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# Young Black Children's Representations of the Father Figure in Low-income Households

Shawnae Shalae Thompson

*University of Connecticut - Storrs*, [shawnae.thompson@gmail.com](mailto:shawnae.thompson@gmail.com)

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Young Black Children's Representations of the Father Role in Low-Income Households

Shawnae S. Thompson

Department of Human Development and Family Studies

University of Connecticut

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### Abstract

This study investigated the cognitive-emotional schemas surrounding the father role in 50 young, low-income, Black children in relation to the amount of father involvement in the first 5 years of their lives. These representations were framed within four parenting categories: Nice, Mean, Authoritative, and Authoritarian. Diana Baumrind's parenting style framework was utilized to create the Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting categories. This question was investigated in low-income families; the impact of gender of the child was also considered. Information on fathers' involvements in the children's lives were gathered through interviews and self-reports from the children's fathers and mothers. Story Stem Narrative video tapes were coded for numerous father parenting representations. Results suggested that children having a biological father involved in their lives increased the likelihood of having positive father representations. Having more years of either a biological father and/or a social father figure involved was associated with Authoritative parenting style representations. Gender differences were observed with respect to representations of Anger in the father figure; boys were observed to associate the father using an Angry Tone with Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Mean parenting styles alike. Girls on the other hand, only associated the father using an Angry Tone with Mean parenting behaviors. The results of this study suggest that the amount of father presence (whether biological or social) is important in order for children to develop positive representations of the father figure.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction and Literature Review

#### The Power of Parent-child Relationships

Taken from the Family System's Theory is the belief that all members of a family simultaneously collect and provide information (Kantor & Lehr, 1975). This information, known as *feedback*, is constantly being interpreted by the family system as a whole and by its individual members. This information creates family themes, interaction patterns, and role assignments. This is then often internalized by the family members and becomes the individuals' cognitive schema of how families operate, are organized, and how tasks should be distributed. For this reason, we may find ourselves with the understanding that it is the mother's role to tuck the children in at night, or it may be the father's role to discipline the children. Whatever representations we have, it often stems from our family of origin and the schemas we've acquired throughout development.

An example of how frequent interaction patterns create a general understanding of function can be found in Erik Erikson's (1968) Stages of Development model. For example the frequent response that parents may give to a child's bids to show initiative will aid in establishing the child's foundational feelings of accomplishment and ability to carry out responsibilities. If parents frequently respond appropriately to a child's initiative to complete a puzzle on their own for example, the child will most likely develop a positive self concept and a feeling of purpose. On the other hand, if the parents of a child are habitually unresponsive to the child's bids, or the child receives punishment for wanting to exert control over a task, the child may develop a sense of guilt. This guilt, when experienced in excesses, can result in inhibition. The child now is more likely to create a schema based on these interactions with the parents and

expect all other people in future interactions and relationships to respond similarly. Suppose we look at this through the lens of the father-child interaction? Over time, as a child receives exposure to a father's behavior patterns with him/her, the child will develop mental representations of how a father should behave. These schemas can be embodied in the way a child includes a toy father character in play. For this reason, this study aims to examine the representations of young Black children and the representations of the father figure they display during story telling.

### **Historical Changes Within the Black Family Structure**

Within the Black community, family structure has ideally been a multi-generational family consisting of children, a husband and wife, and their parents (Ruggles, 1994). This is similar to families of other races within America at that time. In America, the extended family arrangement was the prevailing form until the twentieth century (Ruggles, 1994). The majority of American families then moved on to be comprised of two generations, creating the nuclear family. Currently, the family takes on many forms. It is common to now see blended families, cohabitating couples, same-sex couple families, families with grandparents as guardians, as well as single-parent families. These family patterns can be observed throughout all races and social classes. America's low-income Black population, however, contains one of the highest percentages of single parent households. According to the recent US census, 66 percent of children in low-income Black households live with a single mother (Sims, 2012). This compares to only one-third of low-income White children living in single-mother households (Sims, 2012). Single mother parenting is a very real and pressing issue for the Black community



### **Reasons for Lack of Black Father Involvement**

A high number of low-income Black children are being raised in father-less households. In fact, “at least 80 percent of all Black children can now expect to spend at least a significant part of their childhood years living apart from their fathers” (Aird, 1998). One reason for this increase is due to an above-average number of Black males being incarcerated. Statistics show that one in every three Black males have been in and out of America’s criminal justice system (Roberts, 2004). Also contributing to this high number of father-less Black households is an increase in out-of-wedlock births, separation, and divorce, to name a few (Aird, 1998). These factors are usually amplified when combined with low-income, few community resources, and the stigma associated with inner-city black families. Clearly, father presence is a pressing concern for the low-income Black population.

Previous studies have shown that father presence and involvement is especially important for Black children. Fathers spending time with their children was found to be related to positive outcomes such as lower levels of depression and anxiety, and high academic achievement in Black children (Salem, Zimmerman, & Notaro, 1998). These positive outcomes can be due to children having more opportunities to interact with their fathers. These increased opportunities allow the children to receive more emotional support from their fathers. Therefore we hypothesize that children with the greatest father involvement, whether biological or social, will be associated with positive representations of fathers.

### **Hardships Facing Low-Income Families**

Low-income families in general have a lot of stressors to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Resources such as money, time, and energy are very limited. Parents are often away for many hours of the day working multiple jobs. By the time these parents return home, they are depleted

of energy. Because of this, children may experience angry outbursts or harsh inconsistent punishment from their burnt-out parents. Jeong-Kyun Choi and Aurora Jackson (2012) voiced that “economic hardship has an adverse influence on parental psychological functioning and on the quality of family relationships” (p.699). These negative interactions create ripple effects throughout the family’s life and the children’s development. Other stressors low income families may face involve adequate nutrition, emotional health, access to health care, maladaptive coping mechanisms, and inadequate community resources. All in all, many factors shrink the possibility of low-income families having a low-stress life. All of these stressors are especially amplified in single-parent households. Children raised in these conditions are severely disadvantaged in comparison to their middle-class, nuclear family counterparts.

### **The Problem**

Low-income Black fathers have become uninvolved in the lives of their children. As a result, a high proportion of young Black children living in low-income communities are being raised without a consistently present and/or involved father figure. Father engagement has been linked with positive outcomes in “social, behavioral, psychological and cognitive” development of children (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2007). Therefore, the case can be made that the lack of father involvement, especially coupled with the risks involved with living in low-income communities, places children at a higher likelihood of developing emotional and behavioral issues.

This study is interested in finding out how this lack of consistently involved father figures affects young Black children’s internalized notions of the father role. Researchers also set out to observe if there are notable gender differences among the representations of the father role.

### **How Does this Study Address the Issue?**

The present study attacks this issue by quantitatively examining young, low-income Black children's representations of the father figure. After collecting the data, researchers will investigate which representations are common with what cluster of children grouped according to their father involvement level. In order to develop the various representations of the father figure, Diana Baumrind's theoretical framework on parenting styles was utilized. According to Baumrind (1966, 1972), two major parenting styles are Authoritative and Authoritarian.

Diana Braumrind's initial study defined the Authoritative parenting style as characterized by being *high* in warmth and *high* in control. These parents are affectionate and allow age-appropriate independence while setting clear expectations and providing consistent discipline. The Authoritarian parenting style is characterized as being *low* in warmth and *high* in control. Parents with this form of parenting focus on the child following rigid rules and expectations set by the parent. Often, the parents are strict, demanding, unresponsive, and hardly accepting of the child. Disciplining usually takes the form of shaming and corporal punishment. These parents focus on immediate obedience. This early study had great findings, but was limited in some regards. The results were presented without taking into consideration differences that may occur due to the socio-economic status and racial backgrounds of the families. Researchers for this present study were interested in the differences that may exist in parenting styles according to race and income levels.

A later study by Baumrind (1972) addressed this issue and focused on comparing Black and White families' differences in parenting styles and the children's outcomes. This study revealed that an important difference existed. On average, parenting in Black families resembled the Authoritarian parenting style in which immediate obedience is expected and corporal

punishment is often used. However, the negative outcomes Baumrind found to be associated with Authoritarian parenting in White children were not found in Black children. Black children raised with Authoritarian parenting reflected the outcomes of White children raised with Authoritative parenting. Another study by Mary Keegan Eamon (2001) found that corporal punishment is more likely to be used (on both boys and girls alike) in low-income families than in middle and upper class families. Based on this framework, we expect to see the majority of children in the study represent father behaviors that are in line with the Authoritarian parenting style.

This study uses the Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting styles as frameworks in which to capture father behaviors. In addition to these two parenting styles, a Nice parenting category and a Mean parenting style category were developed. The Nice parenting style captures the emotionally pleasant and responsive qualities of parenting. The Mean parenting style captures the possible emotionally disengaged, abusive, and unresponsive parenting characteristics.

### **Parental Investment Theory**

Parental Investment Theory was developed by Robert Trivers (Roeckelein, 2006). Its central concepts include parental differentiation in the allocation of resources to children. A parent will be more likely to allocate his resources (time, energy, money) to a child if the parent sees the child as able to further his genes within the gene pool. From this premise, we can relate it to the expectations of interaction for a biological father versus a social father. According to this theory, a biological father would be most likely to invest more in the child, whether it is through spending time with the child, or being more patient with the child in order to ensure positive developmental outcomes. A social father on the other hand may not be as invested in a

child because the child will not further his genes in the gene pool. On this theory, a social father may not be as beneficial to a child than a biological father.

Also along these lines, prior research has suggested that step-parents are less responsive to children, less likely to engage in positive interactions, and show lower levels of warmth to children than biological parents (Thomson, 1992). Using these two theoretical frameworks, we hypothesize that biological father involvement in the lives of these children will yield greater positive father figure representations than with a social father involved.

### **Gender Differences**

A study done by Easterbrooks and Goldberg (1984) examined the impact on father involvement and parenting on toddlers. The study found many differences in parent-child interaction patterns and the children's outcomes depending on the gender of the child. Gendered differences were found in children when evaluated on task completion and attachment patterns in relation to father involvement. Fathers were seen to spend more time with their sons than their daughters. Support for a salience of father-son relationships was found in their study as well. For this reason, we can hypothesize that a gendered difference will exist between girls and boys in the representations of the father figures.

### **Conclusion and Study Expectations**

To summarize, father presence in low-income Black families is found to be quite low for various reasons. Children's development and emotional states are affected by the involvement or the absence of a father figure in their lives. Social fathers can play an important role in children's lives when a biological father is absent, but social fathers may not be as optimal for children as a biological father. Furthermore, Black parenting takes on a different form than the frequently studied parenting style in White families; yet Black children still maintain the same

positive developmental outcomes. Our first hypothesis was that the majority of children will show representations that resemble the Authoritarian parenting style. The second hypothesis was that children with the greatest overall father figure involvement will have more frequent father representations that reflect the most responsive, empathetic, and positive parenting representations, those which fall under Authoritative and Nice parenting styles.

A third hypothesis was that type of father involvement will make a difference for children, specifically that biological father involvement will be associated with more positive father representations than social father involvement for the sample as a whole. A recent study found that children raised in a home with a stepfather had lower quality relationships with the stepfather than children raised in homes with a biological father (Lansford, Ceballo, Abbey & Stewart, 2001). Lastly, the fourth hypothesis was that there will be differences in the pattern of representations and in the association between father involvement and father representations among the genders of the children.

## Chapter II

### Methods

#### Participants in the Study

**Original study: the national Early Head Start study.** Participants for this current study were from the national Early Head Start study which began in 1996. This study conducted by Love and his colleagues (2005) gathered participants from a population of Americans living at or under the federal poverty level. To be included in the study, the families had to have a child less than 12 months of age, or be expecting a child. From the eligible population, 3,001 families were recruited by a local Early Head Start program and were randomly assigned to either the control group or the program group. In this study's sample, 99 percent of the children's primary caregivers were their biological mothers. Seventy-two percent of these mothers were under the age of 25. Thirty-four percent identified as Black. These mothers' education levels were generally low; 48 percent did not receive a high school diploma. The mothers in this study responded to questions about father involvement at ages 14, 24, 36, and 53 months of the children's lives.

**The present study's sample.** The current study involved families from Denver, Colorado who had participated in the National Early Head Start study. Among these participants, 72 children had mothers who identified as Black. Of these 72 children, 50 were selected based on the completeness of their data during the pre-kindergarten follow-up study. Thirty-one children of this final sample were females, and nineteen were males. At the time of the pre-kindergarten follow up, the youngest child in this sample was 58 months, and the oldest was 70 months old. The average age of all 50 children was 63 months old (5.25 years old).

## Measures

**Father presence.** The father figure was defined as either a biological father or a social father throughout this study. The social father is any male figure that is regularly involved in the child's life and maintains some form of a fatherly role. Social father figures can include an uncle, the mother's boyfriend, an older cousin, a stepfather, or a friend of the family. In order to prevent coders' biases during the study, coders were blind to information on each child's father presence.

The presence of the father figure(s) in the children's lives was obtained by reports from the mother at each year the child was included in the study. Interview questions addressed many facets of father presence. Questions included whether or not the mother was married to or cohabitated with the biological father, whether there was a biological father or a social father present and involved with the child, and whether or not the current father figure was the same as previous years.

**Story stems.** The MacArthur Story Stem Battery (MSSB) was used to gain an understanding of the "children's attitudes and representations toward relationships" (Robinson, Eltz, 2004). There were a total of seven stories used with these children. Each story had a different theme that captured a typical dilemma a child would be exposed to. The dilemmas in each story are listed in Table 1. Children were invited to complete the stories in whichever way they wanted. From these stories, researchers are able to capture the way these children may interpret the world around them.



Table 1  
*Description of Story Stem Narratives*

Story Stem	Dilemma
Spilled Juice	The child spills juice all over the floor in the presence of the entire family.
Headache	The mother has a headache and lies down to rest in the living room. Before lying down, the mother instructs the child that he/she is to engage in a quiet activity. The child's friend comes over and asks to watch an interesting show on TV.
Lost Keys	The child is witnessing the parents arguing over who lost the car keys.
Band-Aid	While breaking the rules and cooking with a knife, the child cuts his or her hand and screams out for a Band-Aid. The parents rush in to see what happened.
Stolen Candy	While on a trip to a local store, the child asks the parents for a candy. The parents say "no." As the parents turn their back to walk out the store the child steals a candy of the shelf, but is caught by the store clerk.
Hot Soup	As the child is cooking with the mother, he/she is told to wait until the soup cools. The child is impatient and reaches for the hot soup regardless. The child ends up spilling it all over his/her hand.
Departure and Reunion	In these two combined stories, the mother and father leave the children at home with the grandmother as they go out to run some errands. The parents then return after a while.

**Coding chart.** Father involvement was measured by using the Father Parenting Style and Engagement Rating coding chart (see Appendix B). This coding chart was developed for this study. The eighteen codes on this chart sought to capture various behaviors/capacities in which fathers interact with their children. The Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting styles were based on a parenting style theoretical framework by Diana Baumrind (1972). To create the other two parenting styles, Nice and Mean, videos of children from the original Early Head Start study, but outside this current study's sample, were viewed and used as a guide for possible father behaviors the story stems may elicit. Items coded from this chart were split into five categories: Authoritative, Authoritarian, Nice, Mean, and Uncategorized. Descriptions of each behavior code are provided in Appendix A.

### **Procedure**

As part of the National Early Head Start and pre-kindergarten follow-up study, the Denver, Colorado Early Head Start site had a sample of N=309 families. This early study examined the socio-emotional development of children who were in the Early Head Start program. At ages 14, 24, and 36 months the children's caregivers and living arrangements were assessed through the use of interviews and self reports conducted in the families' homes. Some of the questions included in these assessments were: Does the child live with his/her biological father; and has the father figure lived with you (the mother) since the child's third birthday? Mainly mothers were interviewed, however at 24 and 36 months, some fathers were interviewed as well. When the children reached five years of age and were ready to enter Kindergarten, the parents were interviewed again, and the children's cognitive and social-emotional development was assessed. For the social-emotional assessment, the MacArthur Story Stem Battery was used. Children were videotaped in their homes as they engaged in completing the story stems.

## Data Analysis

All 50 children's videotaped story responses were coded. An inter-rater reliability check was done by a fellow undergraduate student in the Family Studies department. The range of inter-coder reliability across aggregated variable dimensions was from 20% to 70%.

Authoritative, Nice, Authoritarian, and father using an Angry Tone had the highest percent agreement of 60% and above. For each story, all eighteen coded behaviors were marked as "1" for present, or "0" for absent. These numbers were entered into SPSS version 20. A variable was created with composite means of each behavior in all seven story stems. Reliability correlations were run in order to find which variables co-related and produced the strongest Alpha. Using the original study's data, variables such as gender, biological father involvement, social father involvement, and general father involvement were created.

Using SPSS, frequencies were generated for gender, biological father involvement, and social father involvement. To find if there was a difference in likelihood of father involvement according to gender, a t-test was conducted. Descriptives were then gathered (mean, standard deviation, maximum, minimum, and mode) for the ages of the children and for each of the father involvement and father narrative variables. Correlation tables were created in order to analyze relationships between each of the parenting styles and father narratives, and father involvement levels, for the whole sample and separately by child gender.

## **Chapter III**

### **Results**

#### **Father Involvement**

The data collected from mother reports of father involvement depicts that all children had either a biological father or a social father figure involved in their lives throughout the four studied years. Many of these father figures were not biological however. There were slightly more social father than biological father involvement overall; 31 children had mothers who reported biological father involvement, and 36 reported some form of involved social fathers. (see Table 2). Seventeen children had both a biological and a social father involved in their lives by the time of the Pre-K follow-up study. For the first two years of the child's life, only two mothers reported to be married to the biological father of the child. At age three, still only a small number, N=4, of mothers reported to be married to the biological father of the child.

Table 2

*Mother Reported Father Involvement for Total Sample of Children (N=50)*

Type of Father Involvement		n	%
Any	None	0	0
	1 year	1	2
	2 years	11	12
	3 years	15	40
	4 years	23	46
Biological	None	19	38
	1 year	7	14
	2 years	8	16
	3 years	8	16
	4 years	8	16
Social	None	14	28
	1 year	10	20
	2 years	14	28
	3 years	6	12
	4 years	6	12

Among the father involvement variables, number of years with a social father had the highest mean. Years with no father involvement had a low mean of 18%, signifying that there was a lot of father involvement. The Authoritative, Authoritarian, Nice, and Mean parenting representations all had very low frequencies (each with occurrences of under 10%). Although

the four main parenting styles were rather infrequent, the uncategorized parenting representations were more frequently included. Father Uninvolved had the highest mean at 20 percent. Father character Trailing Along was at 14%, and the father using an Angry Tone had a 10% occurrence (see table 3).

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics for Father Involvement and Father Representations*

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Percent years without father figure involvement	18	20
Percent years with Biological Father Involvement	40	38
Percent years with Social Father Involvement	42	34
Percent of Authoritative parenting representations	05	06
Percent of Authoritarian parenting representations	03	06
Percent of Nice parenting representations	03	05
Percent of Mean parenting representations	05	08
Percent of Father Uses Angry Tone representations	10	14
Percent of Father Trails Along representations	14	15
Percent of Father Uninvolved representations	20	20

Table 4 shows that some of the correlations among the parenting styles were significant while others were not. The Authoritative parenting style had the most significant correlations. Authoritative was moderately correlated with Authoritarian, Angry Tone, Father Uninvolved, and Father Trailing Along. As expected, Authoritarian parenting involved associations with

Mean parenting representations and the Father using an Angry Tone. Furthermore, Mean parenting style shows an association with the Father using an Angry Tone.

Table 4

*Correlations Between the Father Parenting Styles*

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Nice	Mean	Angry Tone	Uninvolved	Trailing Along
Authoritative	1						
Authoritarian	.308*	1					
Nice	-.001	-.030	1				
Mean	.183	.642**	.024	1			
Angry Tone	.324*	.482**	-.089	.666**	1		
Uninvolved	-.411**	-.256	-.234	-.203	-.197	1	
Trailing Along	-.373**	-.224	.005	-.213	-.211	-.057	1

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level

T-tests revealed that there is no statistical difference in father involvement between boys and girls  $t(48) = .716, p = .477$ . Boys and girls are equally as likely to have a father present or absent. We were also interested in observing if any gender differences existed in the associations among variables. Therefore, we looked at correlations between the parenting styles by gender (see table 5). It was hypothesized that there would be a difference in representations among the genders of the children. Table 6 shows the relationship between the father figure using an Angry

Tone and the four parenting styles according to the gender of the children. It also shows the similarity between Authoritarian and Authoritative parenting styles for both girls and boys.

Although this similarity exists, differences between boys and girls are evident.

For girls, authoritative father behaviors were associated with less Mean and Trailing Along father behaviors. For boys, however, authoritative father representations were correlated with more Mean and Angry Toned representations. Boys also had Authoritarian correlated with Mean and Angry Tone. Both girls and boys had Mean father behaviors correlated with the father using an Angry Tone.

Table 5  
*Correlations Between Parenting Styles According to Gender*

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Nice	Mean	Angry Tone	Uninvolved	Trailing Along
Authoritative	1	.434	.044	.505*	.645**	-.505*	-.341
Authoritarian	<b>.012</b>	1	.123	.810**	.688**	-.359	-.218
Nice	<b>-.058</b>	<b>-.021</b>	1	.335	.085	-.238	.169
Mean	<b>-.360*</b>	<b>.262</b>	<b>-.052</b>	1	.767**	-.319	-.298
Angry Tone	<b>-.133</b>	<b>.118</b>	<b>-.240</b>	<b>.530**</b>	1	-.286	-.303
Uninvolved	<b>-.353</b>	<b>-.178</b>	<b>-.245</b>	<b>-.094</b>	<b>-.086</b>	1	-.319
Trailing Along	<b>-.423*</b>	<b>-.268</b>	<b>-.051</b>	<b>-.122</b>	<b>-.108</b>	<b>.166</b>	1

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level  
 \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level  
 Girls below the diagonal, Boys above the diagonal



The first hypothesis was that the majority of Black children will show representations that resemble the Authoritarian parenting style. However, Out of the sample of 50 children, only a minority included authoritarian representations of fathers. Five (10 percent) displayed physical punishment, six (12 percent) had representations of the father figure using Threats of Punishment, and eight (16 percent) had instances of displaying the father figure engaged in Verbal Punishment. Throughout, Authoritarian behaviors were not very frequent in this study's sample (see table 6).

Table 6

*Correlations with Father Involvement and Parenting Styles*

	Years of Father Involvement Type		
	No Involved Father Figure	Biological Father	Social Father
Authoritative	-.184	.112	-.020
Nice	-.051	.341*	-.354*
Mean	-.025	.239	-.254
Authoritarian	.014	.068	-.084
Father Using an Angry Tone	.084	.155	-.222
Father Uninvolved	.052	-.066	.045
Father Trails Along	.087	-.014	-.033

\* *Correlation is significant at the .05 level*

Based on prior research, I hypothesized that children with the greatest overall father figure involvement will have the highest levels of father representations that fall under the Authoritative and Nice parenting categories. This was found to be true in trends, but none of the correlations were found to be significant for the sample as a whole (refer to table 6).

Furthermore, it was hypothesized that children's representations of the father figure will be different whether the biological father was involved or a social father figure was involved in the child's life. Support for this hypothesis was found; as can be seen in Table 6, the direction of each relationship were opposite for biological and social father figures. Biological father involvement had positive correlations with Nice, while social father involvement, on the other hand, had negative correlations with Nice.

Our fourth hypothesis involved whether the type of father involvement and the level of the father involvement was different for boys' and girls' representations of the father figure. Data suggests that there is no significant difference between the gender of the children except with Nice parenting representations. Boys were shown to have strong significant correlations between father presence and Nice parent representations; girls on the other hand did not have any significant correlations suggesting that boys may be more affected than girls by years of involvement with father figures. Indeed, boys had a strong positive correlation for Nice father representations with increased biological father involvement and an equally strong negative correlation for Nice father representations with increased social father involvement (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Correlations with Father Involvement and Parenting Styles According to Gender*

		Years of Father Involvement		
		No Father Involvement	Biological Father	Social Father
Authoritative	Girls	-.267	-.055	.215
	Boys	-.062	.298	-.335
Nice	Girls	.012	.233	-.255
	Boys	-.453	.777**	-.711**
Mean	Girls	.165	.109	-.213
	Boys	-.202	.378	-.356
Authoritarian	Girls	.329	-.058	-.131
	Boys	-.217	.181	-.104
Father Using an Angry Tone	Girls	.074	.138	-.189
	Boys	.090	.174	-.265
Father Uninvolved	Girls	-.043	.189	-.176
	Boys	.219	-.382	.351
Father Trails Along	Girls	.142	-.182	.110
	Boys	.003	.197	-.245

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level

## Chapter IV

### Discussion

The primary focus of this study was to understand the representations about the father role that have emerged for young Black children in low income households. More specifically, we looked at the effect of father presence on these representations. Three out of the five hypotheses were supported. Our second hypothesis was supported by trends in our data which suggested that children with a lot of father figure involvement displayed representations of Authoritative and Nice parenting styles. Our third hypothesis was also supported. Results showed that the number of years of having a biological father involved was positively correlated with Nice, father representations. However, the number of years of having a social father involved was negatively correlated with Nice, father representations. These findings support the results of earlier studies which found that “stepparents provide less warmth and communicate less well with children than do original parents” (Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin, 1992, p.368). Having a biological father in the child’s life was linked with the most frequent portrayal of active father representations. The fourth hypothesis was supported by one of our most interesting findings. There were many statistically significant differences in the quality of father representations that girls and boys portrayed. Boys linked the father using an Angry Tone with a wide spectrum of other father representations. Authoritative representations included Angry Tone as well as the expected Authoritarian and Mean Parenting styles. However, girls tended to only make an association between the father using an Angry Tone with Mean parenting. This suggests that boys internalized the father’s use of an Angry Tone as unvarying from situation to situation, while girls make the distinction and only have internalized notions of the father using a harsh tone when responding to children punitively or when being Mean. This distinction might

be caused by a few things. The first explanation for this is that boys are socialized to be more physically aggressive than girls (Crick, Werner, Casas, O'Brien, Nelson, Grotper, & Markon, 1999). Therefore, the boys in this study may have just included themes of anger and harshness for all story characters, and not just the father character. A second explanation for this distinction between girls' and boys' father representations is that fathers may indeed interact differently with their sons than with their daughters. Aggressive play may be seen more in father-son interactions than father-daughter interactions. An early longitudinal study done by Margaret Tauber (1979) observed that fathers encouraged active play in their sons, but not so much with their daughters. As a result, boys experience more aggression from their fathers, and associate aggression with the father role more than girls.

In keeping with Diana Baumrind's findings in 1972 during her follow-up study, this study expected to see a lot of Authoritarian parenting representations with this Black sample (Baumrind, 1972). This was not the case, however. The more years with any father figure involvement, the less the children had Authoritarian parenting styles. This could have been due to our rather small and localized sample size.

We hypothesized that representations for boys and girls would look similar and not be affected by the type of father involvement or the level of father involvement; this was not supported by our data. The significant results suggested that boys and girls have different representations of the father figure as Nice. The study also found that boys had a very high association between father involvement and Nice parenting representations; a difference existed in the direction of these associations however. For boys, the more social father involvement, the less Nice representations were made. The more biological father involvement in these boys' lives, the more Nice parenting was represented.

### **Limitations to the Present Study and Suggestions for Direction of Future Studies**

A major limitation in this study was the very small number of father representations found overall. The means of all father representations were very low, and consequently, trends were hard to identify. This limitation can possibly be addressed in further studies by having a greater number of coded behaviors defined. During the coding process of this study, the father participated in various interactions that did not fit coding criteria, so those behaviors were undocumented. This can also be improved upon in the future by having more story stems coded for each child. Ten or more stories would possibly produce a greater amount of father representations. The children are young however, and attention span is very short, so the story stem narratives could be administered over a period of two to three days.

Another limitation of this study is that data was not available about the quality of father involvement. For this reason, we were not able to differentiate children who had regular and positive interactions with their fathers and those who simply had a father around in the house yet did not share any quality moments of interactions. The role of the father as a frequent playmate and/or caretaker and the extent to which the father is involved on a daily basis needs to be included in further studies. We also did not know who the social father was, whether it was an uncle, stepfather, etc.

### **Strengths of the Present Study**

A strength of this study lies in the direct assessment of the children. Many qualitative studies with this age group are done through interviews with the parents and data collected based on parental reports about the child. This study, however, was able to capture each child's personal thought process. This method eliminates the extraneous variable of parental bias. Furthermore, very few studies have examined the types of representations of the father figure

that Black children in particular may have. This study also focused on low-income families, a very critical population in America.

### **Importance of the Study**

Once experts in the field grasp a better understanding of the views that young Black children have of the father role in low-income situations, social service programs and initiatives can better angle their approach in improving the father-child relationship in these communities. As a result, any negative views surrounding the father role can be replaced with more positive understandings of the role of the father figure. Thus, the likelihood of these children growing up and perpetuating negative parenting roles will decrease, and positive parenting qualities will be exhibited. This may, in turn, ripple positively throughout the community.

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Appendix A

*Coding Manual*

**Authoritative Parenting Category** (Reliability Alpha of .684)

Code	Description
<i>Verbal Correction</i>	The father character verbally told the child character what he or she did wrong and/or how the child can make a better decision next time
<i>Conflict Intervention &amp; Resolution</i>	The father character stepped in to help resolve a conflict the child character may be involved in. This included a social conflict involving another character, or a personal conflict the child may have such as feeling self worth.
<i>Socialization Demands &amp; Statement of Rules</i>	The father character expressed appropriate ways of socially interacting with others at home or in the public. This also included the parent making maturity demands and explicitly stating his expectations for the child's conduct
<i>Joint Attention &amp; Turn Taking</i>	The father character and child character shared the same visual focus and/or engaged in reciprocal communication.
<i>Protection</i>	The father character looked out for the wellbeing of the child character in the presence of danger.
<i>Caretaking</i>	Father behavior addressed the physical needs of the child character.

**Authoritarian Parenting Category** (reliability Alpha of .720)

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<i>Physical Punishment</i>	The father character physically struck, grabbed, or harmed the child as a result of the child's disobedience or wrongdoing.
<i>Verbal Punishment</i>	The father character got mad, removed a privilege, sent the child to their room, or punished the child in any way that did not include physically striking the child as a result of the child's disobedience or wrongdoing.
<i>Threats of Punishment</i>	The father character warned the child that if he or she continues an unwanted behavior they will be punished.

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**Nice Parenting Category** (Reliability Alpha was .642)

*Behaviors under this category were categorized to portray a nice, emotionally pleasant, and responsive father parenting style.*

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<i>Affection</i>	The father character showed love and care for a character. Behaviors included kisses, hugs, pats on the back, and verbal expressions of love and care.
<i>Reassurance</i>	Any attempt to lower or remove the child character's doubts and fears
<i>Helping</i>	The father character assisted or led the child character in completing an activity. This included scaffolding, verbal, and/or physical guidance.

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**Mean Parenting Category** (reliability Alpha of .812)

*The behaviors in this category represented an emotionally disengaged, abusive, and unresponsive father parenting style.*

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<i>Inappropriate Response</i>	The father character responded, nonverbally or verbally, in a way that was not appropriate to the situation or conversation.
<i>Unprovoked Aggression</i>	The father directed physical or verbal aggression toward a character without provocation.
<i>Physical Aggression</i>	Physical attacks to or threats of physically harming a character. This also included destruction of furniture and physical harm to animals.

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**Uncategorized**

*These behaviors were outside of one of the four categories above. According to inter-variable reliability testing, they did not significantly co-occur with any of the above parenting behaviors.*

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<i>Father using an Angry Tone</i>	The father character used an aggressively raised voice, said insults, or verbal attacks
<i>Father Trails Along</i>	The father was not directly involved in any behavior. The father doll was simply moved along with other family members.
<i>Father Uninvolved</i>	The father character was not touched, talked about, or manipulated by the child. In this case the father played no role whatsoever in any interaction during the story.

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Appendix B

*Coding Chart*

Child's ID Number:

Coder's Initials:

Date Viewed:

Father Narratives	Story Stem Narratives						
	Spilled Juice	Headache	Lost Keys	Band-Aid	Stolen Candy	Hot Soup	Departure & Reunion
<u>Authoritative</u>							
Verbal Correction							
Conflict Intervention & Resolution							
Socialization Demands & Statements of Rules							
Joint Attention & Turn Taking							
Protection							
Caretaking							

<u>Authoritarian</u>							
Physical Punishment							
Verbal Punishment							
Threats of Punishment							
<u>Nice</u>							
Affection							
Reassurance							
Helping							
<u>Mean</u>							
Inappropriate Response							
Unprovoked Aggression							
Physical Aggression							
<u>Uncategorized</u>							
Angry Tone							
Father Uninvolved							
Father Trails Along							