the literature concerning the relationship between nonresident fathers and their children's academic achievement. On one hand, nonresident fathers can bolster their children's academic skills when these fathers have some level of engagement with their children (King & Sobolewski, 2006). There is evidence that when nonresident fathers have some involvement in their children's schools, their children benefit. More specifically, their children are less likely to have ever repeated a grade, or to have ever been suspended or expelled, and are more likely to achieve higher grades and to go further in school (Jethwani et al., 2014). Also, there is evidence that greater involvement of low-income, unmarried, minority fathers was correlated with better school performance and cognitive functioning by children (Coley, 2001). However, others have presented evidence that children with nonresident or absentee fathers are at risk for school dropout and low academic achievement (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

In an Early Head Start evaluation study, both resident and non-resident low-income fathers were found to be highly accessible to their children as well as involved in all aspects of raising these children (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Moreover, fathers engaged in a number of activities with their young children, including caretaking and play. These supportive behaviors (based on a summary score of positive regard, sensitivity, and warmth) predicted children's language and cognitive outcomes (Shannon, et al., 2002) and did so after controlling for a range of demographics and mother-child

interactions (Lamb, 2010). Also, fathers' supportiveness (a composite of sensitivity, positive regard, and cognitive stimulation) during play predicted MDI and PPVT scores at 2 and 3 years, above and beyond fathers' education, income, and mothers' supportiveness (Tamis-LeMonda, Baumwell, & Cabrera, 2013).

More recent research also suggests the unique role of fathering on the academic skills of school-age children. According to this data, fathers' language input predicted children's receptive vocabulary and applied problems scores above and beyond mothers' language input (Baker et al., 2015). More specifically, they go on to write that fathers' mean length of utterance during a shared picture book task just before kindergarten entry positively predicted children's receptive vocabulary and applied problems scores at the end of kindergarten (Baker et al., 2015).

In sum, fathers make a unique contribution to the academic achievement of young Black children, but for nonresident fathers, this evidence is somewhat mixed. Some studies suggest that nonresident fathers of Black children can be seen as protective factors in that they are associated with better academic achievement of these youth (Jethwani et al., 2014; King & Sobolewski, 2006). However, there is also data to support the view that the children of nonresident Black fathers experience detriments to their academic-related outcomes and other problems (see Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

#### Black Father Residence, Quality of Father Involvement, & Behavior Problems

Others have investigated the role of father involvement on low-income, mostly minority adolescents' behavior. The findings of one particular study suggest that decreases in adolescent delinquency were predicted by higher nonresident father

involvement, particularly for youth with initial engagement in delinquent activities (Coley & Medeiros, 2007). Adolescent delinquency did not predict subsequent decreases in father involvement (Coley & Medeiros, 2007). Contrariwise, as adolescent delinquency increased, so too did father involvement, suggesting that nonresident fathers respond to adolescent problem behavior by increasing their involvement, with this pattern driven primarily by African American families (Coley & Medeiros, 2007). These findings support the notion that minority fathers, especially Black fathers, do not disengage from their children when they exhibit problem behaviors, even though these fathers do not reside with the focal youth. Instead, it seems that these fathers increase their efforts to have a positive role in the lives of their children. Though promising, these findings are from only one study. Thus, further empirical work needs to be conducted in order to replicate these potentially important findings.

#### Father Involvement in Black Families: Gaps in the Literature

There is a wealth of extant literature illustrating the benefits of father involvement for child well-being by resident fathers. However, much of this work has focused on White, middle-class samples and school aged children and adolescents (Shannon et al., 2002). Furthermore, the data on nonresident father involvement is somewhat limited (King & Sobolewski, 2006). Much of this work secured data from mothers, not from fathers.

This study would address the gaps in this literature by examining how the involvement of resident and nonresident fathers within low-income, Black families relates to a particular developmental outcome: academic achievement. Moreover, the current study also examines behavior problems as another outcome variable in this



relationship. Although King and Sobolewski (2006) examined the role of nonresident fathers' involvement with their adolescent children in the youths' academic skills and behavior, they did not analyze resident fathers. Furthermore, while Gaylord-Harden (2008) assessed positive parenting and its relationship to academic achievement and behavior problems within Black families, this study did not focus on the unique role of fathers in these outcomes. Most studies, as has been demonstrated, focus their attention on how paternal involvement predicts the behavior problems and academic skills of younger children. This study bolsters the literature by focusing attention on Black biological fathers, both resident and nonresident, and their role in the behavior problems and academic achievement of Black teenagers.

The preceding discussion highlighted some important recent findings in the literature on risk and father involvement within low-income, urban, Black families. Examining the aforementioned work on father involvement has led to the conclusion that the role of father involvement in the development of their adolescent children merits further empirical study. There are at least two questions. First, do Black fathers – through their active and engaged relationships with their children – function in protective roles on their adolescent children, who are living in low-income households? Second, do fathers of low-income adolescents in Black families facilitate adaptive outcomes for these youth in the academic domain (see Coley et al., 2011) and in the behavioral domain (see Coley & Medeiros, 2007)?

Given the unique physical, physiological, social, and psychological changes that occur during adolescence, it is especially important to identify the nature and function of father involvement with their older children in this demographic. It may be that the same

attentive style of low-income Black fathers that was linked to positive outcomes among their children might not be associated with similar outcomes as these children grow into adolescence. For instance, Coley and Medeiros (2007) reported that fathers, mostly African American fathers, heightened their involvement in the lives of their adolescent children in response to the youths' increased delinquency. The inference might be made that the level and type of engagement displayed by these fathers in earlier years was not enough to buffer these youth once they became teenagers.

Moreover, it might be that these unique and complex combinations of factors impinging upon urban Black teens in low income areas demand an entirely different relationship between father and child in order to have the same moderating association. It is one whereby the combination of social and economic pressures will play negative roles on the behavior of Black teenagers, and, in turn, on their academic achievement. One exception would be those adolescents who have a certain advantageous bond with their fathers, as well as with their mothers.

#### The Present Study: Research Question & Hypotheses

This study seeks to extend and supplement the work of Coley and others, who focus on early and middle childhood (except the study with Medeiros), by analyzing the role of low income status and father engagement on fathers' adolescent children. More specifically, the following question will be addressed. How does the presence and positive involvement of a biological father predict the academic achievement of Black adolescents?

Also, the following hypotheses have been formulated. First, I hypothesize that father residence and quality of father involvement will be negatively related to Black

teens' behavior problems – with increases in father involvement preceding decreases in adolescent problem behaviors – and positively related to academic achievement. Second, I hypothesize that the link from father residence to behavior problems and academic achievement will depend on quality of father involvement.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS

#### Participants

To assess the research aims, the current study employs longitudinal survey data from the Three City Study (TCS). These data provide a great many strengths. Included among these strengths are the following: a randomly selected, representative sample of low-income families and rich, extensive, and multi-method data on children's emotional and behavioral well-being (Bachman, Coley, & Carrano, 2011).

The TCS main survey includes a household-based, stratified survey with over 2,400 children and their primary female caregivers (90% were biological mothers) (Bachman et al., 2011). This data was drawn from low-income families (incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line) living in moderate-to-high poverty areas in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio (Bachman et al., 2011). The term "low-income" will be used here, as opposed to the term "poverty" to describe the participants of this study because those who earn more than 100% of the federal poverty line earn more than the poverty level. The majority of the families were African-American (42%) or Hispanic (47%), reflecting the population of low-income urban neighborhoods (Bachman et al., 2011). Moreover, in each family, one focal child was randomly selected (between the ages of 0 to 4 years or 10 to 14 years old) (Bachman et al., 2011).

From the TCS survey sample an analytic sample was drawn that was restricted in two ways. First, this present study included only low-income African-American families and their children, ages 14-17, from the TCS in order to highlight the developmental role of father involvement during this very dynamic period. Second, only families who remained in the sample in wave 3 were included.

### Measures

#### Father-Child Relationship Quality & Mother-Child Relationship Quality

Concerning father-child and mother-child relationships, the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was utilized as part of this study. Developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), this measure requires youths to assess the perceived quality of their close relationships during the developmental periods of middle childhood and adolescence. As such, the IPPA is a self-report measure of attachment. More specifically, it measures psychological security that comes from relationships with significant others and assesses the quality of the attachment to parents and peers (Gullone & Robinson, 2005). For the purposes of this study, only the following relationship subscales were used: father-child total and mother-child total.

Mother-child total is a composite variable consisting of many reverse coded items. Therefore, higher scores on this variable correspond to greater connectedness and warmth in the mother-child bond. Father-child total is also a composite variable with many reverse coded items. Higher values on this variable also indicate greater warmth and connectedness between father and child.

## Academic Achievement

This domain includes direct assessment of quantitative and literacy skills. For the purposes of this study, academic achievement was operationalized in three ways.

Students' grades on their report cards, scores on standardized tests (Woodcock Johnson subtests), and students' global report of how well they are doing in school are the three ways academic achievement was operationalized.

The TCS utilized subtests from the Woodcock Johnson (WJ) test. Overall, the Woodcock-Johnson consists of 2 batteries, WJ III test of Cognitive Abilities & WJ III Tests of Achievement. Combined, they form a comprehensive system to test the general intellectual ability, specific academic achievement, cognitive abilities, and oral language of children in a wide age-range (Schrank, McGrew, & Woodcock, 2001). The norms for the test are created from data from the same sample of subjects which allows for a direct comparison (Schrank et al., 2001).

The two subtests which were utilized in this study are: the Woodcock-Johnson Letter-Word Identification subtest and the Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems subtest. The Woodcock-Johnson Letter Word Identification Subtest measures a student's word identification skills. Students are required to identify individual letters in bold type in initial measure items, and the majority of items require a student to read words of increasing difficulty in isolation (words are in list form rather than in context) (Schrank et al., 2001).

The Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems Subtest measures a student's ability to analyze and solve math problems. Initial items on this measure require test-takers to apply simple number concepts (Schrank et al., 2001). The majority of items require a

student to first listen to the problem, then recognize the mathematical procedure that must be employed, and finally perform the appropriate calculations (Schrank et al., 2001).

As part of the TCS data, adolescents self-reported grades and an evaluation of overall school performance. These represent two distinct, yet related variables.

Academic achievement in this domain will be defined by self-report assessment of the youth's performance in school and academic grades. Students will report both their letter grades earned in school and a more subjective and general appraisal of their performance in school. Possible responses to the overall school performance item were: very well, well, average, below average, not well at all, don't know, and refused.

#### Father Residence

This data was determined or derived from a single variable. This variable asks respondents, mostly mothers, to comment on whether or not the focal youth's biological father lives with the focal child at wave 3 of the Three City Study. Father residence was initially coded in the following manner: 1 = yes, 2 = no. This variable was recoded such that 0 = no and 1 = yes. It must be noted that a more accurate or complete picture of father residence could be attained in future work, to the extent that fathers, as well as mothers, are asked to respond to this question.

#### Behavior Problems

There are two measures used as part of the TCS which assess behavior problems amongst the adolescent participants. Both of these measures were utilized in the current study. One of these measures is the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). The 53-item BSI, developed by Derogatis and Melisaratos (1983), is a brief psychological self-report symptom scale. Developed from its parent form, SCL-90-R, it assesses the presence of

psychological symptoms and somatic symptoms (physical ailments thought to stem from psychological difficulties, such as upset stomach from excessive anxiety) (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). The specific subscale of the BSI that was used was: BSI-total.

The other measure that was utilized in this study, the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), assesses problem behavior among the focal teens of the TCS. The CBCL is a parent report developed by Achenbach in 1991. This measure was designed to obtain information about behavioral/emotional problems and competencies (Achenbach, 1999). The axis that is the focus of this study, Parent reports, assesses parent's perception of their child's emotional and behavioral functioning. The CBCL subscales of interest for the current study include the following: externalizing and internalizing.

#### Background Characteristics

In order to account for other variables that might predict the academic achievement of the focal youth in this analysis, several covariates have been included. The gender (males coded as 0 and females coded as 1) and age (measured in years at time of interview) of the focal youth were included as covariates, in addition to the nature of the focal youth's relationship with their mothers. Although these variables were not the focus of this study, each could possibly play a role in the academic skills of the focal youths. Thus, including these covariates in the analysis enabled the analyses to factor in how these variables relate to academic achievement within this demographic.

#### Analytic Plan

In order to address the aforementioned research questions concerning the relation between father involvement and the academic achievement of their adolescent children, two different categories of models were tested. The first category involved testing for



main effects via multiple regression. Within this category, there were two different models that were tested: the main effect of father residence and quality of father involvement on behavior problems, and the main effect of father residence and quality of father involvement on academic achievement.

It must be reiterated that the specific behavior problems tested include the CBCL internalizing and externalizing subscales and the BSI total subscale. Concerning the parent-child bond variables, only the total scales were utilized (IPPA-father total and IPPA-mother total). Finally, all of the aforementioned academic variables – two Woodcock-Johnson scales (letter-word and applied problems), a variable capturing students' academic grades, and a variable capturing students' perceptions of their overall school performance – were included. Only one of these variables was included in each analysis as the dependent variable.

The second category involved testing for interaction effects via multiple regression. Within this category, there were two different models that were tested. The first model of this category tested for the effect of the interaction of father residence and quality of father involvement on behavior problems. The second model here was the interaction of father residence and quality of father involvement on academic achievement.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

Before delving into the findings of this study, descriptive statistics are presented so as to provide basic information concerning the youth and fathers examined. There were 187 adolescents analyzed in this study, with 100% of them identifying as African American. Of the total analytic sample, 169, or 90.4%, of the youth began high school and did not drop out of school before high school. The average age of the adolescents in this study was approximately 16 years (at time of interview), and 142 participants reported on father-child relationship quality. Of the Black adolescents included in this analysis, 99 were female and 88 were male. For a more detailed information concerning descriptive statistics, see Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FCT	142	3.67	1.33	5	3.27	0.8
FR	187	1	0	1	0.08	0.27
MCT	186	3.33	1.67	5	3.77	0.75
Child Age (Years)	187	3	14	17	16.35	0.68
Gender	187	1	0	1	0.53	0.5
BSI Total	185	47	0	47	8.2	10.54
CBCL-Int.	181	33	0	33	7.55	7.4
CBCL-Ext.	181	54	0	54	9.89	10.43
WJLW	180	106	39	145	91.44	17.45
WJAP	180	57	55	112	87.83	10.34
OSP	177	4	1	5	2.52	1.06
Grades	187	8	1	9	4.34	1.98

Note. FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total; WJLW = Woodcock Johnson-Letter Word;

WJAP = Woodcock Johnson Applied Problem; OSP = overall school performance; BSI = Brief Symptoms Inventory; CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist

Int. = Internalizing; Ext. = Externalizing Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female, Std. = Standard

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . <sup>†</sup>  $t < .10$ .

It is important to note that, overall, there were no significant main effects findings involving the main predictors. Of the total main effects models analyzed, 57.1%, or 4 of 7, were significant, but none of these findings was detected by father relationship quality or father residence, the main predictors. The model including father residence, father-child total, and three covariates (mother-child-total, child age, and child gender) significantly predicted: school grades,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 136) = 6.56, p < .001$ ; internalizing behavior,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 131) = 6.23, p < .001$ ; externalizing behavior,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 131) = 3.16, p < .05$ ; and BSI,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 135) = 4.33, p < .01$ . Students' school grades (see Table 4, first two columns on the left),  $b = -.57, t = -2.59, p < .05$ , and internalizing behavior (see Table 6, first two columns on the left),  $b = -3.12, t = -4.12, p < .001$  were each significantly predicted by the quality of the mother-child bond. Moreover, externalizing behavior (see Table 7, first two columns on the left),  $b = -3.07, t = -2.82, p < .01$ , and BSI (see Table 8, first two columns on the left),  $b = -4.1, t = -3.36, p < .01$  were also each predicted by the quality of the mother-child bond. However, it must be noted that overall, there were mainly null findings within this category of models. The potential causes for this are addressed in the discussion section.

With regards to interaction effects models, there were no findings involving the main predictors (father residence & father relationship quality). Specifically, 57.1%, or 4 of 7, of the interaction analyses yielded significant findings, but none of these were due to the main predictors. School grades,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 135) = 6.12, p < .01$ ; internalizing behavior,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 130) = 5.83, p < .01$ ; externalizing behavior,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 130) = 2.92, p < .05$ ; and BSI,  $F_{\Delta}(3, 134) = 4.16, p < .01$  were all significantly predicted by father residence, father-child total, the interaction term, and the three covariates. None of the interaction terms

were significant predictors ( $p < .05$ ), but the interaction term predicting school grades was predictive at trend level (see Table 4, last two columns and last row on the right;  $b = -1.02$ ,  $t = -1.74$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Finally, one curious finding of the main effects and interaction analyses was that Black girls have lower school grades than boys. This finding does not agree with past literature on this topic. Reasons for this discrepancy will be offered as part of the discussion.

Table 2. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: Woodcock Johnson - Letter Word

Predictors	Main Effects		Interaction Effects	
	WJLW		WJLW	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	-0.29	-0.15	-0.26	-0.13
FR	-1.58	-0.3	-1.5	-0.28
MCT	-2.67	-1.22	-2.69	-1.22
Child Age (Years)	0.54	0.24	0.53	0.24
Child Gender	-4.4	-1.44	-4.35	-1.4
FR x FCT			-0.53	-0.09

Note. FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total;

WJLW = Woodcock Johnson-Letter Word; Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .

Table 3. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: Woodcock Johnson - Applied Problems

Predictors	Main Effects		Interaction Effects	
	WJAP		WJAP	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	0.69	0.61	0.71	0.62
FR	3.09	1.04	3.15	1.04
MCT	-1.15	-0.92	-1.16	-0.92
Child Age (Years)	0.29	0.22	0.28	0.22
Child Gender	-2.97	-1.71 <sup>t</sup>	-2.94	-1.66 <sup>t</sup>
FR x FCT			-0.38	-0.11

Note. FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total;

WJAP = Woodcock Johnson-Applied Problems; Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .

Table 4. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: School Grades

Predictors	Main Effects		Interaction Effects	
	Grades		Grades	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	-0.02	-0.1	0.04	0.20
FR	-0.26	-0.49	-0.09	-0.16
MCT	-0.57	-2.59 *	-0.6	-2.74 **
Child Age (Years)	0.19	0.83	0.16	0.71
Child Gender	-1.05	-3.44 **	-0.96	-3.1 **
FR x FCT			-1.02	-1.74 <sup>t</sup>

Note. FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total;

Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .

**Table 5. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: Overall School Performance**

Predictors	Main Effects OSP		Interaction Effects OSP	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	-0.18	-1.59	-0.15	-1.31
FR	0.15	0.52	0.22	0.75
MCT	-0.24	-1.88 <sup>t</sup>	-0.26	-2 *
Child Age (Years)	0.00	-0.04	-0.02	-0.12
Child Gender	-.32'	-1.84 <sup>t</sup>	-0.28	-1.6
FR x FCT			-0.42	-1.32

*Note* . FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total;

OSP = Overall School Performance; Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .

**Table 6. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: CBCL - Internalizing**

Predictors	Main Effects CBCL - Int.		Interaction Effects CBCL - Int.	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	-0.37	-0.54	-0.48	-0.7
FR	-0.87	-0.48	-1.21	-0.65
MCT	-3.12	-4.12 ***	-3.06	-4.03 ***
Child Age (Years)	-0.66	-0.85	-0.61	-0.78
Child Gender	1.06	1	0.87	0.81
FR x FCT			2	0.99

*Note* . FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total;

CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist; Int. = Internalizing

Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .

Table 7. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: CBCL - Externalizing

Predictors	Main Effects		Interaction Effects	
	CBCL - Ext.		CBCL - Ext.	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	0.29	0.29	0.08	0.08
FR	1.32	0.51	0.74	0.28
MCT	-3.07	-2.82 **	-2.98	-2.73 **
Child Age (Years)	-1.19	-1.06	-1.1	-0.98
Child Gender	0.44	0.29	0.12	0.08
FR x FCT			3.44	1.19

Note . FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total; CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist; Ext. = Externalizing

Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .

Table 8. Least Squares Regression Results with Covariates: Brief Symptoms Inventory - Total

Predictors	Main Effects		Interaction Effects	
	BSI - Total		BSI - Total	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
FCT	0.03	0.03	-0.06	-0.05
FR	0.28	0.1	0.01	0
MCT	-4.1	-3.36 **	-4.05	-3.3 **
(Years)	-1.38	-1.1	-1.33	-1.06
Child Gender	0.52	0.31	0.38	0.22
FR x FCT			1.57	0.48

Note . FR = Father Residency; FCT = Father-Child Total; MCT = Mother-Child Total;

BSI = Brief Symptoms Inve

Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . <sup>t</sup>  $t < .10$ .



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

How does the presence and positive involvement of a biological father predict the academic achievement of low-income Black adolescents? The findings from this study support the notion that mothers play pivotal roles in the academic and behavioral functioning of their teenage children. Specifically, there were associations between the mother-child bond and school grades, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and the BSI such that lower relationship quality was linked to lower grades and greater behavioral problems. Regarding the role of fathers, there were only null findings overall.

How does the literature help make sense of these findings? First, research suggests that mothers are more likely than fathers to assume primary childrearing roles (Baker, 2014), especially in single parent homes, even in the midst of more egalitarian gender roles of today. With regards to mothering, one study found that consistent discipline and parental engagement with children's school by mothers, had positive links to adolescents' grade point average (GPA) and number of absences (e.g., lower number of absences) (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002). Furthermore, even in dual parent homes, mothers are still apt to assume a greater share of the child rearing duties. Finally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified what he termed *second-order effects*, which describe the indirect influence of third parties (e.g. mothers) on the relationship between two other parties (e.g. father-child bond) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Using this notion of second-order effects, it might have been the case that fathers affected their children through the

mother-child bond. Thus, the father-child bond, in this study, yielded no significant findings, while mother-child bond did yield significant findings

Second, it may be the case that the measures utilized for this study do not effectively capture the impact of fathers. Fathers in Black families may have a greater impact on their children's behavior and academics than found here. For example, employing the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) measure, could possibly address this need. The IFI is a self-report measure through which fathers assess their own involvement based on a broader conceptualization of this engagement (Hawkins et al., 2002). The IFI identifies nine distinct components of father involvement (Hawkins et al., 2002), which I consolidated into three main categories: financial support, supporting the mother, and positive/supportive interaction with the child.

There could be limited number of fathers who are actually involved with their children in this sample. It must be noted however, that this general lack of involvement should not be seen as indicative of widespread apathy on behalf of Black fathers concerning their children. Rather, given the relatively higher rate of single mothers in the Black community and that it's costly to both locate and persuade nonresident fathers to participate in research studies (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999), we do not know more about Black fathers. This dearth of fathers participating in research is reflected in the relatively low number of participants for this analysis ( $n = 187$ ). For these reasons, it is not surprising that there were few findings involving in the present analyses supporting the hypotheses presented.

One counterintuitive finding of this study was that Black girls have lower school grades than boys. This finding seems to be spurious for two reasons. First, it does not

dovetail with extant literature on this issue. Second, given the relatively low number of participants, it could be the case that this finding was due to chance.

As mentioned earlier, the quality of the mother-child bond predicted BSI, internalizing, externalizing, and school grades in the current study. This coincides with the literature. In an aforementioned study, mothering – namely routine discipline and parental engagement with children’s school – had positive roles in adolescents’ GPA and school absences (Gutman et al., 2002). Furthermore, other work identified similarly beneficial roles of mothering in the cognitive and behavioral functioning of their children (Baker et al., 2015; Bachman et al., 2010).

This study has strengths and several limitations. The study drew on data from a large, comprehensive dataset consisting of a randomly selected, representative sample of low-income families and thorough data on children’s emotional and behavioral well-being (Bachman et al., 2011). Concerning limitations, the data that were used here only included child reports of parent-child relationship quality and mother reports of father residence, in addition to the limitations noted earlier.

Any future studies that attempt to ascertain what factors promote the academic achievement of low income Black adolescents might address these issues by collecting data instead of relying upon secondary data. This will allow limitations of the present study to be adequately addressed. More specifically, future work might employ internet surveys, interviews, the aforementioned IFI, and focus groups to examine what factors have contributed to adolescents’ current academic status. These adjustments will allow for greater variety in the type and source of information collected, which typically results in data that provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena under investigation.

Despite null findings in the present study, theoretical and research support fathers' important role regarding the academic development of their children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lamb, 2010; Jeynes, 2015). Therefore, policies and programs that support fathers are much needed, as the academic and socioeconomic future of today's youth, especially low-income Black youth, partially depends on fathers' abilities to effectively parent their children.

The recent trends of increases in financial investment, empirical study, and policy implementation surrounding father engagement – and its importance with regard to the educational achievement of their children – position this as an issue that will continue to garner social and political support. In the U.S. Deficit Reduction Act of 2006, \$50 million was earmarked for programs which aimed to strengthen fathers' engagement with their children (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015). In June 2010, President Obama launched the Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative, possibly the most notable item on the President's longstanding agenda concerning strengthening and supporting fatherhood in this nation (Promoting Responsible Fatherhood, 2012). As an ongoing country-wide effort, this Initiative advances responsible fatherhood and encourages positive role models through partnerships with fatherhood and groups serving families throughout the nation (Promoting Responsible Fatherhood, 2012). Finally, the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 reauthorized the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) initiative and subsequently the federal financial support for fatherhood programs was increased to \$75 million annually (Dion et al., 2015). Five years ago, as part of the HMRF, 60 organizations were awarded three-year fatherhood grants, which were extended for a fourth year of funding through 2015 (Dion et al., 2015).

Since the data unequivocally support the notion that supportive and engaged fathers matter in the academic, psychosocial, and emotional development of their children, it is important that the aforementioned fatherhood programs continue. According to the data, absentee fathers harm the families themselves. The children in these families are at greater risk of overall undesirable outcomes in the cognitive, social, and emotional realms (Cowan et al., 2009). More specifically, these youth tend to experience academic underachievement, dropout (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010), decreased involvement in the labor force, and increased levels of risk-taking behavior (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998). This, in turn, creates individuals who struggle to contribute meaningfully to these communities. Thus, assisting Black fathers in their efforts to engage in responsible fatherhood is not only of paramount importance to Black families, but it is indeed important to American society as well.

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