

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

My dissertation had three major aims corresponding to three empirical studies, all connected by the multidimensional construct of paternal involvement (Pleck, 2010). In my first study, I compared levels of engagement, or how much time fathers spent with their three-year-old children (globally and by activity type) for Black, Latino, and White fathers. After taking into consideration demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, fathers across racial/ethnic groups engaged in similar amounts of time with their children overall, with slight differences by type of activity.

My second study explored person-centered latent profiles of parenting among African American fathers. Four distinct and meaningful fathering groups emerged across a constellation of behaviors including not only engagement activities, but also warmth (showing affection towards the child) and control (spanking the child for misbehavior). The largest proportion of fathers belonged to the Average Involved group (41%), who were near the sample mean on all parenting behaviors; followed by Low Involved-Disciplinarians (25%), who were less engaged but had slightly greater reports of spanking; the Highly Involved fathers (19%) who emphasized play, cognitive stimulation, and warmth; and the Uninvolved fathers (15%), who were well below the sample mean on all parenting indicators. Generally, fathers in the Highly Involved and Average Involved clusters possessed more positive personal characteristics (e.g., positive

paternal self-assessment, less likelihood of depression diagnosis) and contextual supports (e.g., religiosity, better relationship quality with the mother, living with the child) compared to the Low Involved and Uninvolved groups.

Third, I tested whether the patterns of parenting among Black fathers were related to subsequent children's social and emotional development, such as anxiety and aggression. Although differences in children's problem behaviors failed to emerge between the four fathering groups, children who exhibited high emotionality as infants were differently affected by fathering for withdrawal and lack of guilt following misbehavior. Children of Highly Involved and Average Involved fathers who had early difficult temperament were reported to be relatively more withdrawn than children not prone to emotionality. Also, children of Highly Involved fathers with difficult temperament exhibited relatively less guilt after wrongdoing compared to children with easier temperaments.

My dissertation studies highlight the importance of attending to the diversity of fathering, incorporating engagement quantity as part of fathers' parenting (especially in samples of fathers in diverse family structures), and considering the role of child characteristics in paternal effects.

A Comparative Examination of Paternal Engagement

In the first study, I compared fathers of three-year-olds across Black, Latino, and White racial/ethnic groups on how frequently they spent time with their children, overall and in different types of activities. After considering socioeconomic and family structure differences across groups, all fathers reported similar levels of overall engagement, spending approximately 3.5 days out of the week with their young children. Despite

popular media coverage portraying fathers of color, particularly African American fathers, as “deadbeat” and “absent” fathers, there are in fact many men who believe strongly in the importance of “being there” for their children and act accordingly. My study adds to the growing scholarship in which researchers document how fathers of color describe the value of “being there” for their children (Edin & Nelson, 2013) as well as quantitative reports of engagement frequency (Jones & Mosher, 2013).

Fatherhood in the United States has substantially shifted over the past decades. Thus, fathers who were raised in different time periods could have experienced particular socialization around - and cultural norms with respect to - how fatherhood was defined. Younger fathers compared to older fathers may have been more accustomed to notions of fathers fulfilling multiple roles: providing financially, but also being actively involved in their children’s daily lives. Also, that fathers in different racial/ethnic groups varied in average age suggests that “younger” and “older” may mean something different for Black, Latino, and White fathers.

The fact that (small) group differences in father-child play, caregiving, social activities, and cognitive stimulation persisted despite controlling for age, socioeconomic status, and family structure leads to the consideration of additional factors. There could be racial/ethnic group variation in general availability to be involved, such as work hours. However, this seems less likely given that there were no differences in overall paternal engagement. Instead of accessibility, there may be different values of certain types of engagement that is influenced by cultural factors. For example, Toth & Xu (1999) reported that regardless of racial group membership, fathers who held nontraditional

gender role beliefs and egalitarian family ideologies were more engaged across multiple domains of involvement.

For social engagement, cultural values as well as convenience may have resulted in greater reports by Black and Latino fathers of young children. The two items comprising social engagement included visiting relatives and going out to restaurants. With respect to visiting relatives, Black and Latino families often value and rely on extended kinship networks more than Whites (Almeida et al., 2009; Barbarin, 1983). Furthermore, it is possible that fathers of color in this sample lived in closer geographic proximity to their extended family members. For example, people of color are more likely to live in neighborhood and regional enclaves with other underrepresented groups (Iceland & Weinberg, 2002). In terms of the second social item, going out to eat may be seen as more celebratory and as a special “treat” in certain families.

For all fathers, the order of activity type from highest to lowest frequency was the same: play, caregiving, cognitive, and social engagement. That fathers interact with their children most in play is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Lamb & Lewis, 2010) and conventional knowledge. Despite minor differences across groups in how often they engage in particular activities, the same relative order of frequency and overall level of engagement demonstrates substantial similarities across Black, Latino, and White fathers.

Patterns of Black Fathers’ Parenting

The purpose of the second study was to explore whether person-oriented profiles of Black fathers’ involvement with their young children could be identified across distinct dimensions of paternal involvement – engagement, warmth, and control – as well as to examine whether paternal and family characteristics were associated with fathers’

membership in these parenting subgroups. This was the first person-oriented study of fathering to explicitly utilize the conceptual framework of paternal involvement to guide the selection of parenting behaviors examined (Pleck, 2010). Additionally, this is the first study of fathers' parenting patterns that uses a within-group approach to describe African American fathers, and the first study to include fathers in different family structures (un/wed, non/resident).

Black Father Parenting Profiles and Connections to Previous Studies

A within-group approach revealed the substantial variation in Black fathers' parenting behaviors. Latent class analysis resulted in four distinctive groups of fathers based on multiple paternal involvement dimensions, which had notable overlap with prior research on father profiles. Average Involved fathers represented the largest group (41%), with all parenting behaviors close to the mean of the sample. The next largest cluster (25%), Low Involved-Disciplinarians, exhibited less father-child interaction with their young children, but slightly greater reports of spanking. The Highly Involved fathers (21%) spent more time with their children compared to other men in the sample, and often expressed affection towards their child. The smallest subgroup of fathers (15%), Uninvolved, had the least involvement in each parenting domain measured. They infrequently engaged, showed loving care, and spanked their children.

Beginning with Highly Involved fathers, this profile represented a constellation of parenting behaviors in which fathers prioritized playing with and stimulating their children in a loving context. The Highly Involved fathers were noteworthy because there was considerable overlap with a theoretical description of fathering (Paquette, 2004). Paquette described the father-child activation relationship as the attachment bond

between fathers and children that supports the child's need for overcoming obstacles, stimulation, and risk-taking. Fathers activate their children by creating challenging contexts that encourage children to explore their environment. These activative fathers also express affection by being sensitive to their child's needs, protecting them from danger, sensing when their child's frustration rises and adjusting as appropriate. Activative fathers engage in creative play and use more sophisticated language beyond their child's ability level, such as may happen while reading stories and singing songs. Thus, the Highly Involved fathers who exhibited the highest levels of play, cognitive stimulation, and warmth were quite similar to activative fathers who emphasize stimulating play and novel teaching experiences with their children in an environment of loving care.

That a parenting cluster resembling activative fathers was found using measures of engagement, warmth, and control is particularly noteworthy given that paternal involvement does not describe a typology of fathers, but rather conceptual categories of fathering behavior that may be important. It suggests that there may be multiple approaches to empirically identify activative fathers, in addition to the Risky Situation procedure developed specifically to assess activation theory (Paquette & Bigras, 2010). This may expand the study of father-child activation theory to existing large-scales datasets and allow for analysis of the implications of activative fathering for child development, which only one study has examined thus far (Stevenson & Crnic, 2012).

There were other similarities between study 2 and the handful of previous studies of fathering patterns. The Highly Involved fathers were similar to Jain and colleagues' (1996) "playmates-teachers" and the "stimulative" fathers in Paquette and colleagues'

typology. The Average Involved fathers were reminiscent of the “Average Parenting” cluster of fathers who were within half a standard deviation of the sample mean on all parenting behaviors in Goodman and colleagues’ study (2011). In that study and my study, this cluster of “average” fathers comprised the largest subgroup in the sample. Given that caregiving was among the highest types of engagement for Average Involved fathers, they also may be similar to Jain and colleagues’ caretaker fathers. The Low Involved-Disciplinarian profile was suggestive of the “disciplinarians” (Jain et al., 1996) and “authoritarian” (Paquette et al., 2000) fathers from other studies. Lastly, most previous findings included a subgroup of fathers who were low on every parenting measure. In this study, that group was the Uninvolved fathers, which other researchers have labeled according to the behaviors examined: “disengaged” (Jain et al., 1996), “low discipline” (Lee et al., 2011), or “detached/low verbal” (Goodman et al., 2011). In sum, study 2 found many similar patterns as in other work, which is even more striking in that the present study expanded prior research by using theoretically-informed measures of paternal involvement among a large sample of African American fathers in diverse family structures.

Even though fathers’ parenting profiles were identified using dimensions of warmth and control (as well as engagement), none of the well-known parenting styles emerged (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive). This could have been because the clusters did not vary much in reports of spanking. Admittedly, the measure of control used was simplistic and not comprehensive of fathers’ disciplinary styles. Fathers may have under-reported whether they spanked due to social desirability. Measures that better assess paternal demandingness and control should be employed in future work.

Yet that fact that no clusters emerged which emphasized corporal punishment may question the notion that Black fathers are especially punitive. In fact, measures that speak more generally to parents' philosophy around discipline, rather than the assessing how frequently they utilize one specific disciplinary strategy, may better distinguish fathers and relate to children's development. Of course, this is not to discount the wealth of scholarship that documents the deleterious effects of spanking on child outcomes such as externalizing (e.g., Maguire-Jack, Gromoske, & Berger, 2012).

Correlates of Black Fathers' Parenting Profiles

Fathers were similar in age across all four parenting groups, which was consistent with previous findings in person-oriented profiles of fathering (Goodman et al., 2011; Paquette et al., 2000). However, the large age span of Black fathers in this study (18-71 years old) may have masked cohort effects. As described more thoroughly in the introduction, fatherhood in the United States has changed dramatically over the past fifty years. These shifts in what constitutes "good fathering" certainly may have influenced the fathers in this study growing up in different eras. Thus, younger fathers may be more likely to adopt norms of the "new nurturant father" who provides financially as well as provides emotional support, nurturance, and moral guidance. Older fathers raised during a time when fatherhood meant breadwinning may have internalized those beliefs and also may not have had models of different ways of being a father. In sum, future studies should purposefully group fathers by age based on the shifts in fatherhood norms over time and test for possible cohort effects on parenting patterns.

Also consistent with previous studies, the parenting profiles in study 2 differed in paternal supports and stressors as well as family structure. The Highly Involved and

Average Involved fathers reported higher religiosity, less work stress, lower likelihood of depression, and greater relationship stability with the mother than the other groups. However, there were no socioeconomic differences between father clusters. That fathers in all four parenting groups had similar income mirrors findings from other person-centered studies, but is in contrast with associations between paternal education and parenting (Jain et al., 1996; Paquette et al., 2000; Stevenson & Crnic, 2012). It may be that the quality of parenting among Black men is not very dependent on socioeconomic resources, and perhaps less so than in other communities. Certainly, replicated findings and comparative research would help determine whether such a statement is accurate. However, if it is the case that African American fathers' ways of parenting are more independent from their socioeconomic station, that most certainly could be viewed as a strength that could be tapped into by the multiple stakeholders interested in encouraging and sustaining greater and more effective father involvement, such as families, government, religious organizations, schools, and social programs.

Black Fathers' Involvement and Their Young Children's Social-Emotional Adjustment

In my third study, I sought to first determine whether the patterns of fathering from the second study related to children's later social and emotional adjustment at age five, above and beyond background characteristics. The second goal was to assess the notion of differential susceptibility, namely whether children with early difficult temperament were more positively affected by fathering than their peers. Taking into consideration mothers' education, maternal engagement, child gender, and infant temperament, there were no significant differences across the four fathering patterns in

terms of any of the six measures of young children's anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, lack of guilt, attention problems, and social problems.

I speculated that these null direct effects of fathering could be explained by several conceptual and methodological possibilities. Theoretical discussions of paternal influences suggest fathers impact their children mostly through indirect pathways (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, et al., 2007). Also, when fathers do have direct influences on child development, that may be more common earlier in the child's life (e.g., Cabrera, Shannon, et al., 2007). Measurement and statistical explanations are plausible as well, such as using father-reported involvement data (which has been less often associated with children's development compared to observed measures of parenting); not having other measures of fathering available (e.g., sensitivity, intrusiveness); and low variability in the child adjustment outcomes.

Another speculation involves the wide age range of Black fathers in the sample (18 to 71 years old). Given the changes in fatherhood norms over the past several decades, it could be that lower involvement among older fathers – which may have been more typical during the time they were growing up, personally and culturally – has different meanings and implications for children's development. Lower involvement among younger fathers who were raised during the emergence of the “new nurturant father” ideals could have greater implications for their children, as a result of the greater incongruence between their parenting practices and societal expectations. Thus, older fathers who exhibit lower paternal involvement may have a different impact on children's development compared to younger fathers who are less involved. Considering all fathers together, regardless of age, could have obscured the effects of different cohorts of fathers.

Last, the holistic family context must be acknowledged. Maternal roles are typically more time-intensive than fathers' roles during early childhood. Thus, the lack of direct influence of fathers may be partially explained by the effect of mothers' involvement on young children. Yet early childhood is still an important period to study fathering. Infants and young children often bring fathers into families who might not otherwise stay. Longitudinal research shows that fathers may be especially involved in early childhood (Yeung et al., 2001), and early involvement begets later involvement (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2008).

Interactions between father cluster membership and children's early emotionality were significant for two of the outcomes, children's relative level of withdrawal and lack of guilt after misbehavior. Again, the vast majority of children were in the sub-clinical range on all adjustment measures, so these effects are relative differences in the normative range of problem behavior in early childhood. Children who had high emotionality were rated as more withdrawn compared to children with low emotionality when their fathers were in the Highly Involved and Average Involved groups. Children of Highly Involved fathers also varied in their level of guilt following misbehavior. Children who were highly emotional as infants expressed relatively less guilt after wrongdoing when their fathers were especially warm, playful, and cognitively stimulating.

Given the small size and tenuous nature of these interaction effects, it is important not to overstate their significance. Yet that interaction effects were found at all is remarkable, as there were a limited number of items for most measures. Thus, it may be possible that stronger effects would emerge with more reliable measures.

That said, the two patterns of fathering for which child temperament was positively associated with adjustment represented the majority of families in the sample at 59%, as 19% of fathers belonged to the Highly Involved cluster and 40% were Average Involved. Thus, the notion that fathers should be sensitive to the temperament of their child may apply to fathers more broadly.

Why were children's level of withdrawn and guilt implicated in the differential effects of fathering patterns by child temperament? Both outcomes relate to not adhering to social and moral standards, i.e., interacting with other children, and showing remorse after wrongdoing). Perhaps for less reactive kids, the parenting style embodied by Highly Involved fathers supported their social-emotional development (e.g., pushing children beyond their limits), but with more reactive children, this style may be too challenging and not afford them the same benefits.

The exact association between withdrawn and lack of guilt is unclear because withdrawal is a complex construct that could have multiple motivational underpinnings. It could be that withdrawal and lack of guilt are unrelated when children avoid social interaction with others due to feeling distress or fear in novel situations (Kagan, Reznick, Clarke, Snidman, & Garcia-Coll, 1984). On the other hand, if children play by themselves due to personal preference, withdrawn could be more related to lack of guilt. Diminished guilt following poor conduct is part of callous-unemotional traits (Pardini & Fite, 2010; Willoughby, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, & Bryant, 2011), a set of behaviors that have been linked to childhood conduct problems and later antisocial behavior (Hyde et al., 2013). Again, in this sample, children's problem behaviors were not in the clinical

range. Rather, these were relative differences among children who, on the whole, exhibited normative adjustment.

It is noteworthy that the fathering pattern that was most involved (Highly Involved), especially in play, cognitive stimulation, and warmth, was associated with worse outcomes for more emotionally sensitive children. It may be a “goodness of fit” issue (Lerner & Lerner, 1987) in that Highly Involved fathers are not as compatible for highly emotional children, who may need more sensitivity and responsiveness to their needs. Of course, I cannot speak with certainty, as measures of paternal responsiveness were not available.

Also, it is reasonable to consider that there may be individual differences in how children interpret their fathers’ behavior. For example, highly emotional children may perceive their fathers’ behavior as more aggressive or invasive compared to less emotional children. How children perceive their fathers’ parenting practices in early childhood could explain differences in how identical parenting behaviors may have differential effects on children. Given that children’s theory of mind, or interpreting others’ underlying mental states, develops in the preschool years (Wellman, 2002), early childhood could be a particularly salient time to assess children’s perceptions of parenting. For example, Cabrera and colleagues (2007) postulated that older children may interpret fathers’ intrusive behaviors in a more positive way than they do mothers’ behaviors as a way to explain why there were effects for maternal (but not paternal) intrusiveness on children’s later social-emotional outcomes in preschool. Even though there are developmental and methodological challenges to measuring young children’s perceptions of parenting, it is possible and theoretically important (Grusec & Goodnow,

1994). Such work on children's perceptions of their parents' behaviors has been recommended by scholars (e.g., Cassano, Zeman, & Sanders, 2014), and it is becoming more common in certain areas of research, such as parental conflict (Clements, Martin, Randall, & Kane, 2014).

Or, it may be not (or not only) children's perceptions of parenting that differ, but fathers' behaviors. Highly Involved fathers may actually be more or less dominant during play and other activities depending on the temperament of their child, which other work suggests has implications for children's development (Flanders et al., 2010).

Understandably, some fathers may recognize that their vulnerable children need extra assistance, but are unsure of how to best support their vulnerable children (Hastings et al., 2008). In attempts to be helpful, these fathers may be overbearing and overly restrictive with their children, which could exacerbate negative outcomes. On the other hand, some fathers may acknowledge the needs of their highly sensitive children, but instead find ways to scaffold experiences and provide manageable opportunities to develop their children's self-confidence and skills in effectively coping with everyday situations.

Integrating the Three Studies

All three studies focused on multiple aspects of paternal involvement in early childhood. This dissertation began with a wide lens examination of how much time fathers of different racial/ethnic groups spent with their children (paternal engagement) in study 1, and then moved to an in-depth exploration of Black families in the next two studies. Study 2 described patterns of Black fathers' parenting behaviors, using the three core dimensions of engagement, warmth, and control; and study 3 concluded with the

implications of these parenting profiles on children's social-emotional development, considering the moderating role of early temperament.

Strengths from utilizing comparative and within-group approaches

Taken together, studies 1 and 2 highlight the value of integrating both between-group and within-group approaches to understanding a phenomenon. In study 1, there were no significant differences between Black, and Latino, and White fathers regarding how frequently they interacted with their three-year-old children, after considering differences in sociodemographic characteristics and family structure. After finding that background factors accounted for differences in paternal engagement across racial/ethnic groups, study 2 focused on Black fathers' parenting by conducting an intragroup examination of profiles of fathering behaviors. My analyses revealed fathering groups that varied not only in levels of father-child engagement, warmth, and control, but also in the frequency patterns of different activity types.

Had I only conducted comparative work, I would have missed the variety of parenting patterns among Black fathers. These within group differences were obscured by overall mean differences across racial/ethnic groups. Conversely, if I had only performed within-group analyses, I would not have known that fathers of the three racial/ethnic groups in this sample reported equal amounts of time engaged with their young children.

Strengths from a multidimensional approach to father involvement

Considering multiple dimensions of how fathers directly interact with their children may enlighten our understanding of fathering processes and influence. In study 1, I examined several types of engagement activities in addition to overall father-child interaction frequency. Such nuanced analyses revealed that although no racial/ethnic

differences emerged for global engagement, the groups differed across activities. In addition to these small distinctions by activity type, I also discovered that all fathers reported the same pattern of relative engagement, which emphasized play, then caregiving, followed by cognitive stimulation, and lastly social activities.

In my second study, I added to the four types of engagement the dimensions of paternal warmth and control in determining latent classes of Black fathers' parenting. The analyses of multiple aspects of paternal involvement revealed four meaningful groups of fathers, who differed in their levels of involvement across most dimensions. In fact, different fathering clusters even had varying patterns of engagement activity. Had I used single indicator for overall engagement instead of multiple measures for the conceptually distinct categories of play, caregiving, social activities, and cognitive stimulation, we would have missed important distinctions across parenting profiles and potentially overlooked connections with theoretically posited and empirically determined subgroups of fathers. In sum, my findings highlight the importance of including multiple measures of fathers' parenting practices.

Strengths from considering the role of child temperament on paternal influences

The child brings his or her own personality, experiences, and individuality to the table of the parent-child relationship. Thus, it is critical that we consider child characteristics in studies of parenting effects. Incorporating child temperament allows us to ask: In what context does fathering benefit kids?

Furthermore, it is important to remember that fathering "quality" depends on our perspective (Lamb, 2000). Is good fathering what appears good when observed? Is good fathering more instrumental – those behaviors that produce positive child outcomes? Is

good fathering based on what matters for the individual father from a phenomenological approach? Is good fathering universal for all fathers and all children? Undoubtedly, fathering is a complex picture in which there may be more universal aspects, as well as differential effects for certain groups in certain contexts. There is an analogous dilemma in education of how to define “good teaching.” Some believe that one knows good teaching when one sees it, whereas others believe we must obtain measures of students’ learning to effectively label good teaching.

My dissertation work provides tentative support for the idea that the same pattern of parenting behavior may have different effects for children depending on their early temperament. At the same time, it is encouraging that there were no differences in mean levels or variation of child temperament across fathering groups. In other words, children with difficult temperament do not necessarily evoke and were not relegated to one particular pattern of parenting. Fathers were not systematically uninvolved with highly temperamental children, nor were they highly involved only with “easy” children.

Considering child temperament may clarify and explain contradictory findings from previous research on paternal intrusive behavior. Some studies report that fathers’ intrusive and challenging behavior was associated with less social anxiety in children (Majdandžić, Möller, de Vente, Bögels, & van den Boom, 2014), less behavior dysregulation, and higher sociability (Stevenson & Crnic, 2012). Conversely, another study found that fathers’ intrusiveness was related to worse social-emotional outcomes, namely poorer emotion regulation (Cabrera, Shannon, et al., 2007). It may be that children’s temperament is a key factor related to whether such paternal practices are beneficial for development, which was supported by another study in which paternal

intrusiveness (among other “negative” parenting behaviors) was associated with more positive outcomes only among children with negative temperament as infants (Belsky et al., 1998).

In the end, most fathers (and mothers) are trying their best to raise their children. We know - from the literature and anecdotally - that many parents already are sensitive to their children’s characteristics, such as gender (Mandara, Varner, & Richman, 2010). That parents should and actually do attend to characteristics of their children when parenting them is not novel. We must not carelessly place blame on either parents or children, and recognize that, as in all relationships, both parties bring something to the table (Sameroff, 2010).

Considerations and Directions for Future Research

The greatest limitations of my dissertation project were directly connected to its great strengths. The Fragile Families is a large, community-based sample of urban fathers. This sample is more representative than most studies of fathers, particularly Black fathers. Yet issues with selectivity were still present. The study was named Fragile Families in recognition of the intentional overrepresentation of unwed parents and the multiple risk factors associated with non-marital childbearing. In addition, the majority of fathers in the study were interviewed when they came to the hospital during the child’s birth (Reichman et al., 2001). Thus, Fragile Families fathers may not be representative of all fathers in that many of them exhibited a level of involvement by visiting the hospital when the mother gave birth. Furthermore, families were recruited from twenty large cities in the U.S., thus the findings may not be generalizable to fathers who live in suburban or rural areas.

Also, I had no available measures of observed parenting by fathers, as well as no measures of additional aspects of parenting that may have been useful in describing clusters and predictive of child outcomes (e.g., sensitivity, intrusiveness, demandingness). Additionally, all of the measures were about parenting behaviors, as opposed to other domains such as affective and cognitive (Palkovitz, 1997). The available items for many of the measures of both parenting and children's development were limited. However, the sample was large and nationally representative of families living in large cities. I was able to examine the heterogeneity in parenting among a large sample of African American fathers, which has been rarely done in previous research.

Future studies should continue to examine fathering in a diversity of contexts, such as fathers in different family structures. It is even more important to take a multidimensional perspective of involvement that includes quantity measures of time engaged with the child when studying groups of residential and non-residential fathers to assess opportunity for direct influence on children's development. We should continue to explore multiple aspects of child adjustment to better distinguish which parenting behaviors influence which developmental outcomes. Additionally, testing mediational pathways, such as the possible association between paternal involvement and child sociability through emotion regulation, could further theory development as to the mechanisms of action for paternal influences (Pleck, 2010). Such refinement of theory could support the development of effective father and family interventions and programs.

Another area of future study relates to fathering over time – how (or do) profiles of father involvement change as children (and fathers) develop? Might there be heterotypic continuity (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Schulenberg, Maggs, & O'Malley,

2003), or when specific behaviors change but the underlying purpose or meaning of those behaviors remains the same? As suggested by Cabrera and colleagues (2014) expanded model of paternal influences, there is likely developmental appropriateness of particular fathering styles at certain developmental periods.

Lastly, we should examine children's capacities and struggles in the social-emotional domain from a person-oriented perspective. The field of clinical psychology has documented the frequent comorbidity of many of the problem behaviors we often study in isolation (McConaughy & Skiba, 1993), such as externalizing and internalizing symptomology. Baumrind's early work (1967) identified children marked by differing levels of self-control, mood, and other social characteristics to determine parenting influences. Particularly among children of color, I would like to focus on strengths and skills they possess in emotional competence, such as emotion regulation and empathy (Saarni, 1999).

Implications for Theory, Practice, Policy, and Public Discourse

What are the conceptual and practical implications of my dissertation project for the way we discuss Black families? First, Black fathers are highly engaged with their children, both relative to other racial/ethnic groups (study 1) and among this group there are high proportions of involved fathers (study 2). The majority of fathers were members of the Average Involved (41%) and Highly Involved (19%) clusters. Conversely, only 15% of Black fathers belonged to the Uninvolved group. This is particularly notable for two reasons. First, a third of the sample were fathers who lived apart from their child. Secondly, a previous study of fathering patterns using home observations found that 43%

of their sample of married fathers were disengaged (Jain et al., 1996), a much larger proportion than in my study which included fathers in a variety of family structures.

Next, we should acknowledge in our discourse and scholarship that there are within-group differences among fathers, even involved fathers. Different fathers are involved in different ways, at different levels, and in different activities. Again, the four parenting profiles in study 2 revealed that fathers varied in how they prioritized types of activities, with perhaps the most striking difference emerging around the relative emphasis on play and cognitive stimulation versus social engagement. Our research designs and our language should reflect this heterogeneity.

My first study that revealed parity in paternal engagement across Black, Latino, and White fathers suggests a different approach to public policy and political campaigns. Fathers spent similar amounts of time with their young children, regardless of racial/ethnic group, after taking into consideration socioeconomic status and family structure. Paternal engagement equality suggests our policies and messages to fathers should begin with the strength that many fathers are already involved. Campaigns to increase father involvement, such as the “Take Time to Be a Dad Today” public service announcements by the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, should be careful to not engage in deficit-based thinking that certain fathers are absent. Instead, media and political campaigns must recognize that there are similar levels of involvement across racial/ethnic groups when comparing fathers in similar economic and family situations.

In addition, our message to fathers to “get involved” should be more nuanced as we learn what activities (and what patterns of involvement) are most conducive for positive child development (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2007; Mitchell & Cabrera, 2009).

Theoretically and empirically, father involvement research has shown that more is not always better (Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1985; Palkovitz, 1997).

Our policies should reflect current conceptualizations of fathering, not solely the “father as breadwinner” model. Undoubtedly, there has been an historical shift in the definition of what makes a good father, from past notions of financial provision to more current models of the “new nurturant father.” Fathers are now expected to provide emotionally as well as economically. Furthermore, my second dissertation study provided empirical support that the vast majority of Black fathers were involved with their children. Black fathers engaged in different activities and loving support in varied ways with their young children. Yet some federal legislation still focuses mostly around the financial aspects of fatherhood, such as the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act. Also, paternal leave policies in the United States lag behind maternity benefits, which signals outdated notions of American family life with mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as breadwinners (Levs, 2015). Such workplace policies do not reflect many fathers’ desires to be involved early in their children’s lives without suffering economic consequences. Even with the laudable increase in funding for fatherhood programs, in some case the programs tend to focus on adapting parenting programs developed for mothers to fathers. Such adaptations may not work well with fathers, as they may not explicitly take into consideration the unique needs of fathers.

Additionally, my dissertation revealed the implications of father involvement on men’s mental health and wellbeing. Although there is much work on mothers’ psychological adjustment and parenting, less research has been done with fathers. My second study found that fathers’ parenting practices were related to their psychological

health, such as men's feelings about themselves as parents and likelihood of depression diagnosis. That paternal involvement was associated with fathers' psychosocial needs has clear policy implications. Increasing fathers' involvement with their children may reduce mental health service needs in the community.

Practically, my third dissertation study on the implications of fathers' parenting and the role of child temperament, when considered with other studies of Fathering x Child Temperament interactions, suggests the parenting practices that may be best for the child may depend on characteristics of the child. Parenting and family interventions may consider ways to teach best practices while also qualifying those messages by reminding parents of the importance of attending to the child's natural "bent."

Expanding profiles of father involvement to fathers of color highlights the within-group heterogeneity, as well as possible "universalities" in fathering. For instance, my second study lends support to the theoretical notion that activative fathering may apply more broadly (Paquette, 2004) than the extant empirical work with White, middle-class populations implies (e.g., Stevenson & Crnic, 2012).

In conclusion, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of father involvement in early childhood and its implications for children's social-emotional development, with a focus on the experiences of Black families. The history of Black fatherhood in the United States is dominated by a narrative of absentee fathers, deadbeat dads, and paternal irresponsibility. At the same time, there is a broader historical narrative of fathers' changing roles in the U.S., facilitated by secular trends in more women working outside the home and increasingly flexible role expectations for men, from primarily breadwinners to a more expanded view of the new nurturant father who

provides physical and emotional care to his children (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Lamb, 2000). As such, it is particularly vital to obtain accurate depictions of paternal involvement for Black fathers. Furthermore, we must gain greater understanding of how involvement may (or may not) positively affect children's wellbeing. The communities invested in supporting and sustaining paternal involvement – as well as the fathers and families themselves – deserve nothing less.

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