

African American families are disproportionately represented in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of violence, crime, drug activity, joblessness, and poverty (Chase-Lansdale & Gordon, 1996; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2000). Living in under-resourced, high-violence communities is an especially challenging and demanding context for African American parents to meet the needs of their families. Because of the constant threats to one's safety in these neighborhoods--drug dealers and gang members on the streets, drive-by shootings--mothers and fathers must use multiple strategies to protect themselves and their families while also providing for, socializing, and nurturing their children. In recent years, researchers have begun to study how African American mothers protect their children in communities characterized by high rates of poverty and violence (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991; Hill, Hawkins, Raposo, & Cart, 1995; Jarrett, Jefferson, & Roach, 2000; Mohr, Fantuzzo, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001; Randolph, Koblinsky, & Roberts, 1998); however, few researchers have focused on low-income African American fathering in these contexts or the ways in which fathers keep their children safe from harm.

To examine African American fathering in high-violence neighborhoods, this study draws upon Darling and Steinberg's (1993) integrative parenting model and Ogbu's (1981) cultural ecological perspective. Darling and Steinberg recognize three salient aspects of parenting: "the goals toward which socialization is directed; the parenting practices used by parents to help children reach those goals; and the parenting style, or emotional climate, within which socialization occurs" (p. 488). Ogbu's cultural ecological perspective suggests parents socialize children to develop the skills and qualities necessary to be competent in their roles as adults in a particular culture; thus, childrearing goals, practices, and styles can only be understood within the context in which they occur. Unfortunately, many of the existing studies of under-resourced African American fathers have tended to "decontextualize" their familial experience and often portray these men as deficient in parenting (Coles, 2001; Fagan, 2000; Spencer, 1990). Few researchers have studied the specific ways in which low-income African American fathers parent their children--in terms of their socialization goals, practices, and parenting style--and few studies have situated these men within a context that essentializes their specific cultural milieu.

Using Darling and Steinberg's (1993) integrative parenting model and a cultural ecological lens (Ogbu, 1981), this study examines African American fathering within a neighborhood context characterized by violence, drug activity, and poverty. This study assumes the socialization goals of fathers include protecting their children from neighborhood dangers and violence exposure while supporting their children's acquisition of the skills and qualities necessary to be competent in adulthood. This study recognizes that fathering in African American communities--and particularly in low-income communities--appears to be a more fluid role than is found in other cultural groups and that this role can be performed by both biological and non-biological "social" fathers, including stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, mothers' romantic partners, and other significant males who play a significant role in the children's lives (Billingsley, 1968; Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; Jayakody & Kalil, 2002). And finally, this study situates

African American fathers within a historical, social, and cultural context that places high value on spirituality and the Black church. As Brega and Coleman (1999) note, the church may be especially important for African American families, connecting them to the past, providing members with a sense of group identity and community affiliation, and operating as a mechanism for the racial socialization of children.

Although the salience of spirituality is well-documented in the African American community (Brome, Owens, Allen, & Veviana, 2000; Randolph & Banks, 1993), few studies have examined how spirituality influences African American parents' socialization of their children (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002), and no studies to date have specifically examined spirituality as it relates to African American fathering. To shed light on this topic, this study explores how spirituality relates to the childrearing practices and parenting styles of African American biological and social fathers rearing children in high-violence neighborhoods.

African American Spirituality and Parenting

Spirituality has been identified as a fundamental attribute or cornerstone of African American family life (Brome et al., 2000; Randolph & Banks, 1993) and therefore is likely to influence African American fathers' socialization goals for their children, the parenting practices they use, and the parenting style or emotional climate they convey during socialization (Caughy et al., 2002; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Although the term "spirituality" has been defined in numerous ways (Brome et al.), Newlin, Knaft and Melkus (2002) provide a conceptual analysis of the term as it relates to African Americans. The concept of spirituality is often used interchangeably with religiosity or religious influence, yet Newlin et al. suggest that spirituality is a broader term than religiosity, and often encompasses aspects of religion. Generally, spirituality refers to the belief that there exists a force greater than oneself (Randolph & Banks). It involves a trusting relationship with God or a higher power, which fosters meaning, hope, and purpose in life (Newlin et al.). Among African Americans, spirituality may also connote interconnectedness with others as well as a higher power, strength, guidance, control, and peace (Mattis, 2000; Newlin et al.).

Historically, scholars have noted that spirituality and religious traditions have provided a central organizing framework for how African Americans know themselves, solve personal and community problems, and feel connected to each other (Frazier, 1978; Moore, 1991). Taylor, Chatters, Jakody, and Levin (1996) found that African Americans attend church services, read religious material, and seek comfort through spiritual activities more often than their White counterparts. Even when African Americans "raised in the church" no longer attend services, the moral values learned early on often frame their worldview as adults (Sanders, 2002). In studying older African Americans, Krause and Tran (1989) noted that religiousness appeared to buffer the effects of negative life events by supporting feelings of self-worth and personal control.

Recent empirical evidence suggests spirituality may not only influence coping mechanisms, but may also influence how African American parents socialize their

children. For example, Brome et al. (2000) found that among African American women in recovery from substance abuse, those reporting high spirituality expressed a more positive self-concept, utilized more positive coping strategies, and held more positive parenting attitudes than less spiritual women. Caughy et al. (2002), in their study of African American racial socialization practices (including promotion of mistrust, preparation for bias, racial pride, and spirituality), found that racial socialization messages related to spirituality were positively correlated with positive parent involvement and enrichment behaviors. Moreover, parents who emphasized messages related to spirituality reported fewer behavior problems with their preschool children (Caughy et al.).

When examining the literature for studies on spirituality and fathering, few studies emerge. Some researchers have begun to shed light on religious influence and fathering among specific groups of men, such as Latter-day Saints (Marks & Dollahite, 2001), Protestants (Wilcox, 1998), and the Promise Keepers (Silverstein, Auerbach, Grieco, & Dunkel, 1999). However, these studies focus more on fathers' religious affiliations than their spirituality per se, and comprise mainly White, middle-class samples. Few, if any, studies appear to examine specifically the relationships between spirituality and fathering practices and styles among African American fathers or fathers rearing children in high-violence neighborhoods.

African American Fathering in Violent Neighborhoods

Parenting Practices

In one of the first studies of African American fathering in violent neighborhoods, Letiecq and Koblinsky (2003, 2004) found that fathers were deeply concerned about their children's safety and used at least five parenting practices to keep their children out of harm's way. Fathers reported: 1) monitoring their children closely and teaching them about personal safety; 2) teaching their children neighborhood safety practices (e.g., walking safe routes in the neighborhood); 3) reducing their children's exposure to media violence; 4) instructing their children to fight back in order to protect themselves; and 5) engaging in community activism (e.g., organizing a voter registration drive or joining a Neighborhood Watch group to patrol the streets at night). Although fathers typically did not use different strategies as a function of their child's sex, fathers of boys attempted to reduce their son's exposure to media violence significantly more than fathers of girls, perhaps because fathers of boys were concerned their son's exposure to violent images might lead to internalization of the images or imitation of violent behaviors (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003).

It is possible that fathers' spirituality might influence or relate to the proactive parenting practices they use to keep their sons and daughters safe. For example, highly spiritual fathers might be more likely than less spiritual fathers to engage in community activism as highly spiritual fathers may also belong to church groups that encourage community involvement and volunteerism. These fathers may draw upon their spiritual beliefs to give them strength and a sense of personal control to thwart the dangers in their

neighborhood (Newlin et al., 2002). On the other hand, less spiritual fathers may be more likely to instruct their children to fight back to protect themselves than more spiritual fathers. Less spiritual fathers may feel socially isolated and disconnected from their communities, may feel like they can't trust community members, and may believe that fighting back is essential for daily survival. Conversely, highly spiritual fathers may believe that teaching children to fight back and use violence to resolve personal and community conflicts goes against their moral code (Sanders, 2002).

Parenting Style

In addition to parenting practices, Darling and Steinberg (1993) suggest parenting style should also be considered when examining how parents socialize their children. Parenting style is defined as a "constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviors are expressed" (Darling & Steinberg, p. 488). Baumrind (1967) identified three parenting styles: 1) an authoritative style, characterized by warmth, nurturance, consistency, reasoning, and responsiveness; 2) a permissive parenting style, characterized by leniency and a lack of discipline and follow-through, and 3) an authoritarian style, characterized by control, coerciveness, and strictness.

Few studies have examined the parenting styles of low-income African American fathers (McAdoo, 1988). However, Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, and Lewis (1990) suggested that African American parents generally are stricter in their parenting style and place a greater emphasis on obedience and self-control than do other parents. Fagan (2000), in his study of low-income African American and Puerto Rican parents of preschoolers, found African American mothers and fathers to be significantly less nurturant, responsive, and consistent than Puerto Rican American parents. Strict, less nurturant parenting styles may be seen as necessary by African American parents who are socializing their children to cope with the harsh realities of racism, discrimination, poverty, and community dangers (Taylor et al.). Indeed, in high-violence neighborhoods, fathers may not be able to rely on many of the authoritative parenting characteristics--e.g., warmth, reasoning--employed by parents in safer contexts. African American fathers may emphasize control and obedience to ensure their children's safety in unsafe surroundings (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003).

As with parenting practices, parenting styles may be related to spirituality. Highly spiritual fathers may emphasize strictness, control, and discipline more than less spiritual fathers because spirituality is likely related to traditional beliefs valuing child obedience. However, highly spiritual fathers may also create a more authoritative climate emphasizing nurturance, warmth, and consistency because of their feelings of connectedness to an extended network of community members that likely offer them parental support. Less spiritual fathers, on the other hand, may lack a sense of personal control or power in their ability to parent their children with authority. These fathers may employ a permissive style, where they ignore misbehavior and lack follow-through, perhaps because they lack spiritual conviction or a sense of purpose.

Clearly, these speculations need to be researched to understand how spirituality relates to African American fathering in under-resourced, high-violence neighborhoods. Thus, this study examined the parenting practices and styles of highly spiritual and less spiritual African American fathers of preschoolers. Because fathers may socialize their sons and daughters differently (Caughy et al., 2002; Isley, O'Neil, Clatfelter, & Parke, 1999; Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003; Lewis, 1997; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), this study also examined fathering practices and styles as a function of their child's sex. Because of the paucity of spirituality and sex-role socialization literature involving African American fathers rearing their young sons and daughters in violent neighborhoods, no specific hypotheses were generated.

Method

Sample and Community Context

As presented in Table 1, 61 African American Head Start biological and social fathers participated in this study. Ages ranged from 18 to 70, with a mean age of 36.2 years for the total sample. Most participants were the child's biological father (67.2%) and reported living in the same household with their preschooler (77.0%). Other fathers identified themselves as the child's uncle ($n = 7$), grandfather ($n = 5$), or stepfather ($n = 4$). Four participants had other kinship or social ties to the child. As noted earlier, social fathers were included in this study to reflect the "fictive" father presence common in African American communities (Billingsley, 1968). All fathers lived in the same low-income neighborhood as their child or within a five-mile radius.

The study took place in southeast Washington, DC and a Maryland county adjoining the District of Columbia. At the time the study was conducted, Southeast Washington, DC was experiencing high levels of community violence (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998). In comparison to the 50 states, the District of Columbia had the highest teen violent death rate and the highest child death rate due to homicide since 1985 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999). The Maryland county also had high rates of community violence. In 1998, this county had the fifth highest death rate due to homicide, suicide, and violent deaths of all 24 Maryland counties (Advocates for Children and Youth, 2000). Targeted neighborhoods in this county had been identified as violent "hot spots" based on county police data measuring murder/negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Environmental scans of the study neighborhoods revealed the lack of institutions often found in more prosperous, stable, non-violent communities. For example, there were no banking institutions, no low-cost chain stores (e.g., Wal-Mart, Target), no grocery stores with a wide variety of fresh produce and other goods, and few restaurants other than fast-food establishments. There were many buildings with boarded-up and barred windows that were covered in graffiti, crack houses, and check-cashing establishments. Many of the Head Start centers visited during this study had bullet-proof windows and nearby playgrounds were littered with drug paraphernalia (e.g., used needles) and discarded beer bottles.

Procedure

The current study was part of a larger effort examining the strategies low-income African American fathers use to protect their preschool children from community violence exposure. The study was funded by the USDHHS/Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Head Start Research Scholars Program. The multi-racial/ethnic research team worked closely with Head Start teachers and staffs to recruit fathers of preschoolers for the study. Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that serves children from birth to age 5 and has as its overall goal to increase the school readiness of young children in low-income families (USDHHS/ACF, n.d.). Working with Head Start professionals was critical, and placed this research effort within a context that was familiar to fathers and their families. The relationships built with Head Start teachers and staffs also facilitated the research team's ability to build trust quickly with fathers and establish our credibility in communities where, regardless of our team's racial/ethnic group affiliations, we were outsiders because none of us grew up or resided in the neighborhoods included in the study. In all, 20 Head Start centers located in high-violence neighborhoods were targeted, which resulted in the recruitment of 61 African American fathers to participate in one-on-one interviews. Once fathers consented to participate in the study, trained African American male undergraduate and graduate student interviewers conducted the in-depth interviews. The interviews took place at the father's home or Head Start center and lasted approximately 1 1/2-2 hours. Fathers received \$25 for their time and effort.

Measures

Background characteristics. Participating fathers were administered a demographic questionnaire that ascertained information about the targeted preschool child as well as the father's age, highest level of education attained, employment status, and residence (i.e., resides in same household as child, resides in separate household), among other variables.

Spirituality. Fathers were asked to respond to the item, "How important is religion or spirituality to you in your life?" Ratings ranged from 5 "very important" to 1 "not very important." Because nearly half of the respondents ($n = 27$) rated this item as very important, spirituality was recoded such that "very important" responses were coded "1" and all others "0."

Parenting practices in violent neighborhoods. This study also employed a new 47-item quantitative measure of protective practices used to keep children safe from community violence, the Parenting in Violent Neighborhoods Scale (PVNS; see Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003, for details about scale development and factor analyses). This measure contains five subscales: 1) monitoring and teaching personal safety (e.g., "I permit my child to play on playgrounds only when directly supervised by an adult"); 2) teaching neighborhood survival tactics (e.g., "I talk to my child about safe routes for walking in the neighborhood"); 3) reducing media violence exposure (e.g., "I keep my preschool child from playing video games that have a lot of violence"); 4) instructing children to

fight back (e.g., "I tell my preschool child to fight back in order to be safe"); and 5) engaging in community activism (e.g., "I participate in neighborhood watch or other groups that try to reduce neighborhood violence"). Item response options were anchored by never (0) and always (4). Cronbach's coefficient alphas were: monitoring/teaching personal safety, $\alpha = .91$; teaching neighborhood survival, $\alpha = .80$; reducing media violence exposure, $\alpha = .56$; fighting back, $\alpha = .84$; and community activism, $\alpha = .81$.

Parenting style. The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995) is a 62-item measure that assesses global parenting typologies consistent with Baumrind's (1967) authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian typologies. The measure also examines 11 secondary subscales. Authoritative subscales include warmth and involvement, reasoning/induction, democratic participation, and easygoing styles. Permissive subscales include lack of followthrough, ignoring misbehavior, and lack of self-confidence. Authoritarian subscales include verbal hostility, corporal punishment, non-reasoning/punitive strategies, and directiveness. Each respondent was asked how often an item described him as a father of a preschool child using a 5-point scale anchored by never (1) and always (5). The PSDQ was scored by summing the subscale items and dividing by the total number of items within each subscale. Internal consistency was established for this study, with the following coefficient alphas: Authoritative = .93; Permissive = .71, and Authoritarian = .84.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary chi-square analyses (for discrete variables) and independent t-test analyses (for continuous variables) comparing fathers who rated spirituality as very important and those who rated spirituality as less than very important revealed few demographic differences between the groups (see Table 1). However, fathers differed by spiritual importance on two variables: child's age and education. Compared to fathers who reported that spirituality was not very important, fathers who rated spirituality as very important had significantly older children ($M = 4.3$ versus $M = 3.9$ years, $t(59) = 2.2$, $p < .05$) and more education ($M = 13.4$ versus $M = 12.1$ years, $t(59) = 2.5$, $p < .05$).

Because this study included both biological and social fathers, demographic and parenting practice and style differences between the two groups were also analyzed. In terms of demographic differences, social fathers had been involved with their preschool child for significantly less time than biological fathers ($M = 3.6$ versus $M = 4.1$ years, $t(59) = 2.1$, $p < .05$). There were no significant parenting practice or style differences as a function of father's relationship to his child.

Multivariate Analyses

Next, this study examined differences in paternal parenting practices and styles as a function of spirituality and child sex using 2×2 MANOVAs and ANOVAs. To control for sociodemographic variables in these analyses, correlations were first run to examine

the relationships between the sociodemographic variables and parenting practice and style scale scores. Only two variables--father's age and employment status--were significantly correlated with at least one of the parenting scales; thus, father's age and employment status were included as covariates in subsequent analyses of the parenting scales.

To examine parenting practices, a 2 x 2 MANOVA was performed on the five PVNS subscales: monitoring/teaching personal safety; teaching neighborhoods survival; reducing media violence exposure; instructing children to fight back; and engaging in community activism (see Table 2). Using Wilks' criterion, the combined subscales were significantly related to spirituality, $F(5, 50) = 4.3, p < .01$, but not child sex or their interaction. Fathers' spirituality predicted differences in three subscales: monitoring and teaching personal safety; teaching neighborhood survival tactics; and engaging in community activism. Highly spiritual fathers were more likely to monitor their preschoolers ($M = 3.1$) than less spiritual fathers ($M = 2.5; F(1,54) = 12.6, p < .001$). As compared to less spiritual fathers, highly spiritual fathers were also more likely to teach their children neighborhood survival skills ($M = 3.0$ versus $M = 2.4; F(1,54) = 10.1, p < .01$) and engage in community activism ($M = 2.1$ versus $M = 1.5; F(1,54) = 7.3, p < .01$).

To examine parenting styles, a 2 x 2 MANOVA was performed on the PSDQ total scale scores, including authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian styles (see Table 2). Using Wilks' Lambda, the combined scales were significantly affected by the interaction of spirituality and child sex, $F(3, 53) = 3.5, p < .05$. Two scales, authoritative and permissive styles, showed significant interaction effects, $F(1,55) = 5.5, p < .05$ and $F(1,55) = 4.4, p < .05$, respectively. While fathers of girls exhibited a similar authoritative style regardless of spiritual importance ($M = 4.0$ versus $M = 3.8$), highly spiritual fathers were significantly more likely to use an authoritative parenting style with their sons ($M = 4.3$) than were fathers who reported spirituality as less important ($M = 3.3$). Regarding permissiveness, highly spiritual and less spiritual fathers of girls exhibited similar permissive styles ($M = 2.1$ for both groups). However, highly spiritual fathers of boys were significantly less likely to employ permissive parenting styles ($M = 1.9$) than were less spiritual fathers of boys ($M = 2.4$). While the interaction effect for the authoritarian scale revealed only a trend in the data, $F(1, 55) = 3.6, p < .07$, the authoritarian style was significantly related to spirituality, $F(1,55) = 7.6, p < .01$. Highly spiritual fathers were less likely to employ an authoritarian style ($M = 2.1$) than less spiritual fathers ($M = 2.4$).

To further examine the parenting style subscales, a series of 2 x 2 ANOVAs were run (see Table 2). Among the authoritative subscales, an interaction effect of spirituality and child sex was found for warmth ($F(1,55) = 3.8, p < .06$, trend) and reasoning ($F(1,55) = 7.5, p < .01$). The interaction patterns were consistent with the authoritative total scale results above. Results for the democratic and good-natured/easy-going style subscale ANOVAs revealed significant main effects of spirituality, $F(1,55) = 12.1, p < .001$ and $F(1,55) = 6.8, p < .05$, respectively. Highly spiritual fathers were significantly more democratic and easy going in their style than their less spiritual counterparts.

Among the permissive subscales, spirituality main effects were found for the subscales "lacks follow-through" and "lacks self-confidence," $F(1,55) = 6.4, p < .05$ and $F(1,55) = 5.0, p < .05$, respectively. Less spiritual fathers used a style that lacked follow-through and self-confidence significantly more than their highly spiritual counterparts. Among the authoritarian subscales, there was a significant interaction effect between spirituality and child sex on the verbal hostility and corporal punishment subscales, $F(1,55) = 4.7, p < .05$ and $F(1,55) = 4.1, p < .05$, respectively. Highly spiritual fathers were more likely to use a style characterized by verbal hostility with their girls ($M = 2.0$) than with their boys ($M = 1.8$). Conversely, less spiritual fathers were more likely to use a verbally hostile style with their boys ($M = 2.1$) than their girls ($M = 1.7$). Regarding corporal punishment, fathers of girls utilized this style similarly, irrespective of spirituality ($M = 1.9$ for both groups); however, highly spiritual fathers of boys were less likely to employ the style ($M = 1.8$) than were less spiritual fathers of boys ($M = 2.3$). Finally, results revealed a spirituality main effect on the non-reasoning subscale, where highly spiritual fathers were significantly less likely to employ a non-reasoning or punitive style ($M = 2.1$) than less spiritual fathers ($M = 2.7, F(1, 55) = 13.0, p < .001$).

Discussion

This study sheds light on a unique aspect of African American family life by exploring how spirituality relates to the parenting practices and styles used by fathers of young boys and girls living in high-violence neighborhoods. Overall, findings suggest spirituality does influence the ways in which African American fathers care for their children and the parenting styles fathers employ to socialize their children while also keeping them safe from harm. Most notably, this study found fathers who reported that spirituality was very important to them were more likely to use positive, proactive parenting strategies--such as monitoring their children and teaching them personal safety and neighborhood survival skills--than fathers who reported that spirituality was less important. Such findings are consistent with findings from the Brome et al. (2000) and Caughy et al. (2002) studies, where spirituality was linked to positive parenting attitudes and socialization practices. Such findings are important because, as Caughy et al. found, African American parents who draw upon their spiritual beliefs when socializing their children may experience fewer behavior problems with their preschool children.

In the current study, highly spiritual fathers also reported engaging in community activism significantly more than their less spiritual counterparts to thwart violence in their neighborhoods and to keep their children safe. It is possible that fathers' spiritual beliefs provided a buffer against the challenges of rearing children in under-resourced, high-violence neighborhoods. It is also possible that highly spiritual fathers felt a deeper connection to their community and felt empowered by their beliefs to take action (Newlin et al., 2002). Conversely, less spiritual fathers may have experienced their community as a context in which no one "had their back"--whether it be a higher power or a next door neighbor. These fathers may have felt isolated, disconnected, and untrusting of others and may have responded by withdrawing from the community, rather than engaging with their community, to keep themselves and their children safe from harm.

Beyond parenting practices, another notable finding emerged when this study examined parenting styles as a function of African American fathers' spirituality and the sex of their child. While fathers of daughters generally employed similar parenting styles irrespective of spirituality, fathers of sons appeared to utilize different styles depending on the importance of spirituality to their lives. Specifically, highly spiritual fathers were more likely to employ an authoritative style and less likely to employ a permissive style with their sons than were less spiritual fathers of sons. It is possible that spirituality served as a source of strength and positivity for fathers rearing sons in violent communities (Randolph & Banks, 1993). Among highly spiritual fathers, it is plausible that they felt that guiding their sons with warmth, reasoning, and a democratic style was consistent with their faith and important to keeping sons connected to their family and the larger community. Fathers of sons may have been keenly aware of the stereotypical portrayals of African American men as perpetrators of violence in the media and may have been concerned that their boys would internalize such images or imitate the violent behaviors (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2003). The extremely high rates of homicide and serious violent crime victimization for African American male youth may have reinforced fathers' fears (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1999). Less spiritual fathers, who employed a more permissive style, might have felt frustrated by the plight of African American men in their neighborhoods and the larger society, might have internalized societal messages about African American men generally and about fathers as deficient parents in particular, and might have lacked the follow-through and spiritual strength to parent their sons with more positive approaches.

Regardless of the sex of their child, this study also found that less spiritual fathers were more likely to use an authoritarian parenting style--including non-reasoning and punitive approaches--than their more spiritual counterparts. For these fathers, keeping children safe meant being tough, hard, disciplined, and strict. Indeed, rearing children in violent neighborhoods may require fathers to keep close tabs on their children and to ensure that children obey their parents at all times. Such a style of parenting may be "best" for African American children growing up in dangerous neighborhoods, particularly if their fathers do not have the spiritual connections or community supports that might enable the use of less punitive styles of parenting. However, before any definitive conclusions can be drawn about the influence of spirituality (and its interaction with child's sex) on the parenting practices and styles of African American fathers, continued research is needed.

Study Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides a unique examination of spirituality and African American fathering in context, there are several limitations that should be addressed in future research efforts. First, this study was limited by its use of a single item measure of spirituality. Future researchers should utilize additional measures of spirituality that tap into the complexities of the construct. Moreover, future researchers might investigate how African American fathers interpret the term "spirituality" and how contexts, such as poverty or violent neighborhoods, help to shape the meanings fathers attach to the term.

Second, this study was limited by its small, purposive sample of African American fathers living in under-resourced, high-violence neighborhoods. Future research efforts should attempt to replicate these findings using larger, representative samples with more diverse groups of fathers. The current study has limited generalizability and caution should be used when applying these findings to African American families generally or to fathers of preschoolers residing in safer contexts. Because of the descriptive nature of the current study, caution should also be used in interpreting the relationships between spirituality and paternal parenting practices and styles. In other words, based on these data, one cannot infer that spirituality "caused" fathers to use certain parenting strategies and styles with their children.

Third, while this study found that fathers' parenting styles differed as a function of spirituality and child's sex, no main effects of child's sex were found. However, extant research suggests that fathers' interactions with their children may become sex stereotyped as early as the preschool years (Lewis, 1997). Recent evidence further suggests that the linkage between parents' positive affect and young children's competence is strongest between fathers and sons and between mothers and daughters (Isley et al., 1999). Such findings support the need for continued research examining fathering practices and styles as a function of the sex of their child.

Fourth, while this study examined the role of spirituality on fathering practices and styles, and took into account a limited set of sociodemographic variables, future research should examine other factors potentially related to African American fathering in violent neighborhoods, including father's relationship status and the quality of his relationship(s) with the mother(s) of his children, mothers' influences on fathers' parenting, fathers' income, fathers' relationship to a church/congregation and church attendance, fathers' social support and community resources, fathers' history of violence exposure, and the level of violence in the fathers' neighborhood. It is critical that researchers of African American fathering locate these men in their cultural context and examine within group variance rather than differences between, for example, low-income African American fathers rearing children in high-violence neighborhoods and fathers from the majority culture or from safer, more privileged contexts.

Finally, while this study was exploratory in nature, findings suggest that the salience of spirituality should be considered in future studies of African American fathering and African American parenting more generally. Spirituality may be particularly important to African American fathers and mothers residing in challenging contexts, such as under-resourced and high-violence neighborhoods, that demand the use of myriad parenting practices and styles to keep children safe while also promoting their healthy development.

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Bethany L. Letiecq, Department of Health and Human Development, Montana State University. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Bethany L. Letiecq, Department of Health and Human Development, 316 Herrick Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59715. Electronic mail: bletiecq@montana.edu

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample by Spirituality

Demographic characteristic	Spirituality	
	Not very important (n = 34) M (SD) or n (%)	Very important (n = 27) n (%)
Child's sex		
Male	20 (58.8%)	12 (44.4%)
Female	14 (41.2%)	15 (55.6%)
Child's age in years	39 (0.8)	4.3 (0.7) *
Father's age in years	35.5 (11.6)	37.0 (11.6)
Relationship to child		
Biological father	22 (64.7%)	19 (70.4%)
Stepfather	2 (5.9%)	2 (7.4%)
Grandfather	5 (14.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Uncle	5 (14.7%)	2 (7.4%)
Other	0 (0.0)%	4 (14.8%)
Years of father involvement	3.8 (0.8)	4.0 (1.1)

Age at birth of first child	23.0 (5.2)	23.8 (4.9)
Number of children	3.0 (2.4)	3.1 (2.2)
Target child living in household (Yes)	27 (79.4%)	20 (74.1%)
Father's education in years	12.1 (1.9)	13.14 (2.1) *
Relational status		
Single, not living with partner	16 (47.1%)	15 (55.5%)
Living with partner	18 (52.9%)	12 (44.4%)
Employment status		
Employed	30 (88.2%)	20 (74.1%)
Not employed	4 (11.8%)	7 (25.9%)

*p < .05.

Table 2
Parenting Practices and Styles as a Function of Spirituality and Child Sex

	Spirituality	
	Not Very important	
	Girl (n = 14) M (SD)	Boy (n = 20) M (SD)
Parenting in Violent Neighborhoods (PVNS) Subscales:		
Monitoring and teaching personal safety	2.8 (.72)	2.4 (.64)
Teaching neighborhood survival tactics	2.4 (.86)	2.4 (.67)
Reducing media violence exposure	2.3 (.66)	2.5 (.81)
Instructing children to fight back	1.6 (.78)	1.5 (.61)
Engaging in community activism	1.5 (.62)	1.5 (.57)
Parenting Styles & Dimensions (PSDQ) Scales		
Authoritative Scale Score	3.8 (.48)	3.3 (.58)
Subscales:		
Warmth/involvement	4.0 (.55)	3.5 (.61)
Reasoning/induction	3.9 (.45)	3.5 (.65)
Democratic participation	3.0 (.78)	2.5 (.77)
Good natured/Easy going	3.9 (.53)	3.5 (.81)
Permissive Scale Score	2.1 (.34)	2.4 (.48)

Subscales:		
Lack of follow through	2.6 (.47)	2.4 (.53)
Ignoring misbehavior	1.7 (.54)	1.9 (.65)
Lack of self-confidence	1.9 (.42)	2.1 (.64)
Authoritarian Scale Score	2.2 (.35)	2.5 (.61)
Subscales:		
Verbal hostility	1.7 (.30)	2.1 (.81)
Corporal punishment	1.9 (.43)	2.3 (.80)
Non-reasoning/Punitive	2.5 (.63)	2.8 (.72)
Directiveness	2.9 (.46)	3 (.57)

Spirituality

Very important

Girl	Boy
(n = 15)	(n = 12)
M (SD)	M (SD)

Parenting in Violent Neighborhoods (PVNS)

Subscales:

Monitoring and teaching personal safety	3.1 (.63)	3.3 (.42) *** (a)
Teaching neighborhood survival tactics	2.9 (.59)	3.1 (.79) **
Reducing media violence exposure	2.1 (.76)	2.9 (.59)
Instructing children to fight back	1.2 (.70)	1.4 (.97)
Engaging in community activism	2.0 (.91)	2.2 (1.03) **

Parenting Styles & Dimensions (PSDQ) Scales

Authoritative Scale Score	4.0 (.48)	4.3 (.50) * (b)
Subscales:		
Warmth/involvement	4.3 (.63)	4.5 (.42) *** (a, [dagger] b)
Reasoning/induction	4.0 (.57)	4.4 (.47) ** (b)
Democratic participation	4.0 (.70)	3.6 (.77) *** (a)
Good natured/Easy going	4.0 (.67)	4.3 (.78) * (a)
Permissive Scale Score	2.1 (.44)	1.9 (.53)* b
Subscales:		
Lack of follow through	2.5 (.71)	2.3 (.69)* (a, [dagger] b)
Ignoring misbehavior	1.8 (.53)	1.7 (.54)
Lack of self-confidence	1.9 (.40)	1.7 (.65) * (a)
Authoritarian Scale Score	2.1 (.47)	2.1 (.50) ** (a, [dagger] b)
Subscales:		
Verbal hostility	2 (.57)	1.8 (.61) * (b)
Corporal punishment	1.9 (.53)	1.8 (.69) * (b)
Non-reasoning/Punitive	2.1 (.78)	2.1 (.74) *** (a)
Directiveness	2.8 (.53)	3.0 (.76)

(a) Significant spirituality main effect.

(b) Significant interaction effect between spirituality and child sex.

Note: PVNS scale anchored by 0 "never" and 4 "always." PSDQ scale anchored by 1 "never" and 5 "always."

[dagger] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$