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This study investigates the effects of parental efficacy on promotive parenting strategies, children's self-efficacy, and children's academic success in adverse environments. Data were obtained from a 1991 survey of 376 mothers, both White and Black, and their young adolescents in inner-city Philadelphia. Analyses show that beliefs in parental efficacy predict the promotive strategies of Black mothers but not those of White mothers, a difference that reflects the higher risk environments of Black families. They tend to live in more socially isolated and dangerous neighborhoods than White families. Overall, mothers' parental efficacy is a stronger predictor of children's self-efficacy and academic success in disadvantaged family and environmental contexts, such as Black single-parent households and Black families with a weak marriage, than in White families or Black families with a strong marriage. Surprisingly, mothers' efficacy beliefs but not their promotive strategies are associated with the self-efficacy and academic success of their children.

# Effects of Mothers' Parental Efficacy Beliefs and Promotive Parenting Strategies on Inner-City Youth

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Inner-city neighborhoods, with high rates of violence, drug use, and unemployment, can place children at considerable risk of impaired life chances and early death (Elliot, Wilson, Huizinga, & Sampson, 1996; MacLeod, 1987; Wilson, 1987). Despite unpromising life prospects, many children manage to rise above the harsh limitations of their environment. Children's own personal efforts are likely to make a difference in such an achievement, particularly in education, and family members or adult mentors play an important role as well. However, surprisingly little is known about factors that enable children to succeed in adverse environments.

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The traditional answer to how inner-city youth escape the dangers of their environment centers on the family and the role of parents. In theory and empirical research, success is aided by nurturing parents who maintain high standards of excellence and discipline (e.g., Clark, 1983; Eccles et al., 1993; Mayer, 1997). Typically, the focus is on what parents do as parents within the household. Left out of the picture is the environmental and social context of the family and the parents' efforts to maximize opportunities while minimizing risks.

This study examines the effects of parental efficacy beliefs and promotive parenting strategies on children's self-efficacy beliefs and academic success in different family and community contexts, using data on 376 mothers and their adolescent children from inner-city neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The data were obtained in 1991 from interviews and questionnaires with mothers and their respective children (age 11 to 14). The sample includes Black and White households from five census blocks of inner-city Philadelphia that average 20% on poverty rates. Sixty-eight percent of the families are Black, and 50% are headed by a single parent, most of whom are Black.

Black families tend to live in more economically deprived and dangerous residential areas than White families (Massey & Denton, 1993). Hence, Black mothers may feel a greater urgency than White mothers to engage in promotive parenting strategies that offer successful developmental pathways for their children. Promotive parenting strategies are defined as activities that are designed to cultivate children's skills, talents, and interests and to prevent the occurrence of negative events and experiences (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999). For example, parents who use promotive strategies may encourage and work with their children to develop their children's personal talents and skills, enroll them in after-school programs, point out dangers in the neighborhood, and involve their children in positive activities both inside and outside of the neighborhood.

Parents are more likely to engage in these activities if they have the confidence that their behavior will indeed have a positive effect on their children. By contrast, parents who feel that they have little or no control over their children's lives and their children's environment are less apt to engage in promotive strategies (Eccles et al., 1993; Furstenberg, 1993). According to Bandura (1997), "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Parental efficacy is defined as the parent's beliefs in his or her ability to influence the child and his or her environment to foster the child's development and success.

Finally, it is expected that both promotive strategies and parental efficacy are related to the developmental success of young adolescents, defined in this study as their own sense of self-efficacy and academic success. In theory, a parent's sense of efficacy would affect the developmental success of children indirectly through promotive strategies as well as directly through the presentation of a positive role model. The generality of the links between promotive strategies, parental efficacy, and child success measures is tested in comparisons by race and family types (strong marriages, weak marriages, and single-parent households).

## PARENTAL EFFICACY, PROMOTIVE STRATEGIES, AND CHILDREN'S SUCCESS

Families who live in the inner-city neighborhoods of major cities face an especially difficult task. Prevailing dangers outside the family, such as increasing problems of violence, gangs, and drugs, make parenting ever more challenging (Furstenberg, 1993). How can parents deal with situations of this kind? A qualitative study on low-income families in inner-city Philadelphia neighborhoods conducted in 1989-1990 by Furstenberg (1993) provided some tentative answers.

Furstenberg (1993) found that parents used different strategies to promote their children's development and to shield them from the dangers of the street. One approach was tight supervision of the child. In socially isolated (anomic) neighborhoods, this often meant keeping children at home or chaperoning them wherever they went. Parents would try to provide a safe environment for their children at home and instill in them a feeling of being different from the other people in the neighborhood. One effective way of doing this was by pointing out bad examples of people living in the neighborhood and explaining how the danger of the streets had destroyed their lives. By contrast, in socially integrated (cohesive) neighborhoods, parents could rely on trusted neighbors to assume a supervisory role when their children were away from home.

Because it becomes increasingly difficult to keep adolescent children and especially boys at home with advancing age, an alternate solution for many parents consisted of placing their children in after-school programs offered either by the school, the church, or other community organizations, for example, Boys and Girls Clubs. In areas where community organizations were either not present or parents did not consider these activities as beneficial to their children, parents would sometimes try to get their children enrolled in activities outside of their own neighborhood. This was

often facilitated by relatives and friends who lived in less dangerous neighborhoods. Other parents would get involved in community services themselves (e.g., as a volunteer at school or church or by organizing community activities for children) to make their neighborhood a better place for children. Parents also tried to find formal and informal sponsors for their children (i.e., teachers, ministers, counselors, and coaches) who were willing to further their children's academic, social, and emotional development.

However, not all parents engaged in these promotive strategies, and not all employed them efficiently and to the same extent. According to Furstenberg (1993), efficacious parents tended to be more successful in their socialization efforts, especially if they lived in anomic neighborhoods. Efficacy beliefs tend to encourage parents to engage in activities that are in fact beneficial for the development of the child (Bugental & Shennum, 1984; Eccles et al., 1993; Gross, Fogg, & Tucker, 1995; Macphee, Fritz, & Miller-Heyl, 1996; Schneewind, 1995; Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Parents in the qualitative study accomplished this protection through either a direct influence on the child or by improving the child's immediate and larger environment. By contrast, parents with very low efficacy beliefs, for example, who were convinced that their parenting efforts would be futile, often did not try to promote their children's development or to improve their children's environment.

The conceptual model in Figure 1 is based on the qualitative research results by Furstenberg (1993) and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. The model shows a reciprocal relationship between parental efficacy beliefs, promotive parenting strategies, and the child's developmental success (Baker & Heller, 1996; Hoeltje, Zubrick, Silburn, & Garton, 1996). Efficacy beliefs work very much like a self-fulfilling prophecy (e.g., Watzlawick, 1984) (see solid line arrows in Figure 1). Parents who feel efficacious as parents are apt to be those who are most engaged in promotive parenting strategies (Eccles et al., 1993; Furstenberg, 1993). These strategies in turn are likely to increase the child's chances for success, either academically or psychologically (Bugental & Shennum, 1984; Eccles et al., 1993; Schneewind, 1995; Teti & Gelfand, 1991). In addition, parental efficacy beliefs may also have a direct effect on children's developmental success. Parents with a high sense of efficacy are likely to serve as role models for their children who will adopt their parents' attitudes and beliefs independently of the parents' actual behavior (Eccles et al., 1993; Ollendick, 1979; Schneewind, 1995; Whitbeck, 1987). Children's sense of efficacy in turn tends to have a positive effect on their success in school and other social settings (Bandura, 1997).

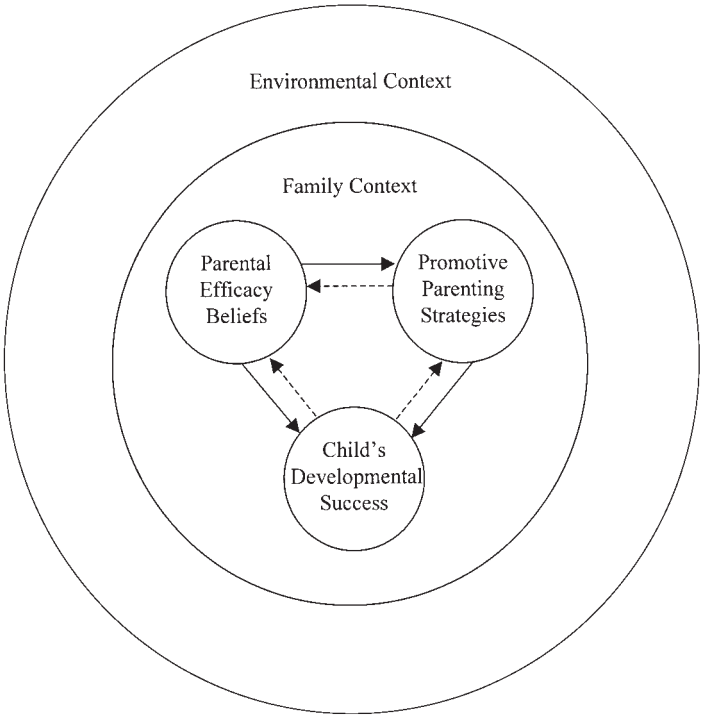


**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

The direction of the effects may also be reversed (see broken line arrows in Figure 1). Bandura (1995) claimed that "the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through *mastery experiences*" (p. 3) (also see Elder & Conger, 2000). Effective parenting tends to enhance feelings of personal efficacy as a parent (Bandura, 1997; Eccles et al., 1993). By contrast, parents who are low on perceived self-efficacy may try only halfheartedly to engage in promotive parenting strategies and give up easily when they encounter difficulties, thereby confirming beliefs in their powerlessness (Bandura, 1995, 1997; Eccles, 1983). Similarly, parents with maladjusted children may have difficulties in sustaining a sense of parental agency when faced with a contradictory reality. By contrast, children's developmental success is likely to strengthen parents' beliefs in their efficaciousness and in the usefulness of their promotive strategies.

However, even for efficacious parents, success is not always guaranteed. What happens when efficacy beliefs fail? Does failure change parents' beliefs in their own parenting abilities and make them less efficacious? Bandura (1995, 1997) and other expectancy theorists (e.g., Dweck & Elliott, 1990; Eccles, 1983; Eccles et al., 1993; Weiner, 1985) argued that efficacy and expectancy beliefs are relatively robust and are sustained even if success is not achieved. Rather than giving up or doubting their own capabilities, efficacious people interpret failure only as a temporary setback that can be overcome with enough effort. Parents with a strong sense of efficacy are determined to overcome the barriers that prevent success. Similarly, children who observe their parents succeed and overcome difficulties in their lives are most likely to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy themselves and to prevail, for example, academically, even under adverse circumstances.

This interaction between efficacy beliefs, promotive parenting strategies, and children's success is likely to vary by environmental and family contexts (Furstenberg et al., 1999) (see circles in Figure 1). The process may be strongest in socially isolated and dangerous neighborhoods. Under circumstances of this kind, parents with weak efficacy beliefs are likely to be overwhelmed by the task at hand, but parents with strong beliefs are most likely to make a positive difference in their children's lives through their promotive behavior and positive example. By contrast, in socially integrated and supportive neighborhoods, even parents low on efficacy may be encouraged by neighbors to help their children succeed in school and other social settings and in turn be rewarded by their children's developmental success. Judging from Massey and Denton's (1993) study on residence and race, Black families are likely to live mostly in socially isolated and dangerous neighborhoods, with White families concentrated in more socially integrated and supportive neighborhoods.

The relationship between parental efficacy, promotive parenting strategies, and children's developmental success may be even stronger in settings that combine adversities (Furstenberg et al., 1999). In these settings, not only neighborhood support is unavailable to foster promotive strategies of parents and children's success, but social and parenting support within the family is also lacking, either because the mother is unmarried or because the marriage is under strain (Elder, Eccles, Ardelt, & Lord, 1995). In these stressful circumstances, parents may not even try to influence their children's behavior and their environment unless they are convinced of their efficacy as parents. Conversely, efficacious parents represent role models in these disadvantaged environments who encourage their children to succeed although the odds are against them. Hence, we expect pa-

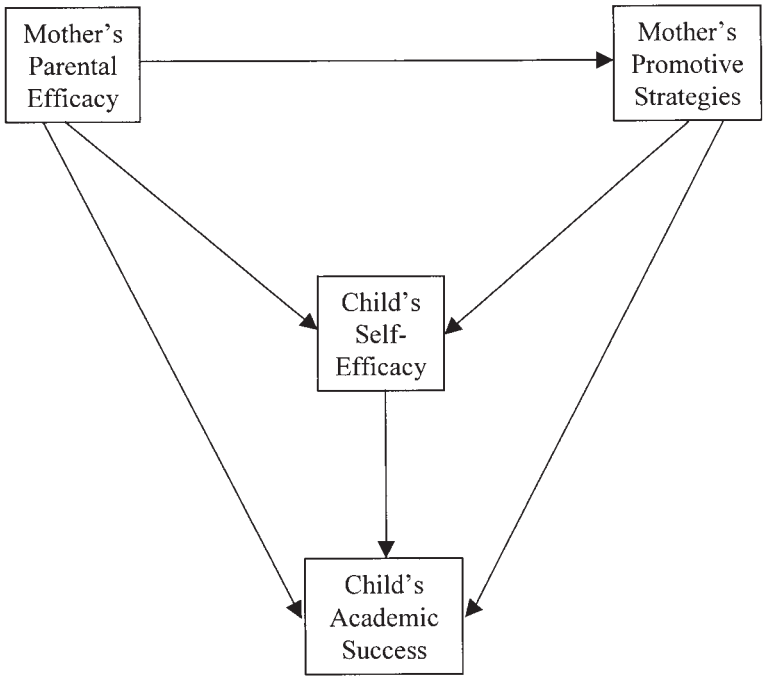


**Figure 2: Path Model of the Effects of Mothers' Parental Efficacy Beliefs and Promotive Strategies on Children's Self-Efficacy and Academic Success**

rental efficacy to exert the strongest effect (directly and indirectly) on children's self-efficacy and academic success in Black single-parent households and among Black families with relatively weak marriages. Weak marriages are defined as partnerships that are characterized by relatively weak spousal support, negative interaction patterns, and relatively high levels of marital disagreement.

In theory, the associations between parental efficacy, promotive strategies, and children's developmental success are bidirectional. However, it is expected that the effect of parental efficacy beliefs on promotive strategies is stronger than the opposite effect and that parents exert a stronger influence on their children than children do on their parents (solid line arrows in Figure 1). The cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow us to test this hypothesis, but considerations of this kind led to the following hypotheses and the path model in Figure 2.

*Hypothesis 1:* Black families are more likely than White families to live in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and to perceive their neighborhoods as more socially isolated and dangerous and less socially integrated and supportive than White families.

Assuming support for this hypothesis, we shall test the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2:* The positive effects of mother's parental efficacy beliefs on her promotive strategies and on the self-efficacy and the academic success of her child will be stronger in Black families than in White families, controlling for all other variables in the model (see Figure 2).

*Hypothesis 3:* Similarly, the positive effects of mother's promotive strategies on the self-efficacy and academic success of her child will be stronger in Black families than in White families, controlling for all other variables in the model.

*Hypothesis 4:* Mother's parental efficacy will exert the strongest positive effect (directly and indirectly) on the self-efficacy and academic success of her child in Black single-parent households and in Black families with weak marriages, controlling for all other variables in the model.

*Hypothesis 5:* Children's perceived self-efficacy is strongly related to their academic success independently of mother's parental efficacy, promotive strategies, and family and environmental contexts.

The following variables were controlled in the analyses: mother's education, total family income, and gender and age (in years) of child. Higher educated parents are typically more engaged in their children's development and may be more adept at finding programs and activities for their children to prevent negative developmental pathways than parents with a lower educational background (Elder & Conger, 2000). Furthermore, total family income is likely to be positively related to the parents' ability to afford these programs for the child. Poverty, by contrast, tends to increase parental stress, which may lead to a decline in parental efficacy and promotive parenting strategies (Bruce, Takeuchi, & Leaf, 1991; Elder et al., 1995). Black families and single mothers in particular are most likely to be affected by the negative effect of poverty on parental behavior (McLoyd, 1990). Moreover, poor children and especially children from poor single-parent households are at increased risk for negative developmental pathways (Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989; McLanahan, Astone, & Marks, 1991; McLeod & Edwards, 1995; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993, 1996; Takeuchi, 1991). Parental education, by contrast, is a possible protective factor for children's behavior problems (Velez, Johnson, & Cohen, 1989; Werner, 1985). Through encouragement and modeling, higher educated parents may foster their chil-

dren's self-efficacy beliefs and their academic success. Finally, parents may engage more in promotive strategies for older children and boys who tend to be most at risk for negative developmental pathways, particularly in economically deprived and dangerous neighborhoods (Elliot et al., 1996; Heimer, 1996; Sampson & Laub, 1992; Warr, 1993).

## METHODOLOGY

### SAMPLE

For reasons of cost and convenience, this study was nested into an existing study of four areas of Philadelphia. The study selected for less affluent neighborhoods, excluding middle-class and upper middle-class areas of the city. The most impoverished areas of North Philadelphia were also excluded. To maximize comparisons between White families and Black families, the sampling frame underrepresented other ethnic minorities. Sampling occurred as follows: Within each of the four catchment areas, a sample of census tracts was identified. From these, up to four block groups were randomly selected. Using a reverse telephone directory, an enumeration was made by phone of all households with listed phone numbers. These households were then called to identify those with a youth between 11 and 14 years of age. A 10% sample of the families with no telephones or unlisted numbers were randomly drawn and screened in person by interviewers. Of the 598 families with children in the appropriate age range, 82% (489) completed interviews.

### PROCEDURE

In each household, the primary caregiver (in 84% of all the cases, the biological mother of the child) and a target adolescent were separately interviewed by a trained interviewer. In addition, both of these participants were given a self-administered questionnaire to complete while the interviewer was conducting the interview with the other study member. The interview and the self-administered questionnaire consisted of items assessing parent and child perceptions of the neighborhood, parenting strategies, family environment and relationships, and parent and child adjustment. In addition, the interviewers completed a short assessment of their observations during their interviews with different family members. This assessment form tapped the interviewer's impressions of the neighborhood and home in which the family lived as well as of characteristics of

the interviewees (e.g., social interaction style, physical appearance, and communication abilities).

## PARTICIPANTS

Two thirds of the study families are Black. Eighty-four percent of the primary caregivers are mothers, 6% are fathers, and 5% are grandmothers of the target youth. Eighty percent of the single mothers are Black. Forty-five percent of the families have less than $20,000 in total family income. Twice as many Black families as White families have incomes below the median, and the former are also concentrated in the poorer neighborhoods. The neighborhood poverty rates vary from 10% to 63%. Twelve percent of the mothers have a college education, and 52% report having a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Because a key feature of this study is to explore potential differences in the parenting processes of Black parents and White parents, the present sample consists of only Black families and White families. Other ethnic groups and mixed racial families are excluded from the analyses. In addition, because 84% of the adult respondents are mothers and the effect of fathers, grandmothers, and other relatives on children is likely to be different than the relationship between mothers and their children, only families with mothers as adult respondents are included in the analyses, resulting in 376 families. Variations from this number reflect patterns of missing data. Black families in this sample have significantly lower total family incomes than White families ($p < .05$), although there is no significant difference between Black mothers and White mothers with regard to their educational background (see appendix).

## DESCRIPTION OF MEASURES

*Mother's parental efficacy beliefs*. These were assessed by two sets of questions. In one set, parents were asked to indicate how much they could do to get their child to do, or achieve, several concrete things on a scale of 1 (*nothing*) to 4 (*a lot*) (e.g., to stay out of trouble in school, to get a good job, to stay in school until graduation, to do his or her homework, to practice safe sex, and to feel good about himself or herself). In the second set, parents were asked how well they could influence certain things that affect their child on a scale of 1 (*not very well*) to 4 (*very well*) (e.g., How well can you keep track of child outside of home, influence what the child does after school, keep child from going to dangerous areas, and get help at school?). The 14 items for the first scale and the 6 items for the second

were created for the Philadelphia Family Management Study (Furstenberg et al., 1999). The items for each scale were averaged with alpha coefficients of .90 and .78 for the first and second scale, respectively. Parental efficacy is measured as the average of the two scales.

*Mother's promotive parenting strategies*. The promotive strategy measures used in this study were also created for the Philadelphia Family Management Study (see Eccles et al., 1992). Mothers were asked about parenting strategies designed to create positive experiences for the child and to promote the development of the child's skills and interests and strategies implemented to prevent bad experiences and bad outcomes for children. To assess both types of strategies, mothers were asked how often they did each of two sets of behaviors with their child. The first set asked how frequently they used different types of strategies to help their child develop a particular talent or interest. The second set asked how often they used various techniques to prevent their child from getting involved in activities or situations that worry them. All items were coded on a 3-point response scale (ranging from 1 = *never* to 3 = *often*).

The following four indices were used to measure promotive strategies: (a) encouragement, (b) collaborative activity between parent and child (work with child), (c) involvement in out-of-house programs and activities, and (d) proactive prevention.

The index of encouragement is an average of four items that reflect verbal feedback parents use to encourage the talents of their children (e.g., "How often have you told child that this is a very important talent because it will help him or her in the future?" and "How often have you told child how to get better at the skill?"). Cronbach's alpha for the scale is .75.

The index of work with child is an average of the following two items: "How often have you made sure child practices the skill at home?" and "How often have you done the activity with child?" Internal consistency for this scale is .61.

The index of involvement in outside programs is the average of four items tapping the extent to which parents provide their child with opportunities for getting involved in programs in the community or school that could foster the child's talent (e.g., "How often have you signed child up for classes or programs?" and "How often have you found out about programs that could help child get better?"). The alpha coefficient for this scale is .68.

The index of proactive prevention is the average of three items. Parents were asked how often they use the following strategies to prevent bad things from happening to their children: "Point out how dangers have de-

stroyed the lives of people you know," "Get child into good activities in the neighborhood," and "Get child involved in good activities outside of the neighborhood." Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is .56.[1]

The variable of mother's promotive parenting strategies is computed as the average of the four indices. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this composite scale is .71.

*Child's self-efficacy.* This represents the child's own perception of self-control and control over his or her environment. Example items are "How well can you finish homework assignments by deadlines? Control your temper? Stand up for yourself when you are being treated unfairly?" The 14 items are measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all well*) to 7 (*very well*). Cronbach's alpha for the scale is .81.

The variable of *child's academic success* is a composite of the following three scales: (a) the child's report of his or her own academic success, (b) the parent's report of the child's academic success, and (c) the interviewer's assessment of the child's cognitive abilities. Multiple informants help to minimize confounding effects, such as the tendency of emotionally strained parents to view their children in a negative light (Angel & Worobey, 1988; Breslau, Davis, & Prabucki, 1988). Cronbach's alpha for the composite scale is .72.

The child's report of his or her own academic success is the sum of five standardized items (e.g., self-reported grades; "How many Ds/Fs did you get last year?" and "Have you ever been held back a grade?").

The parent's report of the child's academic success is the sum of three standardized items (report of grades, has child failed a class in past 2 years, and has child repeated any grades).

The interviewer's assessment of the child's cognitive abilities is the sum of six standardized items, such as the interviewer's impression of the child's intelligence (from 1 = *below average* to 5 = *superior*), assets and coping skills (from 1 = *no special assets and coping skills* to 5 = *quite a few*), and special talents (from 1 = *no special talents* to 5 = *special talents that will child help get ahead*).

*Marital strength.* Marital strength is assumed to be a multidimensional construct (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). The following two indicators were used to assess the level of marital strength in this study: (a) marital relationships (a composite of positive relationships minus severe negative relationships) and (b) marital adjustment.

The indicator of positive marital relationships is the average of the mother's report of the frequency during the past year that she and her hus-

band interacted in the following ways: asked each other's opinion about an important matter, acted loving and affectionate toward each other, and helped one another do something important. The frequency of these behaviors (and of the negative behaviors listed next) was reported on a 7-point response scale that described specific frequency ranges (0 = *never* through 6 = *more than 20 times*). The indicator of severe negative relationships is the average of the mother's responses to the following items: "In the last year, how many times have you (your spouse) pushed, grabbed, shoved, or threw something at spouse (you)? and hit/tried to hit spouse (you) with something?" The alpha coefficients for positive relationships and severe negative relationships are .85 and .84, respectively. These scores were subtracted from each other to create a composite reflecting the extent to which positive interactions outnumber, on the average, severe negative interactions.

Marital adjustment measures the extent to which (from 1 = *often* to 3 = *never*) mothers reported arguing with their spouse about money, sex, how to discipline their child, the child's problem behavior, chores and responsibilities, drinking and drugs, and other women or men. In addition, the mothers were asked how well they got along with their husband (1 = *not well at all* to 3 = *very well*). Unit-weighted items were averaged to form a single index with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .77.

Standardized scores for marital relationships and marital adjustment were averaged and divided at the median to identify relatively strong marriages and weak marriages. The mean difference in marital strength between relatively strong marriages (mean = .69) and relatively weak marriages (mean = –.56) is highly statistically significant with a $t$-value of 14.63 ($p < .001$).

*Mother's education*. This was measured by the reported highest grade completed. Total family income refers to total reported family income for 1989. It was measured in increments of $10,000 on a scale ranging from 1 (less than $5,000) to 7 ($50,000 or more). Race, marital status, and gender and age of child (in years) was determined from demographic interview information.

### NEIGHBORHOOD VARIABLES

*Quality of teen services in the neighborhood* was assessed by asking mothers to rate the following three statements on a scale from 1 (*poor*) to 4 (*excellent*): "The parks and playgrounds in this neighborhood are . . .," "The recreational services for kids in this neighborhood are . . .," and "The

mental health and counseling services in this neighborhood are . . .” The answers were averaged, resulting in an alpha coefficient of .77.

The extent of *social control in the neighborhood* was measured by asking mothers the following:

> How likely is it that someone would do something if someone was breaking into your home in plain sight? someone was trying to sell drugs to your children in plain sight? there was a fight in front of your house and someone was being beaten? your kids were getting into trouble? a child was showing disrespect for an adult?

Answer categories range from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*). The alpha coefficient for the average of the five items is .83.

*Neighborhood cohesion* is the average of six items. Mothers were asked if they agree or disagree (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) that

> their neighbors have similar views how to raise children; this is a close-knit neighborhood; there are a lot of adults around here that their children can look up to; they would hire a neighbor to do a job for them, such as babysitting or fixing a car; adults in this neighborhood can find money for activities for kids; and they can count on neighbors to let them know about opportunities for kids.

Coefficient alpha for this scale is .77.

*Neighborhood problems* is the average of 23 items measuring how much of a problem (from 1 = *not a problem* to 3 = *a big problem*) several social problems are in the mother’s neighborhood (e.g., high unemployment, vandalism, assaults and muggings, delinquent gangs or drug gangs, and poor schools). The alpha coefficient for this scale is .93.

In addition, the following *census track characteristics in 1990* were available: percentage of families living in poverty, percentage of individuals living in poverty, median family income, percentage of African Americans, percentage of female-headed households, and percentage of owner-occupied buildings.

## ANALYSIS

First, independent sample *t* tests were performed to compare Black families and White families with regard to their neighborhood characteristics. Second, structural equation modeling using LISREL 8.20 and a maximum likelihood (ML) estimation procedure was applied to estimate the

path model in Figure 2 for different subgroups, compute indirect effects, and determine the statistical difference between individual coefficient estimates in multigroup comparisons (Bollen, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996a). The statistical difference between coefficient estimates in two subgroups was computed for each pair of estimates separately, which resulted in 1 degree of freedom (*df*) for all multigroup comparisons. Because the number of cases in some of the subgroups is very small, each variable was measured by a single indicator only, although for some of the variables multiple indicators are available.

The path model contains the following three dichotomous variables as control variables: single mother, weak marriage, and gender of child. However, because the dichotomous variables are x-variables and all other variables in the model are considered to be continuous and multivariate normally distributed,[2] the covariance matrix can be analyzed (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996b; Kline, 1998), which results in ML coefficient estimates that are identical to ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates obtained from multiple regression analyses. Hence, third, multiple regression analyses were performed to calculate adjusted multiple $R^2$ values and their respective statistical significance for the three dependent variables in the model. LISREL provides only the unadjusted $R^2$ values. Because the path model in Figure 2 is fully saturated with zero *df*, no overall fit measures are available.

## RESULTS

### DIFFERENCES IN NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS BY RACE

Hypothesis 1 states that Black families are more likely to live in economically disadvantaged, socially isolated, and dangerous neighborhoods and less likely to reside in socially integrated and supportive neighborhoods than White families. The analyses in Table 1 confirm this hypothesis. Black mothers perceived their neighborhoods as significantly more inferior than White mothers with regard to the quality of teen services available, the extent of social control and cohesion within the neighborhood, and the severity of neighborhood problems. The families also tend to live in racially segregated areas, with Black families living in areas with an average concentration of African Americans of 86% and White families residing in areas with an average concentration of African Americans of 14%.

**TABLE 1**
**Neighborhood Characteristics by Race**

| | *Race* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Black Families* (n = *252*) | | *White Families* (n = *124*) | | *Significance of Difference* | |
| Neighborhood Characteristics | M | SD | M | SD | T-*Value* | p |
| Mother's perception of neighborhood | | | | | | |
| Quality of teen services | 1.86 | 0.58 | 2.02 | 0.64 | –2.34 | .020 |
| Social control | 3.10 | 0.70 | 3.32 | 0.52 | –3.43 | .001 |
| Neighborhood cohesion | 3.19 | 0.76 | 3.47 | 0.67 | –3.71 | .000 |
| Neighborhood problems | 2.01 | 0.41 | 1.79 | 0.40 | 4.87 | .000 |
| Census track characteristics in 1990 | | | | | | |
| Percentage of families living in poverty | 22 | 11 | 16 | 8 | 6.18 | .000 |
| Percentage of individuals living in poverty | 26 | 11 | 20 | 8 | 6.05 | .000 |
| Median family income | $24,000 | 6378 | $27,760 | 6271 | –5.40 | .000 |
| Percentage of African Americans | 86 | 23 | 14 | 25 | 27.51 | .000 |
| Percentage of female-headed households | 21 | 6 | 11 | 5 | 16.84 | .000 |
| Percentage of owner-occupied buildings | 57 | 13 | 62 | 12 | –3.95 | .000 |

In addition, Black families tend to live in economically more deprived areas than White families. According to census track characteristics in 1990, Black families are more likely than White families to reside in areas with a significantly higher proportion of poor families and poor individuals and a significantly lower median family income. Black families also tend to live in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of female-headed households and a lower percentage of owner-occupied buildings than White families. Because Hypothesis 1 is supported, the following analyses were carried out separately for Black families and White families.

### PARENTAL EFFICACY, PROMOTIVE STRATEGIES, AND CHILDREN'S SUCCESS BY RACE AND FAMILY CONTEXT

Hypothesis 2 states that the positive effects of mothers' efficacy beliefs on promotive strategies and children's self-efficacy and academic success

are stronger for Black families than for White families, owing to their more adverse environmental context. The analyses in Table 2 support this hypothesis for promotive strategies and the child's academic success but not for the child's self-efficacy. The effect of parental efficacy on promotive strategies is significantly stronger for Black mothers than for White mothers ($\chi^2 = 7.23$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$), whereas its effect on the child's self-efficacy is not statistically different between the two subgroups ($p = .94$). Although the direct effect of parental efficacy on the child's academic success is not statistically stronger for Black families than for White families ($p = .45$), the parental efficacy of Black mothers has a significant direct and indirect positive effect (mediated by mother's promotive strategies and child's self-efficacy) on the child's academic success. For White mothers, by comparison, the effect of parental efficacy on the child's academic success is not significant, directly or indirectly (see Table 2).

It is surprising that parental efficacy is not predictive of promotive strategies among White mothers. However, what these mothers do is affected by context. Table 2 shows that White single mothers and mothers in weak marriages tend to engage less in promotive strategies than do White mothers in strong marriages. No such contextual effects are visible for Black mothers. Contrary to stereotypes, single Black mothers and Black mothers in weak marriages appear to be just as involved in promotive parenting strategies as Black mothers in strong marriages.[3] Furthermore, the data show substantial gender variations that differ by race; Black mothers are more engaged in promotive strategies if the study child is a son rather than a daughter. The gender difference is reversed among White mothers, who are more engaged if they have a daughter rather than a son. The difference between the two coefficient estimates is statistically significant with a $\chi^2$ value of 7.63 and 1 $df$ ($p < .01$).

Overall, Black mothers who describe themselves as efficacious tend to be more involved in promotive parenting strategies than less efficacious mothers. By contrast, parental efficacy is unrelated to the promotive strategies of White mothers. Although there is no significant race difference among mothers in the extent of perceived efficacy, Black mothers are significantly more likely than White mothers to report the use of promotive strategies ($t$-value = 4.98, $p < .001$). However, these strategies are neither significantly related to adolescents' self-efficacy beliefs nor to their academic success. This is true for Black families and White families alike. Hence, Hypothesis 3 receives no support. The positive effect of mothers' promotive strategies on children's self-efficacy and academic success is not significantly stronger for Black families than for White families ( $p =$

**TABLE 2**

**Effects of Mother's Parental Efficacy Beliefs and Promotive Strategies on Child's Self-Efficacy and Academic Success by Race With Selected Controls; Maximum Likelihood Coefficient Estimates**

| | *Dependent Variables* | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mother's Promotive Strategies* | | *Child's Self-Efficacy* | | | | *Child's Academic Success* | | | |
| | *Direct Effects* | | *Direct Effects* | | *Indirect Effects* | | *Direct Effects* | | *Indirect Effects* | |
| *Independent Variables* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* |
| Black families ($n$ = 233) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's parental efficacy | .31*** | .33 | .36** | .17 | .04 | .02 | .26** | .14 | .13** | .07 |
| Mother's promotive strategies | — | — | .13 | .06 | — | — | .02 | .01 | .04 | .02 |
| Child's self-efficacy | — | — | — | — | — | — | .31*** | .35 | — | — |
| Controls | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's education | .01 | .06 | –.02 | –.04 | .00 | .00 | .06** | .13 | –.01 | –.01 |
| Total family income | .02 | .07 | .07 | .11 | .00 | .00 | .05 | .10 | .02 | .04 |
| Single mother (1 = yes) | .02 | .02 | –.02 | –.01 | .00 | .00 | –.07 | –.04 | –.00 | –.00 |
| Weak marriage (1 = yes) | –.01 | –.01 | –.22 | –.10 | –.00 | –.00 | –.11 | –.06 | –.07 | –.03 |
| Gender of child (1 = male) | .12** | .15 | –.20* | –.11 | .02 | .01 | –.24** | –.15 | –.06 | –.04 |
| Age of child | .04* | –.12 | .04 | .06 | –.01 | –.01 | –.00 | –.00 | .01 | .02 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .14*** | | .04** | | | | .23*** | | | |
| White families ($n$ = 121) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's parental efficacy | .02 | .02 | .34* | .17 | –.00 | –.00 | .11 | .06 | .10 | .05 |
| Mother's promotive strategies | — | — | –.11 | –.05 | — | — | .14 | .07 | –.03 | –.02 |
| Child's self-efficacy | — | — | — | — | — | — | .29*** | .30 | — | — |

*(continued)*

**TABLE 2 Continued**

| | *Dependent Variables* | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mother's Promotive Strategies* | | *Child's Self-Efficacy* | | | | *Child's Academic Success* | | | |
| | *Direct Effects* | | *Direct Effects* | | *Indirect Effects* | | *Direct Effects* | | *Indirect Effects* | |
| *Independent Variables* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* |
| Controls | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's education | .01 | .03 | .03 | .07 | –.00 | –.00 | .12*** | .28 | .01 | .02 |
| Total family income | –.01 | –.05 | .08 | .16 | .00 | .00 | –.02 | –.03 | .02 | .05 |
| Single mother (1 = yes) | –.23** | –.27 | –.06 | –.04 | .02 | .01 | –.24 | –.14 | –.04 | –.03 |
| Weak marriage (1 = yes) | –.15* | –.18 | –.11 | –.06 | .02 | .01 | –.05 | –.03 | –.05 | –.03 |
| Gender of child (1 = male) | –.13* | –.16 | –.15 | –.09 | .01 | .01 | –.18 | –.11 | –.06 | –.04 |
| Age of child | –.04 | –.13 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .01 | –.02 | –.03 | –.00 | -.00 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .04 | | .03 | | | | .20*** | | | |

NOTE: U = unstandardized, S = standardized.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

.33 and $p = .55$, respectively). In support of Hypothesis 5, children's self-efficacy beliefs are highly related to their academic success independently of race.

Hypothesis 4 states that mothers' parental efficacy beliefs exert the strongest positive effect on children's self-efficacy and academic success in Black mother-only families and in families with weak marriages. With this in mind, we repeated the analysis for Black families by family context. The White sample is too small for these kinds of analyses. The results partially support the hypothesis.

Maternal efficacy beliefs are only significantly related to the self-efficacy of children in Black single-parent households and among Black families with weak marriages. However, the coefficient estimates are not significantly stronger in these two family contexts than among Black families with strong marriages due to the small number of cases in the three subgroups and the relatively large standard errors. Likewise, the indirect effect of parental efficacy beliefs on children's academic success (mediated by mothers' promotive strategies and children's self-efficacy) is only significant for Black mothers in weak marriages and single-parent households (see Table 3). However, with the reduced sample size, the direct effect of parental efficacy on children's academic success is no longer statistically significant in any type of family context.

As in Table 2, mothers' efficacy beliefs are positively and significantly related to promotive strategies, but these strategies exert no significant effect on children's self-efficacy or academic success, with one notable exception. In strong marriages, the promotive strategies of Black mothers are negatively related to the child's academic success rather than positively as expected, although only at the .10 level of statistical significance. Children's perceived self-efficacy is significantly related to their academic success (Hypothesis 5) independently of family and environmental contexts.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the effects of parental efficacy beliefs and promotive parenting strategies on children's own sense of efficacy and academic success in low-income Philadelphia neighborhoods. As predicted by Hypothesis 1, Black mothers tend to perceive their neighborhoods as more socially isolated and dangerous and less socially integrated and supportive than do White mothers. Black families also tend to reside in more economically deprived areas. The environmental context is clearly not the

**TABLE 3**

**Effects of Mother's Parental Efficacy Beliefs and Promotive Strategies on Child's Self-Efficacy and Academic Success Among Black Families by Family Structure; Multiple Regression Analyses With Selected Controls[a]**

| | *Dependent Variables* | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Mother's Promotive Strategies* | | *Child's Self-Efficacy* | | | | *Child's Academic Success* | | | |
| | *Direct Effects* | | *Direct Effects* | | *Indirect Effects* | | *Direct Effects* | | *Indirect Effects* | |
| *Independent Variables* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* | *U* | *S* |
| Single parent ($n$ = 141) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's parental efficacy | 0.25*** | 0.28 | 0.28* | 0.15 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.22 | 0.13 | 0.10* | 0.06 |
| Mother's promotive strategies | — | — | 0.15 | 0.07 | — | — | 0.11 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.02 |
| Child's self-efficacy | — | — | — | — | — | — | 0.23*** | 0.26 | — | — |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.14*** | | 0.03 | | | | 0.17*** | | | |
| Weak marriage ($n$ = 49) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's parental efficacy | 0.41*** | 0.43 | 1.10*** | 0.42 | –0.24 | –0.09 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.61** | 0.29 |
| Mother's promotive strategies | — | — | –0.59 | –0.22 | — | — | 0.39 | 0.17 | –0.31 | –0.14 |
| Child's self-efficacy | — | — | — | — | — | — | 0.53*** | 0.65 | — | — |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.11* | | 0.15** | | | | 0.40*** | | | |
| Strong marriage ($n$ = 43) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother's parental efficacy | 0.41** | 0.31 | 0.18 | 0.07 | 0.22 | 0.08 | 0.53 | 0.21 | –0.14 | –0.05 |
| Mother's promotive strategies | — | — | 0.53 | 0.27 | — | — | –0.65* | –0.34 | 0.17 | 0.09 |
| Child's self-efficacy | — | — | — | — | — | — | 0.33** | 0.33 | — | — |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.28*** | | –0.04 | | | | 0.16* | | | |

NOTE: U = unstandardized, S = standardized.

a. Statistical controls include mother's education, total family income, and gender and age of child.

*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

same for each racial group. Therefore, Black mothers most likely view their children at greater risk for negative developmental pathways than do White mothers.

We hypothesized that parents with a strong sense of efficacy are most inclined to engage in promotive strategies when circumstances call for their use, such as when their children are at risk. In a dangerous environment, parents with strong efficacy beliefs should be especially active in using preventive and protective measures, thereby enhancing their children's chances for success. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, parental efficacy beliefs are more predictive of promotive strategies among Black mothers than among White mothers, and these beliefs have a stronger effect on children's academic success (but not on children's self-efficacy) in Black families than in White families.

In racially segregated neighborhoods, Black parents tend to perceive more danger than do White parents. In Black low-income neighborhoods, the dangers of drugs, gangs, violence, and crime are often more publicized than in White neighborhoods of similar economic composition. Understandably, Black mothers may believe that more protection efforts are needed to keep their children out of trouble. By contrast, White mothers may not feel such urgency. Indeed, living in socially integrated, White ethnic neighborhoods can be thought of as their primary promotive strategy. This may explain why parental efficacy beliefs are not expressed in promotive parenting strategies among White families.

Furthermore, Black mothers are more likely to employ promotive strategies when they have a son rather than a daughter, whereas the exact opposite is true for White mothers. Again, variations in neighborhood risks and the perceived need for parental control seem likely to account for these differences in parental behavior. The risks and dangers of growing up are substantial for young males in Black neighborhoods, and parents may invest extra effort in their socialization and control, more so than in the lives of their daughters. Among White families, daughters may be regarded as more at risk than sons, especially by the predominantly working-class families of this sample. Gender segregation and an ethos of female protection are pronounced in the White working class.

The effect of family context on promotive parenting strategies also varies by race. Among White families, the stronger the marriage, the more mothers tend to report being actively engaged in the use of promotive strategies with their children. In this racial group, single mothers and mothers in weak marriages are less engaged than mothers in strong marriages. This is what one would expect. Mothers who do not receive social and parenting support from a spouse, either because they are single or be-

cause the marriage is in discord, may not have enough time and energy left to promote the development of their children (e.g., Schneewind, 1995). However, no such difference appears among Black families. Single Black mothers and mothers in weak marriages engage as much in promotive parenting strategies as Black mothers in strong marriages. It may be that Black mothers are so convinced of the urgency to help their children succeed in an adverse environment that they make this task one of their highest priorities regardless of their marital situation.

Surprisingly, and contrary to Hypothesis 3, we find no evidence that promotive strategies are related to children's self-efficacy and their academic success among Black and White families. Why are parental efficacy beliefs more important for children's success than promotive parenting strategies? Compared to these strategies, parental efficacy does not measure what parents do but only what parents believe they can do, specifically, their beliefs in influencing their child's behavior and environment.

One possible explanation for this result is that parents whose children do well feel that they have control over their child and his or her environment, whereas those whose children do poorly blame the environment or the child's character for his or her problems (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Miller, 1988, 1995). This argument is derived from attribution theory, which states that people tend to create self-serving attribution biases by taking credit for the successes they encounter and blaming failures on other people or circumstances (Bradley, 1978; Green & Gross, 1979; Riess, Rosenfeld, Melburg, & Tedeschi, 1981; Sherwood, 1981; Weiner, 1985). However, efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) suggests that a parent's sense of efficacy enhances a child's self-efficacy and academic success by creating an atmosphere of being in control of one's fate. Efficacious parents may be viewed as role models who convey to their children that change and improvements are possible and that they can succeed even in adverse environments (Bandura, 1995; Eccles, 1983; Eccles et al., 1993; Ollendick, 1979; Schneewind, 1995; Whitbeck, 1987).

Parental efficacy beliefs are significantly related to children's self-efficacy beliefs and indirectly related to children's academic success (mediated primarily by children's self-efficacy) in those families that are most disadvantaged with regard to environmental and family contexts (Black single-parent households and Black families with weak marriages). The effects are not statistically significant for Black families in strong marriages. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is partially supported. However, the direct effect of parental efficacy on children's academic success does not reach statistical significance in any family type, probably due to the reduced sample size.

For the group of Black mothers with strong marital bonds, promotive parenting strategies are indeed significantly related to children's academic success, but the effect is negative and not positive as predicted. One possible explanation for this finding and the general lack of statistical significance of the effect of promotive strategies on children's self-efficacy and academic success may be that promotive strategies are a mixture of promoting the child's positive development on one hand and a reaction to the child's behavior problems on the other. Maybe it is in fact not really *pro*active *pre*vention in what some of these parents engage but rather *re*active *inter*vention, a parenting style that is common among the most challenged parents of teenagers. These parents may try to talk and work with the child, get the child involved in after-school programs and good activities, and point out the dangers that can destroy the lives of people after the child has shown signs of trouble either academically or personally. The nonsignificant findings and the negative effect of promotive strategies on children's academic success for Black families with strong marriages suggest a bidirectional model for the relation between these strategies and adolescent success. Promotive parenting strategies may indeed have a positive effect on children's self-efficacy and academic success, but at the same time, children's attitudes and behavior also influence the strategies parents employ (Eccles et al., 1993; McLeod, Kruttschnitt, & Dornfeld, 1994). The cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to test this hypothesis, but future longitudinal studies may be able to examine this issue in greater depth.

Finally, Hypothesis 5 is corroborated by the data. Children's efficacy beliefs are positively and significantly related to their academic success independently of mothers' parental efficacy, promotive parenting strategies, and family and environmental contexts. This suggests that once children have developed a sense of self-efficacy, they are more likely to succeed academically even in the most adverse family and neighborhood environments, which in turn increases their future chances in life (Bandura, 1997). One way to promote a child's self-efficacy appears to be by increasing the mother's beliefs in her own efficacy as a parent.

Future studies need to explore why the relation between parental efficacy beliefs and children's self-efficacy and academic success seems to be stronger than the relation between promotive parenting strategies and these adolescent outcome measures. Perhaps efficacious parents engage in supportive behavior that is not captured by the measures of promotive parenting strategies employed in this study, such as the confidence they express in overcoming difficulties and setbacks. This sense of self may be more valuable for children's development than any amount of after-school

programs and activities. Until these questions are answered, it is not clear if parents should be encouraged to engage in more promotive strategies or conversely, if we first need to help parents to gain the necessary confidence that they can indeed improve their children's chances in life. If the latter is true, offering more after-school programs and activities for children in low-income neighborhoods without convincing parents of the programs' presumed beneficial effect on their children may impede the programs' expected success.

We used Furstenberg's (1993) qualitative study to generate some of our hypotheses and to test them with a larger quantitative data set. However, as is often the case with quantitative research, the results have generated more questions. Hence, it may be appropriate to reanalyze Furstenberg's qualitative data in light of the quantitative findings. For example, what is the meaning of promotive parenting strategies for children? Why are these strategies unrelated to children's self-efficacy beliefs and their academic success? The quantitative study asked how often parents did certain promotive activities for or with their child. However, it may be that the frequency is less important than the meaning these activities have for the child and the underlying message it conveys to them. In this regard, some activities may be more significant in promoting children's self-efficacy and academic success than others. Moreover, use of the qualitative data may enable researchers to investigate the processes that help children with efficacious mothers develop a sense of self-efficacy themselves. What exactly do efficacious mothers do to become a role model for their children and to pass their sense of efficacy on to them? How do children perceive their highly efficacious mothers, and conversely, how do children perceive mothers who are low on parental efficacy? Finally, the qualitative data may shed further light on the relationship between parenting practices and neighborhood contexts.

It is not clear how generalizable these results are to other areas. It may be that families in rural areas and in more affluent urban neighborhoods behave more like the White families than the Black families in this sample regardless of their racial and ethnic background. It is also likely that White parents who live in anomic neighborhoods are more similar to the Black families in this study than to White parents who live in socially integrated neighborhoods. That is, parental efficacy may have a significant effect on promotive strategies primarily when children are most at risk, although parental efficacy per se seems to have an overall beneficial effect on adolescents' self-efficacy and academic success independent of their specific circumstances. Subsequent research in areas other than racially segregated, high-risk, inner-city neighborhoods will need to explore these issues further.

## APPENDIX
## Correlation Matrix for Black Families ($n$ = 233) and White Families ($n$ = 121)

| *Variables* | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* | *8* | *9* | *10* | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mother's parenting efficacy | | .34*** | .20*** | .24*** | .04 | .06 | –.03 | –.08 | –.07 | –.17*** | 3.25 | 0.42 |
| 2. Mother's promotive strategies | .10 | | .10 | .10 | .10 | .10 | –.02 | –.05 | .13** | –.20*** | 2.13 | 0.40 |
| 3. Child's self-efficacy | .21** | –.01 | | .41*** | .01 | .10 | .02 | –.08 | –.12* | .02 | 5.17 | 0.90 |
| 4. Child's academic competence | .20** | .13 | .37*** | | .19*** | .20*** | –.04 | –.04 | –.20*** | –.02 | –0.02 | 0.80 |
| 5. Mother's education | .09 | .05 | .15 | .33*** | | .35*** | –.09 | .06 | –.07 | –.12* | 12.78 | 0.85 |
| 6. Total family income | .13 | .01 | .21** | .18** | .36*** | | –.34*** | .19*** | .00 | .02 | 3.46 | 1.50 |
| 7. Single mother (1 = yes) | –.18** | –.13 | –.11 | –.16* | –.05 | –.52*** | | –.64*** | –.05 | –.00 | 0.61 | 0.49 |
| 8. Low marital quality (1 = yes) | –.02 | –.06 | –.01 | –.01 | –.13 | .22** | –.49*** | | –.03 | .11* | 0.21 | 0.41 |
| 9. Gender of child (1 = male) | –.18** | –.14 | –.08 | –.13 | .05 | .11 | –.11 | –.09 | | –.11 | 0.44 | 0.50 |
| 10. Age of child | –.08 | –.15* | .03 | –.08 | –.11 | .26*** | –.08 | .02 | .12 | | 12.54 | 0.31 |
| *M* | 3.19 | 1.91 | 5.25 | 0.10 | 12.43 | 4.50 | 0.32 | 0.33 | 0.54 | 12.64 | | |
| *SD* | 0.41 | 0.40 | 0.82 | 0.78 | 1.86 | 1.66 | 0.47 | 0.47 | 0.50 | 1.23 | | |

NOTE: Correlations for Black families appear above the diagonal; correlations for White families appear below the diagonal.
*$p \leq .10$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$.

## NOTES

1. Cronbach's alpha may in fact not be the right measure to determine the reliability of this scale. For example, to engage in proactive prevention, it is not required that parents get their children involved in good activities in the neighborhood and also in good activities outside the neighborhood. Either activity could be considered a proactive prevention.

2. PRELIS 2.20 performs a test of multivariate normality for continuous variables. The hypothesis that the continuous variables in the model follow a multivariate distribution cannot be rejected for the Black families ($\chi^2 = 5.38$; $p = .07$) or the White families ($\chi^2 = 5.29$; $p = .07$) in the sample.

3. Ten of the 39 White single mothers and 23 of the 141 Black single mothers live with a partner. However, the results of all analyses basically remain the same if mothers in these live-in partnerships are treated as married rather than single.

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Research literature on fatherhood has featured a critical perspective on men's attitudes toward family life, their style of parenting, and the amount they participate in myriad aspects of daily parenting. This qualitative study explores the resourcefulness of men and women in families dedicated to organizing their family life to involve fathers. A tag-team pattern of sharing parenting emerged as a key to their success. While agreeing on the fundamentals of child care, these mothers and fathers valued differences in what each parent contributes to the tag team. Both men and women in the research couples highlighted the pragmatic benefit of approaching parenting as a tag team requiring the full and unique contribution of each partner (mother and father). Pragmatic aspects of a tag team allow each partner to maintain certain specializations while remaining essentially interchangeable in function if not in form.

# Make Room for Daddy

## The Pragmatic Potentials of a Tag-Team Structure for Sharing Parenting

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Observers of family life in the past decade have seen a rich collage of fatherhood images and scholarship. We might conclude men are reluctant participants in family work despite dramatically changed social conditions. Alternatively, we could conclude fatherhood is in vogue and men are readily embracing the life of the enlightened father. Supporting the first view, socioeconomic studies report significant shifts in women's workforce participation and economic status with little attendant decrease in their responsibilities for family life (for a review of Canadian statistics and research studies, see Armstrong, 1993; for U.S. perspectives, see Hood, 1993; Lamb, 1997; Pleck, 1987, 1997). This literature focuses on the limited quantity and quality of men's participation in families. Associated research has deepened our appreciation of women's "double duty" (Hochschild, 1989); the "asynchrony between the culture and conduct of

Author's Note: *I wish to acknowledge the 36 men and women in 18 couples who so graciously shared their time, their narratives of what it takes to create opportunities for sharing parenting fully, and the invitation to think differently about the pragmatics of collaborating to create mutually satisfying equity in their parenting relationships. I thank the three anonymous reviewers for astute critique and suggestions to sharpen my thinking and writing about this research.*

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fatherhood" (La Rossa, 1988); the distinctions and disparities in men's and women's participation in the activity, engagement, and responsibility of child rearing (Lamb, 1987, 1997; La Rossa, 1988); and differences in men's and women's perceived experience of choice regarding involvement in child rearing (Backett, 1982).

A common thread in this broad literature is its critical perspective on men's attitudes toward the family side of life, their style of parenting, and the amount they participate in the myriad aspects of daily family life. Doherty's (1991) critique of this literature highlighted the pervasiveness of a "deficit-model" lens evident in studies on men in families. Early fatherhood literature by and large features what Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) critiqued as the role-inadequacy perspective. They suggested the role-inadequacy perspective obscures a more complete and complex view of fathering. The role-inadequacy perspective tends to simplify and stultify the deep texture of men's experience of and contribution to family life (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). It rests on a standard of comparison with women (Day & Mackey, 1989); it is against mothers that fathers come up short in their participation and contributions. Our ideals and cultural models of motherhood then become the template for men as they fashion ways of participating in family life, as if motherhood is itself a universal experience. Furthermore, although some idealized motherhood template may be useful for understanding some aspects of what parenthood entails, it limits the scope of inquiry into diverse experiences of fatherhood. Comparative analysis is ultimately valuable; a potential trap lies in the tendency to privilege one way over another rather than value both ways for both their similar and unique contributions.

Some recent academic literature (see Cohen, 1987, 1991, 1993; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Marsiglio, 1991, 1993; Snarey, 1993) offers an alternate perspective on the current fatherhood collage. This literature outlines the potential positive effect on men when they become fathers (C. P. Cowan & Bronstein, 1988; P. Cowan, 1988; Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1987) as well as the potential positive influence men have on their children (Lamb, 1981, 1997; Lewis & O'Brien, 1987; Pederson, 1981; Yogman, Cooley, & Kindlon, 1988). Qualitative research focusing on men's experience of fatherhood explores the absence of good male role models for fatherhood (Daly, 1993a, 1993b), men's experience of single parenting (Hanson, 1985; Risman, 1986), and men who are the primary caregivers in families (Lutwin & Siperstein, 1985; Radin, 1988). Other literature has provided valuable understanding and critique of men's participation in the division of child care in families (Backett, 1982; Ehrenshaft, 1990; Gerson, 1993; LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981).

Recent work by Pleck (1997) and Levine and Pittinsky (1997) suggested we may be getting closer to gender equity in parenting and coparenting than has been previously documented in the literature. The study reported here is focused on exploring these trends in families. It looks specifically at men's and women's experiences in families where they have intentionally organized their family life to actively involve fathers in child care. This research features a specifically selected group of women and men who have creatively constructed pragmatic patterns to cooperatively and actively share parenting in their daily family life. The study took as its starting point a focus on the "everyday world as problematic" (Smith, 1987). The basic research questions asked were What are the experiences of men and women as they work out shared parenting arrangements? and How do they work out the processes of keeping their parenthood experiences shared? The focus was on the pragmatic ways men and women worked out handling the prosaic issues of daily care for their children and home. In accord with Belsky and Volling's (1987) critique of the fatherhood literature, the study was framed within a family systems perspective on the multiinteractional influences among family members, especially in the parental system. Finally, as suggested in Doherty's (1991) critique of the study of men in families, this study was framed to explore possible alternatives to a deficit perspective in arriving at an understanding about men's experiences of sharing parenting actively with their female partner. By featuring family resourcefulness and apparent success in achieving a high degree of father involvement, this study reports on key pragmatic strategies that can support men in achieving a high degree of father involvement.

The research reported here is located within a social constructionist framework to explicitly explore the resourcefulness of men and women selected specifically for their self-reported commitment to share parenting responsibilities and activities fully. The concept of a parenting tag team emerged as a prominent and pragmatic parenting arrangement. Simply put, the tag-team pattern of sharing parenting is one where fathers and mothers regularly on-off shift times of being the on-duty parent in charge of caring for the child during various times on any given day and over the course of a week, a month, or a year.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodologies are particularly pertinent for the study of family experiences (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992). Consistent

with the assumptions of these methodologies, the goal of this phenomenological research was to look into the deep texture and meanings as they emerge out of the everyday experiences of men and women actively working together to raise their children. Accordingly, the open and emergent design of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the long qualitative interview was the methodology of choice for the work. The interviews were open ended; data analysis was consistent with the principles of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Men and women were interviewed to explore the ways that both fathers and mothers construct fatherhood. The interviews focused on their beliefs, expectations, behaviors, and reflective experiences. This author conducted all of the interviews. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim.

As with any self-report interview research, the methodology limited the prospect of taking an "objective" perspective. However, several practices were introduced to increase the potential to encompass a critical view. These included the following:

a. Interviews with the woman and the man were conducted sequentially (without the partner present) in the same session to minimize the opportunity for them to synchronize their stories. The women were asked explicitly about aspects of their parenting arrangements that in their view limited the full sharing of responsibilities and activities.
b. The selection process included an implicit check on self-reports of being a shared parenting couple (see sample selection description that follows).
c. Analysis of the textual data included explicit critical attention to consistencies and inconsistencies between the narratives of the father and the mother in each shared parenting couple. Nonetheless, surprisingly few differences between the man and the woman emerged when exploring the pragmatics of the tag-team arrangements reported here.

The study targeted a specific subset of families, those where it was apparent to an outside observer that the man was fully involved in the active parenting of the couple's children. Thus, a combination of convenience referral and snowball referral was employed to obtain a sample of 18 shared parenting couples. The following three selection criteria had to be met: (a) Both the woman and the man agreed he was an active and fully participating father in everyday family life; (b) they had at least one child between the ages of 2 and 6 years, and at the time of the first interview, none of their children were in their teen years; and (c) they had to be a first family of biological children.

The selection criteria were designed to draw on some common experiences thought to be associated with families with young children. Carter and McGoldrick (1988) identified "accepting new members into the system" as the primary task for families with young children. The following two major challenges facing families with young children are salient to studying shared parenting patterns: adjusting marital system to make space for children and joining child-rearing, financial, and household tasks (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988).

The study was designed to maximize the potential of capturing common ways men and women organized their family life during a life stage when the demands for parenting activities, especially for the physical care of the child, are high. Obviously, the demands of parenting can be high during other stages in the family life cycle. Studying parents with school-age children and/or adolescents would also yield important data on how fathers can be actively involved. The particular selection criteria in this study were imposed to limit potential confounding diversity at this exploratory phase.

All of the research interviews began with the same orienting questions asking people to describe a typical day and week in their family life. The researcher followed up with questions to focus the description explicitly on how they shared the myriad responsibilities of caring for their children and balancing work and family. Participants were also asked to describe how they came to the decision to organize their family life this way. The researcher followed the participants' descriptions and asked clarifying questions as well as explicitly asked each participant to give examples of when/where/how their shared parenting arrangement was more difficult and/or problematic. This area of the interview generated minimal data. Thus, over the course of each interview, the researcher asked the participants what in their view allowed their shared parenting arrangement to work for him or her and how they thought it affected his or her partner. This strategy ultimately resulted in more textual data being generated that focused on their resourcefulness and their perceived success.

Individual interviews with the men and the women in these 18 couples generated the primary textual data. In addition, follow-up couple interviews with 6 of the 18 families were conducted to enrich the data and serve as a check against emerging themes of tag-team parenting. The 6 couples were selected on the basis of nuances of difference in the pragmatic scheduling the families used to balance work outside the home and family life. The data generated in these 6 selected couple interviews confirmed the

strength of the tag-team structure as a way to facilitate the couple's ability to collaboratively share parenting responsibilities.

The average age of the couples in this study was 38 years and 36 years for men and women, respectively. Although there was a wide range of educational and occupational experiences, for the most part, both the men and the women would be seen as well educated and basically living middle-class lifestyles. The 18 families represented several different configurations of family structure: 3 families were dual earners, 3 families job shared, in 4 families the woman worked part time, in 2 families the man worked part-time, and there were 3 stay-at-home dads and 3 stay-at-home moms. The annual income for the 18 families was reported to range from $10,000 (1 family) to just over $140,000 (1 family), with an average income of approximately $50,000. Two families had only one child, 11 families had two children, and 5 families had three children.

## DISCUSSION: TAG-TEAM PARENTING

All 18 couples know the economic/financial imperative for one or both parents to work in paid employment to sustain the basic necessities of daily life. Juggling the competing demands between family work and paid employment for their time, energy, and personal resources is a very real part of their everyday lives and could be considered a central problematic in their everyday experience. These 18 couples have developed pragmatic family patterns that enable both the man and the woman to be actively involved parents—they share the responsibilities and tasks of parenthood fully—as well as sustaining the family economy with paid employment.

Both men's and women's discourses were full of stories about how they take turns being the parent who is in charge or on duty. They talked about taking "shifts" in being the on-duty caregiver. All of the fathers and mothers frequently used words such as *team* and *tag team*, *spelling each other*, and *shifts*. A focused exploration into the pragmatics of this approach to managing daily family life led to the conceptual framework of tag-team parenting.

### WHAT'S IN THE LANGUAGE?

Unpacking the common meanings of *team* serves as a springboard for understanding some of the subtle complexities hidden in these couples' depictions of a parenting tag team. In common parlance, a team is often thought of as a group of persons associated together in work/activity. A

team also connotes some notion of collaboration—or joint working toward a shared goal. Underlying what these men and women described as their parenting arrangements was their stated fundamental commitment to shared goals: First, they were committed to the father's full involvement in caring for and raising their children. Second, generally speaking, they were committed to that most taken-for-granted notion of raising their children well.

### FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENT TO SHARE PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Because most parents might mention a similar shared goal regarding raising their children well, the question became first one of distinguishing these particular parents from parents in general. A distinguishing feature of these research findings is how these parents defined raising their children well to mean both parents were to be highly involved in the daily care of the child (see Dienhart, 1998, for a full explication of this guiding commitment). The commitments these men and women make to each other and to their children are essential lights guiding them through everyday experiences of sharing parenting. Their narratives clarified how these fathers and mothers created unusual yet pragmatic structures to make this happen in ways they reported they found satisfactory.

A second question, whether their parenting team was organized around traditional hierarchical ideas of primary parent or some other notion of nonhierarchical cooperation, was particularly salient to the tag-team construct. Because these men and women had clearly created a relatively nonhierarchical pattern for sharing parenting, I wondered what foundational aspects of sharing were embedded in the tag-team structure.

### MATCHED TEAM: STRONG, COMPETENT TEAM PLAYERS

Generally, both the men and women described themselves in a nonhierarchical position relative to their partner when it came to parenting. Their narratives depicted both partners—the mother and the father—as equally strong team players. Being a strong team player and believing your partner is also a strong team player seemed crucial for creating and maintaining an actively shared parenting experience. Having worked out a tag-team structure that required both the mother and the father to be active in the parenting trenches daily allowed these men and women to acknowledge each other's competence. They both talked about feeling comfortable having their partner actively involved in raising the children. For ex-

ample, Kelly, along with many other women in the research, spoke with obvious joy when describing her experience of her partner's competence and participation in covering the child care responsibilities. Kelly, a woman in her mid-30s with one young daughter, works full-time in the management team of a social service agency. She said,

> As much as I have a tendency to sort of like things to be done a certain way—I mean I have sort of a way I like the house to be tidy and everything—I felt, well, in this case there are different ways of doing things. So right from the beginning, we've had different ways of doing things. . . . I think by the time Amy was born, I owed it to him to let him be as much of a parent as I am. There would be no [way], I would have no right to hold onto the mother thing as being more important or more crucial than the father's responsibility. . . . I think I always felt how important it is to him—plus he's just really good at it.

It is not particularly unusual for men to think of their partners as good mothers and a good parenting partner. It is more remarkable that the mothers in this study spoke of believing their husbands were strong, competent parenting partners. This may be a crucial difference between the women and men in this study and previous research suggesting mothers tend to be skeptical about men's commitment to child care and their relative competence as parenting partners.

*Valuing differences*. Once a couple had negotiated the core commitment to share parenting actively, with full involvement of the father, the issue of differences between them could take on expanded potential. The men and women talked about how agreeing on the essentials allowed them to value the contribution each partner made rather than comparing and judging, which could lock them into an implicit hierarchy, especially one that privileged the mother's way of doing things. As heard in Kelly's narrative, the women and men in these couples indicated a clear recognition about how they each do some things differently. Both the woman and the man can cover the basic functions of parenting, but they may have different forms or ways of getting the jobs done. In talking about managing parenthood's myriad responsibilities, I heard both men and women acknowledge how they believe they each have relative strengths and weaknesses in their repertoire of skills and specialties. They typically concluded that valuing their differences strengthened their potential to create an effective parenting tag team.

For example, in separate interviews, Rodney and Kate expressed their awareness of differences. Their story, similar to many others in the study,

richly highlighted differences. They also seemed to want me to appreciate how despite having times of feeling they are each doing too much, ultimately they feel a general level of satisfaction with their team work. Essentially, the individual women's and men's narratives suggested any burdensome feelings typically emanate from the scale of the demands on their time and energy, not from their partner's lack of cooperation and participation. Rodney and Kate are a couple in their early 30s with two children; both parents work full time. They said,

> Rodney: Kate tends to find the big things [like] transporting the kids around, back and forth to school and that kind of thing [as] being a priority for her. And I kind of tend to think of around here [the home] as my priority, making meals and cleaning up, doing dishes, chores those types of things. . . . There are times when I think or I expect that she should be doing more than what I'm actually doing. Sometimes I get cheesed off about that, but I know she's out doing other things and I kind of think, "Well that's fine."
>
> Kate: There are times when I really sit and think, try to think things through. When I've listened to people talk about the differences between mothers and fathers. Most of the time, I think that we have things pretty, pretty even. Pretty balanced. But there are still times when I think that I carry the burden and it just ticks me off. . . . But I don't even think I can identify a time when it's been Rodney who has been putting that [burden] back on me. . . . I tend to take on a lot of outside things for work. . . . We've also discovered that we never sort of reach the breaking point at the same time.

*With differences comes conflict*. As with most couples, both Rodney and Kate mentioned the edge of potential conflict associated with the presence of differences. Both mothers and fathers recognized the need to walk a fine line between feeling burdened by all that they are doing in this partnership and appreciating what each other does to keep it going. Sometimes walking that fine line is more challenging than at other times. In those more challenging times, these men and women said they were likely to have some minor conflicts. However, both women and men were clear that during these conflicts they tried to hold onto their larger vision of family life and their commitment to each other to share in parenting. This vision and commitment seemed to allow them to trust they would work through any conflict. They could return to exploring the current arrangements, recognize the contribution each was willing to make, and then focus on finding a pragmatic approach to resolving the current conflict.

Dan, for example, recalled a conversation when he believed he and his partner came to a face-to-face realization about their harsh individual realities of juggling all the demands of balancing the family-work interface

while fully sharing their parenting. As his narrative suggests, by sharing their individual perceptions of how burdened they each felt, they averted serious divisive conflict. By talking it out, they regained perspective on the unique challenges they had created by doing family life differently. Dan, who is with his children about 60% of his time, said,

> It's funny, you know, we talked about [our sharing] the other night—we talk about it now and then—we had a really big discussion a couple of months ago. Well I was getting really cheesed off because I was doing all this work, looking after the kids, cleaning the house, and I was really feeling, gosh Dan, you're a marvelous guy. You know, you're such a wonderful new age man, doing all this stuff, getting all these really mega points, brownie points doing all this stuff and enabling Liz to work full time and she should be really grateful. You know—she really owes me. And Liz was feeling—I'm working full time, I'm never home with my kids, I'm doing, I'm out here in this workplace, battling away, doing this working, putting up with this pressure so that Dan can be home with the kids and do his thing in Stonevale. You know he really owes me. We both thought the other was so in debt, and it was a very funny conversation when it came out. . . . There are conflicts. It's not easy doing what we're doing because we're not running down anybody else's tracks. There are no channels for the fluid in our relationship to easily run and we have to dig them as we go and it does get difficult.

Dan's words, similar to the narratives of several other men and women, highlighted the difficulty of juggling multiple demands of family life and paid work for both partners. These difficulties were especially apparent as they try to cocreate a shared way of doing this while having no models, no clear guides as to how it can be done. Basically, these fathers and mothers are creating the rules and patterns as they go along, as they pragmatically solve parenting and family management issues typically encountered in the daily flow of life.

Although the men and the women in these 18 families spoke frequently about differences, they said very little, even when prompted by the researcher, about divisive conflict. People talked about how differences in their respective ways of doing things were to be expected and were quite apparent between them. When pressed to talk about conflict in their relationship, both men and women acknowledged how they can and do get irritated with each other at times. Typically, however, their disagreements or arguments were not experienced as serious divisive conflicts because they were not dealing with fundamental issues. Again, these people went back to their basic beliefs about sharing the responsibilities and activities of family life. Negotiating to find pragmatic solutions was a part of these basic beliefs. There was no evidence of women or men wavering from their

fundamental guiding philosophy even when it came to working out their differences.

### SPELLING EACH OTHER—A PRAGMATIC PRACTICE OF AN EFFECTIVE TAG TEAM

Embedded in the metaphor of a tag team is the pragmatic potential for each team member to spell each other. This fits with how these couples described their tag team. Members of a tag team relieve each other, taking turns being the person of immediate and primary involvement in a given parenting situation, pooling the best efforts of each team member to accomplish the tasks at hand. The tag team is a cooperative effort to maximize the team's chances of managing the parenting tasks at hand. In using the language of a tag team in their narratives, both men and women often went on to talk about the benefits of their partner spelling them. Spelling each other is a central pragmatic practice of a tag team. For example, in Carol's narrative, she, similar to others, talked about the potential for both partners to experience the relief of being spelled:

> I think we pick up each other's slack a lot of times because, you know, one or the other of us may get overloaded, or just be at our wit's end and the other one hasn't, maybe hasn't been dealing with the kids or the situation. So, you say "Okay it's time for me to take that over for a little while or give the other person a break."

Both men and women expressed appreciation for the relief they said they felt when their partner came into an interaction just as he or she was about to "lose it" with a child or no longer had the energy to be effective. Their perception of this experience of relief was set against the backdrop of "We're in this endeavor together" (Erik)—a sense of their joint responsibility. Karen's narrative conveyed this quite clearly. She stressed her appreciation about not having to experience it or handle it alone as being a big relief. Karen is in her mid-30s with three children between the age of 7 and 3 years. She is the designated stay-at-home parent during the day and works part-time some evenings and most weekends in retail sales. She said,

> Just having somebody there who you can count on, who's as much involved as you are to sort of spot for you. You know you're not on 24 hours a day sort of thing. There are times when the kids are sick and up through the night and you know that there's two of you who can do it. . . . You just know that there's always somebody there.

**THE PRAGMATIC POTENTIAL OF TAKING TURNS: MEN'S EXPERIENCES OF BEING *IT***

The tag-team metaphor goes beyond merely spelling each other to get some immediate relief from the demands of parenting. It suggests each parent has regularly scheduled turns of being *it*—of being the team member who is actively exerting the physical, mental, and emotional energy to interact with the children in routine and nonroutine daily events, of being the parent who has full responsibility for handling any parenting demand that may arise during his or her time on full parenting duty. Organizing shared parenting as a tag team means each parent has specific times of being the only parent on full duty. These parents regularly on-off shift their full duty parenting times over the course of any given week. This on-off shifting pragmatically accommodates their schedules in their paid employment.

Given the pervasive presence of a motherhood culture in North America (Dienhart & Daly, 1997) and the tendency to depict fathers as deficient in comparison (Doherty, 1991), I explored how men experienced their turn at being it or not it on the tag team. Jason's description speaks to some important nuances of what being it carries for men. Jason, a man in his early 40s, has two children and works full-time as owner/executive of a successful business. He said,

> If I'm totally responsible for Mike for a small segment of time, or a large segment of time, the feeling is different [than] when we're together with Mike . . . almost a freedom . . . a liberation. A freedom that I'm the one who's responsible. I know it sounds funny because it sounds like it should be a burden, but in a sense, it's kind of a freedom that I'm not having to second guess what the right thing to do is. I'm just doing what I feel the right thing to do is. . . . [When Hillary is present], I feel more inadequate as a parent. It feels like maybe if I felt liberated on one side, I feel inhibited [on the other side].

As Jason's description suggests, there may be both a freedom and some constraints inherent in being it on a tag team. His narrative suggests being it carries both privileges and power and burdens and powerlessness. While a father is it, he has the privilege of parenting in his own way, yet he may also be in the spotlight and his partner may be on the sidelines watching, anticipating how his turn as it might shape her turn coming up. In a sense, he may be calling the various parenting moves; he can rely on his own ways of doing things as the pertinent reference point; he can set the pace, he has some control or choice over how he is it. At the same time, being in

the spotlight carries with it an awareness of others' gaze, a potential that was particularly salient for some fathers.

*Men's hesitation to become it*. When a man spoke about a hesitation to take his turn as it, he often mentioned some sensitivity about the potential that his partner would be watching how he was carrying out his parenting activities. This sensitivity to the mother's gaze may be an artifact associated with our cultural tendency to see women as the experts in the private domain of family, especially on issues of child care. The men's narratives implied a concern at times about being judged by women. These fathers talked about how any hesitation to be it was more pronounced in the initial days of being a tag-team parent; these early feelings of tentativeness and reservations about being judged seemed to fade as he gained experience being it on the tag team.

The fathers who routinely spend more time with their children than their partners do were the least likely to be concerned about being judged by women, especially after they had come through the first few months of actively parenting. The narratives from other men resonated with tones of self-conscious monitoring during their early turns at being it. In this, men seemed to be suggesting their tag-team arrangements allowed them to experience efficacy as a parent when they were not parenting right next to their partner. These fathers said they were more able to let go of concern about comparison with their partner when they were it and their partner was not present. Times of being it solo (during their regularly scheduled on-duty primary parent days) allowed fathers to build up an experiential base of their own expertise. Being it allowed fathers to build confidence that stayed with them later, even when their tag-team partner (the mother) was present. Early hesitation and doubt later give way to delight as the father not only discovered his capabilities but found real enjoyment of being it. For example, Bill, a man in his mid-40s who stays at home with two young children during the day and works part-time evenings and weekends, said,

> The first 3 or 4 or 6 months were very frustrating. Very confusing I suppose. I just wasn't prepared for the job and didn't really realize what it entailed and I think it took me that long to adjust. Now I like this, I know how to do it and I know I do it fairly well and I can relate [to it] really well too.

*Men's readiness to be it*. Men were also clearly aware how at other times, the mother as his tag-team partner may not be as ready as he was to

have her relinquish her turn and let him be it. Everett's narrative suggests an obvious readiness to be it when he came home from work. Everett, a man in his late 30s, has two children. Both he and his partner work full-time; he works as a manager in the financial industry. He said,

> She had this baby all day long during that [first] 3 months. I mean I was the break at night. She was a good baby, which was a bonus, but it was kind of like [it's] my turn. I want her now, you know!

Everett's words echoed the experience of several men in the study. Many of the men's narratives suggested a clear assumption that the father would be and want to be it when he is home. These fathers said they organized their work life so that they could be available for maximum participation in family life.

*What about refusing to take a turn at being it?* Men's apparent desire and willingness to be it left me wondering about times when either partner might choose to not be it—or not it—or refused to be it. I wondered what might be the dynamics if both partners wanted to be it or not it at the same time. The possibility for these occurrences seemed to be greatest when both parents were apparently available to be it (i.e., not at their jobs outside the home). Indeed, men and women spoke about times when they both felt not up to being it or both wanted to be the designated it in a situation.

For example, Phil and Kelly's narratives highlighted some of these dynamics. They, similar to other couples, shared stories that included times when both partners were in the same position of either wanting or not wanting to be it and needing to figure out who would be it. This excerpt from Kelly's narrative highlights the not-it side:

> I think the main benefit is the relationship—that it [being a tag team] gets everything done and we don't have to fight about it. There's no fight about "It's your turn to do this" or "She's your child you watch her!" There's not much resentment about being shouldered with the responsibility. I'm tired of being [the main driver to all the places she has to go] right now, but it's just circumstances, I mean, it just—this is the way it worked out that my job happens to be that close. It's ludicrous to think that he would travel all that extra distance to take her places when I'm right there. . . . About right now is when I'm pretty worn out with it [partner's busy work schedule] because I feel like I'm carrying more of the emotional load too because he's tired. Like he's tired but he's in a situation where he has to just keep his head down and keep doing it for another few weeks, I think most of the work is going to be done, out of the way for this big client [soon]. . . . It's just that when he

> isn't as busy, the weekends are more open, he's just a lot more relaxed and a lot less distracted. . . . I think the reality is when he's here, if you took a calendar and marked it out day by day, despite his schedule, he still bathes her and puts her to bed equally to when I do. And he still is here most mornings when she gets up. So, nothing much is changed for her . . . the law of averages of getting her to bed, and the time spent on weekends—sometimes it's a bit more tradey-offey. You know, I'll be with her and then he'll need to [be with her]—or he'll be with her and then he'll need to sleep, that kind of thing, but she still gets lots of time with him.

Kelly spoke about times when she perceived they both felt quite exhausted, each realizing their daughter needed parenting attention despite their states of mind. Her narrative suggests couples may find themselves shifting around times to be not it—determined by some pragmatic assessment of which partner most needed to be not it. In their stories about these experiences, the notion of goodwill hovers in the backdrop. Goodwill between tag-team partners seemed to enable Kelly, in this particular example, as the partner who became it by default at times when Phil's work was extraordinarily demanding, to trust her need to be not it would be honored in future. She, similar to other women, came back repeatedly to how even in these busy work times, Phil organized his work time to continue his involvement with their daughter—especially around morning and evening routines.

Coming back to exploring the pragmatics of taking turns being it on a parenting tag team, I wondered about times when one partner might refuse to be it. I did not hear about these times in their experience. I speculated this dynamic may have been a possibility for them, but it was not elicited by my questioning. Yet, these couples often noted the absence of significant power struggles between them. The structured way these tag-team parents on-off shift their on-duty parenting time may allow them to avoid power struggles. They negotiate their child care shifts to accommodate work schedules as well as to respect individual needs for off-duty times. They seem to feel the option of choosing some not-it duty at times over the course of a week eliminates the need to refuse to be it. A conversation between Patrick and Daphne highlights how tag-team parents' ways of dealing with issues had shifted since they had children.

> Patrick: I don't think we have a lot of power struggles—we don't have the time, I don't have the time, I don't have the desire, I don't have the need to get into a power struggle with Daphne. I probably used to before we had kids, but I don't think, I mean, I just think that there's probably come a time in our life where it's life experience and maturity—it's just not an issue. It's not an is-

> sue for me. . . . I know what she's good at. I know what she's best at, and she knows the same thing about me, so there's no big need to [get into a power struggle].
>
> Daphne: I really can't say that we've really had any power struggles. Now I know you're not going to believe me because the books don't say that [laughter], but I really don't think that we have like [power struggles].

The semantic difference between choosing, refusing, and default positions—as well as the perceived experiential differences in these stances given the general sense of goodwill and their commitment to sharing—warranted closer critical examination. The closest example of refusing to be it came from the couples who were in transition from previous patterns of more traditionally gendered parenting to one of more equal sharing of all responsibilities. The women in these transitional couples felt quite justified in raising the issue of inequity if the man's participation in their shared parenting arrangements and routines began to slip. Because these couples had explicitly negotiated new sharing arrangements, these women felt they had the grounds and the platform for holding the father accountable for his share.

*What about stepping in, taking over as it?* The routines and experiences people described in their tag-team narratives left me wondering about times when one partner might be tempted to step in, take over being it when the other partner was taking a turn at being it. Women mentioned they often feel a temptation to step in and described how they made decisions to stay out; this discourse was seldom present in men's narratives. This seems consistent with the pervasive cult of motherhood (Dienhart & Daly, 1997) and the presence of maternal gatekeeping (De Luccie, 1995; Thompson & Walker, 1989) found in our culture. Cheryl's narrative expresses aspects of women's struggle to let go, to step away from explicit maternal gatekeeping. Cheryl, a designated stay-at-home parent with three children, also works part-time starting up a retail business out of their home:

> I've been more conscious these past few months of really trying hard not to take over when I know he can handle the situation. One day I was in the shower and I heard one of the kids get hurt. Ned fell off a chair or something and he wanted to come to where I was and he stood outside the door pounding. Well, I was ready to get out of the shower and I thought, "No, no, no. Daddy can do it." I could hear Erik [partner] calming him down and giving him hugs and his cuddles and kissing wherever it hurt and doing everything that I would do and I thought, "Okay, I don't have to get out of the shower." I came out [later] and he felt really good that he'd been able to do it and he

> didn't have to call me and I felt good that I'd been able to sit back and listen and hear that he did all of that without having to think "O geez, I have to get out of the shower, get back in the shower, it's going to be cold"—and it was nice. There are different times as I've come along with each of the children that I've stood back and kind of watched and stepped—stepped right back out of the picture to let him do that. It's just reminding myself to do it. I have to remind myself that Erik's a capable adult and that I don't have to do everything for the children.

Exploring other times when the partners saw themselves as both simultaneously it—working together rather than spelling each other—revealed how parenting together was a bit more complex. One aspect of the complexity during such times in family life is the fact that it may be simultaneously most tempting for the mother to step in and most opportune for the father to hang back and let her take over. Both men and women talked about how their weekend time, while usually treasured as precious family time, could entice them to fall into traditional gender scripts. They spoke about having to work diligently to avoid these temptations. Talk about these times, although quite general, revealed how they saw these periods as times they are both being it—times when they were both in the arena, ready and willing to be involved with their children as the situation unfolded. They talked about being fairly pragmatic about who would step into any given parenting situation. It could be a matter of whoever was in the closest proximity to the child, or they took turns over the course of the family day, or they relied on established patterns of specialization (see following discussion). This area requires further research, especially from an observational perspective, to explore the subtleties of how men and women who have engaged in a tag-team arrangement to share parenting work to minimize the potential to slip into a woman-as-primary-parent pattern.

## TAG-TEAM PARENTING: A DIALECTIC BETWEEN INTERCHANGEABILITY AND SPECIALIZATION

Both men's and women's narratives often highlighted perceived differences in individual preferences, relative standards, or expertise in certain areas of everyday family life. At first glance, the notions of *specialization* and *interchangeability* seem somewhat contradictory. On closer scrutiny, I noticed both men and women described the necessary coexistence of these two mechanisms. Specialization, as a pragmatic practice, seems to allow them to claim certain ways of being and separate responsibility for the handling of selected jobs in the family that essentially acknowledges

their individual differences. These tag-team couples suggested they did not expect themselves to be equal in the sense that they were indistinguishable from each other but to manage a division of labor with an eye on sharing to cover all the bases of child care. At the same time, men's and women's narratives often noted they believe their involvement in tag-team parenthood required certain degrees of interchangeability with their partner. Interchangeability, as another key in the pragmatic arrangements, was talked about in terms of either the father or mother covering all the activities and responsibilities of parenthood but not necessarily covering them in a way that would be seen as an exact replica of how their partner would do things. In this they talked about interchangeability in function, not in form.

## Specialization

Specialization emerged as an interactive layer of influences determining how couples juggle who is available, capable, and willing to be it across the myriad aspects of parenting and managing their household. Specialization was talked about in terms of individual preferences, relative expertise, relative standards, and resource specialization. Specialization is a way these men and women see themselves coordinating their complementary skills and talents as well as pragmatically respecting individual differences. It may also have the potential for people, both men and women, to lay claim to some not-it opportunities without challenging their sense of fully sharing parenthood. In the narratives of some couples, men seemed quite aware of their tendency to specialize (or maximize) their participation in those areas where they felt most comfortable based on their sense of being up to the task. Men's and women's narratives often included talk about their perceived specialization in certain areas in terms of feeling like they enjoy the activity, or that they felt competent to handle the task, and/or having relatively higher standards (or in some cases more or less tolerance) for a given situation/event/domain. Karen described how she perceived her partner's enjoyment of certain activities created some specialization in their respective interactions with their children:

> Well, Jack's a real goof with them. . . . They wrestle and he's just more open and goofy with them. Like I think, I don't know if all mothers [are like this], but I tend to be more, more sort of rules and regulations a little bit. And he's really interested in a lot of things, like they go out on walks and find bugs, and snakes and things like that. Kevin [son] really enjoys those kinds of things.

Although many women's and men's narratives suggested a father's specialization was in areas—such as active play, fantasy play, cajoling or teasing a child out of a mood, and public outings—that could be considered the stereotypic father as playmate, they often also mentioned preferences in areas that are not generally stereotypical for men—such as meal preparation, teaching daily living skills to the child, shopping for the children, medical visits, and conflict negotiation between children. Several women and men spoke of the man being in charge of most of the household cleaning and/or meal preparation. Their narratives often depicted his involvement as based on his skills and tolerances and in the case of meal preparation, his relative skills and preferences for types of meals. Janice noted a difference in how she perceived she and her partner approached meal preparation. She mentioned her partner's use of this activity to get the children involved in both play and learning. Janice, a woman in her early 30s, stays home with their two young children and volunteers many hours of her time to a local public service agency. Her partner (Charles) works full-time in his own business. With regard to his specialization, she said,

> I do the Monday to Friday type dinners and that's, you know [my approach is] "You kids go play or something, Mommy's just getting dinner ready," whereas Charles will spend Saturdays or Sundays cooking up big batches of things to freeze and he'll let them get involved. So they sort of have fun doing things, learning things, that to me are tasks.

### Interchangeability

Being interchangeable means, at least as far as covering all the bases of parenting in these tag teams goes, that either the man or the woman could handle any situation that arises in the course of his or her time with the children. This is the notion that, in Rodney's words, "It's a matter of who's ever there does it kind of thing." Importantly, the degree of interchangeability seemed to vary proportionally with the amount of time they said each parent spent alone with their child. Returning to Dan's story for a description of a high degree of interchangeability, he spoke of how his sense of being essentially interchangeable with his partner spanned both his family life and his work world. He attributes their success at achieving interchangeability to spending about the same amount of time as his partner in both their family and work endeavors. He said,

> [Our work is] very vague and flexible, and [the] amorphousness of the kind of profession [we are] in has made it possible. [pause] I think the fact that Liz and I are in [the same profession] and have shared our work has made the [pause] the openness to our interchangeability in earning and child care much easier.

In the narratives of other men, I found aspects of interchangeability were also quite apparent. Despite their preferences, their perceived and experienced level of comfort or relative expertise, and/or competence with any of the myriad situations likely to come up while with their child, these men felt their commitment to sharing parenting demanded of them a willingness to rise to the occasion of being it. Men depicted themselves as knowing they may not be it in the same way their partner would, but they could carry the full responsibility of being it—especially if their partner was not available to step into her specialized area. Rob's narrative illustrated this idea. As with most of the men, Rob believes he gives nurturing to his children, but he also recognizes that he does so differently than his wife might. He, along with the other men in the study, seemed to be saying that he is in there doing it, but he does not feel he has to replicate how his partner would handle the situation. These women and men believe mothers and fathers do not have to match the method and perhaps the mood of their partner's way; they could express their uniqueness even when operating on the basis of being interchangeable with each other. Rob is in his early 40s with two children. He said he left his job in the financial industry to start a retail business to have the freedom to be more involved with his children. With regard to his ideas about specialization, he said,

> I was much more, in the early days, [pause] pretending isn't the word I want, um, attempting to be a mother, as opposed to being a father. I was attempting to be the mother figure when Donna wasn't here I think. . . . I think a father's got a lot of [pause] nurturing to give, but it's certainly not a feminine [type] in my mind.

The narratives of few men in the study conveyed a sense of how important it has been for them to have had a chance to perform all the daily responsibilities of parenthood. These men tend to see themselves as being essentially interchangeable with their partners in every situation and interaction. Steve's narrative suggests many examples of such interchangeability. He said,

> Just sharing experiences that way, so we've both seen or heard most of the things that have happened to the kids. If something happens today that was

> interesting or exciting or sad or awful or whatever, the one who saw it tells the other, so it's not as though one of us has had a disproportionate exposure to who the kids [are] and what really happens day to day. You know what it's really like to be with the kids from 6 in the morning to 10 at night on a routine basis. I suppose that's one thing that gives us both a real common basis and makes it a lot easier then to decide what you do about a certain situation.

## CONCLUSION

The men in this study may not represent the majority of fathers in our culture; however, their unique stories need not be judged inconsequential and thus subjugated. As family scientists search to expand our understanding of fatherhood in its diversity, the experiences of these tag-team fathers and mothers provide a view into the complexity of what is possible for men in families. It is a view that is consistent with a postmodern framework of valuing the rich diversity of experience. It is a view into what are perhaps somewhat unique family experiences where men and women have achieved a sense of success in creating a high level of father involvement in their tag-team patterns for sharing the myriad and prosaic demands of daily family life. It is a view in the tradition of studying well-functioning families to understand the strengths and possibilities that may be useful in our work with families reporting challenges in achieving a higher level of father involvement. As such, this study provides one model of how men and women can break with a tradition of women being primarily responsible for the caring and rearing of children; it outlines the pragmatic potential of taking a tag-team approach to involving men more fully in family life.

Other studies (see e.g., Backett, 1982; Ehrenshaft, 1990; Gerson, 1993; McMahoon, 1995) have also taken a qualitative approach to studying the division of child care in families. An important distinction in this study is how the men conveyed deeply felt responsibility for the care of their children; these men achieved some success in translating this felt responsibility into pragmatic patterns of sharing the activities and responsibilities. While acknowledging how the culture grants men the option of choosing the extent of father involvement they prefer (Backett, 1983; Daly, 1993a, 1993b), I found these men did not personally feel they have a choice not to be fully involved. Too, women expressed at a gut level a deep connection to their children and recognized the culture grants them the option of privileging their connection over their partner's. In respect for their partner, these women let go of that privilege to make room for a collaborative, tag-team parenting effort. These women noted how letting go, or refraining

from gatekeeping and standard setting, is often more challenging and often more rife with feelings of loss than most academic literature would lead us to believe. This finding further substantiates and updates speculations made by Pleck (1985) and others (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Gilbert, Holahan, & Manning, 1981; Haas, 1980, 1982; Yogev, 1981) about women's reluctance to share what has traditionally been their domain.

Much of the extant academic literature rests on a foundation of either a deficit model (Doherty, 1991), a comparative model (Day & Mackey, 1989), or a role-inadequacy perspective (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) for studying men in families. The men and women in this study did not talk about their parenting tag teams in terms replicating deficit-model or comparative-model themes. Obviously, it may be easy to widen the lens for studying fathers' contributions to families when focusing, as this study did, on men who had already made a foundational commitment to being highly involved in family work. Nonetheless, it seems important to pay attention to particular aspects of their arrangements that may allow family scientists to entertain the pragmatic potentials of a tag-team parenting construct. Their resourcefulness and seeming satisfaction and success offer insights into what collaborative parenting demands of both men and women.

The conceptualization of tag-team parenting potentially facilitates the breaking down of monolithic tendencies (Eichler, 1983) to see motherhood as the template for the new father. A research model that implicitly sets up a woman-determined standard, with men working (or not) toward measuring up and being judged as falling short, is an inadequate lens. It is a lens that puts us at risk of perpetuating the powerful, although usually implicit, cult of motherhood—a cult that traps both women and men. Such a standard serves to obscure the complexities of what it takes for both mothers and fathers to make contributions to what might be considered a good partnership in parenting. If the praxis of a feminist agenda is to be pushed further, beyond strict notions of who does what and how in families, researchers may want to broaden their conceptualizations to encompass the complexities of specialization and interchangeability embedded in a tag-team parenting conceptualization.

What seemed to allow these men and women to escape the trap of comparing fathers to a motherhood template was their willingness to value what each partner contributed to the tag team. The tag-team structure for sharing parenting requires each parent to perform fully all functions and responsibilities of child care when he or she was the on-duty parent. Importantly, a tag-team structure frequently puts a father actively in the parenting trenches. Scheduled time on duty facilitates the building up of a

father's parenting expertise. The tag-team structure, with its scheduled on-off shifting, not only has the potential to enhance a father's claim to parenting expertise, it facilitates his ability to create and sustain a deeply shared sense of joint responsibility for the children's care and well-being. This creates the potential for fathers to be seen by their partners as highly competent parents even while they are depicted as performing and experiencing many aspects of parenthood's responsibilities differently from women. On-off shifting of full, on-duty parenting gives both mothers and fathers extensive and importantly, similar experience providing care of the children. The tag-team structure allows these couples to move beyond gender politics in their everyday family life as they each can rely on extensive parenting experience in a collaborative effort to solve the pragmatic and prosaic issues of daily care for home and their children. These men and women seemed to escape the role-inadequacy perspective because they pragmatically share family work rather than assign tasks based on some preconceived cultural script of what a father or a mother is supposed to do in the family.

The language of women and men being interchangeable is situated in these couples' narrative accounts. This language describes what their sharing demands of them as tag-team partners. Despite the pragmatic requirement in a tag team of fathers and mothers being interchangeable, there is also room for both women and men to specialize in certain areas of family life. The dialectic between specialization and interchangeability is resolved not by comparing and judging men with and against women but by the pragmatic potential of valuing differences that are embedded a tag-team parenting partnership. Specialization is more likely when both parents are present; interchangeability is more likely when one or the other is designated on duty. Both are valued and necessary; both shape the pragmatics of tag-team parenting that can be instrumental in creating space for greater father involvement.

These parenting tag-team narratives stress the value of individual differences. Narrative accounts about working with differences, not on the basis of gender stereotypes or gender-matched equality (Thompson, 1991), stressed the potential of enhancing the overall quality of family life through each partner feeling competent and special in some aspects of their contribution while sharing broadly across many areas of child care and general family life. It seems crucial to pay attention to pragmatic potentials of working as partners on a tag team as a way for men and women to avoid recreating stereotypical gender inequities between them and the attendant justifications practices (Thompson, 1991) as they juggle the work-family interface. The concept of tag-team parents opens space to re-

lease both women and men from constricting comparative and deficit views. As such, the tag-team-parenting concept opens discussion of an alternative understanding of how men may contribute to family life.

The complexity of everyday living seemed to be highlighted in the stories these men and women told, especially in their talk about how fathers experience being it at any given point. These couples expressed their sense of a general satisfaction with how their tag-team parenting arrangements were working for them. Both men and women mentioned how at times they wondered if it might be easier in some ways to go back to the traditional way of doing it. By more traditional ways, they were referring to models where the division of labor and family roles and responsibilities were basically more distinct between men and women. Typically, this was a fleeting wondering as they came back to speak again and again about their foundational commitment to share parenting fully with their partner. The pragmatics of on-off shifting embedded in a tag team facilitated cooperative parenting.

If, as both Pleck (1997) and Levine and Pittinsky (1997) suggested, fathers may be getting closer to realizing gender equity in parenting than has been previously documented, the tag-team-parenting conceptualization may allow researchers and family life educators to adopt an alternative focus when striving to understand fatherhood. Working as a tag team is not only an effective and pragmatic way to arrange schedules, importantly, it involves men in a sharing of parenting activities and responsibilities. Tag-team parenting requires men to be in the trenches, so to speak, of parenting, thus it opens the way for men to find pragmatic ways to resolve myriad prosaic issues they will continually face as parents. The experiences of these particular couples may not be generalizable, nevertheless this research yields clues to the potential for facilitating change with couples who may benefit from learning about similar pragmatic solutions to balancing the work-family interface. The tag-team solution to sharing parenting both relieves women of carrying the full responsibility for child care and challenges them to let go of their tendency to gatekeep in the parenting realm. Importantly, a tag-team approach creates space for a man to develop his active parenting repertoire without necessarily feeling the restraining influence of his partner's intense in-the-moment gaze. Stepping into the full responsibility of being it (i.e., the on-duty parent) requires fathers to develop their parenting skills and relational capabilities. The tag-team pattern also gives men a chance to fully experience active connection with the child and realize the accomplishment of parenting competently.

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Interviews with forty 10- and 11-year-old children (24 boys and 16 girls) investigated the effects of parents' division of child care responsibilities on children's self-esteem, their relationships with parents, and their gendered ideas and preferences. Children whose fathers participated relatively more in the emotional side of parenting (e.g., comforting) showed greater preferences for "feminine" activities and had higher self-esteem than children whose fathers were less involved. Children whose fathers performed a higher proportion of the "work" of parenting (e.g., transporting, planning activities, and arranging child care) endorsed a more gender-free model of family life. The absolute amount of time fathers spent with children had no independent significant effects. Egalitarian parenting clearly benefits children when fathers share "maternal" tasks, but even when fathers do not fully participate in those "maternal" aspects of parenting, dividing the time 50-50 may benefit mothers without hurting children.

# Paternal Participation in Child Care and Its Effects on Children's Self-Esteem and Attitudes Toward Gendered Roles

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Men's participation in parenting is essential to any discussion of gender equality. Gender equality depends as much on the equal responsibility of men for family work as it does on equal opportunity for women in the public world of employment and politics (Deutsch, 1999; Risman, 1998; Silverstein, 1996; Steil, 1997).

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If gender equality were to be achieved inside as well as outside the family, what would be the effects on children? Would a brave new feminist world in the family be good for children? In this study, we examined the consequences of paternal participation on school-age children's conceptions of gender, the quality of their relationships with their parents, and their self-esteem. Unlike many previous studies of father involvement, we included fathers who equally shared parenting. In this work, we integrate the feminist perspective of the domestic labor literature as well as the child development perspective of the fatherhood literature.

Feminist scholars in the past have often examined men's parental contributions as a component of their contributions to domestic labor in general (Coltrane, 1996; Deutsch, Lussier, & Servis, 1993; Hochschild, 1989). Parenting is treated merely as an equity issue between men and women without reference to its consequences for children. The amount of time and energy fathers put into caring for their children relative to mothers indicates the fairness of the division of labor. If mothers are out working for pay, it is simply unfair for them to continue to shoulder the lioness's share of the work at home. In this vein, numerous studies document that women do a disproportionate share of parenting and housework even when they work outside the home for pay (e.g., Almeida, Maggs, & Galambos, 1993; Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Hersch & Stratton, 1994; Hossain & Roopnarine, 1993; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Shelton, 1992). Consistent with the equity approach, Ross and Van Willigen (1996) found that the higher proportion of child care women contributed, the angrier they felt. According to these researchers, women are angry because they perceive the division of labor to be unfair. Other studies examine the conditions under which women consider men's contributions unfair (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Thompson, 1991; Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratcliff, 1998).

Conversely, studies on fatherhood more explicitly address children's needs but often ignore the gender equity issues. This research examines images of what fathers should be, what fathers typically do with and for their children, and what influence fathers have on their children. Most studies of fatherhood from this vantage point are less focused on the work of parenting than are studies from the domestic labor literature and tend to use measures of what Pleck (1997) called *positive paternal involvement*—nurturing relationship indicators such as helping children to learn, being available for talks, sensitivity, and expressing positive affection. Images of the breadwinning Dad are giving way to the image of the nurturing father (Bronstein, 1988; Coltrane, 1996). Although these studies often skirt the issue of relative involvement of mothers and fathers, when they do address it, they tell the same story as the domestic labor literature. Fathers are

much less involved in the lives of their children than mothers (see Pleck, 1997, for a review). As LaRossa (1988) pointed out, there is more of a change in the culture than in the conduct of fatherhood.

Averages, however, obscure the tremendous variability between fathers that exists today. Absent and deadbeat dads coexist with fathers much more involved in the care of their children than their predecessors (Coltrane, 1996). A voluminous literature on the effects of paternal involvement examines the consequences of many types of paternal involvement on children, including the involvement of divorced fathers, stepfathers, never-married fathers, and gay fathers (see Lamb, 1997, for an excellent review of the current research on the effect of fathers on children). Our work concentrates on the participation of fathers in intact dual-earner families. Specifically, this study examines the effects of paternal involvement on children's self-esteem and their gendered ideas and preferences. We investigate the effects of the amount and nature of fathers' participation relative to mothers'.

Past literature has addressed the consequences of active fatherhood on a wide range of cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children. For example, fathers' interactions with their children seem to enhance their cognitive development. One study showed that when fathers were more positively engaged with their infants 1 month after birth, their infants were more cognitively competent at 1 year old (Nugent, 1991). Likewise, time fathers spend with school-age children sharing meals, playing, engaging in activities at home, or assisting with homework is associated with significantly better academic performance. For teens, talking with fathers, leisure time with them, and sharing home activities was associated with better grades (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). (See Biller & Kimpton, 1997, for a review of the effects of paternal involvement on cognitive development and academic achievement in school-age children.) Nonetheless, some of the evidence on fathers' cognitive effects on children is subtle and contingent on the particular social context (Lewis, 1997).

Numerous studies show that paternal involvement can enhance social and emotional development from earliest childhood as well. Cox, Owen, Henderson, and Margand (1992) showed that when fathers engaged in sensitive, warm, and appropriate interactions with their 3-month-olds, those babies tended to be securely attached to their fathers at 1 year old. Esterbrooks and Goldberg (1984) found that toddlers with fathers who exhibited positive parenting attitudes and behaviors were more securely attached to those fathers and were more competent at a problem-solving task. In their review of the effects of paternal involvement on school-age

children, Biller and Kimpton (1997) concluded that children with "nurturant, active, and committed" fathers are more successful in their academic, social, and emotional lives. Children whose fathers are involved in give-and-take play are more popular with peers. One of the most striking findings was that paternal involvement at age 5 was a significant predictor of empathic concern for others at age 31 (Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990).

Self-esteem is an important aspect of children's emotional development. Theories of self-esteem usually emphasize the importance of children's relationship with their parents for the development of high self-esteem. For example, many researchers contend that children's self-esteem is positively related to factors such as parental involvement, interaction, warmth, attachment, identification, and support (Burnett, 1996; Coopersmith, 1967; Growe, 1980; Mruk, 1995; Rosenberg, 1965). Furthermore, research has consistently shown that healthy self-esteem development is associated with authoritative parenting, in which parental nurturance and warmth are balanced with control and discipline (Baumrind, 1972). However, often when researchers invoke *parents*, they really mean mothers. Fathers' specific contributions to self-esteem have been studied less frequently.

In one of the few studies to consider both maternal and paternal influences on the development of self-esteem, Coopersmith (1967) discovered that fathers of high-self-esteem children were generally more attentive to their children than were fathers of low-self-esteem children. Likewise, mothers and fathers who showed high acceptance of their fifth and sixth children boosted their self-esteem (Kawash, Kerr, & Clewes, 1985). In a more recent study, Amato (1986) explored the connection between children's relationships with their fathers and their self-esteem in middle childhood and adolescence. Among intact two-parent families, when 8- and 9-year-old children reported that their fathers talked to them and that they were satisfied with the amount of help fathers gave them, their self-esteem was enhanced relative to other children. For both this group of boys and adolescent males, self-esteem was also bolstered by the perception that their fathers were interested in them. For adolescent girls, the only paternal variable associated with self-esteem was satisfaction with the help they received from fathers.

Much of the research that examines child outcomes, including the studies of self-esteem, focuses on the quality of paternal involvement rather than the quantity. Based on many of the measures used, a father who is very much a secondary parent can still be classified as an involved father if

the nature of the interactions he does have with his children is warm, affectionate, sensitive, and nurturing. Although this kind of involved fatherhood may be good for children, it may do little to ease the burdens on contemporary mothers. Moreover, even when outcome studies do include the effects of the amount of time fathers nurture their children, usually it is without reference to what the mother is doing. It is quite possible that the positive outcomes observed with increased paternal nurturance are simply due to an increase in the amount of nurturance children receive overall. To assess whether egalitarian families are good for children, it is necessary to examine the effects of relative rather than absolute paternal involvement. If fathers take on some of the responsibilities that mothers have traditionally borne rather than simply adding paternal involvement, what consequences will it have for children?

The fatherhood and equity perspectives have been most likely to meet in the study of fathers' effects on the gendering of children. Given that parenting is among the most gendered of adult activities, children have a lot to learn from both the nature and extent of fathers' involvement. Children certainly do pay attention to the gendered nature of adult lives. In one fascinating example, preschool boys and girls were asked to pose in a photo with an infant. The boys stood farther from the infant when asked to pose as a daddy, whereas the girls stood closer when asked to pose as a mommy than they did when given no special instructions (Reid, Tate, & Berman, 1989). In a review of the literature on sex-role development of preschoolers, Lewis (1997) reported that preschoolers are aware of distinct roles for mothers and fathers, and their conceptions are only slightly modified, if at all, when mothers work. As he pointed out, we know that maternal employment does not dramatically change the division of domestic labor. Children's adherence to stereotypes about adult gendered roles even when their mothers are employed may accurately reflect what they are seeing at home.

What happens, however, when mothers and fathers do construct an egalitarian division of labor at home? One study of preschoolers compared children whose parents equally shared their care to children from a more traditional group of families (Fagot & Leinbach, 1995). At 28 months, the median age for accurate gender labeling, fewer children from sharing families than from traditional families could accurately identify the gender of peers. Likewise, at age 4, children whose parents shared child care knew less about adult gender stereotypes than their more traditional peers. There was less difference between the groups in sex-typed play. Although the shared parenting children's play was less sex typed than the other chil-

dren's play at 27 months, in both groups, sex-typed play had increased in frequency between 18 and 27 months.

In another study comparing shared care and maternal care of preschoolers in Israel and the United States, the children of egalitarian parents differed little from those of traditional parents on their scores on the IT scale, a measure of their masculinity/femininity, with the exception that in the Israeli sample, the masculinity scores of the girls in the shared care group were higher than in the traditional group (Radin, 1981; Radin & Sagi, 1982). Carlson (1984) compared preschoolers in equal caregiving families with those in mother-primary families and found that boys in the egalitarian families had less stereotyped views of fathers' roles. Likewise, the less housework their mothers did (implying the more the fathers did), the less stereotyped both boys and girls perceived paternal roles. The gender effects of shared parenting of preschoolers may be quite long lived. A follow-up study of children whose fathers had shared child care when they were preschoolers showed that as adolescents, they endorsed nontraditional work and family roles to a greater extent than their peers raised with less involved fathers (Williams, Radin, & Allegro, 1992).

School-age children are also influenced by their parents' gendered family arrangements. For example, adolescents from single-earner families are less likely to anticipate creating dual-career families themselves than are adolescents who are growing up in dual-career families (Stephan & Corder, 1985). Those from dual-career families also had more liberal attitudes on the Attitudes Towards Women Scale. In another study, girls whose fathers spent as much time interacting with them as their mothers did avoided the decrement in math and science achievement that typically occurs among girls in early adolescence (Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 1996). In a study specifically focused on paternal participation in child care, Baruch and Barnett (1986) found that fourth-grade children had less stereotyped attitudes toward gendered roles, as measured by their own activity preferences, their occupational aspirations, and their views of family roles, if their fathers did a higher proportion of "feminine" household chores or child care and their mothers were employed or held nonstereotypical views toward men's roles. Because they used a randomly selected sample of families, it is quite possible that none or very few of them equally shared family work, which might account for the weakness of their findings.

To date, Risman and Myers (1997) is the only published study on the effects of parents' egalitarian division of labor on the gendering of children that includes school-age children. They interviewed 21 children,

ranging in age from 4 years old to teenagers, who were growing up in what the researchers called "fair families." Parents in these families spent approximately equal hours per week in paid work, housework, and child care as measured task by task at least 60/40, and described their relationships as fair on a number of dimensions. These self-consciously feminist parents were trying to raise their children without gender stereotypes. They did succeed in influencing their children to adopt egalitarian ideologies about gender in adulthood. Most of the children believed that men and women should share family work and should have equal opportunities in the workplace. However, these children adopted gender stereotypes when they talked about children. Boys and girls were different. Boys were "active, into sports, mean, bad, freer than girls, sarcastic, cool, aggressive, athletic, tough, stronger than girls, into fights, troublemakers, competitive, bullies, and into computers" (p. 244). Their own identities were gendered as well, with boys more likely to prefer "masculine" activities and girls preferring "feminine" ones regardless of their gender ideologies. However, the majority of children also crossed gender lines, but because there was no comparison group, it is difficult to know whether those crossovers are attributable to the postgendered parenting they received.

The few studies of egalitarian families that systematically measured the effect of the parents' division of labor on measures of social and/or emotional well-being of children have been limited to families with very young children. Infants of fathers who provide primary care seem to thrive (Geiger, 1996; Pruett, 1987). Preschoolers whose parents shared their care had a more internal locus of control than preschoolers raised in more traditional families (Radin & Sagi, 1982).

Our study focuses on older children. We will examine the effects of parental division of labor on 10- and 11-year-old children's self-esteem as well as the children's gender ideologies and gendered preferences for activities. Our sample of families will include those with equally sharing mothers and fathers. Furthermore, we use measures of both the quantity and the nature of paternal involvement. Radin and Sagi (1982) discovered that in their American sample of couples, fathers' involvement in the caretaking of preschoolers, the work of parenting, was not significantly related to paternal nurturing. Likewise, although Carlson (1984) found that the egalitarian fathers were rated significantly higher on nurturing behaviors toward children than more traditional fathers, the differences were very small. We expect that the effects of an egalitarian division of labor might depend on just what is being divided.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Forty 10- and 11-year-old children participated in the study. Thirty-four children were obtained from a sample of 150 families recruited for a larger study of paternal participation in child care in dual-earner families. Initially, families were obtained through day care centers and schools, and subsequent families were obtained from referrals of participants. We recruited equally sharing parents as well as couples who ranged from highly unequal in their division of labor to slightly unequal (see Deutsch, 1999, for a more detailed description of the sample of families from which these children were drawn). An additional 6 children were recruited from one fifth-grade class.[1] All children lived in cities and towns in Western Massachusetts and Northern Connecticut.

These children, 24 boys and 16 girls, were from Caucasian two-parent families.[2] In addition, all families but 2 were dual earner (mothers and fathers employed more than 20 hours per week), the exceptions being 1 family in which the mother was a full-time student and another family in which the father was a homemaker. The children ranged in age from 10 years 1 month to 11 years 10 months, with a mean age of 11 years. Age was restricted to avoid confounding developmental trends with the effects of paternal participation. In addition, research has indicated that by 10 or 11 years of age, children are able to think about others and themselves in abstract terms (Barenboim, 1981).

Parents had spent an average of 14.48 years married ($SD = 4.11$). Fathers had a mean age of 41.82 years ($SD = 5.30$), whereas mothers were slightly younger with a mean age of 39.28 years ($SD = 1.42$). Occupational prestige levels were coded according to Hollingshead's (1970) 9-point index. The mean occupational prestige level for mothers' jobs ($M = 7.2$) and fathers' jobs ($M = 7.1$) did not significantly differ. The mean occupational prestige rating of 7 corresponds to such professions as artist, grade-school teacher, reporter, and so on (the modal prestige rating for mothers was also 7, but for fathers, the modal prestige rating was 9 and corresponded to professions such as doctor, lawyer, judge, etc.). In addition, parents were almost evenly divided among the following religions: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, other, or none.

## PROCEDURE

Telephone interviews were conducted with parents as part of the larger study of paternal participation and were done before the children's interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, during which each parent was asked about the division of child care in their family. Demographic information about the family was also obtained at this time.

All children were interviewed by the same female interviewer for approximately 1 hour. The interview took place in the child's home in a room that afforded privacy and quiet.

## PATERNAL PARTICIPATION MEASURES

The telephone interviews required each parent to indicate the following: (a) the percentage of total participation each contributed, (b) the number of hours each spouse spent alone as well as together with the children, and (c) the percentage contribution of each parent for each of 32 specific child care tasks. Principal-components extraction with varimax rotation was calculated separately for mothers' and fathers' assessments of paternal involvement in the 32 specific child care tasks. (This analysis was calculated for the larger sample of 300 couples.) Six factors with eigenvalues of 1 or greater were identified; however, only four were used in the present study. (The two factors eliminated dealt with parenting tasks relevant to younger children, such as diapering, dressing, and putting to bed.) Because the same child care tasks loaded on the same factors for both mothers and fathers, factors were created that applied to both mothers' and fathers' assessments. The first factor was Logistics and included taking children to the doctor or dentist, taking them to lessons or parties, planning activities, arranging child care, arranging play dates, and taking care of sick children. The second factor was Emotional Involvement and included comforting, playing, helping children to learn, helping children with problems, and taking children on outings. The third factor was Discipline and included setting limits and disciplining. The final factor was Attention, which included worrying, making decisions, and responding to children's needs for attention. The variables comprising this last factor were added to the telephone protocol after a number of interviews had been completed. The Attention scale was used with only 23 families in this sample.

These factors were then transformed into separate scales for each parent's assessment of paternal involvement. There was, for instance, a scale

for the father's assessment of his emotional involvement and one for the mother's assessment of the father's emotional involvement. Alphas for the scales for fathers' assessments of their participation in logistics, emotional involvement, discipline, and attention were .85, .76, .58, and .50, respectively. Alphas for scales derived from mothers' assessments of fathers' participation were .83 for logistics, .75 for emotional involvement, .90 for discipline, and .73 for attention. Three variables were dropped from the scale for mothers' assessments of paternal emotional involvement as the alpha analyses showed better coherence without them. Two variables, fathers' comforting and helping children with problems, remained. To summarize, paternal participation as assessed from each parent included percentage of total parenting, number of hours alone, number of hours with wife, and relative contributions to the three types of child care described earlier.

Children's measures of paternal participation were derived from the parent measures. Children were asked to rate on a 7-point scale (1 = *father only*, 7 = *mother only*) who took care of them. On the same scale, children were then asked which parent did more of the three types of child care tasks. Each scale was presented as a list of examples, and the children were asked to identify which parent did more for each list. They were also asked which parent they thought spent more time with them or if it was the same.

### GENDER IDEOLOGY

To assess gender ideology, we used a questionnaire that had been written and used previously with a sample of fourth graders (Baruch & Barnett, 1986). Each question was presented orally by the interviewer while giving children a card on which the possible answers were listed.

First, children were asked about current interests and activities. There were 18 items, 9 female (e. g., sewing) and 9 male (e.g., building models). Children were asked about their preference for these activities, and they could respond with one of five answers from 1 (*don't like at all*) to 5 (*like a lot*). Cronbach's alpha for the 9 female activities was .74. Four variables were dropped from the male activities scale as the alpha analyses showed better reliability without them. Five questions remained, including working on science projects, playing with electric trains, building models, fixing things with an adult, and fixing things alone. These remaining items had an alpha coefficient of .64. In addition, although not part of the original scale, children were asked what chores or responsibilities they had.

This line of questioning was based on research indicating that children, especially boys, tend to perform more stereotypically gendered chores in more traditional households (McHale, Bartko, Crouter, & Perry-Jenkins, 1990).

Next, children were asked about adult occupational roles. This section consisted of questions pertaining to 18 occupations, half female (e.g., nurse) and half male (e.g., mechanic). Using similar 5-point bipolar scales, children indicated how much they would want the job (1 = *definitely not want*, 5 = *definitely want*) and what proportion of men and women they thought performed that job (1 = *men only*, 5 = *women only*). Cronbach's alpha for female occupations was .73 and for male occupations was .68.

Finally, children were asked whether mothers or fathers should do each of 12 household and child care tasks (1 = *father only*, 5 = *mother only*). Cronbach's alpha for this family roles scale was .73.

### CHILDREN'S SELF-ESTEEM

Children's self-esteem was assessed using the Self-Perception Profile (Harter, 1983). This scale was written for children ages 8 to 13 and is administered as a paper-and-pencil test that takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The measure assesses perceptions of scholastic competence, social acceptance or acceptance by peers, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth. The task consists of a "structured alternative format" in which subjects are presented with two sentences, such as "Some kids often forget what they learn" and "Other kids remember things easily." Children were asked to decide which sentence is more like them and then to indicate whether the statement was *really true* or just *sort of true* for them. The answers yield a score from 1 (*low perceived competence*) to 4 (*high perceived competence*).

Each subscale contained six questions; thus, the entire measure contained 36 items. Reliabilities based on Cronbach's alpha were between .80 and .85 for scholastic competence, .75 and .80 for social acceptance, .80 and .86 for athletic competence, .76 and .82 for physical appearance, .71 and .77 for behavioral conduct, and .78 and .84 for global self-worth (Harter, 1983).

In addition, children were administered 10 questions that pertained to the importance of the first five subscales. The format was similar to the other questions, and children were presented with statements such as "Some kids think it is important to do well at school work in order to feel

good as a person." These questions yielded importance ratings between 1 (*not at all important*) and 4 (*very important*).

#### CHILDREN'S CLOSENESS TO PARENTS

Father-child intimacy was assessed with an eight-item questionnaire, the Child's Perception of Closeness to the Father (Crouter & Crowley, 1990). The children were presented with an index card on which potential answers were listed. Children were instructed to choose their answers for each question from that list. The interviewer presented the items orally and recorded answers on the questionnaire form. The questions included ones such as, "How much do you go to your father for advice or support?" Answers ranged on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .77. The scale was adapted by using analogous questions about the child's relationship with his or her mother to assess the child's perception of closeness to the mother. Cronbach's alphas for the paternal and maternal closeness scales were .77 and .79, respectively. Further analyses showed that children's perceptions of closeness with their mothers and fathers were very highly correlated ($r = .79$, $p < .001$). Consequently, for all analyses, the two measures were combined in a measure of parental intimacy.

## RESULTS

#### FATHER'S PARTICIPATION VARIABLES

### Maternal and Paternal Assessments

Contributions to child care for fathers in this sample are reported in terms of time (Table 1) and as percentages of the child care performed by fathers (Table 2). Correlations between mothers' and fathers' assessments on each variable ranged from .44 to .86, and all were significant at $p \leq .01$. The correlations between mothers' and fathers' assessments of overall proportion of paternal child care, number of paternal solo hours of child care, and paternal proportion of logistics were $r = .72$, $p \leq .001$; $r = .66$, $p \leq .001$; and $r = .86$, respectively. Because of these high correlations, composite variables were created by using the mean of both parents' assessments for each variable. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these three composite variables were .79, .74, and .93, respectively. Mothers' and fa-

**TABLE 1**
**Fathers' and Mothers' Assessments of Paternal Time in Child Care (hours/week)**

| | *Mothers' Assessments* | | | *Fathers' Assessments* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Type of Care* | M | SD | *Range* | M | SD | *Range* |
| Paternal solo care | 11.2 | 8.35 | 0 to 50 | 15.1 | 11.9 | 0 to 55 |
| Shared child care | 32.4 | 15.5 | 10 to 68 | 30.9 | 14.7 | 3 to 90 |
| Total parent time[a] | 54.8 | 22.3 | 27 to 155 | 68.2 | 25.2 | 27 to 145 |

a. Total parent time includes maternal and paternal solo hours and shared child care hours.

**TABLE 2**
**Fathers' and Mothers' Assessments of Paternal Proportion of Child Care (in percentage)**

| | *Mothers' Assessments* | | | *Fathers' Assessments* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Type of Care* | M | SD | *Range* | M | SD | *Range* |
| Paternal proportion of discipline | 46.3 | 10.4 | 2.5 to 65 | 49.6 | 11.0 | 15 to 75 |
| Paternal proportion of attention | 39.8 | 11.2 | 10 to 50 | 46.3 | 5.96 | 25 to 53 |
| Paternal proportion of emotional involvement[a] | 39.7 | 14.4 | 7.5 to 75 | 44.2 | 10.7 | 17 to 68 |
| Paternal proportion of total child care | 39.3 | 15.4 | 10 to 75 | 40.9 | 15.5 | 10 to 80 |

a. The maternal assessment contains only two of the five variables in the paternal scale.

thers' assessments of paternal emotional involvement, discipline, and attention were analyzed separately.

### CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENTS

In terms of paternal contributions to overall child care, 62.5% of the children reported that the father contributed equally. Ten percent indicated that the father contributed a little more than the mother, 20% indicated the father contributed a little less than the mother, and 7.5% reported that the father did much less than the mother. Children perceived a greater difference between their parents on logistics. Approximately 37.5% thought logistical child care was shared equally, 5% thought their fathers did a bit

more than mothers, 27.5% thought their fathers did a lot less, and 2.5% reported that their fathers contributed none of the logistical care. For emotional involvement, discipline, and attention, 72.0%, 77.5%, and 82.5% of the children, respectively, reported that these types of child care were shared equally. Because of the lack of variability for these types of child care, they were dropped from subsequent analyses.

Correlations between children's assessments of overall proportion of child care contributed by the father and fathers' and mothers' assessments were $r = .38$, $p \leq .01$, and $r = .53$, $p \leq .001$, respectively. There were no significant differences between the child/mother and child/father correlations.

## ANALYSES

### METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Preliminary zero-order correlations were performed between each paternal participation measure and the measures of gender ideology, self-esteem, and intimacy in relationships. These correlations were performed for the sample as a whole as well as for boys and girls separately. From these analyses, correlates of each outcome measure were obtained. These correlates were then entered into multiple regression analyses to determine more precisely the relationships between different aspects of paternal participation and the different outcome measures.

### CHILDREN'S GENDER IDEOLOGIES

*Activities*. Zero-order correlations revealed no significant relationships between paternal participation in child care and boys' or girls' preferences for typically male activities. The following two variables, however, were correlated with children's preferences for female activities: mothers' assessments of paternal emotional involvement ($r = .29$, $p < .05$) and the composite assessment of paternal solo hours ($r = -.31$, $p < .05$). These two variables were then entered simultaneously with gender into a multiple regression with preference for female activity as the dependent variable. As shown in Table 3, the equation was highly significant, $F(3, 36) = 11.01$, $p < .0001$, accounting for 44% of the variance. Feminine activities are preferred significantly more by girls than by boys and significantly more by children whose fathers are relatively more emotionally involved. When controlling for emotional involvement, there was a trend for feminine ac-

**TABLE 3**
**Multiple Regression Dependent Variable: Children's Preferences for Female Activities**

| *Variables* | *Beta* | t-*Value* |
|---|---|---|
| Mothers' assessments of paternal emotional involvement | .26 | 2.10** |
| Child's gender | –.52 | –4.05**** |
| Composite assessments of paternal solo hours of child care | –.23 | –1.79* |

$F(3, 36) = 11.01$, $p < .0001$*****, Adjusted $R^2 = .44$.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ****$p < .001$. *****$p < .0001$.

tivities to be preferred less by children whose fathers spend relatively more time alone with them. Thus, the effects of paternal involvement on preference for female activities depend on the nature of that involvement.

*Occupational aspirations*. A 2 (child's gender) × 2 (femininity/masculinity of occupational aspirations) repeated-measures analysis of variance found a significant interaction such that girls aspired to feminine occupations more than boys, and boys aspired to masculine occupations more than girls, $F(1, 38) = 18.39$, $p < .001$. Zero-order correlations showed no significant relationships between any of the paternal participation measures and children's aspirations to either feminine or masculine occupations.

*Family roles*. Zero-order correlations revealed significant relationships between mothers' and children's assessments of paternal involvement in logistics and children's attitudes toward family roles, $r = –.29$, $p < .05$ and $r = –.34$, $p < .05$, respectively. As fathers did more of the transporting children, arranging activities for them, and taking time off from work when they were ill, children endorsed a less stereotypical view of the family. Because mothers' and children's assessments were significantly correlated, $r = .58$, $p < .001$, each was entered into a separate regression with composite assessments of overall paternal proportion of child care as a control. Although in each equation paternal proportion of logistics reached significance ($t = –2.36$, $p < .05$ and $t = –2.23$, $p < .05$, respectively) and overall proportion of child care was marginally significant in the equation that included composite assessments of paternal logistics ($t = 1.72$, $p < .10$), these effects were relatively weak. Overall, the equations only accounted for 7% to 9% of the variance.

These findings do suggest that it is the nature of the involvement rather than the amount that influences children to adopt less stereotypical ideas about family roles. Note that when paternal logistics is controlled, the proportion of child care contributed by fathers is associated with more traditional ideas about family roles. If fathers' child care is limited to gendered ways of interacting with them, then that kind of involvement seems to lead to more stereotyping on the part of children.

We further examined the interpretation that what fathers do influences what children think they should do by examining the relation between how much fathers cook and the extent to which children think they should cook. Both mothers' and fathers' assessments of how much the father cooks are significantly correlated with how much children think fathers should cook, $r = .37$, $p < .05$ and $r = .27$, $p < .05$, respectively. Taken together, these findings indicate that the more fathers engage in counter-stereotypical child care, by contributing more to the chores of parenting, the more likely children are to believe that fathers should do those activities.

### CHILDREN'S SELF-ESTEEM

A modification of the self-esteem scales was first conducted so that five of the six subscales were weighted by the importance rating for that subscale. Inclusion of importance ratings in the measure allowed a more accurate picture of self-esteem to emerge. These five weighted subscales were then combined to achieve a composite global self-esteem score for each child. This measure was then used in the analyses.

Analyses were conducted to test the hypothesis that emotionally available parenting promotes a sense of pride and self-worth that then is reflected in higher self-esteem. Zero-order correlations were performed with children's self-esteem and all of the paternal participation measures. None of the assessments by fathers or children was significantly correlated with children's self-esteem. However, mothers' assessments of emotional involvement, discipline, and attention were significant correlates of children's self-esteem: $r = .58$, $p \leq .01$; $r = .62$, $p \leq .01$; and $r = .30$, $p \leq .10$, respectively. There were no effects of gender on self-esteem as well as no gender interaction effects. It was also thought that not only the types of child care that fathers engage in but also the nature of the parent/child relationship might be related to children's self-esteem. Thus, a similar zero-order correlation was performed between the parent intimacy variable and self-esteem, which indicated that intimacy with the parent was a significant correlate of children's self-esteem, $r = .31$, $p < .05$. These correlations indicate that as paternal attention, discipline, emotional involvement, and

**TABLE 4**
**Multiple Regressions With Children's Self-Esteem**

| *Variables* | *Beta* | t-*Value* |
|---|---|---|
| Mothers' assessments of paternal attention | .68 | 3.53** |
| Composite assessments of paternal proportion of child care | –.25 | –1.31 |
| $F(2, 20) = 6.24$, $p \leq .01$ | | |
| Adjusted $R^2 = .32$ | | |
| Mothers' assessments of paternal discipline | .53 | 3.42** |
| Composite assessments of paternal proportion of child care | –.05 | –.31 |
| $F(2, 37) = 6.62$, $p \leq .01$ | | |
| Adjusted $R^2 = .22$ | | |
| Mothers' assessments of paternal emotional involvement | .51 | 2.94** |
| Composite assessment of paternal proportion of child care | –.11 | –.61 |
| $F(2, 37) = 5.02$, $p \leq .05$ | | |
| Adjusted $R^2 = .17$ | | |
| Father/child intimacy | .40 | 2.58** |
| Composite assessments of paternal proportion of child care | .29 | 1.89 |
| $F(2, 37) = 4.00$, $p \leq .05$ | | |
| Adjusted $R^2 = .13$ | | |

**$p \leq .01$.

parent-child intimacy increase, so do children's self-esteem. In addition, strong intercorrelations were found among mothers' assessments of paternal attention, discipline, and emotional involvement (ranging from $r = .60$ to $r = .76$). The only one of these variables that correlated with parental intimacy was mother's assessment of paternal attention, $r = .36$, $p < .05$.

Paternal emotional involvement, attention, discipline, and parental intimacy were each entered into a separate multiple regression simultaneously with the composite measure of paternal proportion of child care, which was included to control for overall paternal involvement. In each of these regressions, despite the control for total paternal involvement in child care, each of these variables was still a significant predictor of self-esteem (see Table 4).

Given the level of intercorrelation among the paternal engagement variables (i.e., attention, discipline, and emotional involvement), the separate effects of each variable on children's self-esteem are difficult to discern. When all three variables are entered into the same regression analysis, paternal attention and emotional involvement cease to be significant predictors because of multicollinearity effects. However, because more

**TABLE 5**
**Final Multiple Regression Dependent Variable: Children's Self-Esteem**

| *Variables* | *Beta** | t-*Value* |
|---|---|---|
| Mothers' assessments of paternal attention | .24 | 0.80 |
| Mothers' assessments of paternal discipline | .55 | 2.64** |
| Mothers' assessments of paternal emotional involvement | –.26 | –1.03 |
| Paternal intimacy | .40 | 1.89* |
| Composite assessments of paternal proportion of child care | .03 | 0.12 |

$F(5, 17) = 5.48$, $p < .01$***, Adjusted $R^2 = .50$.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

variance was accounted for by entering all three variables simultaneously into a regression than by entering just one or two, the best model would include all three. Thus, these three variables and parent intimacy were entered simultaneously into a multiple regression, and that regression accounted for 50% of the variation in children's self-esteem, as shown in Table 5.

These results indicate that when controlling for total paternal involvement, children who experience intimate parental relationships and have fathers who contribute a high proportion of the caretaking that is attentive, firm, and emotionally involved have higher self-esteem than other children. The father's firmness seems to be mediated by love and emotional involvement and indicates interest in children's well-being rather than disapproval, which then results in children feeling better about themselves.

## DISCUSSION

Egalitarian parenting can benefit children. Shared care, however, can mean quite different things in different families. In some, an equal division of labor means that mothers and fathers spend an equal amount of time with children, in another that the chores of parenting are shared, and in still another that parents equally tend to children's emotional needs. The most striking finding in this study, which included egalitarian parents, is that the precise effects of men's participation in parenting depend on precisely what fathers are contributing. In this study, we examined children's gendered ideas and preferences and their self-esteem. In both domains, the overall division of labor between their parents had little direct effect.

Children's ideas about adult roles were shaped by witnessing their fathers take on the work of parenting. When fathers comforted them and helped them with their problems, it encouraged their interest in feminine activities. When fathers participated in the attentive work of parenting—the worrying, disciplining, and responding to their children's requests for attention—their children had higher self-esteem.

As in previous studies (Carlson, 1984; Risman & Myers, 1997), children's exposure to nontraditional adult roles led them to endorse a less gendered model of adulthood. Small wonder that children who believed that men and women should have equal opportunities and responsibilities at home and at work were those whose fathers were most involved in juggling family life and paid work—who left work to pick them up at school when they were sick, called another parent to arrange a play date, called the babysitter, or took them to the doctor. The parts of parenting they witnessed their parents share are typically those most likely to be taken on by mothers even in families in which fathers are involved (Deutsch & Karpf, 1997).

Fathers' emotional involvement was associated with children's preference for feminine activities such as sewing, cooking, jump rope, and art for both boys and girls. It is unclear how sensitivity from fathers with respect to children's emotional lives translates to interest in feminine activities. Perhaps fathers who attend to children's upsets are more feminine themselves and either model interest in feminine activities or even encourage children to explore these kinds of activities by initiating them when they are together. Alternatively, a father tuned in to the emotional side of children's lives may simply value feminine pursuits and endorse them for his children. Dad's approval may offset the stigma attached to femininity in any form, particularly for boys.

Notably, no aspect of paternal involvement was related to children's interest in masculine activities such as sports or science. One might argue that because highly participant fathers are nontraditional, they might be less likely to pursue masculine interests themselves and encourage them in their children. However, it is difficult to make that argument when some of fathers displayed a highly gendered version of equal sharing in which they spent as much time as their wives with children but participated in the more masculine aspects of parenting. These fathers drove their children to sports games, coached their teams, played with their children, disciplined them, and helped them with their math homework but left the comforting and arranging play dates to their wives. Although we did not measure it, these men probably have masculine gender identities. Earlier research suggested that available affectionate fathers produced masculine sons as

long as those fathers had masculine gender identities themselves (Biller, 1981), probably because in those earlier studies a higher proportion of participant men were still gender typed in their involvement.

Sharing fathers might have a bigger influence on feminine than on masculine interests because masculine pursuits are relatively more valued anyway. In our study, girls were just as interested as boys in so-called masculine activities. Likewise, Thorne's (1993) observations of children in an elementary school showed that boys were much less likely to try seriously to participate in girls' games than the reverse, and when they did, they were more subject to social censure. In Risman and Myers's (1997) study of children from fair families, although the majority of both boys and girls showed some preferences in behavior or interests that crossed gender lines, girls emphasized the ways in which they differed from other girls, whereas boys denied the ways they differed from male peers. Children may be freer to pursue masculine interests, whereas less valued feminine interests may benefit from more encouragement.

Finally, children's occupational aspirations were gendered but were not affected by any measure of paternal participation. This contradicts Baruch and Barnett's (1986) finding that fathers' solo and proportional interaction time was associated with more masculine occupational aspirations in similar-aged boys. Although we did not have information on the sex typing of parents' jobs, we did have the occupational prestige levels of mothers' and fathers' jobs. Occupational prestige levels are correlated with the masculinity/femininity of professions. In our sample, the mean occupational prestige levels of mothers' and fathers' jobs did not differ, whereas in Baruch and Barnett's study, fathers' jobs had higher occupational prestige. Thus, more exposure to a father did not mean more exposure to a higher status profession, as it did in their study. A decade may have made a difference in the relative status of mothers' jobs.

When we turn to children's self-esteem, parents' division of labor in the disciplining, attention, worrying, and comforting were most influential. Children had higher self-esteem when their fathers shared in these aspects of parenting equitably than when their mothers did a disproportionate share. Paternal relationships that consist of attentive and firm but nurturing parenting seem to increase self-esteem. Although discipline was part of the configuration of critical variables, given the context, we can assume it was the kind of discipline that is loving.

These results are similar to those of a number of previous studies, such as Baumrind's (1968), concerning parental discipline. Baumrind defined authoritative parenting as discipline with verbal give-and-take and a rational, issue-oriented manner (as opposed to authoritarian parenting that re-

gards obedience as a virtue, uses forceful disciplinary tactics, and does not encourage verbal give and take). The style of parenting increasing self-esteem in this study is emotionally supportive and firm and thus most closely resembles authoritative parenting in its moderation and caring context.

Although Baumrind (1968) did not study children's self-esteem, other researchers have (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1983; Coopersmith, 1967). They found, as did we, that authoritative parenting enhances children's self-concept and self-esteem. Coopersmith (1967) argued that this type of discipline is important for children because it conveys parental respect, which engenders a "resultant sense of personal significance . . . which should contribute to heightened feelings of self-esteem" (p. 194). In the context of Cooley's (1902) "looking-glass" theory, children deduce that if parents see them as worthy of concern, they must be worthwhile people. This deduction creates a sense of pride, which is expressed as self-esteem.

The difference among the findings of the present study and those of previous studies is that the predictor of increased self-esteem was not overall authoritative parenting but increased sharing of that kind of parenting between fathers and mothers. Thus, our results indicate that the warm, concerned, yet firm parenting contributed by parents individually is not as important as the extent to which parents share this child care. Children of sharing parents infer that they have two parents concerned about their welfare and as a result feel more cared for than when one parent is uninvolved.

One caveat is in order. We cannot rule out the possibility that parents who equally share the disciplining, attention, and comforting are really providing more of those things. If mothers maintain the same level of involvement with those aspects of parenting and fathers simply add the same level of intensity, children would be getting double parenting. In that case, it might be the amount of nurturing care that is promoting high self-esteem rather than its distribution across parents. Risman and Myers (1997) did find a pattern among a small group of their fair families in which two equal parents seemed to double the parenting, although that pattern was relatively unusual. In Deutsch's (1999) study of 50-50 parents, some described how they had learned not to repeat each other's efforts. When parental time spent with children was compared across 50-50, 60-40, and 75-25 couples, it was roughly the same. The 50-50 couples differed because fathers spent more time with children, mothers spent less, and the couple spent more time together with children than couples did in other families (Deutsch, 1999). These findings suggest that shared loving care between parents rather than simply more of that care from fathers

promotes children's self-esteem, but it would wise for future studies to include both proportional and absolute measures of the different types of parental care to support this interpretation.

Interestingly, when parents responded to children's upsets, worried about them, disciplined them, and answered their requests for attention, children's self-esteem was enhanced regardless of whether those children reported a close relationship with their parents. Close relationships with parents also enhanced self-esteem but independently of the kind of care we examined. In fact, attention was the only care variable that correlated with parental intimacy. Thus, the effects of discipline, attention, and comforting on self-esteem are not mediated by the closeness of the children's relationships with parents. Care and closeness both facilitate self-esteem in their own ways.

The overall proportion of care provided by fathers did not affect the gendering of children, and neither did it promote their self-esteem when specific types of care were taken into account. When fathers simply "do time" with children, it has few benefits for them, although to be fair, neither does it hurt them. Children whose mothers specialize in the nurturing, attentive care they receive do no worse when their fathers are highly involved in their overall care than when their fathers are simply unavailable. Time with fathers seems to be neither harmful nor helpful to children when mothers specialize in dealing with children's emotional lives. However, we must emphasize that the children in this study were 10 and 11 years old. It is unclear whether these findings would generalize to younger children.

Egalitarian parenting can relieve a heavy burden from employed mothers. The ideology of intensive motherhood, which prescribes that any other caregivers, including fathers, are second-best substitutes (Hays, 1996), does a disservice to mothers, fathers, and children. Our study shows that even when mothers continue to specialize in the emotional care of children, an increased proportion of paternal care of children is not harmful. Moreover, when equally sharing parents divide the work, children see and come to endorse a just, gender-free model of shared family work and occupational opportunity (Okin, 1989). When their fathers are as engaged as their mothers in their emotional lives and socialization, children benefit from enhanced self-esteem. It appears that the less gender matters for who does what in the family, the better it is for children. Lamb (1997) argued that fathers promote positive development in their children the same ways that mothers do. Maybe we will not need the terms *mother* and *father* in the 21st century. *Parent* may say it all.

## NOTES

1. We recruited children and their parents from a fifth-grade class to increase the sample size. We were only successful in obtaining 6 additional participants.

2. Three children were from families with stepparents (one girl and one boy lived with their biological mothers, and another girl lived with her biological father).

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Although prior research demonstrates that residence in a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhood increases young women's risk of bearing a child out of wedlock, few studies have explored the sequence of events accounting for this relationship. Analyzing data from the National Survey of Children using a multivariate nested logit model, the authors find that community socioeconomic status has little effect on the likelihood that unmarried adolescent women will become pregnant but that premaritally pregnant adolescents in poor communities are less likely than those in wealthier neighborhoods to voluntarily terminate a pregnancy. Thus, differences in premarital fertility rates across neighborhoods of varying socioeconomic status appear to result largely from differences in abortion rates. Compared to White women, Black women are more likely to become premaritally pregnant and less likely to marry before childbirth. Parent's education reduces premarital fertility rates both by reducing rates of premarital pregnancy and by increasing the likelihood of abortion.

# Community Effects on the Resolution of Adolescent Premarital Pregnancy

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Recent studies of the determinants of premarital childbearing have begun to emphasize the local community as a critical social context for fertility behavior. Ethnographic studies have described the importance of locally based peer-group cultures for encouraging teenage childbearing in disadvantaged neighborhoods (E. Anderson, 1989, 1990), and many quantitative studies have explored the effect of community and neighborhood characteristics on various dimensions of adolescent nonmarital childbearing (Billy & Moore, 1992; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Crane, 1991; Evans, Oates, & Schwab, 1992; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Massey & Shibuya, 1995; Mayer, 1991; Moore & Glei, 1995; Plotnick & Hoffman, 1999; South & Baumer, 2000; South & Crowder, 1999; Sucoff & Upchurch, 1998). Although the designs and findings of

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these studies differ in key respects, in general this research suggests that the presence of economically disadvantaged neighbors (or the relative absence of affluent neighbors) significantly increases the likelihood that adolescent women will bear a child out of wedlock, even controlling for the socioeconomic status (SES) of young women and their families.

However, comparatively few studies have attempted to ascertain why adolescents face a higher risk of premarital childbearing in disadvantaged neighborhoods than in wealthier communities. More generally, extant research has by and large failed to identify the mechanisms that transmit neighborhood effects to problematic adolescent behavior (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Sampson, 1998). And yet, a thorough understanding of the ways in which local communities influence adolescent premarital childbearing requires knowledge of these mechanisms. Learning more about the linkage between community structure and adolescent sexual behavior may also help in developing intervention programs that seek to reduce rates of adolescent premarital childbearing.

This article begins to unravel the mechanisms linking neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage to adolescent premarital childbearing through a disaggregated analysis of community effects on the sequence of events leading to a premarital birth. Using the longitudinal National Survey of Children (NSC) in conjunction with decennial census data describing the NSC respondents' residential communities, we explore how community socioeconomic status influences the likelihood that adolescent women will become premaritally pregnant and conditional on such a pregnancy, the manner in which it is resolved. Thus, we go beyond prior studies of neighborhood effects on adolescent premarital childbearing by examining how neighborhood characteristics influence not only the risk of a premarital pregnancy but also the likelihood that such a pregnancy will be legitimated, aborted, or result in an out-of-wedlock birth.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The life-course pathway leading young women to give birth out of wedlock is marked by several significant decisions and events (Cutright, 1971; Nathanson & Kim, 1989). Characteristics of the local community could conceivably influence the occurrence of events at several critical junctures. The first step encompasses those events that culminate in a premarital pregnancy, including decisions regarding the initiation and subsequent frequency of sexual intercourse and the use of contraception. Either implicitly or explicitly, much of the literature linking neighborhood socio-

economic status to high rates of premarital fertility assumes that the effects operate at this point in the sequence. Wilson (1987, 1996), whose theory of neighborhood effects on family formation guides much of the empirical work in this area, described several mechanisms that might link the absence of middle- and working-class families in ghetto neighborhoods to problematic adolescent behavior. First, high levels of family instability in distressed neighborhoods lead to a dearth of successful economic and family role models. As Wilson (1987) argued, the presence of mainstream role models "helps keep alive the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception" (p. 56). In contrast, the absence of such families from disadvantaged neighborhoods leads adolescents in these communities to see few benefits to delaying parenthood; instead, they adopt attitudes and norms that are conducive to premarital childbearing (Fernandez-Kelly, 1994). From this perspective, adolescent premarital childbearing is a largely rational and intended outcome, a direct product of the norms and attitudes conducive to such behavior (Geronimus, 1991).

Second, and somewhat relatedly, Wilson (1991) argued that neighborhood disadvantage gives rise to low self-efficacy and reduced expectations for the future. Interacting with sporadically employed and financially insecure neighbors signals few benefits to achieving success in school or work. The lack of established avenues for educational and economic achievement in poor neighborhoods means that adolescents in these communities perceive few opportunity costs to early childbearing (Billy & Moore, 1992). With lowered educational and occupational aspirations, young females in disadvantaged communities come to view motherhood—even unmarried motherhood—as a viable route to adult status and the privileges that accompany it (E. Anderson, 1990; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985). One implication of these perspectives is that neighborhood characteristics influence unmarried adolescent women's behaviors that lead to a premarital pregnancy.

However, few studies have directly examined the effect of community characteristics on young women's risk of a premarital pregnancy. Hogan and Kitagawa (1985) found that teenage Black women in low-SES Chicago neighborhoods are more likely than their counterparts in better-off neighborhoods to experience a premarital pregnancy but that teen pregnancy rates do not differ appreciably between middle-SES and high-SES neighborhoods. Studies linking community characteristics to the precursors of premarital pregnancy, such as the timing of sexual initiation, the frequency of sexual intercourse, and the use of contraception, have gener-

ated somewhat equivocal findings. Some studies find that net of individual and family attributes, residing in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood hastens young women's transition to sexual activity (Billy, Brewster, & Grady, 1994; Brewster, 1994b; Brewster, Billy, & Grady, 1993), but other studies report no significant net effect of either objective or perceived neighborhood SES on the timing of first sexual intercourse (Baumer & South, 2001; Brewster, 1994a; Furstenberg, Morgan, Moore, & Peterson, 1987; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Upchurch, Aneshensel, Sucoff, & Levy-Storms, 1999). Research is somewhat more consistent in showing significant inverse effects of neighborhood SES on adolescents' frequency of sexual intercourse (Baumer & South, 2001; Billy et al., 1994), the use of contraception (Brewster et al., 1993; Ku, Sonenstein, & Pleck, 1993; Mosher & McNally, 1991), and number of sex partners (Ramirez-Valles, Zimmerman, & Newcomb, 1998).

Alternatively, it is possible that community characteristics have relatively little effect on the risk that adolescent women will become premaritally pregnant but instead operate through factors that determine whether a premarital pregnancy will eventuate in an out-of-wedlock birth. The possible resolutions of a premarital pregnancy include an out-of-wedlock birth, marrying prior to giving birth (i.e., legitimation), having an abortion, or having a miscarriage or stillbirth (Cooksey, 1990; Leibowitz, Eisen, & Chow, 1986; Plotnick, 1992). Of particular concern for this analysis is the potential effect of community socioeconomic status on the likelihood of marrying prior to childbirth and the probability of aborting the pregnancy.

For many of the same reasons for hypothesizing an effect of neighborhood socioeconomic status on premarital childbearing, Wilson's (1987, 1996) theory also implies that neighborhood SES will have an inverse effect on young women's marriage rates. Disadvantaged neighborhoods lack successful marital role models that signal the benefits of marriage and provide the normative expectations to marry. This deficit of conventional role models in disadvantaged neighborhoods lead young people to avert marriage and perhaps eschew it altogether. Moreover, to the extent that disadvantaged neighborhoods lack a sufficient supply of economically attractive potential husbands, then women's ability and incentive to marry are reduced (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992). High male mortality, incarceration rates, and unemployment in disadvantaged neighborhoods detract from women's pool of eligibles and their potential gains to marriage (Oppenheimer, 1988) and thus may reduce their marriage probabilities. South and Crowder (1999) found that among Black women, neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with substan-

tially lower marriage rates. Although these arguments are relevant for all unmarried women residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods, to the extent that they apply with equal force to premaritally pregnant women, they suggest that neighborhood disadvantage increases adolescent women's risk of premarital childbearing largely because it diminishes these women's probability of legitimating a premarital pregnancy. It is perhaps worth noting in this regard that secular declines in the likelihood of legitimating a premarital pregnancy (Parnell, Swicegood, & Stevens, 1994) have coincided with increasing spatial concentration of poverty in urban areas (Jargowsky, 1997).

Community characteristics could also influence adolescent premarital childbearing through an alternative pregnancy outcome—voluntary abortion. For several reasons, premaritally pregnant women in disadvantaged neighborhoods may be less likely than premaritally pregnant women in wealthier neighborhoods to voluntarily terminate their pregnancy—and thus be more likely to bear a child out of wedlock. First, the factors described earlier that encourage young women residing in distressed areas to have a premarital birth may only begin to operate after becoming pregnant. That is, unmarried adolescent women in both advantaged and disadvantaged neighborhoods may be equally likely to become pregnant, but the lower opportunity costs to a premarital birth for women in disadvantaged neighborhoods may lead them to be less likely than premaritally pregnant women in wealthier communities to seek an abortion. The comparatively lower abortion rates among low-status women may mean that in low-status communities, both low-SES and higher SES women lack the normative support to obtain an abortion. Moreover, even given the motivation to terminate a pregnancy, premaritally pregnant adolescents in disadvantaged communities may lack sufficient access to abortion providers (Billy & Moore, 1992). Recent research suggests that the geographic availability of abortion services is an important determinant of unmarried women's decision to choose childbearing over abortion and that such providers are underrepresented in poorer geographic areas (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Ribar, 1998).

In sum, whereas prior studies strongly suggest that residing in a socioeconomically disadvantaged community significantly raises adolescent women's risk of bearing a child outside of marriage, it remains unclear at what stages in the reproductive process these effects operate. We begin to unravel this linkage by disaggregating the effects of community disadvantage on premarital childbearing risks into their effects on the risk of a premarital pregnancy and its possible resolution through either marriage (prior to childbirth) or voluntary abortion. The results of this decomposi-

tion point to more distal mechanisms that might mediate the effect of community socioeconomic structure on adolescent premarital childbearing.

## DATA AND METHOD

Data for this analysis come from the following two sources: the National Survey of Children and the 1980 U.S. census. The NSC is a three-wave, nationally representative survey of U.S. children age 7 to 11 when first interviewed in 1976 (Moore & Peterson, 1989; Zill, Furstenberg, Peterson, & Moore, 1990). Black children were oversampled and constitute about one quarter of the initial sample. A subset of these children was reinterviewed in 1981 (when they were ages 12 to 16) and again in 1987 (at ages 18 to 22). The NSC includes sampling weights that allow the results to be generalized to the population.[1] Despite nontrivial attrition rates over the three waves, the observed timing of problematic adolescent behaviors—including premarital childbearing—in the NSC is quite similar to that observed in other data sets (Moore & Glei, 1995). The sample used in our analysis includes all 535 women who participated in the third wave of interviews and who provided valid information on the relevant variables.[2]

The NSC has been a valuable source of information on the effects of individual and family characteristics on a variety of adolescent behaviors, including sexual activity and childbearing (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Moore & Glei, 1995). The NSC is also well suited to examining the effects of community characteristics on adolescent behavior because unlike the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth used by Cooksey (1990) and Plotnick (1992), it includes information on respondents' residential addresses at each interview and thus allows us to append census data describing the socioeconomic status of the respondents' local communities. In addition, several features of the NSC make it suitable for deciphering community effects on adolescent childbearing. First, because the NSC is longitudinal, we are able to measure most of the explanatory variables prior to the risk period for premarital pregnancy and its outcomes. This design feature helps to reduce (but does not eliminate) problems of causal ordering and endogeneity bias, for example, the potential for unmarried mothers to move into distressed neighborhoods (South & Crowder, 1997; Tienda, 1991). Second, because the NSC is a population-based study, not a school-based study (cf. the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health), it does not by design exclude adolescents who have dropped out of school. This feature is valuable because unmarried teenage mothers experience high drop-out rates (D. Anderson, 1993) and thus would not be

included in school-based surveys. More generally, adolescents who do not attend school engage substantially more often in health risk behaviors—including early and unprotected sexual intercourse—than adolescents who attend school (Centers for Disease Control, 1994). Moreover, in school-based studies, observed neighborhood effects would be biased downward if unmarried teenage girls in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely than their counterparts in wealthier neighborhoods to drop out of school (and thus not participate in the survey), which appears to be the case (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993). Third, the NSC contains information on the timing of the first premarital pregnancy as well as the manner in which this pregnancy was resolved, such as by having an out-of-wedlock birth, by marrying prior to birth, and through voluntary abortion.

However, the NSC is not without limitations. First, although the NSC is not small in absolute terms, we observe relatively few women who experienced an unmarried pregnancy during the study period ($N = 128$). Thus, significant effects of community characteristics on the three distinct pregnancy outcomes may be difficult to detect with these data. The few premaritally pregnant women in the sample who marry prior to giving birth ($N = 13$) may make it particularly difficult to obtain stable effects of the explanatory variables on the likelihood of legitimation. Second, and perhaps more important, the only geographic approximation of neighborhoods available in the NSC is the five-digit zip code area. Although zip code areas are probably inferior to census tracts as neighborhood approximations (White, 1987), they are not without value. In fact, Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993) reported finding stronger effects of community affluence on school drop-out rates using zip code areas than the more commonly used census tracts. Billy and Moore (1992) found generally similar effects on the risk of nonmarital childbearing of socioeconomic measures at the level of counties (which are appreciably larger than zip code areas) as census tracts. Zip code areas also have one advantage over census tracts: Unlike tract-level data, which are generally available only for residents of metropolitan areas, zip codes encompass the entire country. In 1980, there were 35,610 zip code areas in the United States, with median and mean population sizes of 1,414 and 6,282, respectively (Adams, 1991). The corresponding figures for the 42,978 census tracts are fairly similar, with a median population size of 3,854 and a mean of 4,216. The 535 women in our sample are distributed across 190 zip code areas.[3]

*Independent variables*. Following South and Crowder (1999), we measure the socioeconomic status of the respondent's neighborhood (zip code area) by a standardized index comprised of the following six items: (a) the

poverty rate, (b) the percentage of families receiving public assistance, (c) the male joblessness rate (i.e., the percentage of working-age men who are either unemployed or not in the labor force), (d) the percentage of families earning less than $30,000, (e) the percentage of persons age 25 and older without a college education, and (f) the percentage of workers who are not in managerial or professional occupations. We refer to this scale as the *Neighborhood Disadvantage Index*. Each of the items in this index has been used in prior studies of neighborhood effects on adolescent outcomes. These variables exhibit an average interitem correlation of .59, and the resulting additive scale (after transforming to standard scores) has quite acceptable internal reliability (alpha = .90). These variables are derived from 1980 census data and assigned to the respondents according to their zip code address at the Wave 2 interview.

Inferring an influence of community socioeconomic status on adolescent behavior requires disentangling the effects of community SES from the effects of the socioeconomic status of adolescents and their families (Duncan, Connell, & Klebanov, 1997). The most common strategy for disentangling neighborhood effects from individual- and family-level effects is to include multiple measures of the latter as control variables. Accordingly, the regression models include several characteristics of the NSC respondents and their families that might be related to the young women's risk of premarital childbearing, specific pregnancy outcomes, or the socioeconomic status of their neighborhoods.

Respondent's race is measured by a dummy variable scored 0 for non-Blacks and 1 for Blacks. Because the non-Blacks in our sample are overwhelmingly White, we use the terms *non-Black* and *White* interchangeably. Indicators of the socioeconomic status of the respondent's family include family income (measured with an 8-point scale ranging from less than $5,000 to $50,000 or more), completed years of schooling of the more highly educated parent, and a dummy variable for whether the family owns its home. Family disruption is measured by a dummy variable scored 0 for respondents who at the Wave 2 interview resided with both biological parents and 1 for respondents with other family compositions. Church attendance is measured by a single item asking respondents how often they attend church services. The four possible responses range from never to about once a week or more. Number of siblings refers to the total number of respondents' sisters and brothers living in the household as of the Wave 2 interview.

*Analytical strategy.* We estimate a two-stage nested logit model of the determinants of adolescent pregnancy and its resolution (Lundberg &

**TABLE 1**
**Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables in Analysis of Premarital Pregnancy and Pregnancy Resolution**

| *Dependent Variables* | *Frequency* | *Percentage of All Women* | *Percentage of Pregnant Women* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Premarital pregnancy ($N$ = 535) | | | |
| No premarital pregnancy | 407 | 76.1 | — |
| Premarital pregnancy | 128 | 23.9 | — |
| Total | 535 | 100.0 | |
| Pregnancy resolution ($N$ = 128) | | | |
| Married before birth | 13 | 2.4 | 10.2 |
| Abortion | 38 | 7.1 | 29.7 |
| Premarital birth | 77 | 14.4 | 60.1 |
| Total | 128 | 23.9 | 100.0 |

Plotnick, 1995; Plotnick, 1992). The nested logit model is preferred over other choice models because it relaxes the assumption that the disturbance terms between choices are uncorrelated and takes into account similarities among alternative choices (McFadden, 1981). The nested logit model is a particularly appropriate analytical model when, as in our case, the final outcome is a consequence of hierarchically ordered decisions or events (Hoffman & Duncan, 1988). Specifically, we estimate the effects of the explanatory variables on the likelihood that a young woman will become premaritally pregnant and conditional on becoming pregnant, the likelihood that she will choose either to have an abortion or to marry prior to birth. We estimate this model as a single system using the full information maximum likelihood nested logit procedure in LIMDEP (Greene, 1998).

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution for the outcome variables. Of the 535 women in our sample, 128 (23.9%) experienced a premarital pregnancy by the third wave of interviews. Of those who became premaritally pregnant, 13 (10.2%) married prior to childbirth, 38 (29.7%) had a voluntary abortion, and 77 (60.1%) had the child before (or without ever) marrying. Overall, then, 14.4% of the young women in our sample experienced a premarital birth. The distribution of these outcomes is generally similar to those observed by Cooksey (1990) and Plotnick (1992) using the NLSY.

**TABLE 2**
**Descriptive Statistics for Explanatory Variables in Analyses of Premarital Pregnancy and Pregnancy Resolution**

| *Explanatory Variables* | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Black (1 = yes) | 0.20 | 0.40 |
| Family income | 4.46 | 1.88 |
| Parent's education | 13.02 | 2.95 |
| Family owns home (1 = yes) | 0.82 | 0.39 |
| Family disruption (1 = yes) | 0.40 | 0.49 |
| Church attendance | 3.30 | 0.99 |
| Number of siblings | 1.78 | 1.20 |
| Neighborhood Disadvantage Index[a] | 0.00 | 4.88 |

NOTE: *N* (unweighted) = 535.
a. Standardized scale based on *z* scores.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on the explanatory variables used in the nested logit models. Black women comprise 20% of the sample. The average income of these young women's families falls midway between the categories of $15,000 to $20,000 and $20,000 to $25,000. On average, the more educated of these women's parents completed 1 year of college. Eighty-two percent of their families owned their homes, and 40% of these women did not live with both biological parents at the second wave of interviews. The typical respondent reports attending church between at least once a month and once a week or more and lives with between one and two siblings.

As a standardized scale, the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index has a mean of zero. However, considering some of the individual components of this index reveals the types of communities in which these young women dwell (figures not shown). The typical woman in our sample resides in a zip code area with a poverty rate of 13.1% and in which 8.6% of households receive some form of public assistance. Approximately 30% of the male adults in the average neighborhood are without jobs, and more than three quarters of families have incomes less $30,000 (in 1980 dollars). Fifteen percent of adults age 25 and older have completed college, and about 20% of workers are employed in professional or managerial occupations.

Table 3 presents the results of the nested logit regression model of premarital pregnancy and its resolution. The first column shows the coefficients and their standard errors that describe the effects of the explanatory variables on the log odds that a young woman will experience a premarital

**TABLE 3**
**Coefficients for Nested-Logit Regression Models of Premarital Pregnancy and Pregnancy Resolution**

| | *Pregnancy Resolution*[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Explanatory Variables* | *Premarital Pregnancy 1* | | *Abortion 2* | | *Married Before Birth 3* | |
| Black | 0.902* | (0.323) | –0.007 | (0.610) | –2.609* | (1.232) |
| Family income | –0.076 | (0.095) | 0.040 | (0.198) | 0.073 | (0.232) |
| Parent's education | –0.214* | (0.088) | 0.388* | (0.134) | 0.030 | (0.147) |
| Family owns home | –0.823* | (0.300) | –0.079 | (0.598) | –0.620 | (0.737) |
| Family disruption | –0.041 | (0.360) | 0.426 | (0.609) | 0.732 | (0.749) |
| Church attendance | –0.189 | (0.122) | –0.015 | (0.228) | 0.202 | (0.305) |
| Number of siblings | 0.039 | (0.111) | –0.201 | (0.223) | 0.135 | (0.285) |
| Neighborhood Disadvantage Index | 0.055 | (0.047) | –0.182* | (0.085) | –0.071 | (0.097) |
| Constant | 2.331* | (1.050) | –5.112* | (1.640) | –2.492 | (2.061) |
| Inclusive value | 0.513 | (.511) | | | | |
| Model chi-square | | | 346.63 | | | |
| Log likelihood | | | –338.14 | | | |

NOTE: $N = 535$. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
a. Omitted outcome is premarital birth.
*$p \leq .05$ (two-tailed tests).

pregnancy. Of the control variables, Black women are significantly more likely than White women to experience a premarital pregnancy, a finding consistent with prior studies (Trent & Crowder, 1997). Exponentiating the coefficient for Black implies that net of other factors in the model, the odds that Black women will experience a premarital pregnancy are 2.46 times the corresponding odds for Whites ($2.46 = e^{.902}$). In addition, both parent's education and home ownership are significantly and inversely associated with the risk of premarital pregnancy. Net of these effects, the other control variables—family income, family disruption, church attendance, and number of siblings—do not appear to significantly influence young women's risk of premarital pregnancy.

Of critical importance for evaluating the hypotheses advanced earlier is the coefficient for the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index. Although positive, as hypothesized, this coefficient is quite small and falls far from statistical significance. Thus, net of the control variables, we find no evidence that residence in a socioeconomically disadvantaged community increases young women's risk of becoming premaritally pregnant.

The coefficients in columns 2 and 3 of Table 3 describe the effects of the independent variables on the manner in which a premarital pregnancy is resolved. These coefficients contrast the likelihood of having a premarital birth with both having a voluntary abortion (column 2) and marrying prior to childbirth (column 3). Conditional on becoming premaritally pregnant, Black women are significantly less likely than White women to legitimate the birth, that is, to marry prior to childbirth (column 3). Thus, not only are Black women more likely than their White counterparts to become premaritally pregnant to begin with, they are also less likely than White women to avert a premarital birth by marrying, a reflection of Black women's overall lower marriage rates (Lichter et al., 1992). Parent's education significantly increases the likelihood that premaritally pregnant adolescents will abort the pregnancy rather than give birth while still unmarried (column 2). Thus, children of better educated parents are both less likely than others to become premaritally pregnant (column 1) and, conditional on doing so, are more likely to avert a premarital birth by seeking an abortion.

Notably, the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index is significantly and inversely related to the odds of aborting a premarital pregnancy relative to having a premarital birth. Hence, it appears that the main reason living in a disadvantaged neighborhood increases the risk of having a premarital birth is that it substantially diminishes the probability that premaritally pregnant adolescents will abort. Although neighborhood disadvantage is, as predicted, inversely related to the probability that premaritally pregnant women will marry prior to childbirth (column 3), this effect is not statistically significant.

How strong are the effects of neighborhood disadvantage on adolescent premarital pregnancy and its possible resolutions? Table 4 presents the mean predicted probabilities of premarital pregnancy, the conditional probabilities for the resolution outcomes, and the unconditional probability of a premarital birth for selected values of the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index. These simulated probabilities are derived from the coefficients for the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index shown in Table 3 while assigning each respondent her own values on all other variables. We show the probabilities at the mean of the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index and at one and two standard deviations above and below the mean.

The first column of Table 4 shows that the estimated risk of premarital pregnancy increases fairly modestly as one moves from the best neighborhoods (two standard deviations below the mean of the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index, with a mean predicted probability of .101) to the worst neighborhoods (two standard deviations above the mean, with a mean pre-

**TABLE 4**
**Mean Predicted Probabilities of Premarital Pregnancy, Pregnancy Resolution Outcomes, and Premarital Birth at Selected Values of the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index (*N* = 535)**

| | | *Conditional Probabilities* | | | *Unconditional Probability of* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Premarital Pregnancy* | *Abortion* | *Married Before Birth* | *Premarital Birth* | *Premarital Birth* |
| Neighborhood Disadvantage Index Value | | | | | |
| –2 standard deviations | .101 | .720 | .088 | .192 | .019 |
| –1 standard deviation | .138 | .572 | .108 | .320 | .044 |
| Sample mean | .185 | .411 | .118 | .471 | .087 |
| +1 standard deviation | .241 | .265 | .114 | .621 | .150 |
| +2 standard deviations | .304 | .155 | .100 | .745 | .226 |

NOTE: Predicted probabilities for premarital pregnancy, abortion, married before birth, and premarital birth were computed using the coefficients shown in Table 3 and respondents' values on the neighborhood disadvantage variable with all other variables held at their observed values. The predicted unconditional probability of premarital birth is the product of the probability of premarital pregnancy and the conditional probability of premarital birth.

dicted probability of .304). As shown in column 2, however, the Neighborhood Disadvantage Index exerts a substantially stronger effect on the likelihood of aborting a premarital pregnancy. In the best neighborhoods, the estimated conditional probability of aborting a premarital pregnancy is .720 compared with a probability of only .155 in the worst neighborhoods. Because neighborhood disadvantage has little effect on the conditional probability of marrying before birth (column 3), the probabilities of having a premarital birth given a premarital pregnancy (column 4) are essentially the obverse of the conditional probabilities of aborting a premarital pregnancy. Multiplying the probabilities of becoming premaritally pregnant (column 1) by the conditional probabilities of having a premarital birth given a premarital pregnancy (column 4) generates the unconditional probabilities of having a premarital birth shown in column 5. These estimated probabilities demonstrate that the risk of having a premarital birth varies substantially by neighborhood socioeconomic status, from a low of .019 in the best of neighborhoods to a high of .226 in the worst of communities. More important for our purposes, these simulated probabilities show that the effect of neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage on the overall risk of bearing a child out of wedlock results largely from the very

low abortion rates in economically distressed neighborhoods. Variation across neighborhoods of different socioeconomic quality in the initial risk of becoming premaritally pregnant plays, at best, a secondary role.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although numerous studies find that young women who reside in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods experience a higher risk of having an out-of-wedlock birth than residents of wealthier communities, few studies have explored the life-course pathways that contribute to this effect. We address this issue here by examining the effect of a multi-item index of community socioeconomic status on young women's risk of premarital pregnancy and the manner in which it is resolved. The key finding is that net of other factors, community socioeconomic status does not significantly affect the likelihood that adolescent women will become premaritally pregnant. Neither does community SES significantly influence the probability that premaritally pregnant adolescents will legitimate the birth. Rather, the main reason that residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood increases the risk of a premarital birth is that compared to women in wealthier neighborhoods, adolescent women living in disadvantaged neighborhoods who become premaritally pregnant are substantially less likely to voluntarily terminate their pregnancy.

Thus, the paths through which community socioeconomic status affects premarital fertility appear to differ from those of family socioeconomic status. Several studies find that high family socioeconomic status reduces both the risk of a premarital pregnancy and conditional on becoming pregnant, the likelihood that a young woman will give birth out of wedlock (Cooksey, 1990; Plotnick, 1992). Indeed, we observe this pattern for parent's education, which is inversely related to the probability of becoming premaritally pregnant and positively related to the conditional likelihood of aborting. In contrast, community socioeconomic status affects only the manner in which a premarital pregnancy is resolved and not the initial probability of becoming premaritally pregnant.

At least two processes could account for the lower rates of abortion in socioeconomically distressed neighborhoods. One possibility is that lower abortion rates—and consequently, high rates of premarital fertility—in disadvantaged neighborhoods result from the comparative absence of abortion providers in these communities. In this view, premaritally pregnant women in poor communities are just as likely as women in wealthier localities to desire terminating the pregnancy but lack the opportunity to

do so. Although we cannot directly test this explanation, it is challenged by two strands of side evidence. First, Billy and Moore (1992) found no significant effect of the availability of family planning services or abortion providers on adolescent premarital fertility. Admittedly, their measures are at the county level and thus may be poor proxies for the availability of these services at the level of local communities or neighborhoods. But the failure to observe an effect challenges an interpretation of our findings that emphasizes the presumed deficit of abortion providers in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Second, a recent study by South and Baumer (2000) showed that the effect of community socioeconomic disadvantage on young women's risk of having a premarital birth is largely attributable to the greater acceptance of nonmarital parenthood among adolescents in poor neighborhoods. If the effect of community SES on abortion rates (and through this, rates of premarital fertility) operated primarily through abortion availability, we would not expect adolescent women's attitudes toward unmarried motherhood to mediate the effect of community SES on premarital fertility. That is, if abortion availability were the primary mechanism linking community SES to abortion rates, then we would not expect to find that community SES is related to attitudes toward unmarried motherhood or more important, that these attitudes partially explain the effect of community SES on premarital fertility. However, the results of prior studies suggest that community SES is inversely related to premarital fertility rates because women in low-SES communities are more accepting of unmarried motherhood than are their counterparts in higher SES neighborhoods. Thus, differences in abortion availability across communities of varying SES may play only a minor role in generating lower abortion rates in low-SES than in higher SES communities.

A second possible explanation for our findings is that the forces that encourage women in disadvantaged neighborhood to bear children out of wedlock only come into play after these women become pregnant. Such factors as lower opportunity costs to unmarried motherhood, the lack of family role models, and the desire to achieve adult status that presumably lead women in disadvantaged neighborhoods to exhibit higher than average premarital fertility rates do not distinguish all women in disadvantaged neighborhoods from the counterparts in wealthier areas. Indeed, the observed difference in premarital pregnancy rates across communities of varying socioeconomic status is not statistically significant. Rather, it is only after becoming pregnant that women in disadvantaged communities are more likely to voluntarily carry the pregnancy to term. Thus, it is only among the select group of premaritally pregnant women that these forces begin to hold sway. Perhaps premaritally pregnant women in disadvan-

taged neighborhoods are more likely than their counterparts elsewhere to be enmeshed in networks of social support that although generally discouraging premarital pregnancy, nonetheless accept it when it occurs (Burton, 1990).

Future research might profitably attempt to test these and other explanations for the effect of community socioeconomic status on the resolution of premarital pregnancy. Quantitative studies that employ larger samples of adolescent women combined with richer measures of explanatory constructs might shed additional light on how community characteristics shape the fertility decision-making processes of young adults. The relatively small sample size used in this analysis means that our inferences must be considered somewhat provisional. Larger samples might also allow for the estimation of race-specific models, a strategy that is unfortunately prohibited by the small sample used in this analysis. Differential effects by race might be anticipated from South and Crowder (1999), who found that neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage decreases Black women's marriage probabilities but increases marriage rates among White women. Qualitative studies that systematically compare youth in advantaged and disadvantaged neighborhoods might also illuminate more generally how community context affects adolescent behavior.

## NOTES

1. Attrition between waves of the National Survey of Children (NSC) has averaged approximately 15%. Zill, Furstenberg, Peterson, and Moore (1990) reported that this attrition has been somewhat higher among poor Blacks from large cities. The sampling weights have been designed to adjust for differential attrition rates.

2. The total NSC female sample at Wave 2 was 699; 569 of these women both participated in the Wave 3 interview and provided valid information on the control variables. Our final sample of 535 excludes 18 women whose premarital pregnancy ended in a miscarriage or stillbirth and 16 women who were premaritally pregnant at the Wave 3 interview. The latter group is excluded because we do not know how these pregnancies were eventually resolved.

3. Because there is very little clustering of the NSC respondents within zip code areas, little would be gained by applying hierarchical linear models to these data (Duncan, Connell, & Klebanov, 1997).

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This article attempts to make a connection between two heretofore analytically distinct discourses on *risk*. On one hand, it refers to ways in which social work professionals and the like use the term to identify certain categories of teens as high, moderate, or low risk. On the other hand, it refers to the way theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck described the advent of *the risk society* as a manifestation of a novel stage in the development of modernity. Theoretical issues are raised in reference to the findings derived from a study on teenage sexuality and pregnancy conducted in a Midwestern metropolitan statistical area of approximately 300,000, paying particular attention to a comparative assessment of the following two groups of interviewees: teen mothers and adolescent women using the services of a family planning clinic.

# Teenagers, Pregnancy, and Childbearing in a Risk Society

## How Do High-Risk Teens Differ From Their Age Peers?

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Since the 1960s, teenage childbearing and parenting have been considered to be significant social problems in the United States (Furstenberg, 1991; Luker, 1996; Maynard, 1996). Despite the fact that childbearing rates among teens have actually declined in recent years, public perceptions about the seriousness of the problem remain unabated (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Chase-Lansdale, 1989). In part, this is not surprising because the rate of teen pregnancies in this country is far higher than those in all other advanced industrial nations despite the fact that teens in those nations are as sexually active as their American counterparts (The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994). Births to adolescents account for 20% of the annual births in the United States (Brindis & Philliber, 1998; "Teen Births Decline," 1996).

Teen pregnancies present a variety of physical and social problems for both mother and child, and yet one third of pregnant teenagers obtains inadequate prenatal care. Early childbearing poses increased health risks for both mother and baby. Teen parents are far more likely to live in poverty

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than peers who defer childbearing until later in life. They are far more likely to drop out of school. Their educational attainment level is lower than that of their nonparenting age peers. Their career opportunities tend to be considerably more limited than those who remain childless until adulthood. Compounding this situation, the problems confronted by teen mothers tend to be passed on to their children, thus creating problems that are perpetuated from one generation to another (East, 1998; Furstenberg et al., 1989; Geronimus, 1991).

Those teens who become mothers are increasingly inclined to keep their babies rather than place them for adoption. At present, only 4% of teens opt for adoption compared to 21% a generation ago. At the same time, one of the most significant developments in recent decades is that teen mothers who keep their children do so without getting married. This is a marked departure from a quarter of a century ago, when the vast majority of adolescent premarital pregnancies resulted in marriage. The decision not to elect marriage is part of the reason that the public has become more aware of teen childbearing as a social problem. As Furstenberg (1991) posed it, as long as adolescent women got married after they got pregnant, "the issue of early childbearing was invisible" (p. 129). The percentage of unmarried teen mothers rose nationally from 15% of all teen births in 1960 to 71% by 1992.

This phenomenon has a direct correlation with socioeconomic status, as 66% of children living with mothers who have never been married live below the poverty line, whereas only 11% of children residing with two parents live in poverty. Exacerbating this situation, poverty is associated with a variety of social problems for the children of never-married mothers, including crime, substance abuse, welfare dependency, and low educational attainment (Allen, Philliber, & Herrling, 1997; Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1990).

Thus, it is for good reason that across the political spectrum there is a general consensus that encouraging teens to defer having children is sound social policy. However, beyond the debates over "just-say-no" campaigns versus condom machines in the school restrooms, more dispassionate attempts to determine what kinds of programs will actually work to reduce the number of teen parents must identify the most salient factors differentiating those who are at high risk of becoming a teen parent from their age peers who are either sexually abstinent or who practice safe sex. This study is an attempt to identify some of the key operative factors contributing to these differences.

## THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

This article attempts to make a connection between two heretofore analytically distinct discourses on *risk*. On one hand, it refers to the ways in which social work professionals and the like use the term to identify certain categories of teens (as in the reference to *high-risk teens* in the subtitle) and on the other hand to the ways theorists such as Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992, 1998) and Ulrich Beck (1992) described the advent of *the risk society* as a manifestation of a novel stage in the development of modernity.

The former employment of risk discourse uses the term to describe certain categories of behavior or the attributes of social actors that are seen as relevant to the likelihood of engaging in such behaviors that are deemed detrimental to personal well-being. Typically in the literature, the behaviors singled out for attention are alcohol and substance abuse, gang and other criminal involvement, and issues related to sexual activity, including age at first intercourse, number of sexual partners, and practicing unprotected sex. Thus, a low-risk teenager is someone who for a variety of contributing factors is disinclined to engage in such behaviors, whereas the high-risk individual is so inclined. Risk in this usage evinces an intent to explore social character, and the goal of research operating out of this perspective—the bread and butter of articles published in journals such as this one—is to identify those social structural factors that play the most significant role in shaping the character of social actors.

On the other hand, theorists of risk society shift the level of analysis from the actor to the culture and structure of contemporary society. Beck (1992) made the claim that modernity has entailed two stages, the earlier industrial one that was concerned primarily with the expansion of society's capacity to produce wealth and the risk stage, which we are now entering and which increasingly forces us to respond to the unintended consequences of technology, science, and industry. Giddens (1998) concurred, stressing that the advent of risk society spells the end of nature "untouched by human intervention" (p. 207) and the end of tradition. Noting that societies in the past certainly were hazardous places and that advanced modern societies have often found ways to alleviate or reduce the negative effects of many hazards, the notion of risk makes such societies unique. Giddens (1998) offered the following distinctions to make his point:

> Risk is not, as such, the same as hazard or danger. A risk society is not intrinsically more dangerous or hazardous than pre-existing forms of social

> order. . . . Life in the Middle Ages was hazardous; but there was no notion of risk and there doesn't seem in fact to be a notion of risk in any traditional culture. The reason for this is that dangers are experienced as given. Either they come from God, or they come simply from a world which one takes for granted. The idea of risk is bound up with the aspiration to control and particularly with the idea of controlling the future. (pp. 208-209)

The purpose of this article will be to link this understanding of risk society to the discourse on risk-taking versus risk-averse adolescent women in relation to sexual activity and pregnancy. As such, what I am doing herein bears a resemblance to a recent article by Mary Ann Lamanna (1999) in the following ways: (a) It is concerned with similar empirical questions, (2) it employs similar data (in fact, from the same region of the country), and (c) it attempts to bring into fruitful engagement a long tradition of research in family studies and what is perceived to be an important development in social theory outside of this disciplinary subfield. The difference is that for Lamanna, the theory at issue is postmodernism, whereas for me it is the theory of risk society as advanced by two theorists who suggested that we are not leaving the modern for the postmodern but instead are entering a new stage in the history of modern society. I will return to the significance of this difference at the end of the article after first describing the research project and discussing its results.

## DATA AND METHOD

The data employed in this study derive from a two-stage research project conducted during 1996 and 1997 in a Midwestern metropolitan statistical area of approximately 300,000 people that includes both a survey component and in-depth taped interviews. The survey consisted of a 75-item instrument in which subjects were asked to provide information about perceptions and behaviors associated with school, family, peers, and organizational affiliations as well as questions about self-image, attitudes regarding sexuality, and their own sexual history. The questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of 443 male and female high school students from three urban and two suburban schools. To ensure adequate minority representation in the sample, Blacks were purposively overrepresented in the sample from an inner-city high school, whereas Latinos were overrepresented in two of the urban schools. The result was that the number of minority respondents reflected the racial composition of the metropolitan area. For the purposes of this article, I rely on the findings

from the survey in a limited way to provide an overall portrait of teen sexuality and to distinguish in a general way high-risk teens from others.

More important for the purpose at hand is the in-depth interviews conducted with the following two groups of sexually active females: teen mothers and young women who are clients at a local family planning clinic. A convenience sample was used for this phase of the study, with the selection being done to ensure that the sample reflected the different minority breakdowns of clients in these two offices of the clinic. A total of 52 interviews were conducted, 29 with teen mothers and the remaining 23 with clinic clients. The interviews were taped and took from 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The teen mothers were either interviewed in their homes or at the site where they were participating in a county health department teen mothers' support group. The family planning clients were interviewed at the clinic. It should be noted that the study's original plan also called for interviewing the male partners of clinic clients. This aspect of the project was dropped when it was determined that we could not find an adequate number of partners that were willing to be interviewed.

Although an interview protocol was used to ensure that certain topics were raised consistently in all interviews, the research team wanted to provide for considerable latitude in individual responses because its primary interest was in examining the narrative accounts that subjects constructed. Thus, interviewees were permitted to focus on certain features of their life histories (e.g., assessments of their partner or partners, relationships with parents, views about contraception, etc.) as they saw fit (Maines, 1993).

These interviews were conducted with an appreciation of the importance of talk to social life and the connection between language and behavior. The narratives that people construct to account for their behavior, both for themselves and for others, constitute instances of meaning creation (Denzin, 1990; Maines & Ulmer, 1993). In particular, the researchers were interested in the varied ways teens interpreted and made sense of their sexual behavior, looking at both the excuses and the justifications they employ to explain their actions (Lyman & Scott, 1968). One of the distinct virtues of this methodology is that it permitted interviewers to probe, ask for clarifications, and search deeper into the initial answers. It yielded a richer and more nuanced portrait of the individual's sexuality than can be obtained in survey research, permitting the researcher to locate that activity in terms of the ambiguities that teens experience, the complexities of the lives they lead, and the overall way in which they orient themselves to their everyday circumstances. In addition, it allows insights into personal history as the narrative accounts frequently focused

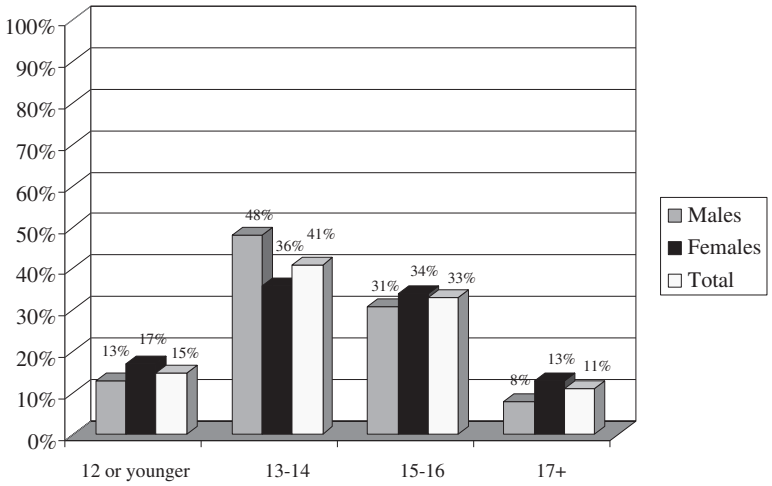


**Figure 1: Age When Teens First Had Intercourse (percentage of sexually active teens)**

on the varied ways teens continue, modify, or dramatically change patterned behaviors (Thompson, 1995).

## SURVEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the high school survey help to contextualize the ethnographic interviews. I will briefly summarize findings regarding the following topics: (a) the onset of sexual activity, (b) current sexual behaviors, (c) reasons for abstinence, and (d) the characteristics of teens who are at high risk for pregnancy.

### THE ONSET OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY

The survey revealed that the rate of voluntary intercourse increased significantly as teens got older. Thus, although 34% of 1st-year high school students reported having had sexual intercourse at least once, that figure rose to 72% among seniors. As Figure 1 indicates, among the sexually active segment of our sample, 15% reported having first had intercourse when they were 12 or younger and 41% when they were 13 or 14 years old. Thus, 55% of the sexually active teens in the sample had their first sexual experience before they were 15 years old. This is significant

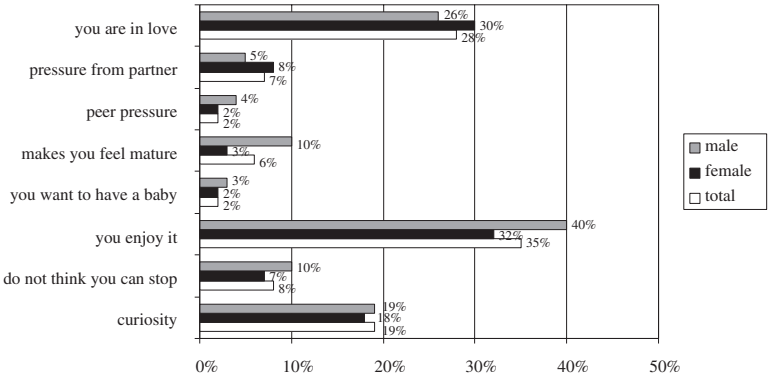


**Figure 2: Reasons Cited for Being Sexually Active (%)**
NOTE: Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could make more than one choice.

because there is ample evidence to conclude that the earlier the initiation of sexual intercourse, the greater the likelihood of teen pregnancy (Maynard, 1996; Witte, 1997).

## CURRENT SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Many of the teens that defined themselves as sexually active engage in sexual intercourse relatively infrequently. Approximately 39% report having had sex between 1 and 5 times during the past 6 months. On the other hand, among those engaging in sex more frequently, 16% report having had sex more than 25 times during the same period. In responding to the question about the number of sexual partners they have ever had, 40% answered one, 20% have had two, 25% cite between three and five, and 15% claim to have had more than five.

Among sexually active teens, there is considerable variation in the decision about whether to use any form of birth control. At 56%, a remarkably high percentage of respondents claim that they always use birth control, whereas 23% use it either sometimes or rarely. Slightly more than a fifth of sexually active young people never use any form of birth control. Teens who had commenced sexual activity before age 15 were far more likely to fall into the last category than those who initiated sexual activity in the later teen years.

Sexually active teens were asked to identify the three reasons that best described why they are sexually active. In rank order, the most frequently

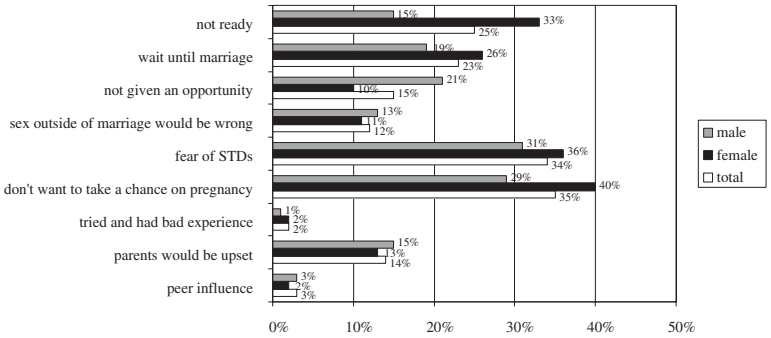


**Figure 3: Reasons Given for Abstaining From Sex (%)**
NOTE: Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could make more than one choice.

cited reasons were (a) because the respondent enjoys it, (b) because the person is in love, and (c) curiosity. As Figure 2 reveals, there were no significant gender differences in these rankings.

Approximately 15% of the sexually active sample reported that they have either been pregnant or have gotten someone pregnant. Considerably more females (22%) reported having been pregnant than males (4%) contended that they had impregnated someone. These findings are consistent with findings at the national level by researchers at The Alan Guttmacher Institute (1994). The institute's researchers and independent research conducted by Mike Males (1998) concluded that the differences reported between males and females were due to the fact that for a sizable majority of young women who become mothers, the father is 6 or more years older and thus is typically not a teen. However, this was not what this study found. Although I was unable to determine why our findings did not support those of other studies, two possible explanations can be offered. First, it may be the case that many teen males are unaware that they have fathered a child. Second, teen males may be unwilling to admit paternity even in an anonymous questionnaire. Whatever the reason, this study was not able to lend empirical support to the argument that predatory adult males were a major contributing factor to teen pregnancy.

## REASONS FOR ABSTINENCE

Students who had not become sexually active were asked to identify the most important reasons for their decision to refrain from sex. As Figure 3 reveals, the four most frequently offered reasons were, in rank order,

the following: (a) not wanting to take a chance of becoming pregnant, (b) fear of contracting a sexually transmitted disease, (c) not being ready to become sexually active, and (d) wanting to wait until marriage.

Some gender differences were apparent in the reasons cited for abstinence. Perhaps not surprisingly, females are more likely than males to list the fear of becoming pregnant as a major reason for refraining from sexual intercourse. They are more than twice as likely as males to say they are not ready for sex, whereas considerably more males than females state that the reason they have not had sex is that the opportunity has not availed itself.

## HIGH-RISK TEENS

The teens that we defined as not being at risk of pregnancy are limited to those who reported that they are not sexually experienced. We divided those who have had sex on at least one occasion into the following three categories reflecting differing levels of risk: low, moderate, and high. Respondents were defined as low risk if they indicated either that they had not had sex in the past 6 months or that they always use birth control when they have sex. Teens fell into the moderate-risk category if they have had sex between one and five times during the past 6 months and sometimes use birth control. There was nobody in the sample that claimed to have had sex between one and five times and rarely or never used birth control. The high-risk category includes teens that have had sex six or more times during the past 6 months and rarely or never use birth control. Those 6 teens that claimed to have had sex more than six times in the past 6 months but sometimes used birth control were located in the moderate-risk category.

On the basis of these definitions, 56% of the sexually active teens fall into the low-risk category, 16% are in the moderate-risk group, and 28% are classified as high risk. It should be noted that the number of high-risk teens in the general population is likely to be higher than this figure because excluded from consideration in this study are teens who have dropped out of school.

In most respects, the low-risk teens and to a slightly lesser extent the moderate-risk teens very much resemble the nonrisk teens. Members of these groups are quite alike in terms of demographic variables, school performance, the kinds of peers they associate with, and other related factors. In contrast, the high-risk teens differ from their age peers in a number of ways. Blacks are overrepresented in the high-risk category. Although they comprise only 15% of the sample, they account for 46% of high-risk teens. In terms of socioeconomic status, those teens reporting a household income of under $20,000 were twice as likely to fall into the high-risk cate-

gory as those reporting higher incomes were. Adolescents in this group do not do as well in school and are less involved in extracurricular activities. They are more likely to engage in other risk behaviors such as drinking, smoking, and using illegal drugs. Their friends place less value on school, are less involved in extracurricular activities, and are less inclined to be involved in voluntary and community organizations than the friends of other teens. On the other hand, the friends of high-risk teens are more likely to be involved in gangs, to have been in trouble with the police, and to be sexually active than is the case of friends of teens in the other categories. The parents of high-risk teens, in the eyes of those teens, are perceived to have relatively little involvement in their lives. In terms of sexual histories, high-risk teens are more likely to have engaged in sex for the first time before they were 15, generally report that they did not use birth control at first intercourse, and are less likely to use birth control today than their sexually active counterparts. Moreover, these teens report having had more sexual partners than low- or moderate-risk teens.

## COMPARING TEEN MOTHERS AND FAMILY PLANNING CLIENTS

With these differences between high-risk teens and their peers derived from the survey in mind, I turn to the one-on-one interviews in an attempt to better understand the comparative life trajectories of teen mothers and family planning clients who have never been pregnant. These interviews are intended to suggest the varied ways in which two groups of young women create personal narratives to account for their life situations.

The result of this comparison between the groups is a study in contrasts. The following discussion summarizes the main findings from the collective portraits of these two interview groups (the names of subjects have been changed to ensure anonymity).

### TEEN MOTHERS

Do adolescent women want to have babies? It is commonly assumed that teenage females have children as a result of rational choices. For example, this view has been supported in research conducted by Judith Musnick (1993), who bluntly asserted, "If adolescents did not want babies, they would not have them. But they do want them" (p. 109). The two most frequently cited reasons for this decision are first, a desire to solidify a relationship with the young woman's partner and second, a wish to be-

come independent from one's parents. The portrait presented by the 29 teen mothers we interviewed calls into question this perspective. I believe it is only partially correct and needs to be reassessed and revised (see also Jacobs, 1994; Winter, 1997).

If sexual abstinence or consistent use of contraceptives are clear indications of a desire to avoid pregnancy, one might conclude that teens who fail to use any birth control or use contraceptives only intermittently or ineptly are by their actions expressing a desire to have a baby. However, none of the young women we interviewed claimed to have set out to have a baby. Despite this fact, only 3 claimed that they had used contraceptives routinely. Three other interviewees initially claimed that a condom had failed them, but after probing, they admitted that they did not always use a condom. A 15-year-old mother asserted that when she got pregnant, she had little knowledge about birth control, and she contended that her lack of knowledge led to her failure to use any form of protection. This particular claim of a lack of knowledge about sex and birth control was not asserted by any of the other teen mothers. The reasons cited in other interviews are revealing insofar as they call into question the rational choice argument.

For example, Monique, a 15-year-old African American who became sexually active at 13 and is now the mother of a 6-month-old daughter explained how she became pregnant by stating,

> I didn't think I'd get pregnant. My family didn't know I was having sex and I didn't want them to know. I figured they might get suspicious if I had condoms or whatever, so I never used it [birth control].

Getting pregnant shortly after a reconciliation with her boyfriend, Monique might be seen as an example of a young teen who chose pregnancy as a way of keeping her boyfriend, and thus her case might be seen as supporting the rational choice argument. However, she contended that she knew in advance that young men today usually do not stick with a relationship once a baby arrives on the scene. She said she did not think her boyfriend was any different from his peers, who she thinks are far more likely to flee from a relationship when the female gets pregnant rather than assume responsibility for the child. Far from being an abstract notion about male irresponsibility, Monique could point to experiences close to home because she identified a friend and a cousin who after becoming pregnant quickly discovered that "their boyfriends didn't want anything to do with them anymore. Both of the studs had new girlfriends before the babies were born."

Terri, a 17-year-old European American teen who also had a child at 13, said that her sexual partner "volunteered to use a condom, but I said he didn't have to. I was young. . . . I was stupid." When she learned she was pregnant, she was terrified. As an initial response to her situation, she did 200 sit-ups every night hoping for a miscarriage. She was one of the few women we spoke with who considered having an abortion but did not know how to obtain one and had no one to turn to for advice or counsel. Thus, for months Terri hid her pregnancy from those around her and practiced a form of self-denial that prevented her from confronting directly the fact that she was pregnant. Only in the last 2 months of her pregnancy did she wrestle with the fact that she was going to become a mother, and she describes this as a slow process of acceptance, which involved first an acceptance of the fact that "this is the hand I've been dealt" to a more enthusiastic embrace of impending motherhood late in the pregnancy.

Similarly, Nikki, a 15-year-old European American mother of a 1-year-old baby boy, experienced depression and considerable anxiety when she learned she was pregnant. In contrast to Terri, Nikki has wanted her partner, whom she described as a bully, to use a condom, but he refused. Nikki not only considered an abortion but went so far as setting up an appointment at a clinic. When she was confronted by a contingent of antiabortion protesters picketing in front of the building, she was sufficiently intimidated by their presence that she left and never returned (see Kane & Staiger, 1996, for a general discussion of abortion access). She also discussed the possibility of giving the child up for adoption (the only participant for whom this seemed to be a genuine possibility), but she ultimately decided to raise him herself. Once again, this move toward an acceptance of becoming a teen mother occurred gradually over the course of the pregnancy (Cervera, 1993).

Ronnie, a 16-year-old African American with an 8-month old son, claims she did not know (or at least did not admit to herself) that she was pregnant until the sixth month of pregnancy. She refrained from informing her parents for another month, and soon thereafter when she told her sexual partner about the pregnancy, he vehemently denied that he was the father. Since that encounter, Ronnie had no contact with him, and he has never seen his child. Ronnie's views on abortion were emblematic of the vast majority of the teen mothers we interviewed. She was opposed to abortion, but this opposition was not, as one might have expected, articulated in religious or ethical terms. Rather, Ronnie voiced an oft-repeated argument that abortion is wrong because in her words, "If you play, you

pay." It was striking how frequently this view was expressed in the interviews. It might be suggested that this argument reflects a peculiarly self-punitive attitude about sexuality, perhaps a reflection of the lingering vestiges of puritanical sexual mores in the larger culture. Moreover, there is a remarkably fatalistic character to this reaction to an unplanned pregnancy.

Overall, it is quite evident that the narrative accounts of these participants call into question the argument that teen mothers employed some variant of means-ends calculation in which they sought to solidify a relationship with a sexual partner or to achieve independence from their parents. If such reasoning was actually the motivation behind their actions, it would appear from their own accounts that their reasoning was seriously flawed because in virtually every case, the opposite occurred. In none of the cases we studied did the father actually marry the mother of his child or even take up residence with her. In fact, the typical scenarios were either immediate flight from responsibility or the progressive disengagement from any ongoing relationship with the mother and child.

One might be tempted to suggest that it was only in retrospect that these women discovered their partners could not be counted on to stand by them. However, their discussions suggest that none of them expected that having a baby would result in marriage. Beyond this, only 4 of the teen mothers harbored a belief, generally for a relatively short time, that the couple would set up a household together. The point is that for those young women who thought for a time that their relationship with their partner might persist, they did so with the idea that it might despite the presence of a child, not because of its presence.

A majority of the subjects reported having family members, friends, and close acquaintances who have had children out of wedlock, and they know from these close-at-hand examples that the era of forced or shotgun marriages is over. Moreover, we discovered that many teen mothers hold fairly unflattering images of typical young males. As one mother succinctly put it, "He figures knocking someone up means he's a man. Shows what he knows!" Others voiced similar assessments. These men were frequently depicted as being irresponsible and immature, unwilling and incapable of providing needed financial and emotional assistance. Ironically, the only mother interviewed who did not voice this general assessment has a boyfriend who is not only a high school dropout but is currently serving a prison term.

Unlike the situation several decades ago, today there appears to be a basic recognition that having a child means, essentially, going it alone—without a genuine expectation that the biological father will play a significant role in raising the child. Thus, teen mothers are accepting of the new

reality of single parenthood. Although some hold out the possibility that at some time in the future (but not the immediate or short-term future) they will find a marital partner and establish a traditional nuclear family unit, others are not so sanguine about this possibility.

Except for 3 young women who lived in abusive homes and had good reason to want to move out, the rest of the mothers described their relationships with their families in generally positive terms. Rather than a quest for independence and the establishment of their own households, one of the main reasons identified by these teens for concluding that they could raise their children was because their parents were frequently willing to play major roles in child rearing.

Although these teens rejected abortion for the reason noted earlier, it was not always clear whether their parents would have supported a decision to abort. Some parents encouraged their daughters to consider this option, whereas others urged against it. Whatever the case, it appears that the young women generally understood that they and not their parents were the final arbiters in this particular decision.

Adoption tended to be rejected because it was felt that a powerful emotional bond had been forged between mother and child during pregnancy. One teen's description of how she came to terms with her pregnancy after an initial reaction of shock, fear, and anxiety resonated with the views of others: "I got this thing growing inside of me and it's going to be a baby—and I'm happy." However, in most instances it was clear that these young women's ability to conclude that they were happy required considerable emotional labor, and even then, many of the mothers admitted that having a child was a decidedly mixed blessing. All of the teens expressed some level of regret that they had been "forced to grow up too fast" and that their "adolescent years had ended." Although there was anger in the voices of a few of the participants, by and large, these comments were made in a rather rueful tone.

None of these teens—not even Monique—seems to have set out to become pregnant. All ended up with mixed emotions after discovering that they were in fact pregnant. As the earlier examples illustrate, the initial reaction was typically negative, with a more positive one emerging only later. This returns us to the question posed at the outset of the section: Why did these women become pregnant? Why didn't they insist that their partners use condoms, both to prevent pregnancy and to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)? Only 2 respondents said that they had been the victims of unwanted sexual advances, and in only one case was that advance from the baby's biological father. Thus, force was not a major contributing factor.

The interviews suggest less that there are particular reasons for opting to become pregnant than that these teen mothers lacked sufficient incentives to prevent themselves from becoming pregnant. For the large majority of these teen mothers, parental disapproval of early childbearing was absent or minimal and thus did not encourage these teens to take preventive measures. Indeed, in many instances, an older sister had already borne a child out of wedlock. In those cases where the parents were less accepting initially, they had tended to be uninvolved in helping their daughters to make informed choices and often were unaware that they had become sexually active.

Although the teen mothers we interviewed were quite willing to talk to us about their private lives, compared to their counterparts at the family planning clinic, this group had a less developed ability to articulate who they were and to express what kinds of aspirations and plans they had for the future. They tended to struggle with low self-esteem and frequently appeared unsure of themselves. Their educational, career, and family goals were nebulous. Indeed, they often seemed to be quite uncomfortable talking about their futures.

Far from being rebellious, these young mothers struck us as being remarkably passive. Rather than taking charge of their lives, they allowed other people and external forces to control them. Indeed, what was remarkable about these teens as a group was the rather fatalistic way they approached motherhood. Far from being perceived or described as a choice, pregnancy was usually depicted as something that had unexpectedly happened to them, and they gradually learned to accept and define as positive the fact that they were going to become mothers. All of these mothers, despite frequent assertions of the love they feel for their children, also confided at some point in their interviews that they wish they has deferred parenthood.

## FAMILY PLANNING CLIENTS

The general passivity of the teen mothers stands in marked contrast to the teens interviewed at the family planning clinic. In this section, I turn to a group of sexually active young women who made a choice to take steps to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. What prompts some young women to become clients at a family planning clinic? Why did they enter the clinic's doors for the first time? Why do they keep coming back? Who are the people that these clients confide in? What kinds of plans for the future do these teens harbor? What are the most important ways in which these young

women differ from the teen mothers? These are the questions I turn to in this section.

Not surprisingly, the reason universally cited by our 23 interviewees about why they make use of the clinic was that they were either already sexually active or in a few instances planned to become active in the near future and were not yet prepared for motherhood. Related to this wish to avert an unwanted pregnancy was an interest in ensuring that they avoid contracting any STDs. For 2 of the women who were interviewed, the fear of STDs loomed large in their decision to go to the clinic. In one case, that of a 15-year-old African American, a close friend is HIV positive and is "really messed up psychologically"; in the other case, the person has several friends and acquaintances who have had various STDs. However, in the vast majority of cases, particularly when the individual had a steady sexual partner and has not had any other or many other partners, STDs were a concern but not the major concern. Pregnancy prevention, thus, was the primary motive for using the clinic's services.

Amy, a 17-year-old European American from a family of middle-class professionals, was a study in contrasts to the teen mothers. An honor student, she had recently been accepted to college as had her steady boyfriend. She had first visited the clinic a few months earlier, prior to becoming sexually active. A high school friend had informed her about the clinic's existence and its policy of confidentiality; thus, without her parent's knowledge but with the support of her boyfriend, she began to visit the clinic.

Amy defined herself as a realist and a careful planner. Although she thinks she and her current boyfriend may eventually get married, both agreed that marriage is not something to consider for the next several years. Neither of them, for example, thinks it would be a good idea to get married before completing college and getting started on their careers. Given this, Amy was quite emphatic when she asserted that "This is not a good time to get pregnant." At the same time, she contended that "it's easy to prevent pregnancy." Given this conviction, Amy has not seriously wrestled with what she would do should she experience an unplanned pregnancy. She is not in principle opposed to abortion and thinks people who put children up for adoption are often doing the "noble thing," but she also claims to realize that these are in any event hard decisions to make.

A similar orientation can be seen in the case of Melissa, an 18-year-old European American. Melissa is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. She reported the abuse, and both of her biological parents came to her support. Her mother divorced the stepfather, and Melissa moved in with her father and received the counseling she needed to

"get on with my life." At the present time, she is sexually active with her boyfriend of 3 years; he has been her only sexual partner. He was involved in the decision to initiate contact with the clinic, and they jointly participated in informational sessions.

Melissa explained her decision to become a family planning client in simple and direct terms: She does not want to have a baby right now, claiming that "I have enough trouble taking care of myself." One of her close friends has a child, and Melissa sees her as "missing out on so much." Not only does her friend miss out on "fun," but her college plans have been disrupted as well. Melissa, in contrast, is currently attending a local community college and working part-time. Taking control of her life is important to Melissa, and one area where she thinks she can exert considerable control is in determining if and when she becomes pregnant. Although she thinks that the precautions she is taking should suffice, she is one of the few women we interviewed who was unequivocal in asserting that she would terminate an unplanned pregnancy.

## COMPARING TEEN MOTHERS AND FAMILY PLANNING CLIENTS

These two examples are typical of clinic clients and serve as illustrations of some of the ways this sample differs from the teen mother group. There are several ways in which the two groups differ from each other. First, the teen mothers usually initiated sexual activity at a younger age than the clinic clients, and this is significant because younger teens are inclined to be less responsible than their older counterparts and appear to have less developed refusal skills. For example, they are less willing to require that their partners use a condom. Younger teens frequently fail to anticipate situations that may lead to sexual conduct, and this makes it difficult for them to plan accordingly. Their sense of self-identity and their future goals were far less clearly articulated than was the case for older teens (Allen et al., 1997).

Second, the clinic clients have done better in school, have a wider range of interests and involvements outside of the classroom, and have more concrete educational and career plans than the teen mothers. Likewise, members of the family planning group are more likely to have experienced no interruptions in their school careers and to have gone directly to college, the military, or into full-time employment.

Third, if there is an operative self-description that the clinic clients employed that is not part of the discourse of the teen mothers, it is that they are "careful" and want to be "in control" of their lives. Almost all of the teen

mothers use similar words to describe themselves today, but their narratives of the ways they acted prior to motherhood suggest that these were not apt characterizations of that stage in their lives. Moreover, the teen mothers themselves do not see these as valid descriptions of their earlier selves (Cervera, 1993; Webb, 1994).

Fourth, and very crucially, the client sample inhabits a network of family and friends that played a crucial role in encouraging pregnancy prevention measures, whereas such a network was lacking among the teen mothers. Indeed, it is striking that 18 women in family planning got there initially not on their own but because someone close to them not only encouraged but facilitated the initial contact. Although mothers played this role in 6 cases, older sisters did likewise in almost equal numbers. But members of the immediate family were not the only people to assume this role. Rather, we found grandmothers, aunts, cousins, friends, and in one instance a neighbor who were responsible for convincing the teens to make appointments at the clinic and more often than not accompanied them on their first appointments.

Fifth, the teen mothers were far more likely than their clinic peers to have sisters, other relatives, and friends who are teen parents. Moreover, they were less likely than the clinic clients to assess the life chances of these siblings and peers in negative terms. Although the teen mothers do see that motherhood can stand in the way of getting out and socializing with their peers, they are far less inclined to see early parenting as limiting or constraining their school or career plans. In contrast, the clinic sample sees a cause-and-effect relationship, and their preventive actions are in no small way a reflection of their desire to prevent their aspirations from being curtailed or sidetracked.

## CONCLUSION: RISK BEHAVIOR/RISK SOCIETY

Risk needs to be distinguished from hazard or danger insofar as built into the concept of risk are both an appreciation of uncertainty and the assessment of the probabilities of various potential outcomes of particular courses of action (Giddens, 1998, 1999; Luhmann, 1998; Lupton, 1999). The "end of nature" and the "end of tradition," according to Giddens (1998, pp. 207-208), are characteristic of risk society. The end of nature refers to the expanded role of human intervention in all facets of the world of nature. Most relevant to this article is the development of safe and effective contraceptives that unlink the "natural" connection between sex and procreation. The end of tradition refers to a world no longer dominated by

a culturally defined fate. In terms of teen pregnancy, this suggests a world in which the cultural mores concerned with the control of sexual conduct and expectations regarding the relationship between having a child and marriage no longer have the efficacy they once did.

In what Giddens (1991, 1998) characterized as the "late modern age," individuals are increasingly free from the moral constraints imposed by traditional society, seen very clearly in the widely held notion that people are not only able to but in fact are compelled to make their own choices about how they are going to guide and shape their own lives. In such a situation, obedience to tradition-based normative expectations or the sheer weight of habit or routine gives way to a heightened sense of reflexivity in which individuals make decisions predicated on what amounts to personal risk analyses and structure their actions accordingly (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991, 1992).

Based on the narrative accounts the clinic clients provided, one can conclude that these adolescent women are relatively at home in the late modern age, having developed a reflexivity at the level of intimate relations appropriate to a risk society. Rather than being driven by the moralizing of the "just say no" or "wait until marriage" demands of the cultural right, with its call to resist the relativizing character of modernity, these women have decided (often with the moral support of others close to them) that they will be the arbiters of their sexual lives. Moreover, they proceed to make choices about their sexual lives with an eye to the potential risks (pregnancy, STDs, and the emotional risks) and to the ways they might best respond to those risks. What makes these young women somewhat different from earlier generations of modern women is that they tend to see life as a series of provisional choices made necessary because of the changes they anticipate encountering in the world of work as well as in the realm of intimacy. In this respect, it is appropriate to see them as reflecting the reflexive consciousness of late modernity.

However, not everyone has embraced this late modern reflexive consciousness. Not surprisingly, those with the most social and cultural capital—the middle class, the better educated, and so on—tend to be most capable of making the changes required of them by a risk society. On the other hand, those with less social and cultural capital appear to be less likely to have made the late modern turn. This, it seems to me, is one of the conclusions we can draw from this study insofar as there were distinct differences between the teen mothers and the family planning clinic clients in terms of race, socioeconomic location, educational achievement, and related differences. The former group was overrepresented by racial minorities (particularly Blacks), poorer women, and high school dropouts. In this

regard, they were quite different from the latter. What the interviews suggest is that these differences translate, to use Mills's (1963) terminology, into differing "situated actions"—those that were risk taking versus those that were risk averse—that in turn are reflections of differing "vocabularies of motive."

Lamanna (1999) saw teen mothers as being imbued with a postmodern sensibility, one attuned to the fragmentary and ambiguous character of contemporary social life that she depicted as a consequence of the transformation of work in a postindustrial economy and the erosion of the modern family. They are engaged in "constructing a sense-making collage of cultural bits" (p. 210). In contrast, I would suggest that the teen mothers in this study reflect neither a postmodern nor a late modern consciousness but rather an earlier modern consciousness, one that is powerfully overlaid with a traditionalist worldview. In particular, this is apparent in the fatalistic quality of the narrative accounts they provided the interviewees, accounts that discount considerably the conviction among these adolescents that they have control over their lives, that they are in a position to arbitrate and navigate their futures, however ambiguous they might be. Put bluntly, these are young women who do not believe that they are ultimately in control of their own lives. This is far removed from the image—to employ the idiom of the postmodernists—of the actor as bricoleur cobbling together a meaningful notion of self out of the quotidian vagaries of the postmodern world. It is far closer to the descriptions one finds in the work of students of contemporary poverty, such as William Julius Wilson (1987), that emphasize the lack of control over their personal lives experienced by disadvantaged people. And insofar as this is the case, the kinds of policy implications that derive from it must begin with a consideration of what would be involved in assisting "high-risk" teens to acquire the social and cultural capital that would equip them for life in a risk society.

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Intensive interviews were conducted with 31 streetwalking prostitutes to examine their interpersonal support systems. Interviews focused on their relationships with parents or parental figures, partners, and children. Data were analyzed using phenomenological descriptive analysis. Results reveal the potentially dark side of human relationships and the destructive, lingering effects of such on individual development. Familial environments were characterized by parental alcoholism and drug abuse, domestic violence, parental absence and abandonment, and multiple forms of childhood abuse. Relationships between the women and their male partners were largely devoid of emotional content but rather based on sex and drugs. Few of the women retained custody of their children, although many were hopeful that they would be reunited with them in the future.

# Et Tú Brutè?

## A Qualitative Analysis of Streetwalking Prostitutes' Interpersonal Support Networks

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Women involved in the sex industry are exploited, abused, stigmatized, and perceived as morally reprehensible (Overall, 1992; Pheterson, 1990). Despite their visibility on the streets, they live marginalized lives on the fringe of society. They are rarely recognized as individuals with life histories, parents and siblings, husbands and partners, or children. Subsequently, investigations of prostitution have typically focused on drug-related (e.g., drug or alcohol addictions or abuse) or associated risk-taking (e.g., HIV or AIDS knowledge and condom use) behaviors (e.g., Goodman & Fallot, 1998; Graham & Wish, 1994; Plant, Plant, Peck, & Setters, 1989). Moreover, qualitative data have rarely been collected; what is understood about prostitution has come primarily from survey instruments and self-report indices. Rich details of the lives of women who become streetwalking prostitutes are visibly absent in the extant literature. Although discovering antecedents to entry into prostitution has been an issue of increasing interest in the past decade, research has failed to capture information on streetwalking prostitutes' social relationships (e.g., with

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their children, partners, and family members) or detailed descriptions of their life histories and the significant people comprising their social worlds. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that these social factors largely influence why and how women become involved in prostitution and once involved, whether they will seek help and eventually leave the streets or die in them. The purpose of this investigation was to examine the social relationships of women involved in streetwalking prostitution. Relationships with parents or parental figures, siblings, intimate partners (boyfriends or husbands), and children were emphasized.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A prostitute is defined as one who exchanges sexual favors for money, drugs, or other desirable commodities. A single type of prostitution does not exist. Prostitution, similar to most professions, is hierarchically organized ranging from high-class call girls (who often work within a safe environment, e.g., a penthouse, with regular clientele, and for whom prostitution may be an extremely lucrative business) to streetwalkers. Streetwalking is considered the most dangerous and least glamorous form of prostitution (Maher, 1996; J. Miller, 1993). Streetwalkers live in perpetual danger; they are frequently beaten, raped, and exploited by their pimps, clients, or boyfriends (J. Miller, 1993). Prostitution is not a money-making activity for the largest majority of streetwalkers; prostitution activities are often pursued to support a personal drug habit or that of a partner (Feucht, 1993; Graham & Wish, 1994). Yet, women do not plan to become prostitutes; developmental processes that culminate into entry into prostitution are not haphazard or random. Key antecedent variables have been identified and are described next.

Early sexual abuse is a well-established correlate to prostitution (Earls, 1990; Nandon, Koverola, & Schludermann, 1998; Seng, 1989; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991). Estimates of the percentage of female prostitutes who have experienced early sexual abuse vary considerably, from 10% to 50% (Russell, 1988) to 60% (Silbert & Pines, 1983) to 73% (Bagley & Young, 1987). Nonetheless, the causal paths linking early sexual abuse with prostitution are a matter of debate. Simons and Whitbeck (1991) examined the causal processes linking early sexual abuse with prostitution among adolescent runaways and adult homeless women. They reported that early sexual abuse and destructive parenting generally may lead to running-away behavior and increased participation in deviant activities, including prostitution (indirect effects model). Regression analyses, however, dem-

onstrated that after controlling for all other explanatory variables, early sexual abuse significantly increased the odds of runaways' engaging in prostitution (direct effects model).

E. M. Miller (1986) supported the direct effects model but on different grounds. She contended that early experiences of sexual victimization and abuse provide training in emotional distancing, which is reenacted during sexual activities with clients. Similar to E. M. Miller (1986), James and Meyerding (1977) argued that early sexual abuse results in separation between emotions and sexual activity. They further argued that a young girl's self-concept changes as a result of sexual abuse in that she begins to view herself as debased, thus making it easier to identify oneself as a prostitute.

Seng (1989) also examined the link between sexual abuse and prostitution by comparing children who had been sexually abused (but not exploited) with prostitution-involved children who had experienced earlier sexual abuse. If sexual abuse and prostitution were linked, it was hypothesized, few differences would emerge between the two groups on 22 key variables. Significant differences emerged on 9 of the variables examined. The sexually abused children experienced more emotional and physical abuse, neglect, and parental drug abuse and domestic violence. The sexually exploited only children, in contrast, evidenced more deviant behaviors including running away, abusing alcohol and drugs, and dropping out of school. Seng concluded that the link between sexual abuse and prostitution is indirect, mediated largely by runaway behavior.

In a similar vein, Potterat, Phillips, Rothenberg, and Darrow (1985) tested an explanatory model containing two concepts (susceptibility and exposure). The susceptibility concept refers to feelings such as worthlessness, alienation, and self-abasement that when coupled with crises (e.g., incest) make some women more likely to enter prostitution. The susceptibility component is similar to the process of prostitution entry described earlier by James and Meyerding (1977). Conversely, entry into prostitution may result largely from exposure to significant others involved in the subculture. Prostituted women were compared with a matched control group on indices of early socialization, adolescent experiences, and exposure to the prostitution subculture. Few differences were observed. Of significance is that similarities existed in rates of running away, feelings of worthlessness, drug use, arrest records, and mental breakdowns. Likewise, in a Canadian study, Nandon et al. (1998) found few differences on key variables between teenagers involved in prostitution and a nonprostituted, matched control group, including incidents of early sexual abuse, perpetrator of the abuse, or seriousness or duration of the abuse.

Moreover, the nonprostituted teens reported experiencing higher rates of physical abuse and were also found to have come from homes with more severe family dysfunction. Nandon and colleagues contended, "The current findings . . . indicate that, when an appropriate comparison group is used, known precursors of prostitution *fail* [italics added] to discriminate between the prostitution and nonprostitution groups" (p. 207).

Inconsistency and contradictory evidence reveal the complexity of identifying causal, developmental paths leading from childhood experiences to adult prostitution. Bullough and Bullough (1996) noted, "When all is said and done, no single factor stands out as causal in a woman becoming a prostitute" (p. 171). Undoubtedly, entry into prostitution results from the culmination of multiple interdependent personal and contextual factors. Efforts at teasing apart those variables and the relative significance of each have left many questions unanswered and uncertainties remaining. Specifically, previous research has documented a correlation between various life experiences (e.g., early sexual abuse, running away, and domestic violence) and prostitution. Yet, what is abundantly clear is that many women are exposed to similar life experiences, a large majority of whom never engage in prostitution-related activities (Bullough & Bullough, 1996). What buffers exist in the lives of women who experience traumatic developmental beginnings that alleviate their potential for involvement in prostitution? Are those buffers absent or relatively nonexistent in the lives of women who become prostitutes?

Rook (1983) contends that social bonds are considered essential for healthy functioning; isolated people, or those lacking social bonds, are presumed vulnerable to emotional, physical, and social problems because they lack something essential only available through social transactions. A lack of social attachment, or tense and conflictual relations, are capable of thwarting adjustment and diminishing one's ability to cope constructively with personal crises. Lack of strong family ties and a sense of not belonging are typical background characteristics of prostitutes (Earls, 1990; Nandon et al., 1998).

Social networks play a critical role in individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Beginning with birth, individuals are embedded within multifaceted and multilayered social systems that guide, mold, and largely dictate personal life experiences, setting developmental processes in motion. Bronfenbrenner (1989) argued that development results from the interaction between the person (including all of her personal characteristics) and her environment (including all people in that environment and their personal characteristics) through time.

Social systems exert both positive (buffering) and potentially negative influences on individual development. According to Thoits (1983), there are three specific mechanisms through which support enhances well-being. First, role relationships provide a set of identities by answering questions such as "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" Thus, they afford purpose and meaning and quite possibly, feelings of security. In addition, through support, role relationships prevent anxiety and despair, particularly during periods of tension and stress. Those experiencing personal crises (e.g., incest and physical abuse) are likely to benefit from the sense of security attained through interpersonal networks of support and the security incurred from such. Role relationships also provide a context for positive self-evaluation or reflected self-esteem. Namely, perceptions of positive evaluations (e.g., love, care, and esteem) from others such as through the provision of aid, advice, and emotional concern contribute to positive self-evaluations.

Alternatively, network stresses such as disapproval from primary others may instigate feelings of "shame, guilt, anxiety, frustration and despair" (Thoits, 1983, p. 59). Rook (1983) argues that social network stressors are stronger negative influences of mental health status than supportive features are positive influences. In short, social networks impart powerful influences on individual development, play a critical role in personal adjustment, and are critical for understanding unique developmental trajectories.

The family system, as an interpersonal network comprised of parents (or parental figures), siblings, and extended kin, plays a monumental role in individual development throughout the life span (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), with peers and intimate partners becoming increasingly influential in adolescence and later adulthood (Brown, 1990; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Life events and experiences that influence the developmental processes leading to prostitution do not occur in a vacuum. Women who become streetwalkers are and have been embedded within interpersonal social systems. Interpersonal network influences likely play critical roles in the culmination of events that result in a woman's first experiences with prostitution. Likewise, it can further be assumed that interpersonal experiences play an equally crucial role in determining how, when, or even if a woman will (or will be able to) leave the streets. Although some have addressed interpersonal relationships among prostitutes in a peripheral manner, critical questions remain. Few qualitative studies have been conducted with streetwalking prostitutes (for exceptions, see Hardman, 1997; J. Miller, 1993; Potterat et al., 1985). Rich, detailed descriptions of the in-

terpersonal social networks of women involved in streetwalking prostitution are lacking, as are the women's interpretations of those relationships.

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the interpersonal network systems of women involved in streetwalking prostitution as perceived by each participant. Research questions centered on the relationships between the prostituted women and members of their families of origin (parents or parental figures, siblings, and extended kin), their intimate partners, and their children.

Regarding families of origin, questions of interest included the following: As children, how did the women perceive their relationships with parents and siblings? What role did parents, siblings, and extended kin play in their development? How have those relationships changed through time? Are family members aware of their lives as prostitutes, and what has been their reaction?

This investigation also sought to examine the experiences of prostituted women in relationships with intimate relationships (husbands or boyfriends as opposed to clients), including the development, maintenance, and culmination of those relationships; the influence of intimate partners on the women's involvement in prostitution; and the women's future expectations (e.g., marriage) with intimate partners.

Rarely are prostitution-involved women recognized as maternal figures. Although quantitative data regarding maternity have been given cursory attention (e.g., percentage of prostitutes who have children), qualitative accounts of those mother-child relationships have yet to be examined. This investigation sought to answer basic questions including the following: Do prostitution-involved women perceive of themselves as maternal figures? Who are the primary caretakers of their children, particularly when the women are working the streets? Are the children aware of their mothers' prostitution activities? To what extent do children affect a woman's desire to abandon the profession?

## METHOD

It is important to note at the outset researcher biases that were present during the data collection, analyses, and interpretation phases of this investigation. I am a developmentalist and a family scientist. I entered this area of investigation believing that streetwalking prostitution is not freely chosen over a vast array of alternative career choices; rather, women who sell themselves on the streets do so because of lack of (perceived or real) options. I also began this work biased by my beliefs that individual experi-

ences, beginning in the formative years, influence unique interpretations of and reactions to future experiences. As a family scientist, I strongly believe that cumulative familial and interpersonal experiences are paramount for shaping personal choices and by extension, individual development. Data were thus examined from a developmental point of view, with an emphasis on familial dynamics and personal relationships. To alleviate misinterpretation, data were analyzed individually by the principal investigator and her research assistant; their interpretations were then compared. When dissimilarities arose, they returned to the original protocols, jointly discussed the situation(s), and reevaluated their analysis until agreement could be reached.

## SAMPLE

The final sample comprised 31 female streetwalking prostitutes. Most ($n = 26$) were involved in an intervention program designed to help prostitutes leave the streets. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 56 ($M = 34.1$). Most identified themselves as Caucasian ($n = 14$) or Black ($n = 14$), with the remainder being Native American ($n = 3$). The majority lived in various shelters ($n = 14$) although others lived alone (or with their children) ($n = 4$) or with their partners or husbands ($n = 6$). Four of the women were incarcerated. Age of first involvement in prostitution-related activities ranged from 13 to 31 ($M = 19.1$). Most of the women ($n = 28$) were no longer actively involved in prostitution-related activities, although length of time since the last incident of prostitution varied dramatically among the women, from less than 6 months ($n = 13$) to 6 months to 1 year ($n = 9$) to 1 or more years ($n = 6$). Most ($n = 29$) also indicated addiction to one or more drugs; crack cocaine and alcohol were their reported drugs of choice. Length of time since last drug use experience corresponded with length of time since last incident of prostitution. Years of public education ranged from 7 to college experience ($M = 8.3$ years).

## PROCEDURE

This investigation was conducted in a midsized Midwestern city. All data were collected by the principal investigator. This study was part of a larger investigation; information relevant to present purposes only will be presented. Inclusion for the study required that participants be female, involved in or have former experience with streetwalking prostitution, and be at least 18 years of age. The majority of participants were located through an intervention program offering weekly group meetings and

one-on-one counseling designed to keep women off the streets. Most group attendees were transitory, coming for several weeks then disappearing, and then perhaps returning. With support of the program director and approval of group members, the principal investigator attended weekly group meetings to meet group members within a familiar environment. Some participants were located through word of mouth, and 5 were contacted while incarcerated.

In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted in private, typically in the shelters where many resided, in parks, in the participants' residences, or in a private room in a correctional facility. Interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by research assistants. Participants were compensated $20 for their time.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using phenomenological descriptive methodology (Colaizzi, 1978), a technique that allows for the analysis of text-based data. The procedure begins with a thorough reading of all text-based data (or protocols) and the extraction of significant statements or phrases, including those related to the primary research questions. The next step entails formulating meanings of each significant phrase or statement, which is then followed by the identification of emergent themes or patterns across each statement. Themes are then organized or clustered, and the results are integrated into an exhaustive description of the investigated topic (see Colaizzi, 1978, for a complete description of this technique). The final step includes returning to several participants and requesting opinions regarding derived conclusions. The first draft of the article was reviewed by several participants who evaluated the results and conclusions for accuracy. Although they were in full agreement as to the final themes derived from the data analyses, they suggested incorporating more specific information about the individual lives of the female participants. Their suggestions were integrated into the final manuscript.

## RESULTS

*Interpersonal relationships with family members, including parents or parental figures, siblings, and extended kin*. The majority of participants described their family systems while growing up as chaotic, diffused, and lacking affection. These family characteristics remained largely un-

changed throughout their entire lives. Emergent themes are described next.

First, parental alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse were commonly reported. For instance, one young woman described both parents as alcoholics and intravenous drug users. They went into rehab when she was 9. She reported, "My childhood was chaos, I raised myself, there was a lot of abuse." Homes characterized by substance abuse were overwhelmingly also the sites of domestic violence. Interparental violence was frequently reported; several women reported memories of watching their fathers "beat the shit out of" their mothers. Another stated, "I hated my dad. . . . I had no use for a father—he used to hit my mom and stuff." Many of the women were themselves the recipients of multiple forms of abuse (i.e., physical, emotional, and sexual). Sam[1] reported that her father "always called me a slut, a whore—he told me I was no good and would never amount to anything." She continued by saying, "I was never good enough for my dad." Others reported similar experiences.

A second prevalent pattern to emerge involved severance of the parent-child bond. The majority of women reported lack of attachment to or closeness with anyone during their childhood years; most (23 of 31) felt abandoned by key individuals at critical points in their development. When asked if there was anyone in her family that she felt close to, Char, for instance, responded in the negative and continued by saying, "I've been by myself all of my life." This is not unlike how the majority of the women reported feeling, although the sources for their feelings of isolation differed.

Some reported losing significant people through death. Jackie's parents, for instance, were killed when she was only 12. She noted, "I always felt really weird having parents that were alcoholics, but then after they died I really felt weird because most people had parents . . . when my parents died I felt cheated, I felt abandoned." Another participant reported feeling close to no one except her brother—he was killed unexpectedly when she was 22.

For many, abandonment occurred not through death but through a significant parental figure walking out on them, either literally or symbolically. Bettie's parents, for instance, separated when she was 12. She reported, "I resented my mom because she promised she would take us [she and her three sisters] with, but she didn't do that . . . at 13 I left and basically haven't been back since." Numerous participants reported being left by their birth parent(s) as young children or while in their early teens to be raised by extended family members. Yet for most, it was already too late. One participant recalled being sent to live with her aunt in a "real good en-

vironment" when she was 10. She explained further, however, "But I was already too lost by then." Others, because of parental death, domestic violence, or drug abuse, were removed from their families of origin and placed in foster care. Many moved from one foster home to another; these situations rarely provided a sense of stability or cohesion in the lives of most of the women. One of the participants, for instance, noted having been in 27 different foster homes by the age of 18. Some of the women reported developing close connections with their foster parent(s); several referred to their foster parents as "Mom" and "Dad." Nonetheless, many reported enduring continued abuse (physical, verbal, or sexual) within their foster families.

Symbolic abandonment was described by many of the women as well. Some, for instance, felt that their mothers chose a boyfriend or partner over themselves. Katie, for instance, stated that her mother's boyfriend

> was giving her [mother] ultimatums between him and I, she told me she would never [choose him over me], although a few days later he was coming over and she told me to go upstairs and hide—so that ended that.

Katie left and never went back. Another who did not get along with her stepfather also reported that her mother "chose" the stepfather over her. She remarked, "The biggest crises I've had is my parents walking out on me; closing the door." The majority, however, described feeling abandoned by their parents, typically their mothers, for failing to protect them when they divulged instances of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse, the third pattern to emerge, was reported by an astonishing number of participants (26 of 31). Perpetrators included stepfathers (most frequently), uncles, foster fathers, birth fathers, brothers, and neighbors. When asked whether they told anyone about the abuse, respondents answered in one of two ways, either by stating they did not tell anyone—there was no one to tell—or by stating that they had told someone, but they were not believed. In the former situation, when asked why they told no one, several of the women reported that if their mothers knew they would "kill" the perpetrator and go to prison. Silence, in other words, was maintained to protect their mothers. In the latter situation, women who divulged the "secret" felt undeniably violated when they were not protected or believed. After telling her mother that her uncle had been molesting her and her sister, Cammie explained her mother's response with the following, "She said sometimes things happen and you just have to let them go. . . . I was basically told to forget about it." She continued by saying, "I have a lot of resentment toward her [her mother] now." Similarly, when

Char told her mother of the abuse she was experiencing from her stepfather, her mother informed her "that it was between me [Char] and him [the stepfather], not her [mother]." Later, when asked to describe her feelings about her life experiences, Char responded, "I don't know, I don't have them anymore." Another participant who along with her older sister was molested by her foster father for years reported that her foster mother knew, "She was just in denial." One of the participants reported that her mother was the perpetrator and had been involving other men in abusing her; her grandparents knew of the abuse but did nothing to remove her from the situation. Whether they told no one or told and were not believed, the result was the same. As children, these women were left in damaging situations and endured sustained abuse with long-lasting effects.

Many of the women were sexually abused over a number of years beginning when they were quite young (2, 3, or 4) by numerous individuals. For some of the women, the abuse was not perceived as wrong; they knew nothing else. For example, about the abuse she experienced from her uncle and brother throughout her childhood, Sam stated, "It was normal, it was always something that was happening to me." Significantly too is that in some families, all of the children present in the home were sexually molested. Char was one of six siblings, all of whom were sexually abused by their stepfather. Another reported not understanding why her older sister kept running away—not until her foster father started sexually abusing her as well. She explained, "I was next in line." And when asked if she or her brothers discussed the sexual abuse all were subjected to, another participant explained, "We were just too ashamed to discuss it."

Others, in contrast, reported that they endured the abuse as a way of protecting their younger siblings. Barb stated, "I took all the abuse, I was their [her younger brother and sister's] protector because they were my heart, they were everything in the world to me." Barb had not been in contact with her siblings in years—their foster mother informed Barb that they no longer remembered her; Barb stated that it was probably best if they forgot about her. She explained, "I don't want to bring up the past. . . . I don't want them to go and be like me."

Sibling relationships comprise some of the most enduring, complex, and emotionally intense connections experienced between individuals within the family realm (Markowitz, 1994). The relationships between the female participants and their siblings were thus examined to provide a clearer understanding of their family systems and interpersonal support networks. Given their chaotic family systems, many of the women reported learning to care for themselves at very young ages; those with younger siblings often assumed a maternal role by performing many

caretaking tasks. One of the participants reported that her mother, "made me a slave—babysitting, dishes, cleaning." She was the primary maternal figure for her seven younger siblings. Her mother, she reported, frequently disappeared for days at a time. Subsequently, she rarely attended school and dropped out in the 11th grade. Some of the women also reported staying with older siblings when the home environment became too unbearable. Several moved out of state to be with siblings; one did this "because my sister thought I could get off the drugs if I went." Several also noted that their siblings were aware of their prostitution-related activities. Tereasa stated, "They did not approve of it, they were totally against it." She continued by explaining how one of her younger brothers went to Texas to get her, but it did not work. She noted, "I know that it hurt him to see his older sister out on the corner hoeing and stuff . . . we never talked about it after that, either." And another stated, "I have one sister that supports me, she tells me that she loves me regardless." Finally, several reported leaving their children with siblings (or having siblings take their children from them) when they could no longer provide care because of their own drug addictions.

Additionally significant is that some of the women were introduced to prostitution and drug use through an older sibling. About her older, prostituting sister, one participant reported, "I never thought I would become one of her, I did become one of her." Some reported that their sisters were still on the streets, "prostituting and drugging." Sexual interaction with siblings was also described by numerous participants. Char and Sam had both been molested by older siblings. Another young woman explained that her two older brothers had molested her for an extended period of time in her early adolescence. She continued to live in the same home with one of those brothers. When asked about this, she stated, "It's not an issue anymore . . . we've moved past that." Another reported a recent incident between herself and an older brother, both in their late 20s, in which they were drunk and engaged in consensual sex. Finally, two of the women reported being raped by their sisters' husbands (one at 14 years, the other at 13). One of the sisters was still married to the perpetrator.

The overwhelming picture that emerged between these women and their siblings was one of little enduring connection or emotional bond. Although some reported feeling "close to" their siblings while growing up, few maintained contact. Most had not spoken to or seen their siblings (or any family member) in months; for some it had been years. Lack of contact often resulted from drug addiction, incarceration, early childhood separation, or because contact was too painful.

To summarize, familial relationships often comprise our earliest and most enduring social connections. They provide the building blocks, blueprints, and foundation for how interpersonal relationships are supposed to function and of how individuals are supposed to act toward and treat others, particularly loved ones. When characterized by support, nurturance, warmth, and concern, the mold is set for the formation of interpersonal trust, secure attachments, and feelings of belongingness. When characterized by distrust, dishonesty, disrespect, and abuse, healthy social and emotional development is challenged. Moreover, what is learned in the family realm from those earliest social relationships is often repeated in future relationships (i.e., with intimate partners) and relearned by future generations (i.e., by one's children).

*Interpersonal relationships and experiences with intimate partners*. Eighteen of the women reported being single and having never married, 5 were married at the time of being interviewed, 7 were divorced, and 1 was separated. Eleven of the nonmarried women reported current involvement with a male partner. In describing their intimate relationships, several themes emerged consistently among the women participants.

First, most of the women reported having their first experiences with male partners in early or preadolescence, with sexual activity beginning soon thereafter. Significant also is that many of these relationships were described as developing rapidly, without forethought, hesitation, or future planning. Although lack of forethought in and of itself is not unusual among early adolescents, what was unusual about these relationships is the rapidity in which they progressed. Dating, for instance, was never mentioned by the participants; most had never had a "real" date (e.g., dinner without an exchange of sexual favors). Subsequently, many of the women attempting to forge new lives for themselves described fear of dating and not knowing what to do or what to expect. Interesting also is that despite having extensive sexual experience, the thought of having sex within a "healthy" relationship was frightening to many. One explained, "I have never been in a healthy relationship . . . I have never dated so it seems exciting, but then I think they might want to have sex so then I don't want to date."

Several of the women reported running away with their boyfriends at very early ages; one woman ran from her home in Montana at age 16 to be with a man in Texas that she had met at a fair and known for only 2 months. Needless to say, the relationship did not last. Another reported that she started running away at age 13 because she was "in love;" she had her first

child at age 15. Most women described a succession of relationships devoid of emotional content, nurturance, or support and based primarily on "sex and drugs."

Several women ($n$ = 7) reported that their partners were also their pimps. Both Tereasa and Marilyn, for instance, were "pimped" by their partners, who were also the fathers of their children. They both also explained they were the "main" women, although their pimps had multiple prostitutes working for them simultaneously (who they also slept with and frequently beat). Often, they would travel from state to state picking up new women to be part of the "stable" (group of women living together and working for the same pimp). When asked to describe their feelings about being one of many, both responded, "It meant less work for me." When asked about their relationships with the other women, tolerance rather than camaraderie or support was typically described. Nonetheless, Tereasa did report helping one of her "little hoe sisters" escape from the stable because the pimp was continuously beating her.

Others ($n$ = 8) reported that their partners were former tricks, and still others indicated that although their partners were not tricks or pimps, they were aware of their prostitution involvement ($n$ = 8). Some of the women had been first introduced to prostitution by their partners, and many partners encouraged continued prostitution involvement because the money supported their own drug habits. Some of the women indicated that their partners would "babysit" their children while they worked the streets. Typically, this type of arrangement benefited the partners in that the women would return with drugs or with enough money to buy drugs. Interestingly, although the women were careful in distinguishing relationships between men who were "partners" from those with men who were their pimps, the differences between the two were subtle. For instance, both partners and pimps were prone to physical violence and abuse, both fathered children of the women, both were aware of the women's prostitution and drug-related activities, and often both partners and pimps introduced the women to the streets. The primary differences were that (a) the pimps typically "required" that the women make a certain amount of money before returning from the streets, (b) the women would give all of their money to their pimps who in turn would provide shelter and clothing for the women, and (c) the pimps often had several women working for them at once.

Violence characterized the relationships between the majority of the women and their partners. In fact, despite being subjected to multiple forms of bodily injury by clients (tricks) or strangers while working the streets, partners were the source of the majority and most severe forms of

abuse experienced by the women. Many were hospitalized on numerous occasions for injuries received while being beaten by their partners. One received a busted eardrum, and another was shot at by her ex-husband; the bullet missed her but hit her 4-year-old daughter. Another described being beaten with a shoe for not telling her partner she was pregnant. Still another stated that her boyfriend "brought me home a disease once, and then beat me for it." And Cammie, who was only 18, described how her boyfriend beat her unconscious and then drove her around a graveyard saying he was going to bury her alive. She reported constantly having "choke marks on my neck or bruises on my face" but continued by stating, "What is really sad is that I expected that, I didn't think there was anything better for me." Several described being beaten on a weekly basis; few sought help.

When asked how they envisioned future relationships with male partners, several indicated a desire to get married and create a "normal" life with someone. Jackie hoped for

> a man that accepts me, that we can talk about whatever, but he's got to accept my children and if we get into an argument he wouldn't throw anything about my past into my face. . . . I just [want to be] loved for who I am.

Another commented, "I see myself with a man and married—that's what I want, that's one of my goals. It just has to be the right one this time." Several noted, however, that men comprised no significant place in the futures they imagined for themselves. One reported, "I don't hate men, but I don't have a lot of respect for them either." Finally, Tereasa summed up her feelings about men by saying, "Jesus Christ is the only man that I can trust—the only one that won't turn on me."

To summarize, the participants described involvement with men who pimped them out, forced them into drug use and prostitution, and viciously attacked them both verbally and physically. These men were not ideal mates, as most of the women readily admitted. Although many of the relationships were relatively short-lived, some endured for years. Logical, rational decision making regarding who to become involved with and how those relationships should proceed appeared lacking in most of the participants. Indeed, it is unclear if any logical, rational, decision making occurred at all with regard to choosing a partner. Cammie described her own feelings regarding the men she became involved with by stating, "When men hit on me I just felt obligated, like I didn't have a right to say no. . . . I think it's because I was used all my life." Apparently, many of the others felt similarly.

*Interpersonal relationships with children*. Of 31 women, only 5 were childless. The number of children of each ranged from one to seven ($M$ = 2.58). Although many had intended on raising their children "perfectly," those plans did not materialize. For women who were already involved in prostitution when they became pregnant, life continued without interruption. Most continued working the streets, and alcohol and drug use during pregnancy was normative.

Others, however, had already had their children before they began to prostitute. Some of the women had originally entered prostitution out of economic necessity and a need to provide for their children. Regarding prostitution, one commented, "It was so much against my morals years ago. I wanted my kids raised so perfectly and then I just turned, it's like I gave up." Some of the women reported that their children were aware of their prostitution activities; some had brought tricks to their residences while their children slept. And one participant, after becoming heavily addicted to crack, introduced her 18-year-old daughter to prostitution. About her daughter she stated, "I know there's a lot of resentment in her, she's just not letting it out." She continued by saying, "It's amazing how much my children love me." Most of the participants described feeling shame and remorse for the pain they had inflicted on their children. One of the participants was convinced that she was evil and bound to suffer eternally in hell for what her children had experienced.

Few of the women had not been separated from their children at some point. Many of the children had been removed from their mothers' care by the state. Several of the women were actively trying to regain custody, and still others had relinquished all parental rights. Some of the children lived with their fathers, and still others resided with extended family members, including aunts or grandparents. When asked what had been the most painful experience of her life, Brandi remarked, "losing my babies."

Significantly, several of the women indicated that the impetus for change, the motivation for rebuilding their lives and finding "new playgrounds and new playmates" came from their children. Lettie described her feelings by stating,

> I know I wasn't there for my kids when they were young. I know I let them down. I have to be strong and continue [in her recovery] and maintain my conviction that they will need me even more in the future.

In summary, relationships between the female participants and their children reflected similar themes found in the relationships between the prostituted women and their own parents. These themes included parental

alcoholism and drug abuse, domestic violence, parent-child separation, and abuse. With rare exception, the participants described feeling intense love for their children. Quite unintentionally, many also described repeating familial patterns and traits in their families of procreation that they despised about their families of origin. This is no coincidence. Social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1963) postulates that individuals learn behavior from watching and imitating others. Parents are the primary models for their children. Unfortunately, and as evidenced in this investigation, modeled behavior is often unpleasant and abusive. Often without intention, those behaviors are transmitted to future generations. Without interruption, the cycle likely continues.

## DISCUSSION

When little girls are asked what they want to be when they grow up, rarely will they respond by saying "a prostitute." Although accurate figures are difficult if not impossible to obtain, it is believed that the prevalence of women involved in the sex industry is staggering (Potterat, Woodhouse, Muth, & Muth, 1990). Cole (1987) argued that women do not freely choose to become prostitutes. Rather, an accumulation of events and personal experiences coupled with lack of viable (perceived or real) alternatives and the oppressive influence of a male-dominated society force the decision on women. The purpose of this investigation was to examine a significant facet comprising the events and personal experiences in the lives of women involved in the sex industry. Intense interviews were conducted with 31 streetwalking prostitutes to gain insight and depth of understanding regarding their interpersonal systems of support. Particular attention was afforded the women's relationships with parents or parental figures, partners, and children. The title of this manuscript, *Et Tú Brutè?*, largely reveals its content: Nurturing, supportive relationships were rarely described. Rather, it was discovered that personal relationships, even with trusted companions, are frequently the sources of danger and deceit.

Familial environments were characterized as chaotic, affection as a rare commodity. Emergent themes included parental alcoholism and drug abuse, domestic violence, parental absence and abandonment (literal and symbolic), and multiple forms of childhood abuse. Extended kin, including aunts and grandparents, were frequently mentioned, although they tended to assume peripheral roles in the women's development. Siblings'

relationships assumed significance for many of the women. Nonetheless, contact with family members, including sisters and brothers, was reportedly rare for the majority of participants.

Relationships between the women and their male partners were largely devoid of emotional content but rather based on sex and drugs. Violence comprised an integral part of those relationships; the women described severe and sustained abuse suffered at the hands of their partners. Despite their precarious relationship experiences with men generally and partners specifically, most of the women hoped to one day marry and live a "normal" life, out of the "game" and drug free. Understandably, however, some reported little need or desire for a monogamous relationship with a male partner in their envisioned futures.

Finally, the women described the relationships between themselves and their children. For many, this was the most difficult part of the interview process. Most had lost their children, some permanently, because of their own actions and behaviors or for failing to protect their children from the actions of others. Many described sinking into a deep depression when their children were removed. Child removal became a critical point in the progression of their addictions, marking the beginning of the most severe use for many. On a positive note, several reported that motivation to enter and maintain recovery came from their children. They had to succeed because their children's lives depended on them.

In essence, what has been revealed here has been understood for decades. Interpersonal relationships are vitally important for shaping who we are and what we become. This is not to say that social connections and interpersonal dynamics dictate development, this would be ludicrous given the human capacity for free choice. It is to say, however, that social relationships provide a framework that molds human development by impacting the human psyche, including one's social and emotional functioning, personal goals, dreams, values, and ambitions.

Despite the rich information obtained, this investigation was limited on several accounts. First, each participant was only interviewed once. Changes in their thoughts, attitudes, and interpretations of their life experiences that would be evident through time were thus not captured. Second, the majority of the women were attempting to forge new lives for themselves free of prostitution and addiction. They represent a small subgroup of streetwalking women only; the data are not meant to be representative of all prostituting women and should not be generalized across women actively involved in the "game."

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps the personal realm of women who become streetwalkers has been neglected in the academic world because personalizing these women renders them real. They can no longer be ignored or marginalized if they come to be recognized as someone's daughter, someone's mother, or someone's sister and wife. We can no longer accept as their fate the vile conditions under which these women operate on a daily basis; we are forced to make changes, to take a stand. When discussing with my students the women I have come to know through this research, I often begin by explaining, "Any one of us could be out there, doing exactly what these women are doing, had we been born into the situations they were born into. At our cores, you and I are no different from them." The point is not to obtain a reaction but to provide perspective.

## NOTE

1. All names have been changed.

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