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Fathers' Perceptions of Relationships With Young Adolescent Children: Implications for Family Therapy

Tyler D. Patrick
Utah State University

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FATHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG ADOLESCENT
CHILDREN: IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY THERAPY

by

Tyler D. Patrick

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Family, Consumer, and Human Development

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2006
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ABSTRACT

Fathers’ Perceptions of Relationships with Young-Adolescent Children: Implications for Family

by

Tyler D Patrick, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2006

Major Professor: Dr. Troy E. Beckert
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

This study used family systems theory as a lens to examine fathers’ relationships with young adolescent children as it relates to the areas of time spent together, communication between generations, and paternal satisfaction in raising an early adolescent child. Similarities and differences of scores on the Parent Success Indicator were examined for 191 Caucasian American (n = 110) and African American (n = 81) fathers of 10- to 14-year-old children. Results showed that increased amounts of time that fathers report spending with children was significantly associated with paternal satisfaction, communication between generations, fathers’ use of time, parental frustration, and parental teaching. Implications for training and family therapy involving fathers were also explored.

(63 pages)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process of writing this thesis has been one of the most mentally and emotionally challenging undertakings of my life. As I have struggled to complete this project, I have made many discoveries about myself, some of which I am not very proud of. Many of my personal weaknesses have become very apparent to those who have helped me struggle through this process.

I am sincerely grateful to my committee members, Dr. Scot Allgood and Dr. Kathy Piercy, for the time and effort that they have invested in helping me to finish this project. On more than one occasion I have received valuable advice and support from each of them regarding my thesis and my personal life as well.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Troy Beckert for all of the support and help that he has provided to me during this process. He has always been very patient and supportive through the process. His mentoring and willingness to work with me have been invaluable to me on more levels than simply finishing this project. I can honestly say that I would probably not have even been able to complete this project without the help and support of Dr. Beckert.

Finally, I want my wife, Rhiannon, to know how much I love and appreciate her. I admire her for her patience and willingness to struggle with me as we have undergone this process together. Her belief in me and her positive supportive attitude have been my inspiration to keep working during the times that I became discouraged. I am looking forward to what the future holds for our family.

Tyler Patrick
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Family therapy is replete with children between 10 and 14 years of age as clients. They are frequently presented in therapy by their single parent mothers for behavior problems and depression. These children often have limited or no contact with their non-custodial father. In two-parent families, most fathers are hesitant to participate in therapy with their children. Historically in parenting research, fathers take a back seat to mothers (Montemayor, 1982). Recently however, there has been an upsurge in research and a greater understanding gained of some of the issues that face fathers today (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Snarey, 1993). Yet there remain many unanswered questions related to the issues of fatherhood particular to raising early adolescent children. Of particular interest in fathering is the reciprocal impact for the father-child dyad as it relates to therapy.

The traditional portrait of a father might best be seen as a man coming home from work as the sole provider of the family income. As he enters the house he might do some chores, provide emotional support to his wife, and spend a little quality time with his children (Montemayor, 1982). While these “Leave it to Beaver” ideas still exist, researchers have recently begun to understand some of the inaccuracies of these stereotypes and elucidate a more realistic view of fatherhood.

Most notably, fathers are not solely responsible for the financial portion of the household as they were a generation ago. In fact, Pleck (1997) found that 80% of women in two-parent homes in the United States were also financial contributors. With more
women entering the workforce to provide for financial needs of the family the balance of home care and childrearing is brought into question. An obvious realignment of responsibility would require fathers to adjust by helping more with household chores and taking a more active role in child care.

Unfortunately, this is not generally the case. Researchers have found that fathers expend much less energy helping with household chores than their spouses (Kamo & Cohen, 1998), and more importantly to this study, fathers still spend much less time with their children (Brotherson et al., 2005). If fathers are not spending sufficient time and effort with children what are the implications for fathers and children?

Based on family systems theory, change in one part of the family system will create a change in other parts of the system (Hanson, 1995). Because of the assumption that all parts of the family system are connected it can be expected that any change in a part of the system, such as increased levels of time spent, will cause a change in other parts of the system, such as satisfaction, communication, and levels of conflict. If there is a difference in the level of time and effort that fathers put into rearing their children, then there will be some difference in the behavior and functioning of the children as well. In addition, it is assumed that higher levels in the amount of time that fathers spend with their children will also yield increased levels in their satisfaction as parents and in their ability to communicate with their children (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998).

As workforce demographics continue to transform, perceptions of fatherhood have begun to change. There is an increased focus on father-child involvement throughout child development. A common measure of parental involvement has been the amount and quality of time spent with children (see Russell & Russell, 1987). While time
with children seems to be an important facet of fatherhood in normal functioning families, there is limited information to support a connection between the amount of time spent and other areas of parenting including communication, satisfaction, and quality of the time spent (Beckert, Strom, & Strom, 2006). This gap in knowledge poses problems, particularly, in areas that focus on parent training such as family therapy.

The purpose of this study is to examine, within a family systems theory framework, the amount of time a sample of fathers spend with their early adolescent children as it relates to subjective measures of parental satisfaction, communication, and perceptions of quality time. Because limited research exists in this area, an exploratory descriptive design was employed. Scores from a self-report assessment of parental strengths and needs from two culturally diverse samples were examined and compared for similarities and differences. The data consist of scores for groups of African American and Caucasian fathers according to self-reported amounts of weekly interactions with their sons and daughters who were between 10-14 years in age. To this end, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do fathers differ significantly by ethnicity according to self-reported amounts of time spent with the child?
2. Does the amount of time spent with the child differ significantly by SES?
3. How does child gender relate to the amount of time fathers spend with the child?
4. To what extent does the amount of time fathers spend with their children relate to their satisfaction as measured by the Parent Success Indicator (PSI) in
   a. How the child gets along with family members?
   b. How the child considers consequences when making decisions?
c. How they are treated by the child?

5. As reported on the PSI, do levels of time spent with the child positively correlate to better communication including:
   a. Listening to child?
   b. Seeing positive side of situations?
   c. Disciplining in a fair manner?

6. According to scores on the PSI, do levels of time spent with the child positively correlate to quality of time including:
   a. Enough time with the child?
   b. Higher levels of energy while with the child?
   c. Patience with the child?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the amount of time a sample of fathers spend with their early adolescent children as it relates to subjective measures of parental satisfaction, communication, and perceptions of quality time. This chapter provides a review of previous literature on fathers that is pertinent to the current study. Topics that will be discussed include: Father involvement and time spent with adolescent children; ethnic uniqueness of fathers; and generational communication.

Father Involvement and Time Spent with Adolescent Children

One of the aspects of fatherhood that researchers have taken an interest in is the amount and quality of time that fathers spend with their children. Fitting a common stereotype, past researchers have found that on average fathers spend less time with their children than mothers (Pleck, 1997; Russell & Russell, 1987). Contributing factors to this phenomenon include social beliefs about fathers, definition of traditional family roles, fathers’ commitment to their occupation, and traditional views of providing for children. Daly (1996) found that fathers wanted to spend time with their children, but that it was too costly financially for them to make time for children. Daly also notes that fathers have been traditionally viewed as responsible for providing the physical needs of children while mothers have been expected to provide for their emotional needs. Pleck and Stueve (2001) identified five components that play a role in fathers’ limited involvement with
children including contextual factors, father’s characteristics, mother’s characteristics, co-parental relations, and child’s characteristics.

While fathers have historically spent less time with children of all ages than mothers, the overall time a child spends with either parent significantly decreases during adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1994; Miller & Lane, 1991). Traditionally in the United States adolescent children spend more time with their same-sex parent. Montemayor (1982) found that adolescent sons reported spending 53 minutes per day with fathers while adolescent daughters reported only spending an average of 17 minutes per day with their fathers. Harris (1991) found similar results on 184 sibling pairs and also found that when daughters had male siblings they received more father attention than daughters who had female siblings.

It also appears that there are differences in the ways that fathers, as opposed to mothers, spend time with children. Larson and Richards (1994) found that during much of the time children spend with their mothers they are each engaged in separate activities and do not necessarily interact in the same activity. Fathers on the other hand, are more likely to engage in leisure activities together with their adolescent children during the time that they are together (Asmussen & Larson, 1991; Montemayor & Brownlee, 1987). Interestingly, however, teenage children reported that approximately half of the time that they spend with fathers is spent in front of the television (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984).

There are some contrasting views about the actual quality of time that fathers are spending with their children. Montemayor and Brownlee (1987) reported that adolescent children of both genders find more enjoyment and satisfaction from time spent with
fathers than with mothers. Roll and Millen (1978) found that quality of time spent also increases when children feel like they are understood by their fathers.

On the other hand, nearly half of adolescent children report that activities with parents often feel rushed (Galinsky, 1999). Strom, Beckert, Strom, Strom, and Griswold (2002) posited that the inability of today's fathers to find personal time leads to stress, fatigue, and negatively impacts the father-adolescent relationship.

Even if fathers' time with adolescent children is perceived as good in quality, there seems to be no real substitute for the benefits connected to an increased amount of interactive time with children. Adolescent children of Caucasian fathers who spend at least 10 hours per week with their adolescent children also report better ratings for their fathers on communication, satisfaction, use of time, teaching, and frustration than children report for fathers who spent less than 10 hours per week (Strom et al. 2002). In addition, recently researchers have found that increased father involvement with African American adolescents significantly decreased the likelihood of adolescent alcohol abuse (Clark, Thatcher, & Maisto, 2004; Jordan & Lewis, 2005). Father involvement with adolescent children also appears to affect psychological well-being. Flouri and Buchanan (2003) found that father involvement served as even better psychological protection for adolescents than mother involvement. Yet another effect of father involvement on children is that when fathers are more involved, sons tend to show higher levels of empathy. This study focuses on the amount of time fathers are spending and how that is related to some aspects of the quality of the time that they are spending with their young adolescent children.
Ethnic Uniqueness of Fathers

African American fathers have been characterized as the phantom of American family studies (Cazenave, 1979). Regarding African American fathers, past research has traditionally focused on father deficits and has categorized African American men as a homogeneous group. There has been more concern about father absence than what his presence means to families (Biller, 1969; Collier, 1973). However, variance in the population must be acknowledged before the special challenges that confront African American fathers can be understood (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Wilson, & Vine, 2002). It therefore, becomes appropriate to understand how African American fathers are perceived by their spouses, children, and themselves.

Contrary to common stereotypes about African American fathers, black men who achieve financial success are more likely to be married, remain married, and report greater contentment with their family circumstances than black fathers with low incomes (Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1994). Shipley (2005) speculated that one possible explanation for these outcomes is that attitudes about education, higher levels of income, and longer marriages may account for increased satisfaction and, in turn, motivate greater father involvement.

In relation to caring for children, it appears that when compared to Caucasian fathers, African American fathers actually report very similar levels of child care. According to Kamo and Cohen, (1998) Caucasian fathers usually spend about one-third as much time as their wives engaged in child care. Hassani and Roopnairine (1994) found similar results when they surveyed 45 African American fathers and their wives. African
American fathers reported 42% as much time as wives doing child care, whereas their wives reported that fathers spent 37% as much time engaged in child care as they did. Similar to Caucasian fathers, Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1999) found that African American fathers who were employed and had higher levels of education were more likely to be highly involved with their children. As it relates to the child’s development, researchers have found that African American fathers are significantly more involved in the cognitive aspect of parenting than Caucasian fathers (Toth & Xu, 1999).

While African American fathers have been generally viewed from a deficits perspective, there is emerging research to suggest the important role that they play in family life. Self-reports of 136 middle-class men revealed that these fathers regularly took care of sons and daughters, shared in decision-making about raising children, often joined them in play and imaginative activities, and served as a powerful influence in the child’s socialization (Connors, 1986). Mirande (1991) found that 88% of fathers believed that children had needs that only a father would be able to meet. Scanzoni (1985) studied 400 African American men who had been married for at least five years and found that middle class families had strong father figures who commonly shared in decision-making with wives.

The emerging picture of African American fathers in intact families is that they are motivated to care for children and share responsibilities with their wives to a greater extent than the stereotypes have attributed to them (Comer, 1997). Clayton, Miney, and Blankenhorn (2003) found that as economic stability increases, corresponding gains occur in the level of father’s participation with children’s education. Alerting these men of their self-identified parenting strengths and potential learning needs can provide them
with direction in how to spend their time as fathers.

Father and Adolescent Communication

Communication is an important facet of the relationship between fathers and young adolescents. Researchers have looked at the amount of communication that fathers engage in with their adolescent children. While not the target population for this study, it is interesting to note that Miller and Lane (1991) found that college students reported that they talked to their mother once per week on average and only talked to their father every two weeks on average. While it is interesting to note that fathers seem to communicate less than mothers with their college-aged adolescents, there is limited information on how the amount of communication affects generational views of their relationships.

Past research efforts have focused more on communication styles and the type of communication that fathers have with their adolescent children. Fathers have generally engaged in problem-solving activities with their adolescent children (Hauser et al., 1987; Noller & Bagi, 1985; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Hauser et al. also found that adolescent children were more likely to be more accepting of fathers than mothers.

Montemayor and Hanson (1985) speculate that fathers, more than mothers, are actually more talkative with adolescents in theoretical debates about morality. This supports the findings of Hauser et al. (1987), who identified fathers as being more enabling and less constraining than mothers in some areas of communication. In addition, it seems that it may be easier for fathers to engage in theoretical debates with children because there is limited emotional investment and self-disclosure (Lecroy, 1988;
Noller & Callan, 1990) making father and child less vulnerable to the judgment of the other. Another area of communication that many adolescents indicated that fathers excel in is that of listening to their adolescent children (Strom et al., 2002).

Past literature highlights some areas where fathers could improve communication with their adolescent children. Larson and Richards (1994) found that fathers rarely discussed personal feelings and other emotional topics with their adolescent children. This can lead to adolescent children, especially daughters, feeling like they are unimportant and unknown to their fathers. Another area of communication for fathers to improve upon is being able to talk with their adolescent children about social issues such as dating (Strom et al., 2002).

There appear to be some differences in the type of communication fathers have with sons as compared to daughters. Noller and Callan (1990) found that daughters disclose much less about themselves to fathers than they do to mothers. In the same study Noller and Callan found that sons disclose an equal amount of information to fathers and mothers. One possible reason for this finding is that daughters feel like mothers know them better than fathers do (Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987).

In our culture, parents assume the responsibility of imparting their own values to their children. Fathers, especially, have been identified as the disciplinarian figure that enforces the rules and sets future expectations (Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). As children reach adolescence they become more independent. During this process children often begin to feel like parents are too controlling. This can lead parents to feel that their children are rejecting them (Ellis-Schwabe & Thornburg, 2001). Block and Langman (1974) found that for families navigating this stage of development it is common to have
increased levels of conflict even if there is a good parent-child relationship.

It is often believed that negative communication between parents and adolescent children involves constant heated arguments. However, researchers have shown that negative communication between parents and adolescents are less frequent than previously thought and areas of family conflict seem to be more for everyday types of things that are seen as minor issues (Papini & Sebby, 1988). Some of these areas of conflict identified include curfew (Montemayor & Hanson, 1985), dress and social life (Block & Langman, 1974), home chores, adolescents’ use of time, and school work (Schvanaveldt, 1973).

There is limited research that differentiates areas of conflict for fathers and mothers. Ellis-Schwabe and Thornburg (2001), however, found that fathers are more likely than mothers to have conflict with adolescent children about dating and their choice of friends. They also found that this conflict was higher for male children during the ages of 10-12, years and for female children during the ages of 12-14 years. Some effects of conflict on the father-child relationship were found by MacKinnon, Castellino, Brody, and Fincham (2001). They found that fathers who had negative interactions with and attributions of their young received more negative attributions from their children during adolescence.

Summary

In summary, previous literature has made strides in understanding the role of fathers and some of their strengths and weaknesses in dealing with adolescent children. A single portrait of the typical father cannot be depicted because fathers represent culturally
and ethnically diverse populations with unique issues and problems. There is still little information regarding the similarities and differences of African American and Caucasian fathers as they relate to their young adolescent children. Given the variety of issues that fathers of different cultures face, there still appear to be some general themes. Fathers engage in leisure activities with children when they spend time with them, they are more likely to engage in theoretical debates and problem-solving with children when communicating, and they appear to be less involved emotionally with children than mothers are. Research has also linked poor marital quality and low marital satisfaction for fathers to increased levels of depression in children. There has been little attention given to cultural variations in the connection that fathers’ time spent with young adolescent children has with communication, parental satisfaction, and how time spent with children is utilized.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the amount of time that fathers spend with young adolescent children is interrelated to fathers’ perceptions of communication, parental satisfaction, and how time spent with children is utilized for African American and Caucasian fathers across different levels of SES. Information gained from this study will help fill some of the gaps that remain in understanding fatherhood. In particular, it will aid in helping to understand from fathers’ perspectives how the issue of time spent with adolescent children impacts other areas of their relationship with their children. In addition, it is intended to view these results through a systems theory lens in helping the field of family therapy to better understand some of the issues that fathers might regularly face when dealing with early adolescent children.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Sample

The sample for this study included Caucasian and African American fathers of 10- to 14-year-old children. Data were previously collected. A more detailed explanation of the procedures of collection can be found in the literature (see Strom et al., 2000, 2002).

The original data set contained ethnically and economically diverse mothers, fathers, and children from urban and rural middle-class neighborhoods in the south. The current study included data on African American and Caucasian American fathers of two levels of socioeconomic status. As mentioned later in the limitations sections, my intention was to use three levels of income but due to a lack of previously collected information, the data were collapsed into two categories. Fathers of different ages ranging from below 30 to above 50 years old were also represented. A stratified random sample of Caucasian and African American participants was drawn from the original data set and included only those fathers who were married. The total sample for the current study consisted of 191 fathers of 10- to 14-year-old children (81 African American and 110 Caucasian). This study did not take into account whether or not the child was a step-child or the biological child of the fathers being studied. As seen in Table 1, 182 fathers had an education of at least a high school diploma with 89 (46.6%) having earned college degrees, and nearly all of the fathers represented were employed full-time (93.7%).
Of the fathers sampled 129 (67.5%) earned more than $35,000 per year.

Table 1

*Demographic Information for Total Sample of African American and Caucasian Fathers*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (F)</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 191)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>57.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>42.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 35k</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>67.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 35k</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father age</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 years and older</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>30-39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father at home</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>47</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom or never</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father-child time</td>
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<td>More than 5 hours per week</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Father education level</td>
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<td>College degree</td>
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<td>Some high school</td>
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<td>8th grade or less</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child gender</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>56.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>43.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instrumentation and Procedure

This study used select items and scales from the *Parent Success Indicator (PSI)* developed by Strom et al. (2000). The purpose of the *PSI* is to identify strengths and education needs of parents of 10- to 14-year-old children. As seen in the Appendix the *PSI* is a 60-item self-report survey that contains six scales with 10 items each. Areas of emphasis include: Communication, Use of Time, Teaching, Frustration, Satisfaction, and Information Needs.

Scoring for the *PSI* is set up on a Likert-type scale where each response is assigned a value of 1, 2, 3, or 4. The value of 4 represents parental strength and a score of 1 represents identified needs for future education of the parents. Based on group responses descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were derived.

For the present study particular interest was given to the scales of Use of Time, Communication, and Satisfaction. From each of these scales specific questions were further analyzed. Specifically, from the Use of Time scale: item 14- Able to spend time with the child, item 15- Able to be fresh and energetic when spending time with the child, and item 16- Able to be patient with the child. From the Communication scale the following items were analyzed: item 1- Good at listening to the child, item 4- Good at being honest and expressing feeling to the child, and item 6- Good at showing trust to the child. Finally, the following items from the Satisfaction scale were analyzed: item 41- Likes being with the child, item 42- Likes how the child gets along with family members,
and item 49- Likes the way he or she is treated by the child. The reason these items were chosen is because they were of particular interest to me as I have seen relational aspects from each of these areas play out in therapy.

Fathers for this study were administered the PSI as part of a program that their children’s schools were supporting. Descriptive and inferential analyses were performed. For the purpose of analyses, the PSI has been subdivided into six subscales which included the parenting areas of communication, use of time, teaching, frustration, satisfaction, and information needs. Each subscale consisted of 10 items covering various aspects of parenting early adolescents. The total instrument therefore included 60 items. For inferential analyses the dependent variables included item mean scores, subscale mean scores, and total mean scores for each sample group. Independent variables included ethnicity (African American/Caucasian), child gender (male/female), time with the adolescent (0-5 hours per week/more than 5 hours per week), and annual household income (less than $35,000/more than $35,000).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity of the PSI have been established with scores from a sample of 1,640 culturally diverse adolescents and parents representing a wide range of income and education. A factor analysis determined that 57 of 60 items loaded at .40 or greater, and no items loaded significantly on two different factors (Collinsworth, Strom, & Strom, 1996). Across all populations alpha coefficients for the total instrument were high ranging from .92 to .95. Alpha coefficients for each scale ranged from .77 to .94. As
seen in Table 2, reliability alpha coefficients for the current set of scores for the scales were very strong (Henson, 2001) and ranged .81 to .93.

Table 2

Reliability Statistics for African American and Caucasian Father Respondents (n=91) on the Parent Success Indicator (PSI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent use of time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teaching</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent frustration</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent satisfaction</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent information needs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results of the Parent Success Indicator (PSI) survey for the groups of African American ($n = 81$) and Caucasian fathers ($n = 101$) are outlined in this chapter. Each respondent group had mean scores indicating various strengths for almost all of the subscales. A mean score of 2.50 or greater for any item or subscale was considered favorable and identified a strength (Strom et al., 2000); specifically, 2.50 to 2.99 were slightly favorable, and 3.00 to 4.00 were highly favorable. Item mean scores of 2.49 and below were unfavorable and represented an area where additional education might be considered helpful. For example, a group mean score that ranged from 2.00 to 2.49 was considered slightly unfavorable, and a group mean score that ranged from 1.00 to 1.99 was considered highly unfavorable (Strom et al., 2002). Results for each particular research question are outlined individually in this chapter.

1. Do fathers differ significantly by ethnicity according to self reported amounts of time spent with the child? Fathers were divided into two groups based on the amount of time they reported spending with their child each week. As seen in Table 3 for father groups who spent less than 5 hours per week with their child African American fathers scored themselves significantly higher than Caucasian fathers on aspects of parenting measured by the PSI ($t (80) = -3.10, p = .003$). Specifically African American fathers scored themselves higher on the ability to communicate (black fathers $M = 3.13$, $SD = .40$; white fathers $M = 2.87$, $SD = .42$), $t (80) = -2.72$, $p = .008$, to use time (black fathers $M = 2.91$, $SD = .47$; white fathers $M = 2.64$, $SD = .42$), $t (80) = -2.73$, $p = .008$, to teach (black fathers $M = 3.43$, $SD = .45$; white fathers $M = 3.00$, $SD = .45$), $t (80) = -4.13$, $p = $
Table 3

Results of t test for Ethnicity and Time Spent with Children 0-5 Hours per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Black fathers n=(29)</th>
<th>White fathers n=(53)</th>
<th>t (df(80))</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>3.13 .40</td>
<td>2.87 .42</td>
<td>-2.72</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent use of time</td>
<td>2.91 .47</td>
<td>2.64 .42</td>
<td>-2.73</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teaching</td>
<td>3.43 .45</td>
<td>3.00 .45</td>
<td>-4.13</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent frustration</td>
<td>3.13 .41</td>
<td>2.87 .44</td>
<td>-2.63</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent satisfaction</td>
<td>3.31 .47</td>
<td>3.07 .45</td>
<td>-2.52</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent information needs</td>
<td>2.60 .65</td>
<td>2.76 .63</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>3.09 .34</td>
<td>2.87 .29</td>
<td>-3.10</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

.000, to avoid frustration (black fathers $M = 3.13, SD = .41$; white fathers $M = 2.87, SD = .44$), $t (80) = -2.63, p = .010$, and to experience satisfaction in parenting (black fathers $M = 3.31, SD = .47$; white fathers $M = 3.07, SD = .45$), $t (80) = -2.52, p = .027$.

The second group of fathers indicated that they spent 5 hours or more with their 10- to 14-year-old child. As seen in Table 4, African American fathers who spent more time (5+ hours per week) with their child also felt significantly better about aspects of parenting measured by the PSI, $t (107) = -2.01, p = .046$ as compared to Caucasian fathers. African American fathers viewed themselves more favorably in the areas of communication (black fathers $M = 3.39, SD = .33$; white fathers $M = 3.16, SD = .44$), $t (107) = -2.99, p = .003$, teaching (black fathers $M = 3.56, SD = .41$; white fathers $M = 3.39, SD = .05$), $t (107) = -4.13, p = .000$, and the level of parental frustration (black
Table 4

Results of t test for Ethnicity and Time Spent with Children 5+ Hours per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Black fathers ( n = 52 )</th>
<th>White fathers ( n = 57 )</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( df(107) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>3.39, .33</td>
<td>3.16, .44</td>
<td>-2.99</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent use of time</td>
<td>3.01, .53</td>
<td>2.84, .44</td>
<td>-1.83</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teaching</td>
<td>3.56, .41</td>
<td>3.39, .40</td>
<td>-2.56</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent frustration</td>
<td>3.21, .49</td>
<td>3.00, .47</td>
<td>-2.42</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent satisfaction</td>
<td>3.46, .39</td>
<td>3.36, .33</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent information needs</td>
<td>2.69, .85</td>
<td>2.83, .67</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>3.22, .36</td>
<td>3.10, .30</td>
<td>-2.01</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although not statistically significant \( t(107) = -1.83, p = .07 \) there was a trend for African American fathers to also rate themselves higher than Caucasian fathers in the way they used their time as parents (Black fathers \( M = 3.01, SD = .53 \); White fathers \( M = 2.84, SD = .44 \)).

Initial findings show that black fathers tended to rate themselves higher than white fathers regardless of how much time was spent per week in the areas of communication, frustration and teaching. In addition black fathers who spent less than five hours per week rated themselves higher than white fathers in use of time, and satisfaction.

2. Does the amount of time spent with the child differ significantly by SES? In an
attempt to understand the issue of spending time together, groups were divided by SES (as measured by self-reported annual household income) without regard to ethnicity. Separate analyses were performed for the two groups of fathers based on the amount of time they spent with their child. As shown in Table 5 for the father group who spent less time with their children, those who earned less than $35,000 per year rated themselves significantly higher on the PSI than fathers who earned more than $35,000 per year (less than $35k $M=3.05, SD = .34; more than $35k $M = 2.89, SD = .30), $t(80) = 2.07, p = .042$. Specifically fathers in the lower income bracket perceived themselves as significantly better communicators with their children than higher income fathers (less than $35k $M=3.21, SD = .39; more than $35k $M = 2.83, SD = .39), $t(80) = 4.19, p = .000$. Parent teaching also approached significance $t(80) = 1.88, p = .064$ as fathers with

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Less than 35k $M$</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>More than 35k $M$</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df(80)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent use of time</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teaching</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent frustration</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent satisfaction</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent information needs</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>-.63</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
less annual income reported better scores for the ability to teach their children than
fathers with more annual income (less than $35k $M = 3.29, SD = .52; more than $35k $M = 3.08, SD = .47).

For fathers who spent more than 5 hours per week with their children income
level was not a statistically significant factor on the total instrument or individual scales
(see Table 6). In summary, income level was not a very significant factor except for
fathers who spent less time with their children who were in the lower income bracket. In
this case fathers reported better communication with their children.

3. How does child gender relate to the amount of time fathers spend with the
child? Again using the same two groups for comparison (less than 5 hours/ more than 5
hours), fathers’ scores were analyzed based on the gender of the child. As seen in table 7

Table 6

Results of t test for SES and Time Spent with Children 5+ Hours per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Less than 35k n = (34)</th>
<th></th>
<th>More than 35k n = (75)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>df(107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent use of time</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teaching</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent frustration</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent satisfaction</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent information needs</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
fathers who spent less than 5 hours per week with their children reported a significantly greater need for parenting information if their child was female (fathers of daughters $M = 2.91, SD = .52$; fathers of sons $M = 2.52, SD = .68$), $t(80) = -2.87, p = .005$. Although not statistically significant $t(80) = 1.86, p = .066$, fathers in this group viewed themselves as better teaching sons than daughters (fathers of daughters $M = 3.04$, $SD = .46$; fathers of sons $M = 3.24, SD = .50$).

Table 8 demonstrates that when fathers spend more time with their children (5+ hours) they rate themselves significantly more favorably for daughters than sons on the $PSI$ (fathers of daughters $M = 3.26, SD = .35$; fathers of sons $M = 3.10, SD = .30$), $t(107) = -2.70, p = .008$. In particular, fathers of daughters were significantly more satisfied as parents $t(107,) = -4.00, p = .000$ and they reported significantly better communication, $t$

Table 7

**Results of $t$ test for Child Gender and Time Spent with Children 0-5 Hours per Week**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Boy $n = (44)$</th>
<th>Girl $n = (38)$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$df(80)$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>3.01 .46</td>
<td>2.91 .39</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent use of time</td>
<td>2.79 .46</td>
<td>2.68 .44</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teaching</td>
<td>3.24 .50</td>
<td>3.04 .46</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent frustration</td>
<td>2.95 .49</td>
<td>2.97 .41</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent satisfaction</td>
<td>3.12 .52</td>
<td>3.20 .40</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent information needs</td>
<td>2.52 .68</td>
<td>2.91 .52</td>
<td>-2.87</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>2.94 .37</td>
<td>2.95 .27</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.889</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While not statistically significant $t(107) = -1.88, p = .062$, fathers of daughters who spent more than 5 hours per week also gave more favorable impressions of their ability to teach (fathers of daughters $M = 3.57, SD = .41$; fathers of sons $M = 3.42, SD = .40$).

In summary, fathers generally felt better about parenting sons when they spent less than five hours per week with their child. Fathers who spent more than five hours per week with their child felt much better about communication and their ability to teach daughters as opposed to sons.

4. To what extent does the amount of time fathers spend with their children relate to their satisfaction as measured by the Parent Success Indicator (PSI) in how the child gets along with family members (Question 42), how the child considers consequences

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$n = 64$</th>
<th>$n = 45$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df(107)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Communication</td>
<td>3.19 .41</td>
<td>3.39 .38</td>
<td>-2.51</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Use of Time</td>
<td>2.87 .47</td>
<td>2.99 .51</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Teaching</td>
<td>3.42 .40</td>
<td>3.57 .41</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Frustration</td>
<td>3.05 .47</td>
<td>3.16 .52</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.30 .36</td>
<td>3.57 .31</td>
<td>-4.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Information Needs</td>
<td>2.69 .73</td>
<td>2.87 .80</td>
<td>-1.22</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall PSI</td>
<td>3.10 .30</td>
<td>3.26 .35</td>
<td>-2.70</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
when making decisions (Question 45), and how they are treated by the child (Question
49). As Table 9 illustrates, fathers who spend more time with their children felt
significantly more satisfied as parents in the way that their children get along with family
members (0-5 hours per week $M = 3.23, SD = .61$; more than 5 hours per week $M = 3.50,$
$SD = .55), t (189) = -3.21, p = .002$. Fathers who spend more time also expressed more
satisfaction in the way that their children consider consequences before they make
decisions (0-5 hours per week $M = 2.78, SD = .77$; more than 5 hours per week $M = 3.17,$
$SD = .69), t (189) = -3.71, p = .000$. In addition, fathers who spent more time with their
children were also significantly more pleased with the way that they were treated by their
child (0-5 hours per week $M = 3.23, SD = .57$; more than 5 hours per week $M = 3.54, SD$
$= .52), t (189) = -3.90, p = .000.

5. As reported on the PSI, do levels of time spent with the child positively
correlate to better communication including; listening to child (question 1), seeing
positive side of situations (question 2), and fair disciplining (question 7)? As

Table 9

Results of t Test for Time Spent with Children and Items from the Satisfaction Scale on
the PSI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>0-5 Hours</th>
<th>5+ Hours</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df(189)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = (82)$</td>
<td>$n = (109)$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How child gets along with family members</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>-3.21</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How child considers consequences for decisions</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>-3.71</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How father is treated by child</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>-3.90</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
shown on Table 10, fathers who spent more than 5 hours per week with their children viewed themselves in a significantly more favorable way than fathers who spent less than 5 hours per week in the way that they listened to their child \( t(189) = -3.66, p = .000 \), saw the positive side of situations \( t(189) = -4.14, p = .000 \), and being fair in the way that they disciplined their child \( t(189) = -2.25, p = .025 \).

6. According to scores on the PSI, do levels of time spent with the child positively correlate to quality of time including; enough time with the child (question 14), higher levels of energy while with the child (question 15), and patience with the child (question 16). Table 11 illustrates that fathers who spend more time with children rated themselves significantly better at all aspects of time use that were measured for the study. Fathers who spent more time felt better about how much time they had with their child (0-5 hours per week \( M = 2.43, SD = .74 \), more than 5 hours per week \( M = 2.94, SD = .76 \), \( t(189) = -4.64, p = .000 \), experienced higher levels of energy to spend on their children (0-5 hours per week \( M = 2.49, SD = .70 \), more than 5 hours per week \( M = 2.83, SD = .73 \), \( t

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>0-5 Hours</th>
<th></th>
<th>5+ Hours</th>
<th></th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( df(189) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to the child</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>-3.66</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing positive side of situations</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>-4.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplining the child in a fair way</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>-2.25</td>
<td></td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(189) = -3.21, \( p = .002 \), and felt that they were better able to demonstrate patience (0-5 hours per week \( M = 2.73, SD = .77 \), more than 5 hours per week \( M = 2.99, SD = .75 \)), \( t (189) = -2.33, p = .021 \). Further implication and interpretation of these findings are further addressed in the next chapter including discussion of how the findings relate to family therapy.

Table 11

*Results for t Test for Time Spent with Children and Items from Use of Time Scale on the PSI*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>0-5 hours</th>
<th>5+ hours</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>df(189)</th>
<th>( P )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having enough time to spend with the child</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>-4.64</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enough energy when spending time with the child</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>-3.21</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having patience with the child</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>-2.33</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This study was designed to evaluate the effects of the amount of time spent fathers report spending with their early adolescent children and the fathers’ perceptions of their relationships with their child across ethnicity, SES, and child gender. Previous researchers have indicated that fathers traditionally spend less time with their children than mothers (Pleck, 1983; Russell & Russell, 1987), especially in adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1994; Miller & Lane, 1991). When fathers do spend time with their children it is often rushed or done in front of the television (Galinsky, 1999).

Scores from two groups of ethnically diverse fathers \((n = 191)\) on the Parent Success Indicator (PSI), a self-report survey designed to assess strengths and education needs of parents, were gathered from fathers who had a young adolescent child. Fathers’ responses were divided between those who reported spending less than 5 hours per week with their child and those who spent more than five hours per week with their child. These groups were then divided and analyzed again for differences between the contextual factors of ethnicity, SES, and child gender.

Results from this study indicated that the amount of father/child time relates to other aspects of the father/child relationship including communication, use of time, parental frustration, the ability of the parent to teach, and parent satisfaction. The following is a critical review of the findings as seen through a systems theory perspective. Observations, limitations, and applications of this study as they relate to the field of marriage and family therapy were also explored.
Ethnic Comparisons

The first research question dealt with how African American fathers differed on their scores on the PSI from Caucasian fathers. For those who spent less than 5 hours per week with their child, African American fathers scored significantly higher than Caucasian fathers on five of the six scales. It is interesting to note that the only scale where Caucasian fathers scored higher in this group was on the need for more information. It appears that when fathers are spending more time (5+ hours) with their children, the gap between Caucasian and African American fathers begins to decrease. For fathers who spent 5+ hours per week with their child, African American fathers still rated themselves as higher on the PSI in the areas of communication, teaching, and frustration. Although not statistically significant, Caucasian fathers in this group also rated themselves as more needful for parenting information than African American fathers. Findings suggest that these African American fathers tend to view themselves as parents in a more positive way than the Caucasian fathers did. However, the amount of time spent with children did seem to have somewhat of a mediating effect between fathers of both ethnicities. Given the common negative stereotype associated with absent black fathers, reporting these findings to African American fathers in two parent families can give encouragement to them as they fulfill their role in the home. There are a number of possible explanations for these findings. First, it is possible that black fathers who spent less time with sons reported higher scores because they were worried about their public image and simply gave themselves higher scores. Second, it is possible that due to cultural differences expectations for black fathers as parents are different than white
fathers. I like to believe however, that this is a great sign to show that black fathers have begun to buck the stereotype that they are uninvolved and are showing that they are successful as fathers. Literature reviewed previously supports the latter statement that black fathers are generally supportive and involved as parents.

Fathers of both ethnicities rated themselves higher on each scale on the PSI when they were spending more time (5+ hours per week) with their children. These findings support the systems theory idea that change in one part of the system leads to change in all other parts of the system. Hence when fathers spend more time with their children there are residual effects in the other areas of their relationship with their children. It would also be expected to show effects in other relationships within the family. If findings of this current study generalize to other fathers in similar family situations the information is valuable to family therapists because they know that helping fathers to spend more time with their children can potentially improve father-child relationships in communication, satisfaction, the ability to teach, and lower levels of parental frustration.

SES and Time

Results showed that there very few significant differences in scores on the PSI between fathers who made less than $35k per year and fathers who made more than $35k per year. When fathers spent less than five hours per week with their children those who earned less income scored themselves significantly higher on their ability to communicate with their young adolescent child. One possible explanation for this finding is that fathers who make more money may feel that they are meeting their children’s needs through financial means more and see less need than fathers who make lower
levels of income. In addition, there may be better communication from the lower income group because financial circumstances may lead fathers to be more open with their children about family expenses and expectations.

It appears that amount of time spent was also a mediating factor for income level. When fathers reported spending more time with their children there were no significant differences on their responses on the PSI. Again, although these data do not provide a causal link, it can be argued that if fathers can find a way to make time for their children they might be more content with themselves as parents regardless of income level. Theoretically, the next natural step would then be a better relationship with their child, and better family functioning overall.

Comparisons of Time and Child Gender

As one might expect, fathers who reported spending less than 5 hours per week with their early adolescent child reported a significantly greater need for information about how to raise daughters than sons. There was also a trend for fathers in this group to view themselves as better at teaching their sons than their daughters. In contrast, when time with the child increased, fathers were significantly more satisfied and felt better about their ability to communicate with daughters than sons. It was not statistically significant, but fathers in the more-time group also showed a trend to feel better about teaching daughters in contrast to fathers who spent less time with their child. One interpretation of these findings is when fathers spend little time with their young adolescent children they are likely to report lower scores on the PSI regardless of their child’s gender. Child gender becomes a factor as fathers spend more time with their
children. These findings suggest that when fathers are spending time with their children, they are more likely to view their role as a parent in a more favorable light, but that the increase in parental ratings are greater for girls than for boys. This finding is important to therapists who work with families with both sons and daughters. Highlighting the benefits of interactive time in the father-child dyad might assist fathers with either gender of child.

**Time Spent and Father Satisfaction**

Research question 4 addressed paternal satisfaction as measured on the *PSI*. Father perceptions of how their child gets along with family members (question 42), how the child considers consequences when making decisions (question 45), and how they are treated by the child (question 49), were examined across the amount of weekly time that they reported spending with their child. Fathers who spent more than 5 hours per week with their child reported significantly higher scores on all questions examined than fathers who spent less than five hours per week. Results make a convincing argument that increased levels of time spent between father and child are related to increased levels of parental satisfaction felt by fathers.

When fathers are more familiar with their children, as demonstrated through the amount of time that they are spending together, it seems that there is greater family harmony (see question 42). This information supports the systems theory idea that change in one part of the system (the father-child dyad) also leads to change in other parts of the system (the child getting along with other family members). For family therapists who are working with young adolescent children and their families this information is
valuable because it allows them to begin to prescribe increased amounts of time between child and father with confidence that family cohesiveness will increase.

For question 45 on the PSI, results suggest that as fathers spend more time with their child they are happier with the way that their children make decisions. This would suggest a greater level of trust and may actually allow the child greater freedom to make future decisions.

Results from question 49 on the PSI indicate that fathers feel like they are treated better by their children when they spend more time together. This becomes important because it implies that fathers are feeling more respected by their children. It would stand to reason that when fathers feel more respected by their children not only does the satisfaction level of the father increase, but because of the reciprocal nature of the relationship, it would be expected that fathers would also give greater respect to their children as well.

Communication and Time

Three questions from the communication subscale on the PSI were the topic of research question 5 (questions 1, 2, and 7). There was statistical significance for each question that was analyzed. When fathers spent 5+ hours per week with their young adolescent they viewed themselves as better listeners, more positive, and better at disciplining their child than fathers who spent less time with their children. These results are important because they open the gate for helping fathers to increase their ability to communicate with their young adolescent children. If fathers can find a way to spend more time with their children it is expected that results of better communication will lead
to a better relationship between the father-child dyad and for better overall family functioning.

**Amount of Time and Use of Time**

Research question 6 looked at questions 14, 15, and 16 from the *PSI*. All of these questions were contained within the Use of Time subscale. Fathers reported on how they felt about spending enough time with the child, if they had enough energy when they were with the child, and if they were able to be patient with the child. In all cases, fathers in the more time group felt significantly better about all areas measured than fathers who spent less time. Even with the significant difference fathers who spent 5+ hours per week with their child still left room for improvement as their mean scores for each question were still nearly a full point short of exceptional. These findings may suggest that while the amount of time spent with a child is important, there is still also some room for helping fathers to use their time in better ways while they are with their child. As reviewed in the previous literature, much of the time that fathers spend is in front of the television. Helping fathers become more actively engaged with their children may yield better results. Family therapists may be able to focus efforts in therapy toward not only increasing the amount of time and involvement fathers have with their young adolescent children, but also helping them to use it in more effective ways by teaching communication skills and encouraging activities that are more involved.

**Family Systems Theory and Fathering**

In Systems theory, the idea of nonsummativity means that the whole is greater
than the sum of its parts (Hanson, 1995). Adams (2004) referred to the concept of nonsummativity as a family’s collective temper. The family system is made up of subsystems which may include the marital dyad, children, siblings, individuals and in the current study the father-child dyad. Each of these subsystems relies heavily on the family for their development, and in turn each subsystem has an impact on the functioning of the family and other members of the system in which they live. Isomorphism, or the idea that change in one part of the system will affect and change all other parts of the system (Hanson) is a core concept of family systems theory. The following section is included only to lay the groundwork for further discussion and to provide support for viewing results of this study through a Family Systems lens as it relates to family therapy.

A popular focus for past research has been the marital dyad and its relationship to outcomes for children. Some researchers have focused on the affects of good marital quality. According to Belsky (1984) marital relations can support or undermine the parenting role. It appears that good marital quality is associated with a number of desirable outcomes. Children show higher levels of attachment security and sociability when parents have a strong marriage (Howes & Markman, 1989). Goldberg (1990) found that parents in a harmonious marriage are likely to give more favorable ratings of their children and the parental role. As it relates specifically to fathers, when the marriage is strong, children have better relationships with their fathers (Cummings & Watson O’Reilly, 1997).

The connection of poor marital quality to outcomes for children has received far more attention. Poor marital quality has been found to be associated with lack of parental warmth (Holden & Ritchie, 1991), increased parental negativity (Hetherington &
Clingempeel, 1992), higher levels of insecure parent-child attachment in children (Howes & Markman, 1989), and increased levels of parent-child conflict (Christensen & Margolin, 1988). As it relates specifically to fathers, Crane and Wang (2001) found that children were more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression when fathers perceived that mothers had triangled the child into marital conflict.

Literature on the isomorphic nature of the father-adolescent relationship and its relationship to the family system appears to be more limited. Research supports the belief that compared to mothers, fathers generally have less impact on adolescents (Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984). Montemayor (1982) speculated that this is because fathers spend less time and have fewer conversations with adolescent children than mothers. Findings from this study, however, seem to indicate that these fathers identify many areas of parental strength in raising an early adolescent child and these strengths are reflected greater when fathers spend at least 5 hours a week together with their child.

Researchers have identified some areas that fathers appear to have an impact on risk-taking behaviors of their adolescent children. When adolescents feel close to their fathers, they are more likely to postpone sexual activity (Crouter, Carson, Vicary, & Butler, 1988). Carr (1998) found that adolescents are likely to share similar beliefs to their fathers about alcohol. Patterson, Reid, and Dishon (1992) found that adolescent boys are more likely to display antisocial behaviors when fathers use coercive discipline practices as opposed to mothers coercive discipline techniques.

Because of the nature of family therapy and the belief that therapy is most successful when the whole family system is involved, there has been some research on fathers' role in family therapy. Salvador Minuchin, a pioneer in family therapy,
introduced the idea of the peripheral father (Carr, 1998). Carr agreed with this idea, which states that in our current culture, fathers have taken on a peripheral or secondary role in family life, thus becoming somewhat aloof or uninvolved in certain relational aspects.

Because of the role that fathers traditionally play in our culture it comes as no surprise that they do not often attend family therapy sessions. Walters (1993) reported that only one third of fathers attended therapy with their children. Phares (1992) noted that one reason fathers tend to play a lesser role in therapy is the traditional bias of researchers and therapist to focus on the mothers relationships with family members. Walters, Tasker, and Bichard (2001) listed other reasons that fathers report for not attending therapy sessions. Walters et al. found that (a) work commitments, (b) feeling awkward, (c) feeling attacked, (d) not wanting to admit problems, (e) the children being closer to their mother, (f) feeling like the clinic atmosphere is too controlled by women, and (g) children not being their responsibility were reasons that fathers reported for not attending therapy. Other reasons found to prevent fathers from therapy included fathers’ self-doubt of their own value to the therapy process feeling they had little to contribute (Foote, Schumann, Jones, & Eyberg, 1998).

While fathers do not often attend therapy sessions, researchers make a strong case for the importance that fathers play in the process of family therapy. Gurman and Kniskern’s (1978) findings that the presence of fathers improves the odds of favorable outcomes has been supported in more recent years by Carr (1995) who found that fathers’ perceptions of the therapist had a stronger association with therapy outcomes than mothers’ perceptions. When fathers attend at least some sessions of family therapy there
are lower drop out rates and higher levels of problem resolution within the family (Bischoff & Sprenkle, 1993; Frielander, Wildman, Heatherington, & Skowron, 1994). Ferholt and Gurwitt (1982) found that fathers are needed in family therapy because they provide critical information about their children that mothers and other family members may miss. Findings support the proposal from family systems theory that the whole family system working together is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Hanson, 1995).

Recently researchers have focused on what therapists can do to engage fathers more in family therapy. Some successful techniques that have been explored include telephoning before therapy begins (Bying-Hall, 1991), giving a personal invitation (Littlejohn & Bruggen, 1994), setting appointments after work hours (Churven, 1978) and showing confidence in fathers’ abilities as an expert with their children (Hecker, 1991). Application of the present study might encourage fathers to assess their parental strengths and needs through self-reflective tools like the PSI.

A smaller area of emphasis in the research of fathers and family therapy has examined the relational aspect that fathers have with other family members. Crane and Wang (2001) found that when fathers were satisfied with their marriage their children experienced lower levels of depression. They also found that when there were lower levels of marital satisfaction children were more likely to be triangulated and have higher levels of depression. While marital satisfaction has been explored, research is limited on information regarding satisfaction with the father-child relationship as it relates to family therapy. The findings of Crane and Wang support the family systems theory belief that change in one part of the family system will have a direct impact on all other parts of
the system.

Information gained from this study seems to coincide with the previous research mentioned when viewing it systemically. Seeing a father's perspective in relation to aspects of communication, satisfaction, and use of time as measured by the PSI provide valuable tools to therapists who seek to help fathers increase involvement in the therapy process and in helping to change the family system. If fathers are more satisfied, communicate more effectively, and use time better when they spend increased amounts of time with their children, it would be expected that future research would also show that fathers would also see similar isomorphic results in their relationships with their spouse and other family members as well. Ideally, a change in one subsystem of the family will also lead and overall positive change in the family’s collective temper.

Limitations

While the merits of this study have been outlined above, there are several methodological limitations that should be discussed. As with any use of survey methods self-report bias was not controlled. Another problem that was encountered during some of the analyses was than there were a limited number of subjects for each group for analysis. This caused a problem because it became necessary to collapse some of the variables for SES into larger groups in order to be able to retain the power of analysis. Ideally this study would be replicated with a large sample to allow for more detailed analyses. A third limitation of this study is the exploratory descriptive design. This limited any implication of cause and effect relationship to the amount of time spent and the other variables. Although assertions have been made throughout this section
regarding therapeutic direction, further research is needed to empirically test the relationships of these variables.

Future Research

There are a number of directions to take for future research. First, similar research can be done to explore the same variables through the eyes of the children. Doing this, will help to create a greater understanding of the father/child dyad as it relates to issues that are measured on the PSI. Second, it would be helpful to the field to see how the effects of time spent with the adolescent impact other family subsystems and the family unit as a whole. As additional information is gained from the entire system a greater insight will be gained in understanding how the interplay of fathers’ time spent with adolescent children has an impact on other parts of the family including the spousal relationship and the relationship with other children. A third direction would be to explore outcomes for family therapy when increased amounts of father-child time are prescribed. It is possible that this will provide therapists with empirical data that may be helpful for developing and using techniques aimed at helping fathers become more involved with their adolescent children.

Conclusion

Research findings of this study affirm the statement of Snarey (1993) that “good fathering, it seems, really does matter. It matters over a long time, over a lifetime, and even over generations” (p. 356). In addition, findings of this study assert that the issues surrounding the way fathers spend time with children also really do matter. They matter
in the way that these fathers felt about their ability to communicate, their satisfaction as parents, and how they use the time that they are spending with their young adolescent child. As demonstrated in this study, when fathers spend more time with their children they report significantly better results in all of the areas previously mentioned regardless of ethnicity or the gender of their young adolescent. These findings while limited in establishing causal links offer a rich vein to explore for future research on fathering. Results of this study are valuable to the field of family therapy because they contribute to establishing a link to the importance of fathers in the lives of young adolescent children and clarify some of the contextual issues that fathers face in fulfilling their role as emotional and physical caregivers to their children. If increased amounts of time with children are associated with better outcomes for fathers, it is not too far off to expect that results of future research will show that there are also better outcomes for children and entire family systems when fathers increase their time spent with their children.
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APPENDIX
Questions from the Parent Success Indicator (PSI)

1. Good at listening to child.
2. Good at seeing positive side of situations
3. Good at discussing what we watch on television
4. Good at being honest and sharing feelings with child
5. Good at learning from child
6. Good at trusting child
7. Good at disciplining in a fair way
8. Good at discussing child's friendships
9. Good at discussing dating concerns
10. Good at accepting criticism from child
11. Difficulty finding time to attend school activities
12. Difficulty limiting television viewing
13. Difficulty with the way child manages time
14. Difficulty finding time to spend with child
15. Difficulty doing things with child because I am tired
16. Difficulty being patient with child
17. Difficulty allowing child to make decisions
18. Difficulty allowing time for child to spend with friends
19. Difficulty allowing child to spend time alone
20. Difficulty finding personal leisure time
21. Try to teach child to be healthy
22. Try to teach child to care about other people's feelings
23. Try to teach child a sense of right and wrong
24. Try to teach child to cope with stress
25. Try to teach child how to use imagination and be creative
26. Try to teach child to treat both sexes equally
27. Try to teach child how to judge him/her self
28. Try to teach child to manage money
29. Try to teach child that effort is key to success
30. Try to teach child religion by example
31. Frustrated by the way child follows rules
32. Frustrated by child’s language
33. Frustrated by child’s values
34. Frustrated by how child does chores
35. Frustrated by child’s manners
36. Frustrated by child’s peer influences
37. Frustrated by child’s choice of clothes, music, and movies
38. Frustrated by child’s telephone use
39. Frustrated by child’s moody behavior
40. Frustrated by child’s study habits
41. Likes being with child
42. Likes the way child gets along with family members
43. Likes the way child gets along with friends
44. Likes child’s effort to help others
45. Likes the way child considers consequences before making decisions
46. Likes child's sense of responsibility
47. Likes child's grades
48. Likes child's self confidence
49. Likes how child treats me
50. Likes how the child handles criticism
51. Need more information about helping child in school
52. Need more information to help child deal with bullies and gangs
53. Need more information about avoiding smoking, drugs, and alcohol
54. Need more information to help child appreciate other ethnic groups
55. Need more information about how to answer questions about sex
56. Need more information about helping child set goals
57. Need more information to help child explore careers
58. Need more information to help child deal with conflict
59. Need more information helping child deal with fears or worries
60. Need more information about what to expect of my child at this age