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Predictors of paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers

Deadric Treandis Williams

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PREDICTORS OF PATERNAL COMMITMENT AND PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT
AMONG LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS

By

Deadric Treandis Williams

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science
in Sociology
in the Department of Sociology and Social Work

Mississippi State University

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Results indicate that structural factors are highly predictive of paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers, thus lending strong credence to the structural barriers perspective. Moreover, while findings also indicate that several cultural factors are associated with paternal involvement (e.g., attitudes toward single motherhood and low self-efficacy), they are at odds with the cultural deficiency perspective. These results have both theoretical and policy implications. With respect to fatherhood theory, findings derived from this research call for a much-needed theoretical integration in studying paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers; that is, to synthesize and integrate a structurally sound theory with a culturally sensitive approach, such as the cultural resiliency perspective. This research also suggests that public policy-makers should be aware of the adaptive strategies that many low-income African American fathers employ in order to be actively involved with their young children.

Key words: low-income, African American fathers, paternal involvement

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to those who have supported and inspired me along my academic journey at Mississippi State University. These individuals include my two daughters (Abriona and Victoria), my partner (Arrica), my mother (Darlene) and my two social fathers (Wiley Brooks, Jr. and William D. Smith). In addition, to the youth who march onward and upward towards the light, this thesis is respectfully dedicated.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

The role of African American men in low-income families has been a topic of great debate and controversy for some time. The reason for such debate and controversy involves the increase in female-headed households, teenage pregnancy and the decline of marriage among African Americans. According to Lichter and Qian's (2004) monograph on *Marriage and Family in a Multiracial Society*, in 2000, nearly 70 percent of African American children were born outside of marriage and most African American children grew up in poor, female-headed families. Only 30 percent of African American women ages 25-29 had ever been married and they continue to have a sharper downward trend in marriage than women from other racial/ethnic groups. The authors suggested that a unique set of disadvantages affects the marriage patterns of African American women. For example, sex ratio imbalances are large in the African American population (especially in inner-city neighborhoods), reflecting, in part, much higher mortality rates and prison incarceration rates among African American men. High unemployment rates and low earnings among the African American male population further diminish the likelihood of getting and staying married (Lichter and Qian 2004). These conditions are

often cited as the source of African American fathers' absenteeism in families and their uninvolvement with children.

In early research, two broad perspectives informed the understanding of the perpetuation of inequality among African American families: the cultural deficiency perspective and the structural barriers perspective. The former argues that African American families' deficient cultural norms concerning marriage and family lead to "tangles of pathology" and a "culture of poverty." The latter argues that various structural constraints plague African American families, which often leads to female-headed households and a wide array of socioeconomic disadvantages. However, these perspectives seem to be too simplistic and limited in the explanation of inequality among low-income families. Thus, some scholars argue for a more holistic approach in which cultural and structural explanations are integrated (Wilson 1990). To date, there has been little direct application of these perspectives in relation to paternal commitment and paternal involvement among African American fathers in general and low-income African American fathers in particular. This is surprising given the important role paternal involvement plays in African American children's social and psychosocial well-being (Bryant and Zimmerman 2003; Salem, Zimmerman and Notaro 1998; Zimmerman, Salem and Maton 1995).

Contemporary Relevance

Although scholars have refuted the assumption that African American families are trapped in a "tangle of pathology" or display a "culture of poverty" (e.g., Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Cazenave 1979; Gutman 1976), contemporary scholarship and

current public policy advances the “culture of poverty” thesis. For example, Massey and Denton (1993) argued that there exists a “culture of segregation” among many poor African Americans. Although the authors reject the notion that African Americans display an autonomous “culture of poverty,” they continue to argue that poor African Americans develop an oppositional culture that devalues work, schooling and marriage (Massey and Denton 1993:8). These descriptions of poor African Americans are consistent with earlier depictions of poor African American families (e.g., Lewis 1968).

Moreover, recent public policy and marriage initiatives also further the “culture of poverty” thesis, albeit indirectly. It has widely been assumed by many policymakers that marriage will increase fathers’ involvement and subsequently improve poor families’ economic and social well-being (Johnson 2001). In 2006, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and started grant programs to promote “healthy marriage” among poor families. Although recent scholarly research demonstrates that marriage benefits both men and women (Waite 1995), whether this program will work to encourage and sustain healthy marital unions among poor families is not a certainty (Dion 2005; for a review, see Kowaleski-Jones and Wolfinger 2007; Lichter 2007). Despite the argument that such programs are beneficial (Fagan 2001), several studies demonstrate that many low-income couples want to marry but other factors prevent them from actually getting married (Gibson-Davis, Edin and McLanahan 2005). Thus, due to their unique needs, scholars question whether any marriage program will benefit poor families (Dion 2005), and low-income and minority fathers (Coley 2001). Indeed, Gibson-Davis, Edin and McLanahan (2005) reported that many low-income, unmarried parents aspire to get married but financial concerns, relationship quality and fear of divorce lead to a delay in

marriage. Thus, healthy marriage programs that only stress the benefits of marriage may not be the only suitable mechanism to strengthen poor families.

In fact, McLanahan (2007) presented three assumptions that drive the "healthy marriage" program: (1) that unmarried parents will participate, (2) that participation in the program will increase marriage and (3) that children will be better off. These assumptions are problematic because the program presents marriage as the only potential mechanism that will aid and benefit poor families and these families will adequately respond to the program. Although the "healthy marriage" program is not overtly critical of African American families, it is, however, based on the same logic of the cultural deficiency perspective, albeit inverted. Instead of highlighting poor African American families as pathological, the program presents marriage as the best way to aid poor families. Thus, the "healthy marriage" program is an attempt to impose what many consider to be ethnocentric (i.e., white middle-class) norms and values of marriage on poor African American families. Such programs may not be able to respond to the unique needs and circumstances of low-income couples (Dion 2005).

Objectives of the Study

To demystify and critique the deficiency argument, a growing body of research has begun to document what African American fathers *do* in families. While some scholars focus specifically on the role of resident (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Cazenave 1979; Hossain and Roopnarine 1993) and nonresident African American fathers (King, Harris and Heard 2004), others emphasize the cultural resiliency of African American families (Hill 1999; McAdoo 2007; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson and

Futrell 1998; Roschelle 1997). To continue this emerging trend, the present study attempts to accomplish three important research goals. First, this study evaluates whether African American fathers who hold nontraditional family ideologies (e.g., single-parenthood, nonmarital cohabitation and nontraditional marriage ideologies), who have low levels of self efficacy and who hold traditional gender ideologies are less committed to and less involved with their children. Second, this study examines whether larger structural conditions (e.g., income, education, employment status and resident status) affect African American fathers' commitment to and involvement with their children. Lastly, this study investigates whether the effects (discussed above) differ across fathering context (e.g., resident vs. nonresident fathers). More specifically, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent do the factors associated with the cultural and structural explanations of African American families predict paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers?
- (2) Do these factors differ across resident and nonresident fathers?

To investigate these research questions, I used data from wave one and wave three of the Fragile Family and Child Well-being study. Since the Fragile Family Study collected information from inner cities and over sampled unwed mothers and fathers, the data set is suitable for evaluating both the cultural and structural perspectives in the context of low-income African American fatherhood. In terms of statistical analyses, this study utilized the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression technique to estimate the cultural and structural effects on paternal commitment and two dimensions of father involvement (i.e., affective and interactive fathering).

Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to the extant literature in a number of significant ways. First, unlike previous research, the current study simultaneously explores the cultural as well as structural antecedents of both paternal commitment (the attitudinal dimension) and paternal involvement (the behavioral dimension). It examines both the subjective and objective aspects of fathering. Second, this study investigates paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers only. Prior research suggests that comparisons between African American and white families are problematic because these families operate from different normative and functional processes (Staples 1976). As such, comparisons between African American and white fathers can be counterproductive because this type of comparisons may neglect African American fathers' own sociohistorical context (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Billingsley 1992; Coley 2001). Third, this study uses measures that reflect fathers' responses. Previous research on paternal involvement relies disproportionately on mothers and children's reports instead of using measures that directly reflect low-income African American fathers. Last, but not least, this study examines potential differences between resident and nonresident fathers. Despite a recent surge in studying African American fathers (Cochran 1997; Gadsden and Smith 1994; Wade 1994), much of the published work has disproportionately focused on resident fathers (e.g., Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Cazenave 1979; Toth and Xu 1999). Given the distinct fatherhood patterns among African American men, this study include fathers who cohabit with their partner and live with the biological child.

In the next chapter, I first review literature on several theoretical frameworks that explore family life among low-income families in general and African American families in particular. I then extend these perspectives to paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers. In addition, I review the literature on resident and nonresident African American fathers in order to address whether the factors associated with both perspectives are equally predictive of paternal commitment and involvement among resident and nonresident fathers. The comparison of African American resident fathers with nonresident fathers is vitally important because nonresident fathers tend to face more barriers and challenges in paternal involvement. Finally, based on the reviewed literature, I present research hypotheses.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives

The Cultural Deficiency Perspective and African American Family Life

The cultural deficiency perspective grows primarily from the rise in female-headed households and the idea that African American fathers are absent and uninvolved with their families and children. Early scholarship attributed the disorganization of African American families to the legacy of slavery (Frazier 1939). Although Frazier's point of departure was race relation processes (i.e., acculturation), he believed that family life was essential to the transmitting of culture. However, according to Frazier, the legacy of slavery (e.g., racism, economic exploitation, etc.) destroyed African kinship and family relations among African slaves. Consequently, African American families developed new patterns of family life. More specifically, Frazier asserted that the conditions of slavery brought forth a matriarchal character to African American family life, whereby African American women are the most important figure in the family while fathers are marginal, weak and ineffective (Frazier 1939). However, in contrast to Frazier's argument that slavery destroyed or disorganized African American families,

Gutman (1976) pointed out that early African American families created kin networks during and after slavery in order to adapt to the harshness of initial slavery and emancipation. For Gutman, Frazier underestimated the adaptive capacities of slaves and ex-slaves (Gutman 1976). Although some scholars do not associate an explicit matriarchal thesis with early African American families, some do further argue that African American women assumed many decision-making and housekeeping roles in early family life (Bernard 1966).

In the mid-1960s, Moynihan (1965) advanced Frazier's matriarchal thesis. In the Moynihan Report (1965), Moynihan presented another attempt to address the disorganization of African American family life based on census data. Moynihan argued that "At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community..." (Moynihan 1965: 8). For Moynihan, the deterioration of the family is a direct result of a "tangle of pathology" in the Negro family. Moynihan suggested that African American families are pathological because they do not align with traditional forms of marriage. In particular, Moynihan argued that a matriarchal family structure seriously retarded the progress of African Americans (Moynihan 1965). A matriarchal family system went against the traditional view of family—a view that often placed men as the provider and leader of the family. Thus, African American families' pathology is a consequence of nontraditional marital attitudes and family life that contradict the traditional roles of husbands and wives.

Much like Moynihan, Oscar Lewis' (1968) argument of the "culture of poverty" further advanced this perspective. According to Lewis, the "culture of poverty" was a

way to explain the perpetuation of poverty among poor families. The assumption is that the culture of poverty has a negative effect on poor families and children. Lewis (1968: 191) argued that, “On the family level, the major traits of the culture of poverty are...initiation into sex; free unions or consensual marriages; a relatively high incidence of the abandonment of wives and children; and a trend toward female or mother-centered families.” Similar to the Moynihan Report, Lewis’ “culture of poverty” thesis suggests that many poor individuals subscribe to values that are contrary to middle-class values. For example, Lewis argued that “People with a culture of poverty are aware of middle-class values; they talk about them and even claim them as their own, but on the whole they do not live by them. Thus, it is important to distinguish between what they say and what they do” (Lewis 1968: 190). For Lewis, understanding the values of people with a “culture of poverty” is important because once the “culture of poverty” comes into existence it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation through its effect on the children.

The Structural Barriers Perspective and African American Family Life

In sharp contrast to the assertions of the cultural deficiency perspective, some scholars shifted the level of analysis from cultural deficiencies to the focus of structural factors (e.g., employment, housing, neighborhoods, proximity to jobs, etc.) related to the impact and decline in traditional family life among African American families (Bowman 1993; Staples 1985; Wilson 1987). To understand the dynamics of African American family life, Wilson (1987) argued that researchers must address joblessness of African American men and the consequences of unemployment on marriage and family life.

Wilson further argued that there exists a positive relationship between the rising rates of male joblessness and the rising proportions of female-headed families, thereby suggesting structural conditions, not cultural orientations, as the primary source of continuing poverty among African American families.

Wilson's emphasis on female-headed households is important to the study of paternal involvement because early research suggests that children reared by single mother families tend to have lower educational, occupational and economic attainment than two parent families (Mueller and Cooper 1986). Although studies on paternal involvement have not explicitly used the structural barriers perspective as a point of departure, many scholars find financial support and paternal education to be an important aspect of paternal obligation among African American fathers (Bowman 1993; Cazenave 1979; Coley and Chase-Lansdale 1999; Johnson 1995, 1998, 2000, 2001). However, because low-income African American fathers are often unprepared educationally to provide sustaining financial support, they may subsequently become less involved with their children (Johnson 2001). Education, or lack thereof, may also directly act as a potential structural barrier given the strong relationship between educational attainment and labor force participation (Johnson 2001). Fathers with low education (e.g., high school diploma and below) are less likely to have high-quality paying jobs. Wilson (1987, 1996) thus attributes unemployment, underemployment and inconsistent employment among African American men to America's changing economy; that is, the shift from manufacturing to a service economy has affected the labor market status of many poor, African American men living in inner cities. Such a change in the economy

affects African American women's "marriageable pool," reflecting, in part, many out-of-wedlock births and single-parent families (Wilson 1987).

Another important potential barrier to paternal involvement is the resident status of the father. Although the potential structural barriers presented above provide a clear effect on paternal involvement, resident status of the father and paternal involvement is much more ambiguous, particularly among nonresident fathers (Leite and McKenry 2002). Such ambiguity may be a product of the lack of clear guidelines for nonresident fatherhood (Leite and McKenry 2002; Minton and Pasley 1996; Seltzer 1991). For example, some scholars argue that because nonresident fathers are not exposed to daily interaction with their children, the parental role loses its salience and centrality (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley and Buehler 1993). Moreover, low-income nonresident fathers tend to become less involved with their children over time (Nelson 2004). Thus, it is often hypothesized that nonresident fathers are less involved with their children as compared to resident fathers.

Bridging the Cultural and Structural Perspectives

The dichotomy between culture and structure appears to be narrow and simplistic for the explanation of prolonged poverty among low-income African American families. Therefore, Wilson (1990) integrates the structural and cultural arguments in order to develop a more holistic approach to the study of inner-city family life. Wilson posits that in order to understand inner-city residents, one must emphasize the association between attachment to the labor force and social environment. Wilson argues that weak attachment to the labor force produces feelings of low self-efficacy among many men in

poor neighborhoods. For Wilson, what is important is that individuals living in poverty or low-income areas may doubt what they can do or accomplish what is expected. For many men, the parent role may produce feelings of strain, especially in disadvantage areas. In addition, low self-efficacy may further lead to uninvolved with children, especially when society, family and friends reinforce the idea that men are economic providers. Furthermore, low self-efficacy may also lead to culturally distinct behavior but this behavior is a product of cultural resilience rather than deficiencies, which is directly related to the adverse structural conditions many African American men face.

Broadly speaking, in the West, men are typically socialized to view the father role as economic provider. Family, government and public policy often reinforce this cultural understanding of the paternal role (Bowman and Forman 1997). The idea that men are economic providers or breadwinners in the family may urge men to be less involved with their children. This is especially true if men view the mother's role as the primary nurturer or caretaker of the family and children. Indeed, past research suggests that fathers who subscribe to more traditional gender ideologies are less involved with their children than fathers who are more egalitarian (Bulanda 2004). Moreover, traditional gender ideologies among African Americans are even more prevalent i.e., African American fathers place high importance on the role of economic provider (Allen and Doherty 1996; Billingsley 1992; Bowman and Forman 1997; Staples and Johnson 1993). It is thus proposed that fathers who view their paternal role as economic provider and the mother's role as nurturer or caretaker are less inclined to be involved with their children.

For African Americans, Allen and Conner (1997) proposed an Afrocentric perspective on fathering. They argue that commitment is a valuable component to

paternal involvement since commitment is strongly related to motivation. Therefore, fathers with a strong sense of commitment to the paternal role may subsequently be more involved with their children. Unfortunately, much of the extant research on paternal involvement failed to consider paternal commitment.

Towards a Broader Understanding of African American Family Life

Much of the societal stereotypes and the academic literature prior to the 1980s reinforced the cultural deficiency model (Cazenave 1979; Cochran 1997; Mirande 1991). However, revisionist scholars such as Staples (1971, 1976) and McAdoo (1981) argued that the deficient depiction of African American families was due to the comparison of African American families to white middle class norms. This comparison is not warranted due largely to the fact that African American and white families operate from different normative and functional processes (Staples 1976). For example, scholarly studies have documented that historical conditions and socioeconomic realities experienced by African American and white families are drastically different. As a result, family and gender expectations and roles can be quite different (Cochran 1997). As such, comparisons can be counterproductive (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Billingsley 1992; Coley 2001). To depart dramatically from the deficient description, recent literature on cultural resiliency (Hill 1999; McAdoo 2007; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson and Futrell 1998; Roschelle 1997) and intact families (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Billingsley 1992; Cazenave 1979; Cochran 1997) provides a more accurate and balanced depiction of African American families and fathers. Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine's (1992) study of 45 intact African American families

found that mothers spent significantly more time in childcare than fathers did. However, sociodemographic factors (higher levels of income, education and length of marriage) were positively related to fathers' socialization of their children and direct child care. Furthermore, factors such as fathers' productive communication with the family, commitment to the family and extrafamilial support had a positive relationship with the investment in child-care and socialization of their children.

The cultural resiliency of African American families involves the significant role played by extended kinship ties (Hill 1999; McAdoo 2007; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson and Futrell 1998; Roschelle 1997) and these families' ability to adapt to adverse circumstances (Brodsky 1999; Hill 1999; McAdoo 2007; Murray et al 2001). Several scholars trace the extended kinship patterns of African American families to western African culture (Hill 1999; Roschelle 1997). The role of extended kin is important to African American families because extended family members provide financial assistance, child-rearing and household help (Roschelle 1997). As advocated by resiliency scholars, adaptation is a key element of the resiliency thesis. For example, single African American mothers tend to adapt to adverse circumstances through adaptive strategies (Brodsky 1999; Murray et al 2001). Indeed, empirical research demonstrates that African American children in single mother families do as well as children from families with both parents (Thomas, Farrell and Barnes 1996). This may be a reflection of the cultural resilience among African American single mothers that promote strong achievement orientation and work ethic among their children (Hill 1999).

African American Fathers, Family Context and Paternal Involvement

The critique of family life among poor African American families sparked new interest in fatherhood research. There has been a recent influx of literature on low-income fathers in general (Coley 2001; Nelson 2004) and African American fathers in particular (Cochran 1997; Gadsden and Smith 1994; Wade 1994). African American fathers, according to data from the National Survey of Family Growth (2002), have distinct fatherhood patterns when compared with other racial/ethnic groups. For instance, only a quarter of African American fathers have children while married. Additionally, African American fathers are much more likely to have children while cohabitating than white fathers, and more likely to have unwed births than Hispanic and white fathers. These trends in fatherhood patterns are alarming due to the disadvantages cohabitating and unmarried couples experience (for a review, see Nelson 2004). Given these distinct fatherhood patterns among African American men, exploring potential differences between resident and nonresident African American fathers is of great importance.

The cultural deficiency and structural barriers perspectives are commonly used to explain the inequalities that many low-income, nonresident father families face. For a more balanced depiction of African American fathers, previous research on paternal involvement among African American fathers explored fathers of intact families (e.g., Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Cazenave 1979; Hossain and Roopnarine 1993). In contrast, the research proposed here defines *resident fathers* as fathers whose children live with him most or all of the time, a definition that includes cohabiting fathers, therefore, more representative of African American men's fatherhood patterns.

Nonresident fathers, on the other hand, are defined as fathers who do not live with their children most or all of the time.

Nonresident Fathers and Paternal Involvement

Understanding barriers that may inhibit African American fathers' involvement with children is critically important because fathers' absence can lead to negative consequences for children (Thomas, Krampe and Newton 2008; Harris 2002). A study conducted by Rodney and Mupier (1999) revealed that African American male adolescents with an absent father were more likely to run away from home, skip or cut classes, be suspended from school and get in trouble with the police than African American male adolescents who lived with both parents. As family scholars correctly pointed out, though nonresident African American fathers aspire to be involved, they, however, face an array of barriers that inhibit their involvement with their children (Allen 1999; Hamer 1998, 2001). Based on interviews conducted with African American nonresident fathers, Allen (1999) concluded that African American fathers do aspire to be involved with their children but there are several factors hindering the actual performance of these fathers. Allen (1999) also posited that father involvement is contingent upon whether the natal mother lives with her parents because her parents may work as a barrier to involvement, especially if the natal mother's parents do not want the father around. Hamer (1998, 2001) further showed that despite the father's aspiration for greater involvement many of the nonresident African American fathers she interviewed mentioned that certain barriers, such as relationship with the child's mother, work schedules and even proximity to the child, acted as barriers that inhibit their involvement.

Contrary to the above reviewed findings, some studies in fact demonstrate the active role played by nonresident African American fathers in their children's life. For example, one study conducted by King, Harris and Heard (2004) indicated that African American nonresident fathers tend to be more involved in religious activities with their children than their white counterparts are. Another study showed that African American children felt closer to their nonresident fathers when they lived with their biological mother than white children who grew up in the same type of family (Thomas, Krampe and Newton 2007). Still, other studies indicated that in some cases African American children in single-mother families do as well as children with both parents (Thomas, Farrell and Barnes 1996). Nevertheless, in spite of the inconsistency in prior research, these studies, along with others (Danziger and Radin 1990), suggest that fathers' absence from the home may not be the same as fathers' absence from a child's life.

Resident Fathers and Paternal Involvement

Unlike absent fathers, previous studies demonstrated that father's presence often yields positive outcomes for children. As shown by Zimmerman, Salem and Maton's study (1995), when fathers spent time with their children and gave emotional support children tend to have positive psychological outcomes. Likewise, children who spent time with their fathers and viewed them as significant figures were less likely to experience negative psychosocial outcomes (Salem, Zimmerman and Notaro 1998). In addition, empirical findings suggest that fathers' presence also helps build children's self-esteem and increase academic achievement (Harris 2002).

Historically, resident fathers' involvement was largely associated with being the economic provider for the family and many researchers explored the paternal role by focusing on economic contributions, which was deemed a key measure of fatherhood (Griswold 1993; LaRossa 1997; Pleck and Pleck 1997). However, for many African American fathers, this economic model may not be a sufficient indicator of paternal involvement due to various forms of institutional racism including Jim Crow that prevented many African American men from becoming adequate economic providers (Griswold 1993). Thus, many scholars emphasized the need to explore paternal involvement among African American fathers in terms of what they *do* with their children rather than solely observing their financial contributions (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine 1992; Billingsley 1992; Cazenave 1979; Hossain and Roopnarine 1993). Although Cazenave's (1979) study of middle-income African American fathers found that the provider role was the most salient aspect of the paternal role, respondents also emphasized the importance of being involved in expressive dimension of fathering. Fathers who spent more time with their children also reported being more involved with their children in child-care activities, such as changing diapers and babysitting, when compared to their own fathers (Cazenave 1979). Cazenave further criticized the popular perception that African American fathers tend to be more absent from the home and less involved with their children than white fathers— a view that he found reproduced in much of the literature on fathers' involvement. For instance, based on a review of 27 popular family texts, Cazenave (1979) found no studies that addressed the presence of African American fathers in families but multiple studies that addressed their absence.

In assessing potential cultural differences in paternal involvement, Toth and Xu (1999) used data from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households. They found that in comparison to Whites, African American fathers were significantly more likely to be involved in the cognitive domain of fathering (e.g., monitor and supervise their children's activities). Given their results, Toth and Xu (1999) further argued that the stereotype of African American fathers being irresponsible and non-supportive is inaccurate. When considering gender and family ideologies, paternal commitment, child rearing values and other socioeconomic factors, Toth and Xu (1999) found that African American fathers were similar to White fathers in terms of interacting with and showing affection to their children.

The above studies collectively contradict a common stereotype about the “uninvolved” African American fathers. These studies also demonstrate that African American fathers’ perception of the father role extends far beyond the economic provider model and that African American fathers are highly involved in their expressive and nurturing roles in addition to acting as financial providers. Unlike the portrait painted by the deficiency perspective, the fathers in these studies were not only present in home with their children but also played a vital part in the childrearing process.

Given these research findings, this study further explores whether factors associated with the cultural and structural perspectives are more predictive of paternal involvement for nonresident fathers than for resident fathers. Since both perspectives have been frequently used to assess poor, single parent families, I expect factors associated with both perspectives to be more predictive of paternal involvement for nonresident fathers than for resident fathers.

Figure 1 presents a theoretical model outlining the theoretical relationships between the exogenous (i.e., cultural and structural factors) and endogenous (i.e., paternal commitment and involvement) constructs for low-income African American resident and nonresident fathers. The model demonstrates the expected relationships between the cultural and structural explanations of family life and paternal commitment and paternal involvement. In addition, the model shows the expected relationship between paternal commitment and paternal involvement.

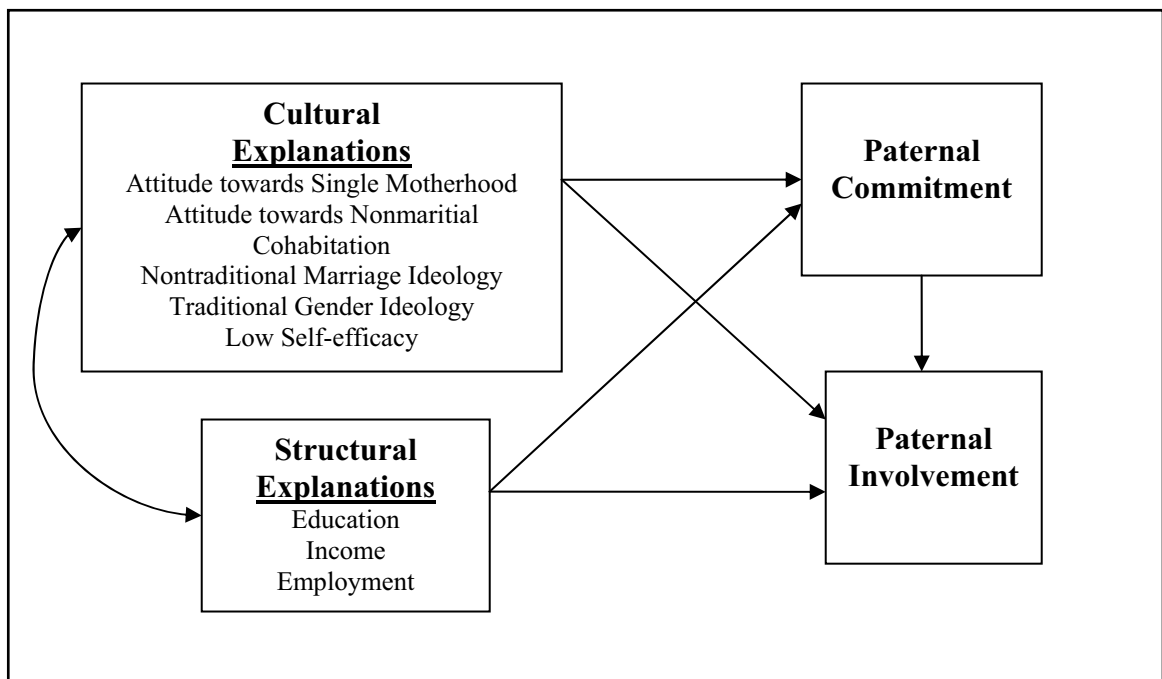


Figure 2.1 Theoretical Model Showing Relationships between the Exogenous and Endogenous Variables for All Fathers

Hypotheses

In this study, six cultural factors are used to assess the cultural perspective on African American fatherhood. They are: 1) pro-single parenthood attitudes, 2) pro-nonmarital cohabitation attitudes, 3) nontraditional marriage ideology, 4) traditional attitudes toward the parent role (i.e., self-efficacy), 5) self-reported paternal commitment and 6) gender ideology. While the first five factors represent family ideologies, the last factor captures broadly defined gender ideologies. Based on the reviewed literature, I hypothesize the following for all low-income African American fathers:

Hypothesis 1a: The more a father endorses single motherhood, the less likely he is committed to and involved in fathering.

Hypothesis 1b: The more a father endorses nonmarital cohabitation, the less likely he is committed to and involved in fathering.

Hypothesis 1c: The more a father is subscribed to nontraditional marriage ideology, the less likely he is committed to and involved in fathering.

Hypothesis 1d: The more a father displays low self-efficacy, the less likely he is committed to and involved in fathering.

Hypothesis 1e: Fathers who hold traditional gender ideologies will have no effect on paternal commitment; however, these fathers will be less involved in fathering.

Hypothesis 1f: Fathers who display higher levels of paternal commitment will be more involved in fathering. This hypothesis is based primarily on Allen and Conner's (1997) Afrocentric perspective on generative fathering.

In sharp contrast to the cultural deficiency perspective, the structural barriers perspective argues that the household arrangements of African American families and

much of the inequality poor families experience are due to structural barriers rather than cultural deficiencies. Scholars suggest that barriers such as joblessness, low education, and low levels of income inhibit marital formation, which often leads to single-parent homes and uninvolved fathers. Moreover, this perspective suggests that despite the fact that many fathers aspire to be involved and are committed to their paternal role, many barriers inhibit actual involvement with their children. I assess this perspective by exploring whether fathers who are employed and have higher income or higher levels of education will be more committed to fatherhood and more involved with their child's life. In addition, fathers' resident status may potentially serve as a barrier to paternal involvement. Thus, I hypothesize the following for all African American fathers:

Hypothesis 2a: Employed fathers will not be significantly different from unemployed fathers and inconsistently employed¹ fathers in paternal commitment but will be more likely to get involved with their children.

Hypothesis 2b: Fathers with income equal to or higher than the median income will not be significantly different from fathers with income less than the median income in paternal commitment but will be significantly more likely to be involved with their children.

Hypothesis 2c: Education will be unrelated to paternal commitment but will be significantly and positively related to paternal involvement.

Hypothesis 2d: Nonresident fathers will be less committed to and less involved with their children than resident fathers are.

¹ Inconsistently employed fathers are those who were either employed at Wave 1 but became unemployed at Wave 3 or unemployed at Wave 1 but became employed at Wave 3. See Chapter III for details.

To highlight the differential patterns in African American fatherhood across family or fathering contexts (e.g., resident vs. nonresident) as documented in previous studies, I investigate paternal commitment and involvement separately for resident and nonresident African American fathers. Recognizing this contextual difference is imperative because both the cultural deficiency and structural barriers perspectives pertain largely to nonresident African American fathers and little, if any, scholarly attention has been given to the potential linkages between these theoretical perspectives and resident African American fathers. Nevertheless, guided by the two theoretical perspectives I surmise that nonresident fathers will be less committed and less involved in fathering than resident fathers. Moreover, I conjecture that the effects of the factors associated with both perspectives will be stronger for nonresident fathers than for resident fathers. Specifically, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: As stated in the first set of hypotheses (i.e., hypotheses 1a-1f), I contend that the effects specified in Hypotheses 1a-1f will be observed for both resident and nonresident fathers; however, the effects will be stronger for nonresident fathers than for resident fathers.

Hypothesis 3b: As stated in the second set of hypotheses (i.e., hypotheses 2a-2d), fathers who are disproportionately affected by the factors identified by the structural barriers perspective will have no effect on their paternal commitment but will be less involved in fathering. The effects, however, will be stronger for nonresident fathers than for resident fathers.

The next chapter discusses the data, variables, methods and the analytic strategy that are employed to test the aforementioned hypotheses in this study

CHAPTER III

DATA AND METHODS

Data

The current research made use of two-wave data from the Fragile Family and Child Wellbeing Study, a nationally representative study that includes a stratified random sample of new parents in all U.S. cities with a population of 200,000 or more. The stratification was not geographic, rather, it was based on policy environments and labor market conditions in the different cities (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel and McLanahan 2001). The principal investigators of the Fragile Families Study are Sara McLanahan and Christina Paxson at Princeton University and Irwin Garfinkel, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Ron Mincy, and Jane Waldfogel at Columbia University. Data are available for download at The Office of Population Research at Princeton University: <http://opr.princeton.edu/archive/restricted/>.

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study follows a cohort of new parents and their children and provides previously unavailable information about the conditions and capabilities of newly unwed parents and the well-being of their children. These new families are referred to as “fragile families” because of the multiple risk factors associated with non-marital childbearing and the vulnerability of the relationships within these families. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study provides the

most complete data on unwed fathers to date. The total sample is estimated at 4,700 families, made up of 3,600 unwed couples and 1,100 married couples. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study also provides important new information on unmarried mothers. However, its major contribution is to describe the characteristics and capabilities of fathers in fragile families (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel and McLanahan 2001).

The subsample for this study included African American fathers only. I used data from wave 1 (1998-2000) and wave 3 (2001-2003) that contain the father's report in the Fragile Family and Well-Being Study. The reason for using these two waves is that the paternal commitment measure is available in wave 1, whereas the paternal involvement measures are available in wave 3. To separate resident fathers from nonresident fathers, I used the resident status variable from wave 3 to select 856 resident fathers and 585 nonresident fathers, which yielded 1,441 African American fathers.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Over the past two decades, the conceptualization of paternal involvement has received much needed attention from family scholars. Lamb's early (1986) conceptualization contains three distinct dimensions: (1) engagement or interaction (e.g., feeding, helping with homework or playing catch), (2) accessibility (e.g., paternal availability—not necessarily father and child direct involvement), and (3) responsibility (e.g., making childcare and babysitting arrangements, etc.). However, scholars have

since re-conceptualized paternal involvement in an attempt to broaden Lamb's (1986) model and at the same time offered a multidimensional way to conceptualize paternal involvement (Hawkins and Palkovitz 1999; Hawkins et al 2002; Palkovitz 1997; Schoppe-Sullivan et al 2004). As put nicely by Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999), there is a need for more mature conceptualizations and more robust and sensitive measures of father involvement. This more mature conceptualization requires researchers to go beyond a hegemonic focus on behavioral indicators measured by time and frequency; that is, to move beyond "ticks and clicks" by including a broader and richer array of cognitive, affective, economic, spiritual, and ethical tasks that fathers do for their children. For Palkovitz (1985), there are 15 major categories of paternal involvement, namely, *communication* (listening, talking, expressing love); *teaching* (advising, disciplining, role modeling); *monitoring* (friendships, dating partners, schoolwork); *thought processes* (worrying, planning); *errands* (driving, picking up items); *caregiving* (feeding, bathing, clothing); *child-related maintenance* (cleaning, repairing, cooking); *shared interest* (providing for instruction, reading together); *availability* (attending events, spending time together); *planning* (birthdays, vacations, holidays); *shared activities* (exercising, shopping, movie going); *providing* (housing, financing, medical care); *affection* (loving, hugging, kissing); *protection* (monitoring safety, providing bike helmets, life jackets, etc.); and *supporting emotionally* (encouraging, developing interests). As can be seen, Palkovitz's restructuring of paternal involvement added to the literature that viewed paternal involvement as a multidimensional concept and addressed cognitive and affective approaches to fathering, which Lamb (1986) failed to consider.

Consistent with the current literature, this study utilized three dependent variables. The first dependent variable measures paternal commitment, while the other two dependent variables capture paternal involvement defined and measured by the time and frequency fathers are involved in particular behavioral functions. Following Palkovitz's (1997) multidimensional conceptualization (see also Hawkins and Palkovitz 1999; Hawkins et al 2002; Schoppe-Sullivan et al 2004), paternal involvement is measured as two latent constructs; that is, affective and interactive fathering.

Paternal Commitment

Paternal commitment² is gauged by the items that tap the agreement of the following statements at Wave 1: (a) "Being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have," (b) "I want people to know that I have a new child," and (c) "Not being a part of my child's life would be one of the worst things that could happen to me." Responses range from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. The items were summed so that higher scores reflect higher levels of paternal commitment with alpha = .71.

Affective Fathering

Affective fathering is gauged by three items as well. They are: (a) "How many days a week you tell child that you love him/her?" (b) "How many days a week you hug or show physical affection to child?" and (c) "How many days a week you tell child you

² In this study, paternal commitment is used as a dependent and independent variable. Based on the reviewed literature, paternal commitment is hypothesized to be an important component to and predictor of paternal involvement, especially for African American fathers.

appreciate something he/she did?" All items range from 0 (none) to 7 (7days a week).

The items were summed so that higher scores indicate higher levels of involvement with alpha = .81.

Interactive Fathering

Interactive fathering is gauged by four items tapping the frequency of the following items: (a) "How many days a week you sing songs or nursery rhymes with child?" (b) "How many days a week you take child to visit relatives?" (c) "How many days a week you read stories to child?" and (d) "How many days a week you tell stories to him/her?" All items range from 0 (none) to 7 (7days a week). The items were summed so that higher scores indicate higher levels of involvement with alpha = .77.

Independent Variables

Cultural Variables

In early studies, the cultural deficiency perspective suggests that inequalities experienced by African American families are a result of nontraditional family attitudes and marriage arrangements that often resulted in female-headed families and absent fathers. Moreover, contemporary social policies reinforce the idea that marriage will get fathers in the home and subsequently improve these families' socioeconomic well-being. Even structural scholars call for the examination of how low self-efficacy (Wilson 1990), traditional gender ideologies (Bulanda 2004) and paternal commitment (Allen and Conner 1997) affect paternal involvement. In order to gauge this cultural approach, the

following items are used: (1) pro single motherhood (2) pro nonmarital cohabitation, and (3) non-traditional attitude toward marriage. The purpose of the first two variables employed in this study is to contrast respondents' beliefs in single motherhood and cohabitation versus marriage. The purpose of the third variable is to incorporate a direct measure of the respondent's attitudes toward the institution of marriage. Based on the cultural deficiency perspective, one should expect that fathers who hold nontraditional family ideologies (e.g., pro single-motherhood and pro non-marital cohabitation) would be less committed to and involved with their children. Furthermore, fathers who embrace nontraditional marriage attitudes and traditional gender ideologies will be less committed and involved with their children. However, fathers who are committed to the paternal role will be more involved in fathering. The measures are described below.

Attitude toward single motherhood

To gauge the attitude towards single motherhood, I used a single item that taps the agreement to the following statement: "A mother living alone can bring up her child as well as a married couple." Responses range from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Higher scores reflect stronger approval of single motherhood.

Attitude towards non-marital cohabitation

To gauge attitudes toward non-marriage cohabitation, I used a single item that measures the agreement to the following statement: "Living together is just the same as being married." Responses range from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. High scores indicate stronger approval of non-marital cohabitation.

Attitude toward marriage

To gauge attitudes towards marriage, I used two items that tap the agreement to the following statements: (1) “It is better for a couple to get married than to just live together” and (2) “It is better for children if their parents are married.” Responses range from (1) strongly agree to (4) strongly disagree. The items were summed so that higher scores reflect higher degrees of nontraditional attitudes toward marriage with $\alpha = .71$.

Traditional gender ideology

. In gauging traditional gender ideology, I used the following question from wave 1: “It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family.” Responses range from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Higher scores reflect stronger belief in traditional gender ideology.

Self-efficacy

In gauging self-efficacy, I used the following question from wave 3: “I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from raising a family.” Responses range from (1) strongly agree to (4) strongly disagree. Responses were recoded so that higher scores reflect lower levels of self-efficacy.

Structural variables

.Using Wilson’s (1986) argument as a guide, I explore how structural variables, such as income, education and employment status, may work to prohibit a father’s participation in childrearing. To do so, I propose that if African American fathers are not

employed, and have less income and education, they will be less involved with their children. Additionally, researchers argue that the resident status of the father may serve as a barrier to involvement, particularly among nonresident fathers. In the pages that follow, these variables are discussed.

Employment status

To gauge employment status, the following question was used: “In the last week, did you have any regular work for pay?” Responses are (1) yes or (2) no. I used the aforementioned question from both wave 1 and wave 3 to capture changes in employment, i.e., whether fathers were employed at the birth of the child (wave 1) and if the father’s employment changed three years later (wave 3). I used the cross-tabulation procedure to assess employment changes. Once the employment changes were ascertained, I created a new variable with four categories: (1) always employed, (2) employed then unemployed, (3) unemployed then employed and (4) always unemployed. Three dummy variables were created (with always unemployed as the reference) to test possible effects of the difference in employment status on paternal commitment and paternal involvement.

Income

To measure father’s income level, I used the income variable from wave 1. Respondents were asked the following question: “What was your total household income before taxes in the past 12 months?” Response categories are as follows: (1) under 5,000, (2) 5,000 to 9,999, (3) 10,000 to 14,999, (4) 15,000 to 19,999, (5) 20,000 to 24,999, (6)

25,000 to 34,999, (7) 35,000 to 49,999, (8) 50,000 to 74,999 and (9) greater than 75,000.

Due to high number of missing values (missing n = 394), I took the median value and created a categorical variable in which the values equal to and below the median value were coded as 1 for low income, values above the median were coded as 2 for high income, and all missing values were coded as 3. These categories were further dummy-coded for statistical analyses with low income serving as the reference.

Education

To gauge educational attainment, I used the education variable from wave 1. Respondents responded to the following question: “What is the highest grade or year of regular school that you have completed?” Response categories are as follows: 1 = no formal education; 2 = less than high school; 3 = some high school; 4 = high school diploma; 5 = GED; 6 = some college; 7 = tech training; 8 = BA/BS; and 9 = graduate level of education. This variable was treated approximately as a continuous variable.

Resident Status³

To gauge fathers’ resident status, I used the following question at Wave 3: “Does child live with father all or most of the time?” Respondent choices are (1) yes or (2) no. Respondents who answered yes were considered resident fathers and fathers who

³ It is important to note that there may be a potential selection effect among these fathers. This means that there might be mechanisms and processes that are not observed in this study but can help explain why nonresident fathers are not in residence. However, the examination of these potential mechanisms and processes is beyond the scope of this study.

answered no were considered nonresident fathers. Resident status was dummy-coded with resident fathers as the reference.

Mediating Variables

Relationship Quality and Parental Alliance

Studies on paternal involvement show that when exploring father-child relationships, one must consider the effects of the relationship between the mother and father. Previous studies have shown that strong mother-father relations increase fathers' involvement (Coley and Chase-Lansdale 1999). According to Harris and Ryan (2004), “[f]athers’ behaviors and interactions cannot be understood without considering the role of the resident mother” (p. 298). Other studies, such as Belsky’s (1984), argued that the “marital relationship serves as the principal support systems for parents” (p.87), suggesting that when the marital quality of the mother and father is good, fathers are more likely to be more involved with their children. Volling and Belsky (1991) further observed that “in dual-earner and single-earner families, fathers who display more positive and less negative marital relations forecasted more responsive and stimulating father-infant interactions” (p. 471). This finding is consistent with Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine and Volling’s (1991) work in which they argued that what transpires between father and child appears to be more systematically related to the marital relationship than what goes on with mother and child. Moreover, when men feel that the marital relationship is not durable, they are less likely to express positive affection to their children (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine and Volling 1991). In short, past research has

consistently demonstrated that poor relationship quality has negative effects on children, which may mediate the relationship between fathers' resident status and fathers' involvement.

Similar to relationship quality, parental alliance is also shown to be a strong indicator of paternal involvement. While developing a Parenting Alliance Inventory, Abidin and Brummer (1995) argued that "parental alliance is met when: (a) each parent is invested in the child, (b) each parent values the other parent's involvement with the child, (c) each parent respects the judgments of the other parent, and (d) each parent desires to communicate with the other" (Abidin and Brummer 1995). They went on to state that "if parents have a strong alliance around the issue of parenting, they can continue to nurture their children after a divorce or during a conflictual marriage" (p. 31). It is thus concluded that even if there happens to be poor relationship quality, parents can come together for the sake of the child and be productive in positive parent-child interaction. Given these observations, it is sensible to suspect that parental alliance may also mediate the relationship between fathers' resident status and fathers' involvement.

Relationship quality

Relationship quality is gauged by a single item at Wave 3, which asked: "Relationship with [child's] mother is?" Responses were recoded so that they range from (1) poor to (5) excellent. These response categories were further dummy-coded into bad, good and missing with good relationship as the reference.

Parental alliance

In gauging *parental alliance*, the following items were used: (a) “Mother respects the schedules and rules you make for the child,” (b) “Mother supports the way you want to raise the child,” and (c) “You and [child’s mother] talk about problems that come up with raising the child.” Responses to each statement were recoded so that they range from (1) rarely true to (3) always true. They were then summed so that higher scores reflect higher levels of parental alliance with $\alpha = .75$.

Control Variables⁴

Religious Attendance and Demographic Characteristics

Studies show that participation in religious activities are associated with positive paternal involvement (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Wilcox 2002). This may be especially true for African American fathers because African Americans tend to exhibit higher levels of religious participation than do white Americans (Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody and Levin 1996). Moreover, because interactions among churchgoers can reaffirm what it

⁴ Preliminary analyses controlled for relationship status, which was measured by a single item that asked respondents: “What is your relationship with [child’s] mother?” Response categories were (1) Married, (2) Romantically involved, (3) Separated/Divorced, (4) Just friends and (5) No relationship. These response categories were first dummy-coded and then entered into regression models. However, due to severe multicollinearity problems (e.g., with resident status), relationship status was dropped from the final analyses. However, in auxiliary analyses among resident fathers, I collapsed the original relationship status categories to reflect three distinct groups of fathers: (1) married, (2) romantically involved, and (3) other. The “other” category reflects partnered relationships between the mother and father but does not necessarily indicate if they lived together. These variables were further dummy-coded with married serving as the reference. Analysis revealed that for resident fathers, fathers who lived with child’s mother and had a romantic relationship with her were more involved in interactive fathering than married resident fathers. Although the results yielded significant differences between romantically involved and married resident fathers in interactive fathering, explaining such differences theoretically is beyond the scope of this study. However, this significant finding should be thoroughly examined in future research.

means to be a good parent (Ellison 1997), high levels of religious participation can foster more frequent paternal involvement.

Demographic factors also play an important role in the involvement of fathers with their children. Fathers' characteristics as well as children's characteristics must be considered in the study of paternal involvement. For example, empirical studies have shown that younger fathers tend to be more involved with their children than older fathers are (Danziger and Radin 1990) and that paternal involvement decreased for older fathers (Toth and Xu 1999).

In studying nonresident fathers, the physical distance between the child and father is an obvious and important characteristic to explore. Cooksey and Craig (1998) reported that fathers who lived 10 miles or less from their children were significantly more likely to see their children at least once a month or more than were fathers who lived at least 11 to 100 miles away. Furthermore, fathers who lived more than 100 miles away from their children were significantly less likely to see their children.

Children's characteristics are important in the study of father involvement. Empirical studies suggest that a child's age and gender influence the level of involvement among fathers. One study indicates that fathers tend to be more involved with sons and fathers are less involved with older children than younger children (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson 1998). This study is also consistent with Harris and Morgan (1991) and Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmar's finding (1998) that fathers are more involved in the lives of boys than that of girls. This greater involvement with sons appears to be a part of an institutional role-behavior expected by fathers (Harris and Morgan 1991). In sum,

these sociodemographic variables are essential in capturing the context and extent of paternal behavior. Thus, they must be statistically controlled.

Religious Attendance

To gauge religious attendance, I used the following question from wave 3: “How often do you attend religious services?” Response categories were (1) everyday, (2) a few times a week, (3) once a week, (4) a few times a month, (5) a few times a year, (6) less often than that, and (7) never. Response categories were recoded so that higher scores reflect higher levels of religious attendance.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic variables included *father’s age* (actual years), *child’s age* (months), *child’s gender* (1 = male; 0 = female) and for nonresident fathers, whether *father lived in the same state as child* was dummy-coded with 1= yes and 0 = no.⁵

Analytic Strategy

To test the effects of the factors associated with the cultural perspective and the structural perspective, I conducted a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses. Model 1 tested the independent effects of the predictors associated with the cultural explanation on paternal commitment and each domain of paternal involvement

⁵ In the next wave of the Fragile Family and Child Well-being Study (data were not available when this study was proposed), there will be a variable that will have the actual mileage between nonresident fathers and their children. I employed whether father lived in the state in this study until the mileage variable is released.

(i.e., affective and interactive fathering). Model 2 tested the independent effects of the predictors associated with the structural perspective on paternal commitment and each domain of paternal involvement. Model 3 tested the additional effect of resident status. Model 4 further tested the joint effects of the predictors associated with the cultural and structural perspectives on paternal commitment and each domain of paternal involvement. Model 5 tested whether the effects of both perspectives are mediated by relationship quality and parental alliance. Finally, model 6 tested the effects of both perspectives net of statistical controls, namely, father's age, religious attendance, child's age, child's gender and whether father lived in the same state as child (for nonresident fathers only). Additional analyses were then performed for resident and nonresident fathers separately to test whether the effects of both perspectives are equally predictive across fathering contexts.

To handle missing values properly, I used the mean substitution technique for continuous variables, whereas for categorical variables, I created dummy variables in order to code and include missing cases as a distinct category.⁶ All variables were listwise-deleted for multivariate regression analyses.

In the next section, I discuss descriptive statistics and multivariate regression results for all fathers, resident and nonresident fathers, respectively.

⁶ Though these techniques may yield undesirable and even biased results (Acock 2005), multiple imputation for missing cases is beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1 features the means and standard deviations for all continuous variables and the percentages and number of observations for categorical variables in the study. As can be seen from the table, after listwise deletion there are 1,173 African American fathers who are on average 31 years of age and have young children about 36 months. Over half (67.4% or 791) of these fathers live with their biological child most or all the time and 32.6% or 382 of the fathers do not. Although these fathers are highly committed to their paternal role (3.73) and are more engaged in affective fathering than in interactive fathering (5.98 and 3.35, respectively), resident fathers appear to be more committed (3.76) and more involved (6.54 and 3.75) than their nonresident counterparts (3.68, 4.82, and 2.54, respectively). Two sample t-test results in the table affirm that there are significant mean differences between resident and nonresident fathers across all three dependent variables.

As to the cultural variables, there are clear and consistent differences in family ideologies, gender ideologies, and self-efficacy between resident and nonresident fathers. The mean values in Table 4.1 indicate that resident fathers exhibit more traditional attitudes toward the institution of marriage and family, gender roles, and provider roles

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

	All Fathers			Resident Fathers			Nonresident Fathers			T-Test or Chi-Square
	N	Mean or %	SD	n	Mean or %	SD	n	Mean or %	SD	
Dependent Variables										
Paternal Commitment	1,173	3.73	0.41	791	3.76	0.39	382	3.68	0.45	**
Affective Fathering	1,173	5.98	1.57	791	6.54	0.88	382	4.82	2.00	***
Interactive Fathering	1,173	3.35	1.75	791	3.75	1.68	382	2.54	1.62	***
Independent Variables										
<i>Cultural Variables</i>										
Pro Single Motherhood	1,173	2.61	0.88	791	2.57	0.87	382	2.7	0.88	*
Pro Non-Martial Cohabitatio	1,173	2.32	0.78	791	2.27	0.76	382	2.44	0.80	***
Nontraditional Marriage Idec	1,173	2.01	0.71	791	1.96	0.70	382	2.12	0.70	***
Traditional Gender Ideology	1,173	2.26	0.77	791	2.29	0.76	382	2.21	0.81	†
Self Efficacy	1,173	2.87	1.02	791	2.84	1.03	382	2.95	0.99	†
<i>Structural Variables</i>										
Employment Satus	1,173			791			382			***
Employed	731	62.3		524	66.2		207	54.2		
Employed/Unemployed	154	13.1		91	11.5		63	16.5		
Unemployed/Employed	159	13.6		107	13.5		52	13.6		
Unemployed	129	11.0		69	8.7		60	15.7		
Education	1,173	4.6	1.53	791	4.69	1.59	382	4.41	1.36	**
Income	1,173			791			382			***
Low Income	423	36.1		274	34.6		149	39.0		
High Income	468	39.9		345	43.6		123	32.3		
Missing Income	282	24.0		172	21.7		110	28.8		
Resident Status	1,173									
Resident Fathers	791	67.4								
Nonresident Fathers	382	32.6								
Mediating Variables										
Relationship Quality	1,173			791			382			
Bad Relations	175	14.9		84	10.6		91	23.8		
Good Relations	917	78.2		682	86.2		235	61.5		
Missing	81	6.9		25	3.2		56	14.7		
Parental Alliance	1,173	2.71	0.37	791	2.75	0.35	382	2.62	0.40	
Control Variables										
Religious Attendace	1,173	4.36	1.57	791	4.28	1.59	382	4.53	1.51	
Father's Age	1,173	30.65	7.54	791	31.2	7.46	382	29.4	7.57	
Child's Age	1,173	36.52	2.87	791	36.3	2.83	382	36.8	2.92	
Child's Sex	1,173			791			382			
Males	610	52.0		412	52.1		198	51.8		
Females	563	48.0		379	47.9		184	48.2		
Father's In-State Status							382			
In-State							334	87.4		
Out of State							48	12.6		

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

(i.e., self-efficacy) than nonresident fathers. Two sample t-test results displayed in the table reveal that there are significant mean differences between resident and nonresident fathers across all cultural variables.

In terms of the structural variables, most of the fathers in this study are consistently employed (62.3%) compared to inconsistently employed (26.7%) and unemployed at both waves (11%). Many of these fathers' educational attainment is high school diploma or GED, reflecting a mean score of 4.6. Because income had a substantial amount of missing cases (24%), I created a categorical variable separating the categories by the median (\$20,000). Thus, about 36% of fathers have income \$20,000 or less, 40% of fathers have income over \$20,000 and 24% are missing. Resembling the cultural variables, there are systematic differences in (un)employment, educational attainment and income between resident and nonresident fathers. For education, the two sample t-tests show that there are significant mean differences between resident and nonresident fathers in educational attainment. For the categorical variables (i.e., income and employment status), the chi-square tests reveal that there exist significant differences between the two fathering contexts in both income and employment status

Multivariate Regression Results

All fathers

This study begins by asking whether factors associated with cultural and structural perspectives predict paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers. Although cultural norms or values and structural

forces cannot be separated theoretically, this study addresses the above research question analytically. In so doing, I use OLS regressions to estimate the effects of the independent, mediating and control variables on paternal commitment and the two dimensions of paternal involvement, namely, affective and interactive fathering.

This section begins by testing the hypotheses concerning all fathers. Model 1 in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 tests hypotheses 1a through 1e. As can be seen from the tables, attitudes toward single motherhood and non-marital cohabitation yield no significant effects on paternal commitment or on the two dimensions of fathering. Given these uniform findings, Hypotheses 1a and 1b are rejected. However, Model 1 in Table 4.2 indicates that while nontraditional marriage ideology is significantly ($p < .001$) and negatively related to paternal commitment, it has no effects on the two dimensions of fathering. As such, Hypothesis 1c is partially supported. Moreover, the tables show that low self-efficacy has no significant effect on paternal commitment (Table 4.2) and interactive fathering (Table 4.4) but has a statistically significant ($p < .01$ in Table 4.3) and positive effect on affective fathering. Thus, Hypothesis 1d is also partially supported. With regard to Hypothesis 1e, the findings are mixed. As exhibited in the tables, traditional gender ideology shows no effects either on paternal commitment (which is consistent with the hypothesis) nor on the two dimensions of fathering (which is contrary to the hypothesis). With these findings, Hypothesis 1e is partially supported. Finally, there is weak and inconsistent evidence to partially support Hypothesis 1f. As hypothesized, paternal commitment was positively related to affective fathering (which is marginally significant at the .10 level; see Model 1 in Table 4.3), but the effect disappears once the structural variables are entered into the regression analysis.

Table 4.2 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Paternal Commitment: All Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Independent Variables						
<i>Cultural Variables</i>						
Single Mother Families	0.006			0.018	0.017	0.015
Non-Martial Cohabitation	-0.011			0.004	0.006	0.006
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.099 ***			-0.085 ***	-0.086 ***	-0.089 ***
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.020			-0.009	-0.008	-0.006
Low self-efficacy	-0.005			0.001	0.003	0.001
<i>Structural Variables</i>						
<i>Employment Status</i>						
Unemployed (Reference)						
Employed		0.074 †	0.067	0.051	0.054	0.052
Employed/Unemployed		0.070	0.067	0.059	0.065	0.065
Unemployed/Employed		-0.015	-0.022	-0.027	-0.019	-0.030
Education		0.033 ***	0.032 ***	0.030 ***	0.031 ***	0.034 ***
<i>Income</i>						
Low Income (Reference)						
High Income		0.079 **	0.076 **	0.079 **	0.078 **	0.084 **
Missing Income		0.019	0.021	0.034	0.033	0.034
<i>Resident Status</i>						
Resident Father (Reference)						
Nonresident Father			-0.055 *	-0.048 †	-0.035	-0.039
Mediating Variables						
<i>Relationship Quality</i>						
Good Relations (Reference)						
Bad Relations					-0.095 **	-0.098 **
Missing					0.007	0.000 *
Parental Alliance					0.003	0.002
Control Variables						
Religious Attendance						
Father's Age						-0.004 *
Child's Age						0.000
<i>Child's Sex</i>						
Females (Reference)						
Males						-0.011
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>						
In-State (Reference)						
Out of State						
Constant	4.005 ***	3.497 ***	3.524 ***	3.676 ***	3.661 ***	3.804 ***
R square (%)	3	4.2	4.6	6.6	7.2	7.7
F	7.328 ***	8.616 ***	8.053 ***	6.786 ***	5.995 ***	5.037 ***
N	1173	1173	1173	1173	1173	1173

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Models 2 and 3 in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 test hypotheses 2a through 2d. The estimated regression coefficients in these tables show that employed fathers were significantly more committed to fathering than unemployed fathers (marginally significant at the .10 level) and there are no significant differences between employed and unemployed fathers in the two dimensions of paternal involvement. However, in Model 3 of Table 4.2, the difference between employed and unemployed fathers disappears once the resident status variable is added to the model. This leads me to conclude that Hypothesis 2a is not supported.

In sharp contrast to the employment effects, income exhibits greater and more systematic effects on paternal commitment and involvement. Specifically, the regression results show that fathers with higher income are significantly more committed to fatherhood ($p < .01$ in Table 4.2) and more involved ($p < .01$ and $.10$, respectively in Tables 4.3 and 4.4) than fathers with lower income. These effects are generally robust with the exception of the interactive dimension of fathers' involvement where the effect is no longer significant once other variables enter into the analysis. In the case of affective fathering (Model 3 in Table 4.3), the other variables mediate (reduce) the income effects, albeit they remain statistically significant ($p < .05$). In sum, strong supportive evidence emerges from this portion of the analysis and thus Hypothesis 2b is supported.

Turning to Hypothesis 2c, education is significantly and positively associated with paternal commitment ($p < .001$ in Table 4.2). Moreover, while education is significantly and negatively related to affective fathering ($p < .10$ in Table 4.3), which is contrary to the hypothesis, there is no significant effect on interactive fathering (Table

4.4). The above effects are quite robust and little, if any, mediating effects are observed. With both expected and unexpected findings, Hypothesis 2c is partially supported.

The last structural variable in the analysis is the fathers' resident status. Not surprisingly, the regression results indicate that nonresident fathers are significantly less committed to fatherhood and significantly less involved with their children than are resident fathers ($p < .05$, $p < .001$, and $p < .001$, respectively; see Model 3 in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). It should be noted that relationship quality and parental alliance appear to mediate the effects of fathers' resident status on paternal commitment, as well as other control variables (see Model 2). In general, Hypothesis 2d is confirmed.

In Model 4 of Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, I test the joint effects of the cultural and structural variables on paternal commitment and the two dimensions of paternal involvement. Turning first to the cultural variables in Model 4 of Table 4.2, the results remain the same as those in Model 1, namely, there is a significant and negative association between non-traditional marriage ideology and paternal commitment. In predicting fathers' involvement, attitudes toward single motherhood and traditional gender ideology become statistically significant predictors of affective fathering ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$). Additionally, attitudes toward single motherhood also become significant in predicting interactive fathering ($p < .05$). However, the direction for attitudes toward single motherhood is opposite to what was hypothesized, and thus highly unexpected.

Likewise, after the cultural variables are included in the model, the effects of the structural variables remain quite the same as compared to the previous models. One notable exception is that the significant level for the effect of fathers' resident status on paternal commitment reduces.

Table 4.3 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Affective Fathering: All Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Independent Variables						
<i>Cultural Variables</i>						
Single Motherhood	0.055			0.098 *	0.087 †	0.084 †
Non-Martial Cohabitation	-0.062			0.098	0.017	0.017
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.061			-0.011	-0.006	-0.008
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.087			-0.137 **	-0.139 **	-0.134 **
Paternal Commitment	0.206 †			0.091	0.070	0.059
Low self-efficacy	0.131 **			0.083 *	0.092 *	0.087 *
<i>Structural Variables</i>						
<i>Employment Status</i>						
Unemployed (Reference)						
Employed		0.115	-0.134	-0.119	-0.098	-0.101
Employed/Unemployed		-0.156	-0.233	-0.213	-0.175	-0.181
Unemployed/Employed		0.219	0.003	0.004	0.033	0.012
Education		-0.054 †	-0.073 **	-0.077 **	-0.066 *	-0.059 *
<i>Income</i>						
Low Income (Reference)						
High Income		0.330 **	0.239 *	0.261 **	0.239 *	0.249 *
Missing Income		0.131	0.190 †	0.210 *	0.206 *	0.208 *
<i>Resident Status</i>						
Resident Father (Reference)						
Nonresident Father			-1.736 ***	-1.743 ***	-1.606 ***	-1.612 ***
Mediating Variables						
<i>Relationship Quality</i>						
Good Relations (Reference)						
Bad Relations					-0.286 *	-0.289 *
Missing					-0.593 ***	-0.604 ***
Parental Alliance					0.227 *	0.220 *
Control Variables						
Religious Attendance						
Father's Age						-0.011
Child's Age						-0.009
<i>Child's Sex</i>						
Females (Reference)						
Males						0.007
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>						
In-State (Reference)						
Out of State						
Constant	5.259 ***	5.994 ***	6.863 ***	6.385 ***	5.821 ***	6.473 ***
R square (%)	1.5	1.3	27.2	28.3	29.9	30.1
F	2.866 **	2.594 *	62.199 ***	35.259 ***	30.774 ***	24.759 ***
N	1173	1173	1173	1173	1173	1173

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 4.4 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Interactive Fathering: All Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Independent Variables						
<i>Cultural Variables</i>						
Single Mother Families	0.094			0.128 *	0.118 *	0.123 *
Non-Martial Cohabitation	-0.052			0.004	0.001	0.004
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.077			-0.050	-0.039	0.000
Paternal Commitment	0.087			0.010	-0.003	-0.009
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.034			-0.069	-0.080	-0.082
Low Self-efficacy	-0.013			-0.052	-0.036	-0.036
<i>Structural Variables</i>						
<i>Employment Status</i>						
Unemployed (Reference)						
Employed		0.014	-0.163	-0.185	-0.153	-0.175
Employed/Unemployed		0.187	0.132	0.131	0.155	0.113
Unemployed/Employed		0.191	0.037	0.023	0.063	0.034
Education		-0.024	-0.038	-0.039	-0.029	-0.025
<i>Income</i>						
Low Income (Reference)						
High Income		0.229 †	0.164	0.181	0.146	0.136
Missing Income		0.089	0.131	0.148	0.153	0.150
<i>Resident Status</i>						
Resident Father (Reference)						
Nonresident Father			-1.234 ***	-1.256 ***	-1.132 ***	-1.126 ***
Mediating Variables						
<i>Relationship Quality</i>						
Good Relations (Reference)						
Bad Relations					-0.035	-0.008
Missing					-0.411 *	-0.372
Parental Alliance					0.542 ***	0.509 ***
Control Variables						
Religious Attendance						-0.098 **
Father's Age						-0.006
Child's Age						-0.027
<i>Child's Sex</i>						
Females (Reference)						
Males						0.009
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>						
In-State (Reference)						
Out of State						
Constant	3.168 ***	3.298 ***	3.916 ***	3.919 ***	2.435 ***	4.039 ***
R square (%)	0.4	0.4	11	11.6	13.2	14.1
F	0.873	0.859	20.505 ***	11.695 ***	10.994 ***	9.454 ***
N	1173	1173	1173	1173	1173	1173

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Model 5 in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 introduces relationship quality and parental alliance to the analyses. Two observations can be made. First, with the exception of interactive fathering, relationship quality and parental alliance do seem to mediate the relationships between the cultural and structural variables and paternal commitment and affective fathering. Second, poor relationship quality tends to decrease levels of the father's paternal commitment and affective. On the other hand, stronger parental alliance tends to increase levels of paternal involvement in both affecting and interactive fathering.

Model 6 in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 introduces all control variables to the analyses. The purpose is to examine the robustness of the regression coefficients reported previously for the focal independent variables, i.e., the cultural and structural variables, in predicting paternal commitment and the two dimensions of father involvement. A careful inspection of the coefficients across the tables reveals that, with very few exceptions, nearly all variables that are significant in previous models remain significant in Model 6 either at the same significance level or at the slightly reduced level. Of the control variables, fathers' age is significant and negatively related to paternal commitment and religious service attendance is significant and negatively related to interactive fathering. While the former is congruent with previous study findings, the latter is not. More discussions on this inconsistent finding will be rendered in the next chapter.

Resident and Nonresident fathers

The second question this study addresses is whether factors associated with the cultural and structural perspectives are equally predictive of paternal commitment and paternal involvement for resident and nonresident fathers. In order to address such a

Table 4.5 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Paternal Commitment: Resident Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent Variables					
<i>Cultural Variables</i>					
Single Mother Families	0.001		0.012	0.011	0.011
Non-Martial Cohabitation	-0.001		0.013	0.014	0.013
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.100 ***		-0.091 ***	-0.092 ***	-0.093 ***
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.039 *		-0.025	-0.025	-0.024
Low Self-efficacy	0.000		0.007	0.010	0.009
<i>Structural Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i>					
Unemployed (Reference)					
Employed		0.032	0.012	0.012	0.009
Employed/Unemployed		-0.011	-0.026	-0.027	-0.029
Unemployed/Employed		-0.031	-0.037	-0.033	-0.041
Education		0.023 *	0.020 *	0.020 *	0.022 *
<i>Income</i>					
Low Income (Reference)					
High Income		0.114 ***	0.117 ***	0.116 ***	0.120 ***
Missing Income		0.053	0.067 †	0.068 †	0.071 †
<i>Resident Status</i>					
Resident Father (Reference)					
Nonresident Father					
Mediating Variables					
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Good Relations (Reference)					
Bad Relations				-0.040	-0.040
Missing				0.081	0.080
Parental Alliance				0.017	0.017
Control Variables					
Religious Attendance					0.001
Father's Age					-0.002
Child's Age					-0.001
<i>Child's Sex</i>					
Females (Reference)					
Males					-0.011
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>					
In-State (Reference)					
Out of State					
Constant	4.049 ***	3.576 ***	3.765 ***	3.711 ***	3.824 ***
R square (%)	3.2	4.3	6.6	6.9	7.1
F	5.250 ***	5.819 ***	5.000 ***	4.093 ***	3.255 ***
N	791	791	791	791	791

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

question, I conducted the analyses for resident and nonresident fathers separately. It should be noted that the independent variables in each of the subgroup analyses were entered in the same fashion across the two fathering contexts.

This section begins with several tests for the hypotheses that pertain to the cultural factors across fathering context. Model 1 in Tables 4.5 through 4.10 tests hypothesis 3a. As can be seen from the tables, attitudes toward single motherhood generated no significant effects on paternal commitment for resident and nonresident fathers alike. However, attitudes toward single motherhood produce significant and positive effects on affective and interactive fathering for resident fathers ($p < .05$ and $p < .10$, respectively; see Tables 4.6 and 4.7). By contrast, attitudes toward single motherhood yield no significant effects on the two dimension of fathering for nonresident fathers. Thus, Hypothesis 1a across fathering context is firmly rejected. Contrary to the hypotheses, attitudes toward non-marital cohabitation produces no significant effects either on paternal commitment or on the two dimensions of paternal involvement across fathering context. With this in hand, Hypothesis 1b is firmly rejected. However, as illustrated in the tables, nontraditional marriage ideology is significantly and negatively associated with paternal commitment for resident and nonresident fathers (which is consistent with the hypothesis). However, the effect are far stronger for resident fathers ($p < .001$) than for nonresident fathers ($p < .05$), which is contrary to the hypothesis. Furthermore, nontraditional marriage ideology has no significant effect on the two dimensions of paternal involvement. Thus, Hypothesis 1c across fathering context is partially supported. The tables show that low self-efficacy has no significant effect on paternal commitment for either resident fathers (Table 4.5) or nonresident fathers (Table

4.8). However, low self-efficacy has a statistically significant ($p < .001$ in Table 4.9) and positive effect on affective fathering for nonresident fathers and a statistically significant ($p < .05$ in Table 4.7) and negative effect on interactive fathering for resident fathers. Thus, Hypothesis 1d across fathering context is also partially supported. Traditional gender ideology has a significant and negative effect on paternal commitment for resident fathers. However, the effect disappears once the structural variables enters into the regression analysis. As hypothesized, traditional gender ideology has a significant effect on affective fathering for resident fathers (which is marginal significant at the .10 level; see Model 1 in Table 4.6). However, there is no significant effect of traditional gender ideology on paternal commitment and paternal involvement for nonresident fathers. As such, Hypothesis 1e across fathering context is partially supported as well. Finally, there is inconsistent evidence to partially support Hypothesis 1f across fathering context. As the tables illustrates, paternal commitment has a significant ($p < .01$) and positive effect on affective fathering for resident fathers, whereas paternal commitment has no significant effect in the two dimensions of fathering for nonresident fathers. Due to the inconsistency of the effect size across fathering context, Hypothesis 3a is partially supported.

Model 2 in Tables 4.5 through 4.10 test hypotheses pertaining to the structural variables. These tables show that there are no differences in paternal commitment among employment status for resident fathers (which is consistent with the hypothesis). However, nonresident fathers who are inconsistently employed (employed at Wave 1 and unemployed at Wave 3) were more committed to fathering than nonresident fathers who were unemployed ($p < .05$ in Table 4.8), which is somewhat consistent with the

Table 4.6 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Affective Fathering: Resident Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent Variables					
<i>Cultural Variables</i>					
Single Mother Families	0.103 **		0.098 **	0.092 *	0.095 *
Non-Martial Cohabitation	0.011		0.012	0.017	0.017
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.005		-0.009	-0.009	-0.007
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.072 †		-0.073 †	-0.074 †	-0.075 †
Paternal Commitment	0.239 **		0.233 **	0.223 **	0.217 **
Low Self-efficacy	-0.037		-0.035	-0.022	-0.025
<i>Structural Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i>					
Unemployed (Reference)					
Employed		0.127	0.112	0.103	0.093
Employed/Unemployed		-0.056	-0.038	-0.046	-0.057
Unemployed/Employed		0.221	0.215	0.231 †	0.206
Education		-0.009	-0.014	-0.011	-0.004
<i>Income</i>					
Low Income (Reference)					
High Income		0.063	0.049	0.050	0.058
Missing Income		0.070	0.063	0.076	0.085
<i>Resident Status</i>					
Resident Father (Reference)					
Nonresident Father					
Mediating Variables					
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Good Relations (Reference)					
Bad Relations				-0.272 *	-0.264 *
Missing				-0.033	-0.028
Parental Alliance				0.107	0.104
Control Variables					
Religious Attendance					-0.008
Father's Age					-0.006
Child's Age					-0.010
<i>Child's Sex</i>					
Females (Reference)					
Males					-0.033
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>					
In-State (Reference)					
Out of State					
Constant	5.618 ***	6.443 ***	5.587 ***	5.323 ***	5.932 ***
R square (%)	2.9	0.9	3.6	4.9	5.3
F	3.898 ***	1.199	2.436 **	2.646 ***	2.251 **
N	791	791	791	791	791

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 4.7 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Interactive Fathering: Resident Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent Variables					
<i>Cultural Variables</i>					
Single Mother Families	0.132 †		0.135 †	0.118 †	0.129 †
Non-Martial Cohabitation	0.024		0.019	0.025	0.030
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	0.013		-0.012	0.002	0.046
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.024		-0.035	-0.042	-0.045
Paternal Commitment	0.167		0.192	0.177	0.172
Low Self-efficacy	-0.114 *		-0.116 *	-0.086	-0.087
<i>Structural Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i>					
Unemployed (Reference)					
Employed		-0.029	-0.063	-0.083	-0.118
Employed/Unemployed		0.288	0.301	0.249	0.199
Unemployed/Employed		0.179	0.168	0.187	0.151
Education		-0.044	-0.044	-0.039	-0.027
<i>Income</i>					
Low Income (Reference)					
High Income		0.164	0.152	0.140	0.131
Missing Income		0.182	0.166	0.203	0.206
<i>Resident Status</i>					
Resident Father (Reference)					
Nonresident Father					
Mediating Variables					
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Good Relations (Reference)					
Bad Relations				-0.270	-0.222
Missing				-0.286	-0.239
Parental Alliance				0.531 **	0.514 **
Control Variables					
Religious Attendance					-0.092 **
Father's Age					-0.009
Child's Age					-0.027
<i>Child's Sex</i>					
Females (Reference)					
Males					0.008
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>					
In-State (Reference)					
Out of State					
Constant	3.004 ***	3.811 ***	3.084 ***	1.661 †	3.234 **
R square (%)	1.2	0.8	2.1	3.9	4.8
F	1.559	1.049	1.364	2.085 **	2.052 **
N	791	791	791	791	791

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

hypothesis. Employment status has no significant effect on the two dimension of fathering for resident and nonresident fathers. Thus, hypothesis 2a across fathering context is partially supported.

Turning to the income variable, the tables show that resident fathers with higher levels of income are more committed to fathering than fathers with lower levels of income; however, income has no significant effect on paternal commitment for nonresident fathers. Moreover, income has no significant effect on the two dimensions of fathering for resident fathers. On the other hand, nonresident fathers with higher levels of income are more involved in the affective dimension of fathering than fathers with lower levels of income ($p < .01$; see Model 2 in Table 4.9). However, the effects reduce once the cultural variables enter into the regression analysis. It turns out that income has no significant effect on interactive fathering for nonresident fathers. Hypothesis 2b across fathering context is rejected.

As the tables illustrate, education has a significant and positive effect on paternal commitment for resident fathers ($p < .05$; see Model 2 in Table 4.5) and nonresident fathers ($p < .01$; see Model 2 in Table 4.8). These effects are contrary to the hypothesis. Education has no statistical significant effect on the two dimensions of fathering for resident fathers. For nonresident fathers, education has no statistical significant effect on interactive fathering but education has a significant ($p < .01$) and negative effect on affective fathering. These effects are also contrary to the hypothesis. Thus, Hypothesis 2c across fathering context is rejected. Overall, due to the inconsistency of the effect size

Table 4.8 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Paternal Commitment: Nonresident Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent Variables					
<i>Cultural Variables</i>					
Single Mother Families	0.021		0.022	0.019	0.011
Non-Martial Cohabitation	-0.024		-0.013	-0.010	-0.008
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.092 **		-0.081 *	-0.086 *	-0.099 **
Traditional Gender Ideology	0.011		0.020	0.024	0.030
Low Self-efficacy	-0.019		-0.009	-0.009	-0.009
<i>Structural Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i>					
Unemployed (Reference)					
Employed		0.101	0.092	0.108	0.124 †
Employed/Unemployed		0.170 *	0.165 *	0.195 *	0.213 **
Unemployed/Employed		-0.035	-0.051	-0.036	-0.043
Education		0.052 **	0.047 **	0.053 **	0.057 **
<i>Income</i>					
Low Income (Reference)					
High Income		0.001	-0.002	-0.016	-0.016
Missing Income		-0.029	-0.017	-0.031	-0.041
<i>Resident Status</i>					
Resident Father (Reference)					
Nonresident Father					
Mediating Variables					
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Good Relations (Reference)					
Bad Relations				-0.186 **	-0.201 ***
Missing				-0.075	-0.099
Parental Alliance				0.004	0.002
Control Variables					
Religious Attendance					-0.008
Father's Age					-0.009 **
Child's Age					0.003
<i>Child's Sex</i>					
Females (Reference)					
Males					-0.029
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>					
In-State (Reference)					
Out of State					0.10
Constant	3.901 ***	3.389 ***	3.535 ***	3.546 ***	3.659 ***
R square (%)	2.9	5.4	7.5	10.3	12.7
F	2.257 *	3.590 **	2.735 **	3.020 ***	2.773 ***
N	382	382	382	382	382

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

across fathering context concerning the structural variables, Hypothesis 3b is partially supported.

Model 3 of Tables 4.5 through 4.10 tests the joint effects of the cultural and structural variables on paternal commitment and the two dimensions of paternal involvement across fathering context. Turning first to the cultural variables, the results show that the addition of the structural variables reduces the significant and negative effect of traditional gender ideology on paternal commitment for resident fathers (see Table 4.5). In fact, the significant effect disappears. Nontraditional marriage ideology, on the other hand, remains significant and it is positively associated with paternal commitment. For nonresident fathers, the significant and negative effect of nontraditional marriage ideology reduces ($p < .05$) due to the addition of the structural variables to the analyses (Table 4.8).

In predicting fathers' involvement among resident fathers, the results remain the same as shown in Model 1 (Model 3 in Tables 4.6 and 4.7). Particularly, there is a significant and positive association between attitudes toward single motherhood and affective and interactive fathering ($p < .01$, $p < .10$, respectively). Moreover, there remains a marginally significant and negative association between traditional gender ideology and affective fathering. The effect of commitment on affective fathering also remains significant (Table 4.6). Additionally, the effect of low self-efficacy remains significant and positive on interactive fathering (Table 4.7). For nonresident fathers, there remain no significant effects for the cultural variables on interactive fathering (Table 4.10). However, the negative effect of traditional gender ideology on affective fathering becomes marginally significant ($p < .10$) and the significant and positive effect

Table 4.9 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Affective Fathering: Nonresident Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent Variables					
<i>Cultural Variables</i>					
Single Mother Families	0.103		0.107	0.084	0.060
Non-Martial Cohabitation	0.037		0.037	0.029	0.029
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	0.053		0.001	-0.006	-0.036
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.187		-0.226 †	-0.234 †	-0.237 †
Paternal Commitment	-0.152		-0.021	-0.090	-0.123
Low Self-efficacy	0.353 ***		0.323 **	0.329 ***	0.320 **
<i>Structural Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i>					
Unemployed (Reference)					
Employed		-0.390	-0.311	-0.230	-0.223
Employed/Unemployed		-0.385	-0.335	-0.181	-0.165
Unemployed/Employed		-0.208	-0.147	-0.111	-0.147
Education		-0.237 **	-0.227 **	-0.188 *	-0.185 *
<i>Income</i>					
Low Income (Reference)					
High Income		0.513 **	0.554 *	0.470 †	0.481 †
Missing Income		0.338	0.332	0.266	0.230
<i>Resident Status</i>					
Resident Father (Reference)					
Nonresident Father					
Mediating Variables					
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Good Relations (Reference)					
Bad Relations				-0.241	-0.281
Missing				-0.862 **	-0.909
Parental Alliance				0.345	0.337
Control Variables					
Religious Attendance					-0.013
Father's Age					-0.019
Child's Age					-0.002
<i>Child's Sex</i>					
Females (Reference)					
Males					-0.013
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>					
In-State (Reference)					
Out of State					-0.151
Constant	4.595 ***	5.912 ***	5.334 ***	4.766 ***	5.856 **
R square (%)	4.3	4.2	7.9	10.5	11.1
F	2.826 *	2.712 *	2.635 **	2.864 ***	2.258 **
N	382	382	382	382	382

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 4.10 OLS Unstandardized Coefficients of Interactive Fathering: Nonresident Fathers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Independent Variables					
<i>Cultural Variables</i>					
Single Mother Families	0.114		0.112	0.103	0.093
Non-Martial Cohabitation	-0.036		-0.028	-0.045	-0.056
Nontraditional Marriage Ideology	-0.099		-0.116	-0.112	-0.082
Traditional Gender Ideology	-0.092		-0.105	-0.129	-0.125
Paternal Commitment	-0.264		-0.249	-0.259	-0.258
Low Self-efficacy	0.103		0.091	0.096	0.098
<i>Structural Variables</i>					
<i>Employment Status</i>					
Unemployed (Reference)					
Employed		-0.349	-0.319	-0.253	-0.271
Employed/Unemployed		-0.078	-0.037	0.059	0.010
Unemployed/Employed		-0.160	-0.173	-0.130	-0.205
Education		-0.017	-0.010	0.012	-0.005
<i>Income</i>					
Low Income (Reference)					
High Income		0.183	0.198	0.135	0.148
Missing Income		0.048	0.060	0.031	0.018
<i>Resident Status</i>					
Resident Father (Reference)					
Nonresident Father					
Mediating Variables					
<i>Relationship Quality</i>					
Good Relations (Reference)					
Bad Relations				0.196	0.193
Missing				-0.479	-0.421 †
Parental Alliance				0.570 *	0.486 *
Control Variables					
Religious Attendance					-0.119 *
Father's Age					-0.004
Child's Age					-0.024
<i>Child's Sex</i>					
Females (Reference)					
Males					-0.013
<i>Father's In-State Status</i>					
In-State (Reference)					
Out of State					-0.208
Constant	3.503 ***	2.769 ***	3.688 ***	2.224 *	4.243 **
R square (%)	1.7	0.9	2.5	5.1	6.5
F	1.056	0.555	0.775	1.302	1.251
N	382	382	382	382	382

†p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

of low self-efficacy reduces due to the addition of the structural variables to the analyses ($p < .01$; see Table 4.9).

For the structural variables, the effects remain quite the same for paternal commitment and the two dimensions of paternal involvement across fathering context. One notable exception is that the significant level for the effect of high income on affective fathering reduces for nonresident fathers ($p < .05$; see Table 4.9).

Model 4 in Tables 4.5 through 4.10 introduces relationship quality and parental alliance to the analyses. A few observations can be made. First, for resident fathers, relationship quality and parental alliance did not seem to mediate the relationship between the cultural variables and the two dimensions of paternal involvement (Model 4 in Tables 4.6 and 4.7). Second, poor relationship quality lowered levels of affective fathering and strong parental alliance tends to increase levels of interactive fathering for resident fathers. For nonresident fathers, relationship quality and parental alliance appears to mediate the relationship between the structural variables and affective fathering (Model 4 in Table 4.9). Finally, poor relationship quality decreases paternal commitment while stronger levels of parental alliance led to higher levels of interactive fathering for nonresident fathers.

Model 5 in tables 4.5 through 4.10 introduces all control variables to the analyses. As stated previously, the purpose of the control variables is to test the robustness of the regression coefficients for the focal independent variables on paternal commitment and the two dimension of paternal involvement. For resident fathers (Model 5 in Tables 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7), the results reveal that nearly all variables that are significant in previous models remain significant in Model 5 at the same significant level. Of the control

variables, church attendance is significantly ($p < .01$) and negatively associated with interactive fathering.

Turning to nonresident fathers (see Model 5 in Tables 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10), the results reveal that all the variables that are significant in the previous models remain significant in Model 5 either at the same significant level or slightly enhanced. Of the control variables, fathers' age is significantly ($p < .01$) and negatively related to paternal commitment and religious attendance is significantly ($p < .05$) and negatively related to interactive fathering.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This thesis has addressed two critical questions that, to date, have received little to no empirical attention: (1) To what extent do the factors associated with the cultural and structural explanations of African American families predict paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers? (2) Do the effects of these factors differ across resident and nonresident African American fathers? The overall findings from the Fragile Family and Child Well-Being Study (waves 1 and 3) suggest that to dichotomize the determinants of low-income African American fathers' commitment and involvement into either/or category of culture versus structure is not only simplistic but also problematic. Paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers, as I argued throughout this study, is lodged within a much broader cultural and social context, which calls for a revised, holistic, and integrated perspective on African American fatherhood. This much-needed integration is supported by several important findings that are summarized in the pages that follow.

First, when the cultural factors were considered, only one was found to be predictive of paternal commitment. It became clear that as the level of nontraditional marriage ideologies increases, the level of paternal commitment decreases. This inverse relationship remained unchanged when the analyses were conducted separately for

resident and nonresident fathers separately, which is not only consistent with a recent decline in attitudes toward the institution of marriage among the U.S. population (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001) but also accurate in reflecting a large-scale, nationwide retreat from the institution of marriage. This general trend has been described as the “deinstitutionalization” of marriage (Cherlin 2004). With this in mind, the significant and negative effects of nontraditional attitudes toward marriage on paternal commitment among low-income African American fathers are not surprising.

Second, turning to the structural factors, results showed that the respondents’ education was a persistent predictor of paternal commitment, and fathers with higher income were more committed than were their low-income counterparts to fatherhood. When the analyses were conducted separately for resident and nonresident fathers, the effects of education remained robust. However, for nonresident fathers, income levels were no longer significant. This finding corroborates qualitative studies on the aspiration of nonresident African American fathers, which showed that regardless of income levels nonresident African American fathers exhibited a great desire to become committed fathers (Allen 1999; Hamer 1998; 2001).

Third, when the effects of the cultural factors on the two dimensions of paternal involvement were estimated and examined, it was found that positive attitudes toward single motherhood tend to increase affective and interactive fathering and this finding was more pronounced for resident than for nonresident fathers. It must be noted here that if the cultural deficiency perspective holds, then positive attitudes toward single motherhood should decrease, not increase, fathers’ involvement. So what does this seemingly counterintuitive finding tell us? Given the prevalence of single motherhood

among African American women, it can be conjectured that this finding may reflect an adaptive and acceptable view among African American men. In other words, the more African American fathers accept single motherhood as a reality, the more willingly they become involved fathers.

Another worthy finding was a negative association between traditional gender ideologies and affective fathering irrespective of the father's resident status. This result is consistent with previous research on gender ideologies and paternal involvement among fathers in general (Bulanda 2004) and among African American fathers in particular (Allen and Doherty 1996; Billingsley 1992; Bowman and Forman 1997; Staples and Johnson 1993). While this finding may suggest that low-income fathers are not that different from fathers in the general population, it is, however, more meaningful for African American fathers than fathers in other racial/ethnic groups since they have been disproportionately deprived of the traditional provider role. Consequently, the provider role has become an important part of their gender attitudes.

Turning to self-efficacy, findings demonstrated that low levels of self-efficacy tend to increase affective fathering. After analyzing the data by fathers' resident status, it was found that the effect was more pronounced for nonresident fathers than for resident fathers. Given Wilson's (1990) framework on the linkage between self-efficacy and attachment to the labor force, this finding in the fathering context is somewhat surprising. Based on Wilson's work, I expected that fathers with low levels of self-efficacy would be less involved in the fathering. However, the analyses revealed otherwise, suggesting that although the paternal role may be stressful from nonresident fathers' perspective, these fathers seem to be resilient—at least in the domain of affective fathering.

For resident fathers, paternal commitment was expectedly predictive of affective fathering. Higher levels of commitment to the paternal role did lead to more involvement as suggested by the literature and empirical studies (Allen and Conner 1997). However, it is worth noting that the finding is confined to one particular dimension of paternal involvement for low-income African American resident fathers.

Fourth, as expected the effects of the structural variables on the two dimensions of fathering revealed that nonresident fathers are significantly less involved in affective and interactive fathering than are resident fathers. This makes an intuitive sense because of the father's proximity to their children.

Unexpectedly, however, education was significantly but negatively associated with affective fathering. After analyzing the data separately by fathers' resident status, the negative effect only remained significant for nonresident fathers. This result must be interpreted with caution. It is not that fathers who are more educated are less involved; rather, it is the research design of the Fragile Families Study and the distribution of the education variable that has yielded this unpredicted result. A careful examination of the descriptive statistics shows that for all fathers, 33 percent of the fathers had a high school diploma and 27 percent of all fathers had some high school education. Only 4 percent had a bachelor degree and less than 2 percent had graduate level education. Moreover, when the analyses were separated by resident status, the truncation of the education variable was even more apparent. For example, 30 percent of nonresident fathers had some high school education and 30 percent of nonresident fathers had only a high school diploma. And as expected, only six nonresident father had a college or above education. As alluded to previously, the Fragile Families Study oversampled mothers and fathers of

nonmarital childbirths such that the data may have included many fathers who have limited or truncated educational attainment and do not live with their child's mother.

As hypothesized, the twin relational variables - relationship quality and parental alliance - were shown to be important determinants of paternal involvement but they painted a complicated picture due largely to their mediating effects (mediating the association between the cultural and structural variables and paternal involvement). These results should be interpreted and understood in two different ways. First, the findings suggest that nonresident fathers are more committed to the paternal role when the relationship with the child's mother is good. Moreover, the increased quality of the couple's relationship not only improves paternal involvement but also paternal commitment. Although these findings are consistent with a growing body of research on the importance of relationship quality (Coley and Chase-Lansdale 1999) and parental alliance (Abidin and Brummer 1995) in relation to paternal involvement, this study adds to the literature by highlighting the importance of relationship quality in predicting paternal commitment, especially for nonresident fathers. Second, the mediating effects indicate that there are both direct and indirect associations between the cultural and structural factors and paternal commitment or involvement. This is so because these cultural and structural factors also predict relationship quality and parental alliance, which in turn predicts paternal commitment and/or involvement.

Several of the effects associated with the control variables are worth mentioning. Contrary to previous findings (Bartkowski and Xu 2000), religious attendance was significant but negatively associated with interactive fathering for all fathers regardless of the context of fathering. However, the finding is somewhat consistent with another study

using the same data source, which shows that fathers who attend religious services less frequent were more involved (e.g., paying visits to the hospital and providing financial support during pregnancy) among unwed fathers in fragile families (Johnson 2001). Another possible explanation is that African American fathers who attend religious services more often may be more inclined to view their paternal role as provider and disciplinarian, which subsequently leads to less involvement. It is possible as well that these fathers attended religious services individually, thus taking their time away from visiting or interacting with their children.

In addition to religious attendance, fathers' age is another control variable that was found to be significantly and negatively associated with paternal commitment. This was particularly true for nonresident fathers. This finding suggests that as fathers became older, they were less committed to fatherhood, which could be a product of the ambiguous role among nonresident fathers. In other words, nonresident fathers who see their children less frequently may not only decrease their involvement but also their levels of commitment, which is more or less congruent with previous literature suggesting that fathers are less involved over time if they live apart from their children (Seltzer 1991).

As documented previously, this thesis critically evaluates two major theoretical perspectives. First, this research assessed the cultural deficiency perspective in the context of paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers. The underlining argument of this perspective is that poor families tend to reject the mainstream cultural values (i.e., the white middle-class values) concerning marriage and family and develop their own subcultural norms known as a "culture of

poverty.” To extend this line of argument to fatherhood, this perspective implies that fathers who hold nontraditional norms or values, namely the “culture of poverty,” will be less involved with their children. As anticipated, the results derived from this study reveal no systematic support for this cultural deficiency perspective. In fact, nontraditional family attitudes -- positive attitudes toward single motherhood -- increase low-income African American fathers’ involvement, especially among resident fathers.

Another cultural analysis also contradicts the cultural deficiency perspective. If this perspective is correct, then there should be no relationship between traditional gender ideologies (i.e., men as breadwinner and women as caregiver) and paternal involvement because low-income African American fathers are not supposed to be aspired to become a family provider (traditional gender role). The study finding from this research reveals a negative association between fathers’ traditional gender ideologies and their involvement with children; that is, traditional gender ideologies suppress fathers’ involvement. Taken together, the rival evidence from this study calls for a firm rejection of the cultural deficiency perspective in studying low-income African American fathers’ commitment and involvement.

As an ancillary goal, this research evaluated Wilson’s (1990) argument concerning the effects of low self-efficacy on paternal behavior as well. Wilson argues that living in a social context where there is weak attachment to the labor market (i.e., low-income areas) brings forth low levels of self-efficacy, which may subsequently lead to uninvolvement with children, especially when societal norms suggest that men should be the economic provider. Interestingly, the findings from this study revealed that low levels of self-efficacy increase fathers’ involvement, especially among nonresident

fathers. While this does not support Wilson's argument, it is at odds with the cultural deficiency perspective as well.

Second, this research also evaluated the structural barriers perspective in the context of paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers. This perspective suggests that it is the larger structural and contextual conditions, such as racial discrimination and socioeconomic inequality in education, income and employment, not the deficient cultural norms that underscore paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers. The overall results from this research lend credence to this perspective.

Indirectly, this research evaluated Allen and Conner's (1997) proposal for an Afrocentric perspective on generative fathering. These scholars argue that generative fathering has four components: (1) set of prerequisites (i.e., motivations, skills and energy), (2) patterns of involvement, (3) competence and (4) commitment. According to their proposal, commitment to the father role is a key element to active paternal involvement. Not surprisingly, this proposal has received support from this study.

Overall, this study of low-income African American fathers provides evidence that there are an array of predictors of paternal commitment and paternal involvement. More importantly, this study shows that predicting paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers is a multifaceted phenomenon. Thus, scholars theorizing about the predictors of paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers should take a more integrated approach. For these fathers, paternal behavior cannot be analyzed from one approach alone. The ability to address the factors that predict paternal commitment and paternal

involvement among these fathers from a more integrated approach moves this scholarship in a new direction. As such, I argue that the structural barriers perspective should be integrated with a cultural resiliency or cultural adaptation perspective. The results of this study reveal that structural barriers, namely, income, education and employment status predict paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers. This implies that fathers with more economic resources tend to be more committed to and more involved with their children. Additionally, the results stemming from this study have important cultural implications as well. In particular, fathers' positive support for single motherhood and fathers with low levels of self-efficacy are more involved with their children, implying that low-income African American fathers, despite their difficult and often antagonistic structural conditions, develop resilient attitudes toward family roles. This study, to some extent, advances Bowman's (1993) work on African American fathers. According to Bowman, when African American men are faced with economic provider role strain, they rely heavily upon ethnic adaptive resources, particularly, extended kinship structures, flexible family roles and spiritual beliefs. This study provides empirical evidence that many low-income African American fathers are highly involved with their children despite beliefs in so-called nontraditional attitudes and low levels of self-efficacy.

The results of this study add to the literature in two significant ways. First, it demonstrates that structural conditions (i.e., income, employment status and education) affect paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers, which strongly supports previous literature. Secondly, and perhaps more intriguing, low-income African American fathers develop adaptive strategies that

lead to greater involvement. Due to the positive effects of paternal involvement on children's well-being, these findings are of particular importance. The findings show how low-income African American fathers adjust to adverse circumstances and develop resilient cultural understandings of familial roles. These patterned paternal desires and behaviors can certainly be used to help family practitioners, policy makers and scholars of African American family life see ways in which low-income African American fathers become involved with their children, albeit "nontraditional" but yet adaptive and effective.

Limitations

Although this thesis sheds new lights on the factors that predict paternal commitment and paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers, it is important to note that this study contains several notable limitations. First, the income variable had a few missing values. This may have biased, as admitted previously, the effects of the father's income on the dependent variables. Moreover, the range of the education variable was limited. Because of the research design of the Fragile Family and Well-Being Study that targeted a low-income population, the distribution of the African American father's education was truncated. Many of the men in this study had only a high school diploma or GED. Due to this truncation, the education variable may have yielded unexpected findings.

In addition, the survey does not contain questions that measure the neighborhood's conditions, fathers' proximity to jobs or fathers' social networks, which are all part of Wilson's structural barriers perspective. Furthermore, contextual factors,

such as sex ratio, race specific unemployment rate, and racial segregation would potentially advance this study. Because of this data limitation, I could only discuss certain dimensions, namely income, education and employment status, as they pertain to father involvement.

Moreover, measuring self-efficacy in this study is also a limitation. I recognize that the current measure is not an exact measure of self-efficacy. However, I believe that it does serve as a proxy for self-efficacy. I argue that the measure captures respondents' attitudes toward the familial role. This is especially important in the context of inner-city life given Wilson's argument that many poor families may develop feelings toward the familial role when attachment to the labor market is low in low-income areas. For the most part, this study's research design reflects such an environment.

Another limitation is the inability to capture the relationship between the cultural variables and the structural variables. The analytic strategies employed in this study would not allow for a causal analysis among the focal independent variables. But, I do recognize the possible reciprocal relationship between the two constructs.

In this study, the limited measures of paternal involvement are also a limitation. Unlike several past studies that measured paternal involvement with items reflecting activities with adolescents (e.g., school activities and leisure activities), the paternal involvement measures in this study tap activities with toddlers. This can be potentially problematic as mothers are typically involved with the children at this stage of the child's development. This can be even more problematic for nonresident fathers if the child's mother does not feel comfortable with the father's parenting abilities with the young

child. To overcome these data problems, I included several important measures, such as relationship quality and parental alliance, in the statistical analyses.

Implications

Despite these limitations, this study does have several important implications for public policy. In stark contrast to the early stream of research that echoed cultural biases resulting from inappropriate comparisons between African American families and white middle class norms, contemporary approaches to studying African American families and fatherhood suggest that researchers must understand African American families within a particular sociohistorical context. To this end, this study has attempted to further the understanding of the mechanisms—cultural and structural—that promotes, and to some extent, inhibits paternal commitment and involvement among African American fathers in fragile families. This knowledge can guide family practitioners and public policy makers to develop sensible measures that can better help ameliorate poverty and related problems through paternal involvement.

In light of recent family policies offered by the Bush Administration, understanding the role of fathers in families is of great importance. Recently, during his presidential campaign, President Barack Obama called for the accountability of African American fathers in his speech he delivered on fathers' day at Apostolic Church of God in Chicago. Obama stated, "We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child - it's the courage to raise one."⁷ Obama's speech sparked a rebuttal from civil

rights activist Jesse Jackson. Jackson offered a statement in which he articulated that “my [Jackson’s] appeal was for the moral content of his [Obama’s] message to not only deal with the personal and moral responsibility of African American males, but to deal with the collective moral responsibility of government and the public policy which would be a corrective action for the lack of good choices that often led to their irresponsibility.”⁸ The Obama versus Jackson debate revisited some old wounds concerning African American family life, particularly the role of African American fathers. For Obama, absentee fathers are to blame for some of the social problems afflicting African American Americans whereas Jackson believed that larger structural issues (e.g., public policy) should be addressed in order for African American men to make better choices.

The above argument suggests that the role of African American fathers in low-income families remains a contemporary and critical issue in American society. The key for both President Obama and Jackson is how to get low-income African American fathers involved with their children. Though current policy on marriage, such as the marriage initiative, promotes the benefits of marriage, especially the economic benefits and the subsequent involvement of fathers in families, it does not address socioeconomic disadvantages experienced by low-income, minority families. Thus, creating policies to strengthen poor families’ economic conditions along with healthy marriage programs may work together in order to increase fathers’ involvement with their children. In addition, programs such as father initiative are also an attempt to move understandings of

⁷ For a copy of President Obama’s speech, see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/06/15/obamas-fathers-day-speech_n_107220.html.

⁸ For a copy of Jackson’s response and apology to President Obama, see http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/us/politics/10jackson.html?_r=1.

fathers in a positive direction by addressing the important role low-income African American fathers can play in their children's lives.

Future studies on paternal involvement among low-income African American fathers can be improved by exploring fatherhood over the life course. Because fatherhood is an ever-changing experience, it would be valuable to understand how the changes in life circumstances affect the fathering role. Understanding the extent to which friends and family contribute to African American fathers can also enhance the fathering literature. Although studying the predictors of paternal involvement is a daunting and challenging task, studies that are more thorough and sophisticated can enhance our sociological understandings of low-income African American fathers.

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