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Simmons, Cortney Britney Ann

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The Differential Influence of Absent and Harsh Fathers on Juvenile Delinquency

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Social Ecology

by

Cortney Simmons

Thesis Committee:
Professor Elizabeth Cauffman, Chair
Professor Wendy Goldberg
Professor Jodi Quas

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

By

Cortney Simmons

Master of Arts in Social Ecology
University of California, Irvine, 2017
Professor Elizabeth Cauffman, Chair

Father absence has been identified as a key contributor to juvenile delinquency. As a result, many politicians and community leaders are making the effort to re-engage fathers. However, it is possible that merely the presence of fathers is not, in itself, a substantial protective factor and, in some cases, can even be more detrimental than father absence. The present study (a) examines differential effects of absent fathers and harsh fathers on delinquent behavior, and (b) determines whether these fathers have an effect on youth behavior after accounting for the mother-child relationship. This study employs a diverse (48.4% Black, 37.3% Latino, 12.6% White, and 1.7% other race) sample of first-time male juvenile offenders who identified their father as absent (N=291) or harsh (N=58). Results indicate that youth with harsh fathers reported committing a greater number of offenses and using a greater number of substances than youth with absent fathers. This difference exists even after controlling for the quality of the mother-child relationship. Implications of these findings for future research and delinquency prevention programs are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In his 2008 Father's Day speech, Senator Barack Obama aptly discussed fatherhood and the role fathers have in the development of their children. He largely focused on absent fathers, whom he blamed for the weakness seen in families and communities. He recounts several grim statistics relating father absence to crime and imprisonment rates among African-American youth in particular, yet these associations are true for many minority adolescents. For example, youth living in single-mother homes engage in higher levels of delinquency than youth in dual-parent households (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Juby & Farrington, 2001) and are at greater risk for incarceration (Harper & McLanahan, 2004).

Many community leaders and politicians are developing programs and initiatives that aim to reengage absent fathers in order to prevent these unfortunate outcomes. Such efforts operate on the assumption that every father is equal in quality and support. Yet, all fathers are not the same, and the quality of the father-child relationship varies greatly. As a result, the barrier between youth and crime created by the father-child relationship varies in strength. High levels of paternal warmth are associated with fewer conduct problems in early childhood (Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006; Gardner, Ward, Burton, & Wilson, 2003) and adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Hoeve et al., 2009). For male youth in particular, the risk of first delinquent activity is lower for youth with more positive father-child relationships (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore & Carrano, 2006). However, the inverse is also true. In father-child relationships where the amount of hostility is high and warmth is low, delinquent behavior is more prevalent (Hoeve et al., 2009).

Empirically and theoretically, whether an absent father or harsh father creates a greater risk for juvenile delinquency is unclear. Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969)

suggests that children are less likely to be delinquent if they are bonded to a conventional figure, such as a parent. A parent-child relationship high in negative affect results in a weak bond, therefore this relationship would not be protective against delinquency. In regard to parental absence, the self-control theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) and the parental absence perspective (Amato, 1987; Amato & Keith, 1991) posit that father absence presents problems that are rarely resolved by a significant bond to one's mother (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 103). The goal of the present study is to examine the differential influence of absent and harsh fathers on the delinquent behavior of first-time male juvenile offenders.

CHAPTER 1: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUALITY, PATERNAL ABSENCE, AND DELINQUENCY

The quality of the parent-child relationship is evaluated on two dimensions: control and support (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Support refers to parental behaviors toward the child that makes the child feel comfortable (Rollins & Thomas, 1979), and can include both positive and negative aspects, such as warmth, intimacy, hostility and neglect (Rohner 2004; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). According to Hirschi's social control theory (1969), adolescents who are bonded to their parents are more likely to care about their parents' expectations. When faced with the decision to engage in delinquent acts, thinking about the response of a parent with whom they share a strong bond may prevent an adolescent from engaging in that act. Considering delinquency occurs during unsupervised time and youth are frequently exposed to opportunities for crime, direct controls of adolescent behavior are relatively unimportant (Hirschi, 1969). Rather, it is the indirect control (e.g. aspects of the support dimension) provided by the parent-child relationship that is most influential in regard to delinquency prevention (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Mack, Leiber, Featherstone & Monserud, 2007).

The support facet of the parent-child relationship is consistently associated with adolescent delinquency (see meta-analysis by Hoeve, Dubas, Eichelsheim, Van der Laan, Smeenk, & Gerris, 2009). High levels of parental warmth are associated with fewer conduct problems in early childhood (Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006; Gardner, Ward, Burton, & Wilson, 2003) and adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). High parental support and frequent communication also decreases the risk of cigarette use and alcohol consumption (Simantov et al., 2006). At the negative end of the support spectrum, research suggests that

hostility in the parent-child relationship is related to higher rates of delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009). Lower levels of parental support are associated with increased adolescent use of alcohol, cocaine and marijuana in a large (Parker & Benson, 2004). After examining the development of delinquent behavior among male youth, Keijsers and her colleagues (2011) concluded that a bidirectional relationship exists between parent-child relationship quality and delinquency: poor parent-child relationships precedes engagement in delinquency and delinquency precedes poor parent-child relationships.

The majority of studies on parent-child relationship quality and adolescent delinquency focus on either the mother or the parenting unit as a whole (Williams & Kelly, 2005). However, the quality of the father-child relationship may be most influential for male youth. Considering that children have a tendency to identify with the same-sex parent (Laible & Carlo, 2004), the connection between relationship quality and adolescent problem behaviors may be strongest within same-sex dyads. For example, prior research on delinquency demonstrates that attachment to mothers is a more powerful predictor for girls, while attachment to fathers is more important for boys (Hoeve et al., 2012). A meta-analysis of 161 published and unpublished manuscripts revealed that the father-child relationship is a stronger predictor of delinquency among male adolescents than the mother-child relationship (Hoeve et al., 2009). Specifically, these studies find that poor paternal support was a stronger predictor of delinquency than poor maternal support.

Few studies examining paternal influences also control for maternal influences (Phares, Fields, Kamboukos, & Lopez, 2005). Studies that included maternal influences as controls provide evidence that the quality of the father-child relationship is predictive of delinquent behavior above and beyond maternal involvement (Marsiglio et al., 2000;

Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995). Bronte-Tinkew and her colleagues (2006) investigated the relation between the father-child relationship and the risk of first delinquent activity and substance use among adolescents living in intact families. The researchers found the risk of first delinquent behavior is lower for adolescents with more positive father-child relationships, controlling for the mother-child relationship. Moreover, the influence of the father-child relationship was strongest for male adolescents. Goncy and van Dulmen (2010) tested the association between paternal and maternal involvement, alcohol use, alcohol-related behaviors and risky behavior among adolescent youth. When parental involvement from both parents were analyzed simultaneously, the results revealed that paternal emotional closeness and shared communication significantly predicted each outcome.

Both the parental absence perspective (Amato, 1987; Amato & Keith, 1991) and self-control theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) may shed light on how paternal absence is associated with adolescent delinquency. The parental absence perspective from the divorce and family literature postulates that, all else being equal, two parents are better equipped to monitor, supervise, and respond to the behaviors of their children than single parents (Amato, 1987). Due in part to work demands, single parents have less time to partake in positive child rearing activities, such as providing affection and monitoring, which affords adolescents the time to engage in delinquent behaviors. In their self-control theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) recognized that all else is rarely equal, and suggested that parental absence presents significant issues that are not resolved by increased attachment to one parent.

Paternal absence may influence adolescent behavior is by placing youth at an economic disadvantage. Children in single-parent households have lower family income and a greater likelihood of being poor than those in married-parent families (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005). Father absence substantially increases the likelihood of poverty (McLanahan & Casper, 1995; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008), and children in single-mother families are more likely to live in deprived areas with lower quality schools (McLanahan & Booth, 1989; McLanahan & Sandefur 1994). The link between single-parenting and delinquency may exist because of the relation between economic strain and single-parent households (Amato & Keith, 1991). Indeed, disparities between family income levels of single-mother households and two-parent households may largely explain the association between father absence and incarceration (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Considering their possible confounding effects, it is important to include both parent education, a proxy for socioeconomic status, and neighborhood conditions when examining the influence of parenting on adolescent delinquency and substance use.

An additional issue that might accompany paternal absence is the single parent's inability to provide the same level of affective support that could be given in the presence of an additional parent (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). This additional parent would relieve some amount of child-rearing duties, and provide the original parent with the emotional and psychology support necessary to raise a child in a positive manner. Various studies provide support for the parental absence and social-control perspectives. Strong attachment to two parents has been shown to a greater protective effect against delinquency than strong attachment to only one parent (Rankin & Kern, 1994). A reanalysis of the Glueck data revealed that within families in which there is only one parent, parents

are more likely to exhibit indifference or hostility toward their children (Laub & Sampson, 1988). Further, single-mothers may place fewer maturity demands on their children, engage in less monitoring, and use less effective disciplinary strategies than families with two parents (Simons, Simons, & Wallace, 2004).

It is possible that single parents may be just as effective in producing positive child outcomes as two parents. In his initial test of the broken-home/delinquency connection, Hirschi (1969) found only weak evidence to that suggested the presence of an additional parent was meaningful. Several other studies support the assumption that an attachment to one parent, the primary caregiver or mother, is sufficient. Demuth and Brown (2004) tested the broken homes premise by examining the relation between delinquency and being raised in a single-parent (father or mother) versus a two-parent family. After accounting for variation indirect and direct parental controls, the researchers found no evidence that parental absence was a significant predictor of adolescent delinquency. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Mack and her colleagues (2007) tested four competing theories that explain the association between family structure and delinquency among community adolescents: social control theory, parental absence theory, self-control theory, economic disadvantage. The results suggest that there is no association between paternal absence and juvenile delinquency. Rather, low maternal attachment was the most significant and important predictor of adolescent behavior, supporting the stance of social control theory. These results support the view that maternal attachment, not the absence or presence of a father, is the most important predictor of delinquency.

Most often, paternal absence tends to be considered synonymous with living in single-parent, non-intact, or mother-headed family, and nonresident fathers are typically referred to as absent fathers (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; Mack et al., 2007). Only a few studies have included youth reports of father involvement and data from those who report no relationship at all with their fathers. White and Gilbreth (2001) found no correlation between externalizing behaviors and the lack of contact with non-custodial fathers among adolescent males. However, the results of this study revealed that youth reporting good relationships with their non-custodial fathers scored significantly lower on externalizing problems than those who reported having no father-child relationship. In their examination of how multiple dimensions of nonresident father involvement with adolescent well-being, King and Sobolewski (2008) included adolescents who reported no contact with their father in previous in their analyses, assigning them the lowest value on measures of responsive fathering. Contact with one's father, measured continuously, had only an indirect association with externalizing behaviors through responsive fathering.

The Current Study

The current study examines how having an absent father or harsh father predicts juvenile delinquency. Previous research suggests that both types of fathers may pose a risk to youth. Yet, within the general population there is considerably more concern surrounding paternal absence. This study aims to clarify whether youth with an absent father are more delinquent than youth with harsh fathers. As previous research suggests, the influence of these fathers may persist or be attenuated by the mother-child relationship (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Hirschi, 1969; Mack et al., 2007). As such, this study also

examines whether absent or harsh fathers have an effect on youth behavior after accounting for the mother-child relationship.

As noted above, there are definitional inconsistencies regarding father absence, thus the effect of paternal absence is not fully understood. Youth with zero contact with their fathers tend to be overlooked or excluded from analyses altogether (Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994). This omission effectively eliminates those with the lowest levels of father involvement. Rather than focusing solely on resident versus non-resident status, this study uses both youth father identification and household composition as the defining factors of father absence. Youth who do not identify a father figure comprise the father absent group, and, to my knowledge, this is the first to characterize father absence in this manner.

In addition, much of the literature on fathers and juvenile delinquency is comprised of samples of community adolescents or at-risk youth. To my knowledge, researchers have yet to look at the outcomes of youth who are already involved in the juvenile justice system. Further, these samples are often racially and ethnically unrepresentative of absent-father or system-involved youth. Considering minority youth are more likely to experience paternal absence and juvenile justice system contact, the present study employs a diverse sample of first-time male juvenile offenders to obtain perhaps a more accurate picture of the father's role in juvenile delinquency.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample derives from the Crossroads Study, a longitudinal study that prospectively examines the effects of juvenile system contact on the development of 1,216 male first-time offenders. Youth were ages 13-17 at baseline, and were interviewed at 6 and 12 months after their first official contact with the justice system. Youths had been arrested for a range of low-level (misdemeanor) offenses, with the most frequent charges including vandalism (17.5%) and theft (16.7%). Youths were sampled from three sites: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (N = 533); Jefferson Parish, Louisiana (N = 151); and Orange County, California (N = 532). Consistent with the overrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority youth in the juvenile justice system, the sample was reflective of the overrepresentation of minority youth within the juvenile justice system with Latino (46%), Black (37%), White (15%), and other race (2%) represented. Descriptives for the full sample and subsamples are presented in Table 1.

For the purpose of this study, a subsample of youth who identified their father as absent (N=291) or harsh (high in hostility and low in warmth; N=58) were included in these analyses. Overall, the subsample was reflective of the larger sample with a mean age of 15.3 years and racial diversity with Black (48.4%), Latino (37.3%), White (12.6%), and other race (1.7%) (see Table 1).

Procedures

Signed parental consent and youth assent were obtained for all participants before interviews were conducted. Participants were informed of the nature of the study and were told that there was no penalty for not participating. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at

all three institutions approved the study procedures. Upon obtaining consent, youth completed an interview a maximum of six weeks after their first arrest, as well as a follow-up interview approximately six months after their initial interview. Face-to-face interviews with the youth ranged from 2–3 hours and were conducted using a secure computer-administered program. A Certificate of Confidentiality issued by the Department of Justice protects participants' privacy by exempting their responses and identity from subpoenas, court orders, or other types of involuntary disclosures. Participants were given a detailed explanation of the Certificate of Confidentiality prior to the interview and were reminded again before sensitive questions were asked.

Measures

Demographic Information. Youth self-reported general demographic information, including age and race. Youth also reported on the highest level of education that his parent(s) had received. This was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Approximately 29.38% of the participants did not have a parent with a high school diploma, 34.49% had a parent with a high school diploma, and 36.13% had a parent with more than a high school diploma.

Father Residence Status. Youth were asked to provide information on the number of people living within their home residence and specify their relationship to each individual. This information was used to determine whether the youth lives with the male he identified as his father. To achieve the maximum number of father-son dyads and accommodate all family types, this sample was not limited to biological fathers. However, the majority of harsh-father youth reported on biological fathers (77.6%), followed by step-fathers (18.9%), adoptive fathers (1.7%) and foster fathers (1.7%).

Parent-child Relationship Quality. To assess the affective tone of the relationship with each parent, participants completed the Quality of Parental Relationships Inventory (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). Twelve items evaluated parent-child relationship hostility (e.g. "How often does your father/mother get angry at you?") ($\alpha_{\text{paternal}}=.93$, $\alpha_{\text{maternal}}=.81$). Nine items assessed parent-child relationship warmth (e.g. "How often does your father/mother let you know he/she really cares about you?") ($\alpha_{\text{paternal}}=.91$; $\alpha_{\text{maternal}}=.92$). The participants respond to each question on a 4- point Likert scale ranging from "Always" to "Never". For hostility, higher scores indicate a more negative and abusive relationship. For the warmth, higher scores indicate a more supportive and nurturing relationship.

Neighborhood Conditions. In order to control for the environment the youth lives in, the neighborhood disorder surrounding the youth's home was assessed using an adapted version of the Neighborhood Conditions measure (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). The 21-item scale measures the physical disorder of the neighborhood (e.g., "cigarettes on the street or in the gutters") as well as social disorder (e.g., "people using needles or syringes to take drugs"). The participants respond to each question on a 4- point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Often," with higher scores indicating a greater degree of disorder within the community. This measure has been validated with census data and systematic social observation of disorder (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004).

Delinquency.

Self-Reported Offending. Offending behavior was assessed using the Self-Report of Offending scale (SRO; Huizinga, Esbensen, & Weiher, 1991). This self-report scale assesses 24 various criminal acts ranging from selling drugs to homicide. The number of different

types of offenses the person had endorsed since the previous assessment was summed to create an overall offending count score, which provides a consistent and valid estimate of involvement in illegal activity over a given recall period (Osgood, McMorris, & Potenza, 2002). These variety scores are the preferred method for summarizing individual criminality because they assess heterogeneity in crime types, giving more weight to more serious behaviors that maybe discounted if they occur less frequently than less serious behaviors that occur more frequently (Sweeten, 2012). On average, youth engaged in 1.68 ($SD = 2.38$, range= 0-17) types of offenses prior to baseline, and 1.48 ($SD = 2.35$, range= 0-18) types during the six months after baseline.

Substance Use. Substance use was assessed using the Substance Use/Abuse Inventory developed by Chassin, et al. (1991) for use in a study of children of alcoholics. Only the Substance Use subscale, which considers the youth's use of illegal drugs and alcohol within a six-month interval, was used. An overall substance count score was created by summing the number of different types of substances the youth recounted using since the previous assessment. On average, youth reported using 1.28 types of substances ($SD = 1.62$, range= 0, 10) types of substances at baseline, and 1.23 types of substances ($SD = 1.76$, range= 0-13) during the subsequent six months.

Plan of Analysis

To examine whether self-reported offending differed by father type (absent vs. harsh) a negative binomial regression was used. Because the dependent outcomes are count variables with skewed distributions, ordinary least squares regression (OLS) would not be an appropriate method to analyze the data (Long, 1997; Long & Freese, 2003). Additionally, the distribution of both variables was over dispersed by lower values, and the

variance of each outcome exceeded the means (SRO: $M=1.23$, $Variance= 5.51$; *Substance Use*: $M=1.13$, $Variance=3.09$). Therefore, negative binomial regression models were used in order to avoid violating the assumptions of a regression (Gardner, Mulvey, & Shaw, 1995). Normally, a Poisson regression model is used to estimate count outcome variables, however it was not appropriate considering that the means and variances were unequal. Additional tests were conducted to ensure that negative binomial regression models were appropriate analyses for the data.

The negative binomial regression analyses were conducted in two steps. First, to examine whether father type predicted delinquency, both delinquency outcomes were regressed on father type. Second, maternal warmth and hostility were entered to determine whether father type contributed to delinquency beyond the mother-child relationship. All models included age, race, parent education, and neighborhood conditions as covariates. Baseline counts of self-reported offending and substance use were also included as a controls.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Two groups were selected from the full sample in order to answer our research questions: absent father youth and harsh father youth. Absent father youth were those who neither identified a male as their father-figure nor reported on the quality of the father-child relationship. Additionally, we examined the youth's household composition to ensure that there was not a potential father figure present within the home at the time of the baseline interview. Harsh father youth were those reported having a father-child relationship high (+1 SD) in hostility and low (-1 SD) in warmth. The two groups did not differ on neighborhood conditions ($t(347) = .6, p = .55$). However, harsh father youth were older ($t(347) = -2.32, p = .02$). The two groups differed in racial composition ($\chi^2 = 24.99, p < .01$). The majority of harsh father youth identified as Latino (50%), while the majority of absent father youth identified as Black (53.95%). Parent education also varied by father type ($\chi^2 = 7.51, p = .02$). The majority of harsh father youth reported that at least one parent who had more than a high school degree (44.8%), and the majority of harsh father youth reported having at least one parent who had graduated from high school (37.5%). As such, these were used as control variables in all analyses. Descriptive statistics for the full sample and subsamples are presented in Table 1.

Father Type Predicting Offending and Substance Use

To examine whether youth with absent fathers are more delinquent than youth with harsh fathers, self-reported offending was regressed on father type, adjusting for the youths' age, race/ethnicity, and neighborhood conditions. The results of the negative binomial regressions indicate that youth with harsh fathers are more likely to engage in

self-reported offending than youth with absent fathers. Specifically, youth with harsh fathers reported committing a greater variety of offenses than those with low-hostility fathers ($b = .47$, $SE = 0.2$, $p = .015$; Table 2). Furthermore, youth with harsh fathers reported using a greater variety of substances than youth with absent fathers ($b = .47$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .005$; Table 2).

Influence of Father Type in the Context of the Mother-Child Relationship

As previous research has found that the mother-child relationship may be more important than the effects of paternal absence and harshness (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Mack et al., 2007; Hirschi, 1969), mother hostility and warmth were introduced as covariates into the regression models. As before, even after accounting for a supportive mother, youth with harsh fathers committed a greater variety of offenses ($b = .43$, $SE = 0.2$, $p = .03$; Table 3) and used a greater variety of substances ($b = .37$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .004$; Table 3) than youths with absent fathers. In short, these results suggest that the differences between these groups and the overall effect of paternal influences exist even after accounting for the mother-child relationship.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Community leaders and policymakers are recognizing fathers' potential to decrease youth involvement with the justice system. Father absence is widely acknowledged as a key contributor to delinquency, thus many are making the effort to re-engage fathers as positive father-child relationships have been found to deter juvenile delinquency (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore & Carrano, 2006; Hoeve et al., 2009). Yet, not all involved fathers develop positive, high quality relationships with their sons. We must consider the possibility that father presence alone is not enough to deter delinquent behavior, and in some cases can be more detrimental than father absence. Indeed, the results of this study suggest that father presence may only be beneficial in the context of a high-quality father-child relationship. Our findings indicate that youth with harsh fathers are committing more offenses than those with absent fathers. Moreover, youth with harsh fathers use a greater variety of substances than their absent father counterparts. These findings suggest that it may be irresponsible to encourage fathers to be involved without acknowledging the importance of the quality of the father-child relationship.

To date, several studies have provided conflicting evidence about whether or not the father-child relationship is predictive of delinquent behavior. Theoretically, the presence of both parents is not essential in regard to delinquency prevention (Hirschi, 1969). The attachment to one parent, in most cases the mother, may be just as meaningful as a bond with two parents. Further, previous research suggests that the lack of a father-child relationship is not a significant predictor of delinquency after controlling for maternal attachment (Mack et al., 2007). In contrast, several researchers have found that the father-child relationship is indeed predictive of delinquency after controlling for maternal

behavior (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995). By analyzing both relationships simultaneously, we were able to provide additional evidence that fathers do, in fact, have an effect on youth behavior after accounting for the quality of the mother-child relationship. Thus, this study adds to the growing literature that fathers have a unique influence on youth behavior that is separate from mothers.

Importantly, the present study abandons the common definition of paternal absence as living out of the youth's home in exchange for one of absolute absence. By characterizing absence in terms of residence, previous studies fail to provide a comprehensive picture of the paternal absence and delinquency association. Being out of one's home is not synonymous with being out of one's life. Indeed, previous research suggests that fathers are influential regardless of their presence in the home (Coley & Medeiros, 2007; King & Sobolewski, 2006). Instead, absent father youth are those who do not identify a father figure in any form. Using a similar characterization of father absence, White and Gilbreth (2001) found that youth who reported having positive relationships with non-custodial fathers scored lower on externalizing problems than those who reported having no father-child relationship. The current study extends this work by examining how absent fathers compare to youth with negative father-child relationships. For example, the effects of paternal absence and harshness can be explained, attenuated or intensified by alternative contextual factors (Amato & Keith, 1991; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Indeed, disparities between family income levels of single-mother households and two-parent households may largely explain the association between father absence and delinquency (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Considering their possible confounding effects, this study employed

parent education, a proxy for socioeconomic status, and neighborhood conditions as controls. The differences in offending and substance use between absent and harsh fathers remain even after controlling for these factors. As such, our findings cannot be attributed to economic factors that are associated with father absence. By considering the complete absence of a father-child relationship influences youth, we refine our understanding of the paternal absence-delinquency link.

Despite these strengths, the present study is limited in several ways. First, the sample included only male low level first-time offenders, and, thus, cannot be generalized to serious male offenders or female offenders. However, gender socialization theory posits that fathers would be more influential in the lives of males than of females (Rossi & Rossi, 1990), and previous research suggests that children have a tendency to identify with the same-sex parent (Laible & Carlo, 2004). For these reasons, the connection between father-related factors and delinquency behaviors may be strongest for male youth. Yet, the father-child relationship is predictive of delinquency for both male and female youth (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carano, 2006; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Hoeve et al., 2009) and future research should determine whether the effects of harsh and absent fathers vary across gender. Second, the sample was not restricted to youth who reported only on biological fathers. While it may be important to differentiate between biological and non-biological fathers, the quality of the relationship with both types of father figures has been found to be predictive of behavioral problems (Coley, 1998). Further, a previous study found that youth in single-mother households were more delinquent than youth in mother-stepfather households (Demuth & Brown, 2004), providing additional evidence that non-biological fathers are just as influential on delinquent behavior. As such, our inclusion of all father

figures provides a richer picture of the father-son dynamic. Lastly, despite having data on father residence, this study did not investigate whether the influence of harsh fathers was moderated by their presence in or out of the youth's home. This omission was due to the low number of harsh fathers in the sample and a lack of statistical power to test for differences. Previous research suggests fathers are influential regardless of their presence in the home (Carlson, 2006; Coley & Medeiros, 2007; Demuth & Brown, 2004), however, future studies should investigate if residency impacts whether or not hostile fathers have a more negative effect on adolescent behavior than absent fathers.

While these limitations impact some of our interpretations, it is important to comment on the strength of our sample and, in particular, the racial composition. Employing a sample of first-time offenders is advantageous considering a significant portion of the father-delinquency research employs samples of community adolescents or at-risk youth. A sample of first-time offenders is the most appropriate in which to test the differential effects of father absence and harshness on delinquency. Additionally, this aspect is especially relevant considering many of the father-focused initiatives aiming to prevent continued contact with the justice system. Further, these previously examined samples are often racially and ethnically unrepresentative of absent-father youth. Within the current study, more than half of the absent father youth are Black and over a third are Latino, mirroring the overall racial distribution of single-parent households in the U.S. (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). There is reason to expect that the effects of paternal absence and harsh parenting will vary between racial groups (Matsueda & Heimer, 1987; García Coll & Pachter, 2002). Unfortunately, our sample lacks the statistical power to explore racial differences due to the low number of harsh father youth. Instead, race was

only controlled for in our analyses. For the aforementioned reasons, we believe that it is important that future research pays attention to race/ethnicity when examining the differential effects of father absence and harshness on delinquency.

Interestingly, the majority of harsh father youth were Latino. This fact is at odds with research that consistently finds that Latino parents endorse warm parenting practices (Hofferth, 2003; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996). It is also possible that this finding could be attributed to our measurement of relationship warmth and hostility, which was derived from parenting patterns within a sample of white, middle class parents (Conger et al., 1994). Definitions of normative parenting are largely based on research conducted with similar samples (García Coll & Pachter, 2002). Consequently, Latino youth may be overrepresented in the harsh father category due to differences in culture or the contextual factors that demand this style of parenting.

The findings of this study are particularly important for initiatives and programs whose primary goal is to re-engage absent fathers with their families. Certainly paternal absence is problematic, but solely increasing the presence of fathers is only part of the solution. As seen in this study, present fathers who are hostile and cold pose a greater risk for youth than absent fathers. It is imperative that these initiatives not only re-engage absent fathers, but also equip them with the knowledge and parenting skills needed to positively raise their children.

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Figure 2.1.
Father Type Predicting Offending

Figure 2.2
Father Type Predicting Substance Use

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Full Sample (N= 1,216)	Absent Fathers (N=218)	Father Subsamples Harsh Father s (N=58)	<i>Estimate</i>
Demographics				
Race				$\chi^2 = 24.99^{**}$
Latino	45.8%	34.71%	50%	
Black	36.9%	53.95%	20.69%	
White	14.8%	9.97%	25.86%	
Other	2.5%	1.37%	3.45%	
Age <i>M (SD)</i>	15.29 (1.29)	15.19 (1.35)	15.64 (1.22)	$t(347)= -2.32^*$
Parent Education				$\chi^2 = 7.51^*$
Had not completed high school	29.2%	34.6%	27.6%	
Completed high school	32.5%	37.5%	27.6%	
More than a high school diploma	38.3%	27.9%	44.8%	
Neighborhood Conditions <i>M (SD)</i>	2.07 (.68)	2.23 (.71)	2.17 (.72)	$t(347)= .6$
Father Residence				
Out of Home	50.8%	N/A	36.2%	-
Father-Child Relationship Quality				
Hostility <i>M(SD)</i>	1.46 (.43)	-	2.38 (.53)	-
Warmth <i>M(SD)</i>	2.77 (.86)	-	1.46 (.33)	-
Mother-Child Relationship Quality				
Hostility <i>M(SD)</i>	1.59 (.43)	1.56 (.46)	1.84 (.49)	$t(344)= -4.08^{***}$
Warmth <i>M(SD)</i>	3.17 (.66)	3.25 (.64)	2.72 (.76)	$t(344)= 5.6^{***}$
Delinquency				
Self-Reported Offending Variety at Baseline <i>M(SD)</i>	1.49 (2.12)	1.5 (2.1)	2.85 (3.28)	$t(347)= -4.01^{***}$
<i>Range</i>	0-17	0-16	0-17	
Self-Reported Offending Variety during six months following Baseline <i>M(SD)</i>	1.39 (2.26)	1.29 (2.19)	2.84 (3.26)	$t(330)= -4.38^{***}$
<i>Range</i>	0-18	0-18	0-13	
Substance Use Variety at Baseline <i>M(SD)</i>	1.24 (1.54)	1.13 (1.55)	1.91 (1.63)	$t(346)= -3.47^{***}$
<i>Range</i>	0-11	0-9	0-7	
Substance Use Variety during six months	1.14	.895	2.09	$t(330)= -5.01^{***}$

following Baseline $M(SD)$	(1.67)	(1.37)	(2.52)
<i>Range</i>	0-13	0-8	0-13

⁺ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2.2 Negative Binomial Regression Results for Delinquency by Father Type

	Self-Reported Offending Variety (6M)			Substance Use Variety (6M)		
	Coefficient (SE)	95% CI	Incidence Risk Ratio	Coefficient (SE)	95% CI	Incidence Risk Ratio
Latino ^A	-.06 (.24)	-1.84, .56	.94	-.18 (.20)	-.58, .22	.83
Black ^A	-.36 (.24)	-.83, .12	.70	-.73*** (.22)	-1.16, -.30	.48
Other ^A	-.64 (.61)	-1.84, .56	.53	-.15 (.52)	-1.17, .87	.86
Age	-.02 (06)	-.13, .09	.98	.20*** (.06)	.08, .31	1.22
Parent Education ^B	.06 (.17)	-.27, .38	1.06	.06 (.16)	-.25, .38	1.07
Neighborhood Conditions	.37*** (.11)	.17, .59	1.46	.16 (.10)	-.04, .36	1.17
Offending Variety (BL)	.18*** (.03)	.12, .24	1.20	-	-	-
Substance Use Variety (BL)	-	-	-	.26*** (.04)	.17, .34	1.29
Absent Father ^C	.47* (.2)	.09, .86	1.61	.47** (.17)	.15, .8	1.6
LR χ^2		85.67***			120.39***	
Pseudo R ²		.077			.1256	

* $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

^AReference group is White

^BReference group is "Less than high school diploma"

^CReference group is "Harsh Father"

Table 2.3. Negative Binomial Regression Results for Delinquency by Father Type, Controlling for the Mother-child Relationship

	Self-Reported Offending Variety(6M)			Substance Use Variety(6M)		
	Coefficient (SE)	95% CI	Incidence Risk Ratio	Coefficient (SE)	95% CI	Incidence Risk Ratio
Latino ^A	-.06, (.24)	-.52, .41	.94	-.19 (.20)	-.58, .21	.83
Black ^A	-.37 (.24)	-.85, .10	.69	-.72*** (.22)	-1.14, -.29	.49
Other ^A	-.75 (.62)	-1.96, .46	.47	-.31 (.5)	-1.3, .68	.73
Age	-.04 (.06)	-.16, .07	.96	.17** (.06)	.06, .29	1.19
Parent Education ^B	.02 (.17)	-.3, .35	1.03	.04 (.16)	-.27, .35	1.04
Neighborhood Conditions	.36*** (.11)	.14, .57	1.43	.15 (.1)	-.06, .35	1.16
Offending Variety (BL)	.16*** (.03)	.09, .22	1.17			
Substance Use Variety (BL)				.24*** (.05)	.15, .33	1.27
Maternal Hostility	.37* (.17)	.03, .83	1.45	.23 (.16)	-.09, .55	1.26
Maternal Warmth	.06 (.13)	-.20, .31	1.06	-.14 (.11)	-.36, .08	.87
Absent Father ^C	.43* (.2)	.04, .83	1.54	.37* (.17)	.04, .70	1.45
LR χ^2		89.72***			125.96***	
Pseudo R ²		.0811			.1326	

⁺ $p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

^AReference group is White

^BReference group is "Less than high school diploma"

^CReference group is "Harsh Father"