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Challenging Behaviors in Young Children: The Father's Role

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Abstract: *In this study, the authors examined the parenting practices, developmental expectations, and stress levels of 136 fathers and the challenging and prosocial behaviors of their 1- to 5-year-old children. In addition, the authors systematically addressed fathers' qualitative concerns about their parenting. The authors divided the participants into 4 groups and controlled for family socioeconomic status (SES) and the focus child's gender. Results showed a significantly higher use of corporal and verbal punishment and parenting stress among lower income fathers. Secondary analyses demonstrated a significant effect of paternal disciplinary practices that emphasized the frequent use of corporal and verbal punishment on child behavior problems, regardless of SES level. On a positive note, fathers from both lower and higher SES groups had reasonable developmental expectations for their boys and girls, and they reported similar frequencies of their children's prosocial behavior. The authors discuss the need for early parent education programs that include fathers and that teach specific strategies to address child behavior problems.*

During the early years of development, children present their parents with a number of challenging behaviors. These challenges may include externalizing behaviors such as tantrums, aggression, noncompliance, overactivity, and destruction; internalizing behaviors such as social withdrawal, fears, sadness, and somatic concerns; and other developmental issues such as difficulties with sleeping, eating, and toileting (Achenbach, Edelbrock, & Howell, 1987; Richman, Stevenson, & Graham, 1975). Many of these difficulties represent normal development and tend to dissipate over time; however, these challenges do become mild to moderate problems in 10% to 15% of young children, with a high probability (50%) that the problems identified in early childhood will persist through the elementary school years and into early adolescence (Campbell, 1995). Moreover, as young children mature, those early difficulties may increase in severity and lead to psychiatric diagnoses. For example, Campbell, Szumowski, Ewing, Gluck, and Breaux (1982) followed a cohort of hard-to-manage preschool children and found that 50% of the group met the criteria for Attention Deficit Disorder by 6 years of age, and 48% were considered externalizing (attention deficit disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, or both) by 9 years of age, with continued problems reported at 13 years of age.

Research regarding how parents influence their children's outcomes has a rich history (Baumrind, 1966) that continues unabated today (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). Researchers have agreed with the common wisdom that parents compose a significant component of young children's early environments and as such, they may contribute to the development and maintenance of challenging behaviors in young children (Campbell, 1997). In fact, Brenner and Fox (1998) found that the frequency of a young child's behavior problems was best predicted by parental use of verbal and corporal punishment. Most researchers studying parents and their young children's challenging behaviors have focused on the contribution of mothers (Fox, Platz, & Bentley, 1995). During the past few decades, with more women in the labor force and more men sharing parenting responsibilities, the father's role in the family has significantly changed (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). Consistent with this change and its potential ramifications on family life, researchers have shown a renewed interest in the father's role (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Phares, 1992). More specifically, the role of fathers in the development of children's challenging behaviors has become the focus for some researchers (DeKlyen, Biernbaum, Speltz, & Greenberg, 1998). Amato and Rivera (1999) reported an inverse relationship between level of paternal involvement and children's behavior problems. Aldous and Mulligan (2002) found that fathers' active care of preschoolers who had difficult behaviors was positively related to their children having fewer problems in grade school. As young children's behavior problems escalate in frequency and severity, fathers experience more stress and respond to their children's behaviors using a more authoritarian parenting style (Baker & Heller, 1996). DeKlyen et al. (1998) found that disciplinary practices were the strongest discriminating factor between fathers of clinic- and nonclinic-referred children, with fathers of clinic-referred children more likely to use corporal and verbal punishment.

Our purpose in the present study was to expand the database on parenting practices of fathers with young children. We acknowledge that there are multiple determinants that impact parenting practices (Belsky, 1990), and we controlled two factors that have been shown to influence parenting and children's development–family socioeconomic status (SES; Bornstein & Bradley, 2003) and the child's gender (Webster-Stratton, 1996). Socioeconomic disadvantage has been associated with higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems in children (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994). McLoyd (1997) concluded that socioeconomic influences were not readily apparent in the behaviors of children younger than 3 years of age, but these influences appeared to gradually increase during the preschool and early school years and were most pronounced for externalizing problems. Contributing to an increase in behavior problems in

children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those parents preferred a punitive, coercive, and controlling parenting style (Fox et al., 1995; Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995). Regarding the child's gender, fathers tended to be more involved with their sons than with their daughters (Pleck, 1997) and became more involved in childrearing when they had sons (Barnett & Baruch, 1987). In terms of parenting practices, boys received more physical punishment than did girls (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). This practice may be related to the idea that younger boys have more adjustment problems and related challenging behaviors than do girls of the same age (Earls, 1987).

Method

Participants

The participants for this study included fathers, with at least one child between 1 and 5 years of age, who lived in a large Midwestern urban area and who were currently residing with their child and had done so for a minimum of 6 months prior to the initiation of our study. We used this 6-month criterion to ensure that fathers had spent sufficient time with their child to assess his or her behaviors and to develop and implement parenting strategies to manage the child. Additional selection criteria included the child's gender and the family's SES. We computed each family's SES score by consulting educational attainment and job category information provided by the fathers on a demographic questionnaire using Hollingshead's Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1975). We used the resulting scores to assign families to lower SES (scores 8-34) or higher SES (scores 35-66) groups.

We recruited fathers from a variety of agencies until we obtained the desired number of participants for each study cell. We spent significantly more effort and time recruiting fathers from the lower SES groups than we did for those from higher SES groups. We asked fathers with more than one child between 1 and 5 years of age to select only one child for this study (focus child). The final sample included 136 fathers divided equally into four groups, using the gender of the focus child and the SES of the family, for group assignment.

We collected a number of demographic variables on the fathers, their focus child, and the focus child's mother. To determine if there were significant differences among the four groups on any of the demographic variables, we computed 2 x 2 analyses of variance (ANOVA) for the continuous variables and computed chi-square tests for the categorical variables. Most of the participants (89%) were the focus child's biological fathers; the remaining participants were either stepfathers (4%) or uncles (7%). The sample was ethnically diverse (33% African American, 50% Caucasian, 11% Latino, 5% Asian, 1% Other). The distribution of the different

ethnic groups was not significantly different among the study's groups. Significantly fewer fathersχ^2, (1, N = 136) = 12.46, p < .001, in the lower SES groups were married (47%) compared with fathers in the higher SES groups (77%). Of those fathers who were not married, 43% in the lower SES groups had never been married compared with 18% in the higher SES groups; 7% of lower SES fathers were divorced compared with 4% of higher SES fathers. Fathers in the lower SES groups were significantly younger (M age = 29.44 years) than were fathers in the higher SES group (M age = 33.83 years), F(1, 130) = 13.18, p < .001. Significantly more fathers in the lower SES group had a high school education or less (69%) compared with fathers in the higher SES group (18%), χ^2(1, N = 136) = 36.67, p < .001, with 100% of the lower SES fathers having occupations in Hollingshead's Category 5 (clerical or sales) or lower, compared with significantly fewer fathers in the higher SES group employed in those same occupational categories (41%), χ^2 (1, N = 136) = 56.67, p < .001. We found no significant differences for the number of hours the fathers worked outside of the home (M = 37.49 hr; p > .05). Most fathers were employed full time (86%). As expected, we found lower Hollingshead's SES scores for families in the lower SES groups (M = 27.44) than we found for families in the higher SES groups (M = 46.63), F(1, 132) = 234.29, p < .001. A further illustration of the SES differences between these two groups showed that significantly more families in the lower SES group reported an annual family income of $29,000 or less (49%) compared with the reports from those in the higher SES group (16%), χ^2 (1, N = 133) = 16.60, p < .001.

We found no significant differences among the present participants for the focus child's age (M age = 3.39 years), the number of hours the focus child spent in childcare (M = 17.29 hr), or the total number of children living in the fathers' homes (M = 1.97). Similar to the fathers, mothers in the lower SES groups were significantly younger (M age = 26.93 years) than were mothers in the higher SES group (M age = 30.71 years), F(1, 132) = 15.31, p < .001. Consistent with the national trend of an increasing number of women in the work force, 63% of the lower SES mothers in the our study were employed full time and 12% were employed part time; we found similar numbers for the present study's higher SES mothers (full time = 66%, part time = 16%). Mothers in this group also did not differ on the average number of hours they worked each week (M = 25.66 hr).

Procedures

Prior to participant enrollment, we obtained Institutional Review Board Approval from Marquette University to conduct this study. We recruited participants from a variety of agencies including Head Start programs, community centers, traditional day care centers, day care centers located on the main campus and branch campuses of a technical college, preschools,

general education degree programs, and technical college classrooms. After obtaining approval from each participating agency to conduct the study, we asked each agency director to identify fathers who had a child between 1 to 5 years of age. The agency directors sent a letter to every eligible father requesting his participation. Fathers who offered to participate identified themselves to the directors, who then provided a consent form and a research packet containing the study's instruments. We contacted the directors on a weekly basis, picked up the completed surveys, and discussed follow-up procedures for fathers who did not respond or who did not complete the surveys (e.g., phone contact, second mailing). We paid the fathers $10.00 for their participation.

Instruments

Family information form

We asked fathers to complete a demographic questionnaire that included paternal age, marital status, ethnicity, paternal and maternal employment status including the number of hours worked each week, and level of educational attainment. We also included items about the focus child's age, gender, and the number of hours spent in childcare outside of the home and the number of other children living in the home. We asked fathers to estimate the amount of time spent reading, playing, watching television, and performing routine care (eating, dressing, putting to bed) with their focus child each week. We also asked two open-ended questions, "Please list any of the issues, concerns, or problems that fathers like you might have experienced in being a parent to a young child," and "What could help you to be a better parent to your young child'?"

Parent Behavior Checklist (PBC; Fox, 1994)

The PBC is a 100-item rating scale designed to measure the behaviors and expectations of parents of young children between the ages of 1 year and 4 years, 11 months. The PBC consists of three scales, which were empirically derived through factor analyses: (a) expectations–50 items that measure parents' developmental expectations (“My child should be able to feed him/herself”); (b) discipline–30 items that assess parental responses to children's problem behaviors (“I yell at my child for spilling food”); and (c) nurturing–20 items that measure specific parent behaviors that promote a child's psychological growth (“I read to my child at bedtime”). Items are rated using a 4-point frequency scale (4 = *almost always or always,* 3 = *frequently,* 2 = *sometimes,* and 1 = *almost never or never).* The range of scores for each subscale are: (a) expectations (50-200), with higher scores indicating higher parental expectations and lower scores indicating lower expectations; (b) discipline (30-120), with higher scores indicating more frequent use of verbal and corporal punishment (e.g., yelling, spanking)

and lower scores indicating less frequent use of punishment; and (c) nurturing (20-80), with higher scores suggesting more frequent use of positive nurturing activities. From a representative sample of 1,140 mothers, the following internal consistencies using coefficient alphas were reported: (a) expectations, 97; (b) discipline, .91; and (c) nurturing, .82. Test–retest reliabilities for each of the three subscales were: (a) expectations, .98; (b) discipline, .87; and (c) nurturing, .81. Peters and Fox (1993) reported that responses on the PBC were not influenced by social desirability. The PBC also has been used previously with fathers as the informants. Bentley and Fox (1991) reported similar scores on the expectations and discipline subscales for mothers and fathers from two-parent households; mothers' scores were significantly higher than were fathers' scores on the Nurturing subscale. For the present sample, the alphas were: expectations, .94; discipline, .90; and nurturing, .83.

Parenting Stress Index–Short Form (PSI–SF; Abidin, 1995)

The PSI–SF is a 36-item inventory that measures the relative amount of stress in a parent–child relationship as perceived by the parent. Stress in three areas–personal parental stress, stress related to the parent's interaction with the child, and stress that results from the child's unique characteristics–is measured. A total stress score also is used to measure the overall level of parenting stress experienced by an individual. Finally, a defensive responding scale is used to assess the validity of a parent's responses with scores of 10 or lower (indicates potential problems). The PSI–SF was developed from the 120-item PSI long form by selecting the items with the highest loadings on the three PSI factors. Items on the PSI–SF are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*); the total stress scores on the longer form correlated .94 with the short form scores. The alpha reliability data reported for each of the PSI–SF scores are: (a) total stress, .91; (b) parental distress, .87; (c) parent–child dysfunctional interaction, .80; and (d) difficult child, .85. For the present sample, the alphas were (a) total stress, .92; (b) parental distress, .84; (c) parent-child dysfunctional interaction, .86; and (d) difficult child, .84.

Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory: Parent Form (ECBI; Eyberg & Ross, 1978)

The ECBI is a 36-item inventory that measures behavior problems common in children. Parents rate the frequency of each behavior problem on a scale from 1 *(never)* to 7 *(always),* resulting in an intensity score (range: 36-252). Parents also are asked to identify whether each behavior is a current problem or not. The responses result in a total problem score (range: 0-36). The ECBI has been shown to discriminate between problem and nonproblcm children (Robinson, Eyberg, & Ross, 1980). Reliability of the scale ranges from .86 (test-retest) to .98

(internal consistency). For the present sample, the alphas were .94 for the intensity score and .92 for the total problem score.

Child Behavior Scale (CBS; Fox & Nicholson, 2003)

The CBS includes two scales to separately measure a child's challenging and prosocial behaviors. The challenging behavior items were adapted from a screening tool developed by Richman and Graham (1971) to measure behavioral and emotional problems in preschool-age children. Interrater reliabilities were reported to range between .77 and .94. Richman, Stevenson, and Graham (1975) reported a correlation of .88 between their screening tool and clinical ratings of 3-year-old children. The challenging behavior scale includes eight items (e.g., displays temper tantrums, does not listen, hits or bites). The eight items that assess young children's prosocial behaviors were adapted from Fox and Nicholson (2003) and include items that parents would consider positive aspects of their children (e.g., shows affection, helps clean up messes, shares toys). Parents rate the frequency of each behavior using a 4-point scale (4 = *almost always or always,* 3 = *frequently,* 2 = *sometimes,* 1 = *never or almost never*). A total challenging behavior score is computed by combining the ratings for the eight challenging behavior items (range: 8-32). A total prosocial behavior score is computed by combining the ratings of the eight prosocial behavior items (range: 8-32). Fox and Nicholson reported coefficient alphas for a maternal sample of .80 for the challenging behavior items and .91 for the prosocial items. For the present sample, the alphas were .77 for the challenging behavior score and .70 for the prosocial behavior score.

Results

The scores for the dependent measures are shown in Table 1. They are listed by group.

We computed a number of 2 x 2 multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA), 2 x 2 multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA), and 2 x 2 univariate ANOVA to analyze the dependent variables by the independent variables (lower and higher SES; focus child's gender). We followed up significant MANOVAs and MANCOVAs with univariate *F* tests. We set the alpha level at $p < .05$ for all analyses. We found a significant MANOVA for the three subscales of the PBC for SES, $F(3, 130) = 3.46$, $p = .018$, and child gender, $F(3, 130) = 2.90$, $p = .038$; but we did not find a significant SES x Child Gender interaction effect ($p = .92$). Univariate *F* tests showed that fathers in the lower SES group obtained higher scores, $F(1, 132) = 7.37$, $p = .008$, on the PBC discipline subscale ($M = 48.4$) than did fathers in the higher SES group ($M = 43.5$); fathers did not differ by SES group on their expectations or nurturing scores. Fathers of girls reported higher scores, $F(1, 132) = 6.62$, $p = .01$, on the PBC nurturing subscale ($M = 56.7$)

than did fathers of boys (*M* = 52.9); fathers did not differ by child gender on their expectations or discipline scores. The scores on the defensive responding subscale of the PSI–SF correlated significantly (all *ps* < .001) with the total scale scores (*r* = .80), the parent–child dysfunctional interaction subscale scores (*r* = .49), the parental distress subscale scores (*r* = .95), and the difficult child subscale scores (*r* = .51). Consequently, we used scores on the defensive responding scale as a covariate in the analyses of the PSI–SF scores. We found a significant MANCOVA for the PSI–SF's total stress scores and the parent-child dysfunctional interaction scores for SES, $F(2, 130) = 3.13$, $p = .047$, and child gender, $F(2, 130) = 4.06$, $p = .0189$; but we did not find a significant SES x Child Gender interaction effect ($p = .52$). Univariate *F* tests showed that fathers in the lower SES group obtained higher scores, $F(1, 131) = 5.10$, $p = .026$, for the PSI–SF total stress scores (*M* = 74.7) than did fathers in the higher SES group (*M* = 70.5). Similarly, fathers in the lower SES group obtained higher scores, $F(1, 131) = 6.05$, $p = .015$, for the PSI–SF parent–child dysfunctional interaction scores (*M* = 20.4) than did fathers in the higher SES group (*M* = 18.1). The significant gender effect was because fathers' of boys scored significantly higher (*M* = 20.4) on the PSI–SF parent–child dysfunctional scale, $F(1, 131) = 6.05$, $p = .015$, than did of fathers of girls (*M* = 18.1). Fathers of boys and girls did not differ on their PSI–SF total stress scores. We found a significant MANCOVA for the two remaining scores on the PSI–SF (the parental distress and difficult child subscales) for SES, for child gender, or for the interaction of SES and child gender. We did not find a significant MANOVA for the fathers' frequency or intensity scores on the ECBI for SES, child gender, or the interaction between SES and child gender. We found a significant ANOVA for the challenging behavior scores on the CBS for child gender, $F(1, 132) = 4.12$, $p = .045$; fathers of boys scored higher on this scale (*M* = 15.35) than did fathers of girls (*M* = 14.13). There were no significant SES or SES x Child Gender interaction effects for the challenging behavior scores (*ps* > .05). We did not find a significant ANOVA for the prosocial behavior scores of the CBS (*p* > .05).

Furthermore, to examine the relationship between disciplinary practices that were characterized by the use of corporal and verbal punishment and child behavior problems, we used a median split to group the fathers' scores on the PBC discipline subscale into higher (45 or higher) and lower discipline groups (44 or lower). We computed a MANCOVA using discipline group and child gender as the independent variables and all three-study measures of child behavior problems as the dependent variables (Eyberg's frequency and intensity scores, CBS's challenging behavior scores), with SES as a covariate. We found a significant MANCOVA for disciplinary group, $F(3, 129) = 4.28$, $p = .006$; but we did not find a significant effect for child gender or the interaction between disciplinary group and child gender. Univariate *F* tests

showed that fathers in the higher discipline group obtained significantly higher scores on the ECBI frequency, $M = 15.03$, $F(1, 131) = 11.26$, $p = .001$, and intensity measures, $M = 106.95$, $F(1, 131) = 8.76$, $p = .004$, and the CBS's challenging behavior scores measures, $M = 15.49$, $F(3, 131) = 6.60$, $p = .012$, than did fathers in the lower discipline group *(Ms* = 10.49, 90.71, and 13.95, respectively).

We asked fathers to estimate how many hours they spent each week reading, playing, watching television, and providing routine care with their focus child each week. A MANOVA for time spent reading or playing was not significant for SES, child gender, or the SES x Child Gender interaction. Fathers reported spending an average of 3.09 hours per week (*SD* = 3.29) reading to their focus child and 12.19 hours per week playing with their child (*SD* = 9.62). A MANOVA was significant for watching television and providing routine care for SES, $F(2, 101) = 3.34$, $p = .04$, but not for gender or the SES x Child Gender interaction. Fathers in the lower SES group reported watching significantly more hours of television with their focus child each week ($M = 11.8$) $F(1, 102) = 4.90$, $p = .029$, than did fathers in the higher SES group ($M = 7.4$). Fathers did not differ by SES, child gender, or their interaction for the hours spent in routine care of their focus child ($M = 9.8$, *SD)* = 8.86).

We systematically reviewed fathers' responses to the two open-ended questions and generated themes to categorize the individual responses. The two most common themes for each question and the number and percentage of fathers responding to each theme are shown in Table 2. The first question, “Please list any of the issues, concerns, or problems fathers like you might have experienced in being a parent to a young child,” generated an overall response rate (63%). The first theme–discipline–was characterized by responses such as “getting them to listen the first time, how to discipline effectively, handling temper tantrums.” As shown in Table 2, response rates to this theme did not differ by SES or child gender. The second theme–time limitations–included such responses as, “I work hard and don't have much time to be with my children, I am tired from working second shift, my company hinted that my wife should take care of our son so I could spend more time on the job.” The response rate for this theme was greater for higher SES fathers (38.3%) than for lower SES fathers (13.2%). Other common themes to the first question that generated fewer responses across SES and child gender included wanting more information about child development, worrying about how the child's development will be influenced by others (e.g., teachers, friends, society), and thinking about financial concerns. The second question, “What could help you to be a better parent to your young child,” generated more responses than did the first question (71%). The first theme that emerged with a significant response rate was the need for more parenting knowledge and skills and included

comments such as, “I need parenting classes, I ask questions of the generation of people who raised me, I would like classes on how to react when a child is misbehaving and to learn why.” The response rate regarding the need for parenting classes was similar across SES and gender groups; however, more fathers of boys (29.4%) than of girls (17.8%) reported this theme. The second theme–more time needed–included responses such as, “To be able to spend more time with him and not away at the job, spending more recreational time together, what has helped me is spending time with my daughter.” Of those fathers who responded to the second question, the time theme generated the highest response rate across SES and child gender groups (59.6%). Other common themes that generated fewer responses from the second question included the need for more financial resources, more patience, better anger management, and more societal supports.

Discussion

In this study, we examined young children's challenging behaviors and the influence of their fathers' parenting behaviors and stress. Fathers in lower SES circumstances reported more frequent use of verbal and corporal punishment as discipline with their young children than did higher SES fathers. This finding also has been reported for lower SES mothers (Fox et al., 1995). The use of corporal and verbal punishment as a common choice of discipline among lower SES families has been previously reported (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994); however, its short and long term consequences for children are only beginning to be understood. Campbell, Pierce, Moore, Marakovitz, and Newby (1996) reported a correlation of .43 between observer ratings of negative maternal control and externalizing problems in young boys. O'Leary, Smith Slep, and Reid (1999) found an even stronger relationship between mothers' “overreactive discipline” (e.g., yelling, spanking, getting frustrated or angry) and children's externalizing behaviors (r = .54); furthermore, those relationships remained stable over a 2-year period. Brenner and Fox (1998) reported that the use of verbal and corporal punishment by mothers was the best predictor of behavior problems in young children even when SES level was included. Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, and Lengua (2000) found that punitive parenting practices, including yelling and spanking, were associated with elevated levels of children's disruptive behavior problems. The evidence regarding the relationship between negative parenting practices and child behavior problems is consistent across studies; however, fathers who self-report the frequent use of corporal and verbal punishment also may perceive their children as having more behavior problems. Also, the directionality of the relationship between disciplinary practices and child behavior problems requires further study. However, even

assuming a child's difficult behavior may precipitate negative responses by some parents, it seems likely that that parental response may not have the desired effect on young children's behavior but instead may exacerbate the very behavior problems that parents are trying to reduce or eliminate. In the present study, lower SES fathers reported experiencing more parenting stress than did higher SES fathers. Fathers' scores on the PSI–SF's parent-child dysfunctional interaction subscale indicated overall parental stress. The results of this subscale indicated that those fathers might feel that their children do not meet their expectations and that they may not find interacting with their young children as satisfying as they would like it to be. This dissatisfaction could be related to the child's age because fathers might find interactions with younger children less enjoyable than interactions with older children, or as Baker and Heller (1996) suggested, our results could be influenced by their frustration in managing the children's challenging behaviors, Lower SES fathers also tended to rely more on television to entertain their young children than did higher SES fathers.

One limitation of this study is its reliance on paternal self-report. However, we do have confidence in the data for several reasons: (a) the measures were completed by fathers anonymously; (b) the PBC has been shown to not be influenced by a socially desirable response set (Peters & Fox, 1993); (c) fathers in our study did not respond in a defensive manner on the PSI–SF; and (d) the reported internal reliabilities for all of the instruments used in this study for this group of fathers were moderate to high, Direct or independent measures of actual father-child interactions may have been helpful; whereas, obtaining a diverse population of fathers, particularly those in low-income circumstances who have lived with their young children for extended periods of time, is difficult. Despite our working with community agencies already familiar to fathers and offering a nominal participation incentive, getting sufficient numbers of fathers to consent to participate in a self-report study required an extraordinary amount of time, Also, parent perceptions are important and often are highly correlated with their parenting attitudes and practices, particularly regarding disciplinary practices (Fox & Bentley, 1992).

A positive implication of our study is that regardless of fathers' SES and their child's gender, these fathers reported having reasonable developmental expectations for their child and perceived their child as having a good repertoire of prosocial behaviors, These paternal strengths, along with the fathers' motivation to improve their child-rearing knowledge and skills, would provide the basic foundation on which to tailor early prevention and intervention programs, a number of which are already available (Nicholson, Anderson, Fox, & Brenner, 2002; Webster-Stratton, 1998). The challenge for future researchers will be to attract fathers to ongoing parent-

education and support programs, where their absence has been the rule rather than the exception (Brenner, Nicholson, & Fox, 1999; Nicholson, Brenner, & Fox, 1999).

Notes

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Appendix
Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for the Primary Dependent Measures by Group

	Lower SES (Gender = male)		Lower SES (Gender = female)		Higher SES (Gender = male)		Higher SES (Gender = female)	
Variable	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
PBC								
Nurturing	51.20	9.55	55.56	9.11	54.56	8.63	57.88	7.37
Discipline	50.24	11.29	46.62	9.41	44.71	11.51	42.35	9.69
Expectations	138.47	23.66	140.47	20.75	133.91	21.88	139.41	24.64
PSI-SF								
Defensiveness	15.85	4.41	16.62	5.40	15.41	5.73	15.35	4.73
Parent-child dysfunctional interaction	22.03	6.94	19.21	6.67	18.47	6.29	17.24	4.22
Parental distress	26.74	6.99	27.79	8.40	25.24	8.62	26.29	8.03
Difficult child	27.79	7.35	28.21	7.56	25.85	8.05	25.44	6.68
Total Score	76.56	18.72	75.21	19.40	69.56	18.83	68.97	14.72
ECBI								
Behavioral intensity	99.71	36.40	95.65	30.85	106.97	30.70	93.94	30.12
Total problem	14.26	7.97	13.44	8.07	13.35	8.63	10.24	7.25
CBS								
Challenging behavior	15.74	3.39	14.71	4.03	14.97	3.34	13.56	3.22
Prosocial behavior	24.71	3.61	25.59	3.36	24.77	3.50	24.82	3.88

Note PBC = Parent Behavior Checklist. PSI-SF = Parenting Stress Index-Short Form. ECBI = Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory. CBS = Child Behavior Scale. SES = socioeconomic status.

Table 2
Number and Percentage of Fathers Responding to the Themes Generated by Questions 1[a] and 2[b]

Variable	Lower SES		Higher SES		Men		Women	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Question 1[a]								
Fathers responding	38	55.9	47	69.1	46	67.7	39	57.4
Theme 1								
Discipline	14	36.8	17	36.2	17	37.0	14	35.9
Theme 2								
Time limitations	5	13.2	18	38.3	11	23.9	12	30.8
Question 2[b]								
Fathers responding	44	64.7	52	76.5	51	75.0	45	66.2
Theme 1								
Parenting skills	9	20.5	14	26.9	15	29.4	8	17.8
Theme 2								
More time needed	20	45.5	31	59.6	26	51.0	25	55.6

Note SES = socioeconomic status.
[a]"Please list any of the issues, concerns, or problems that fathers like you might have experienced in being a parent to a young child." [b]"What could help you to be a better parent to your young child?"