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Research

Parental Characteristics, Ecological Factors, and the Academic Achievement of African American Males

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Parental characteristics, ecological factors, and the academic achievement of African American male high school students were examined. One hundred fifty-three 11th and 12th grade African American males completed the Parenting Style Index (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994) and a demographic questionnaire. Results indicated no significant relationship between parenting styles and enrollment in honors courses. However, the results indicated that fathers' education level and two-parent family structures are positive predictors of grade point average (GPA), and fathers' expectations is a negative predictor of GPA. Implications for counselor practice and research are delineated.

Keywords: parental characteristics, academic achievement

African American males, in general, are in a dire situation in the United States (Noguera, 2003; N. Williams, 2006). According to a 2006 *New York Times* article, Columbia, Princeton, and Harvard University experts agree that the rapidly increasing population of poorly educated African American men is "becoming ever more disconnected from the mainstream society" (Eckholm, 2006, p. 1). National statistics and studies have indicated that African American males are overrepresented in juvenile detention centers and prisons (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006), overrepresented in special education classes (Garibaldi, 2009), underrepresented in secondary school honors and advanced courses (Whiting & Ford, 2009), underrepresented on college campuses (Toldson, Braithwaite, & Rentie, 2009), and consistently reported as academically underachieving in today's schools (Entwistle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Mandara, 2006). In addition, the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2011), a national organization that monitors the progress of African American males, reported that only 47% of African American males graduate from high school and that "Black males are more chronically unemployed and underemployed, are less healthy, and have access to fewer health care resources, die much younger, and are many times more likely to be sent to jail for periods significantly longer than males of other racial/ethnic groups" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008, p. 3).

Given the aforementioned statistics, researchers—particularly those specializing in human services—have attempted to understand which environmental and family functioning factors mediate or protect African American males from these negative outcomes. Research and theory suggest that parenting is an important determinant of behavior among adolescents in general (e.g., Spera, 2005) and among young African American males in particular (Mincy, 2006). Poor parental supervision and monitoring, inconsistent disciplinary practices, and infrequent parent–adolescent communication have all been linked to negative behavioral outcomes among adolescents (e.g., Clark & Shields, 1997). Moreover, 43% of African American families are composed of single mother households as opposed to 12% of non-African American families (McKinnon, 2003). Also, 48% of African American families are married couple families compared with 82% of non-African American families (McKinnon, 2003). However, relatively few studies have investigated the effects of parental, family functioning, and environmental factors on the academic achievement of African American male adolescents. As part of his ecological theory, Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1986) posited that family/parental factors have the ability to protect against negative peer influences, implying a moderating role of family and peer variables. Other researchers have proposed more specific theoretical models of parenting styles and their influences on child behavior (e.g., Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Wentzel, Feldman, & Weinberger, 1991).

Maccoby and Martin (1983) developed an influential parenting typology that elaborated on the work of Baumrind (1971) and defined parenting as having a two-dimensional framework: parental demandingness (control and restrictiveness) and responsiveness (warmth and noncoerciveness). Based on these two dimensions, four parenting styles were delineated: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive/indulgent, and neglectful/uninvolved. Each of these parenting styles reflects different

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patterns of parental values, practices, and behaviors, along with a distinct balance of responsiveness and demandingness. For instance, authoritarian parents are highly demanding and directive, but not responsive. Authoritarian parents believe that they have absolute control over their child's life and that the child should be totally submissive to parent demands. Moreover, authoritarian parents tend to have high regard for order and expect their children to conform to their rules. Although they provide little warmth and support for their children, authoritarian parents have high expectations for them.

Authoritative parents, on the other hand, have a balance of high expectations and support and warmth. In other words, authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. Baumrind (1991) posited that they encourage autonomy and discipline in their children while having parental control over them. Additionally, authoritative parents tend to acknowledge their children's positive qualities, continually reinforcing standards of conduct, and provide their children with the tools needed for personal success. The authoritative parenting style has been associated with positive outcomes for children (Durkin, 1995; Spera, 2006).

Permissive/indulgent parents do not put any restraints on their children. The child is free to do what he/she wants, and the parent disregards the child's action. Baumrind (1978) stated, "the permissive parent sees him or herself as a resource for the child to use as he wishes, but not as an active agent responsible for shaping and altering the child's ongoing and future behavior" (p. 245). Permissive parents are more responsive than they are demanding. Neglectful or uninvolved parents, similar to permissive parents, do not provide adequate support for their children. Common characteristics of neglectful parents include low to no interest in the welfare of their children, lack of parental involvement, and no restrictions or limitations on the child (Baumrind, 1991; Darling, 1999). Neglectful parents are low in both responsiveness and demandingness.

Research shows that European American children and adolescents whose parents are authoritative rate themselves and are rated by objective measures as more socially and instrumentally competent than those whose parents are nonauthoritative (Baumrind, 1991; Miller, Cowan, Cowan, & Hetherington, 1993; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Children and adolescents whose parents are neglectful perform most poorly in all domains. In general, parental responsiveness predicts social competence and psychosocial functioning, whereas parental demandingness is associated with instrumental competence and behavioral control (i.e., academic performance and deviance). These findings indicate that children and adolescents from authoritarian families (high in demandingness, but low in responsiveness) tend to perform moderately well in school and are uninvolved in problem behavior, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression. Children and adolescents from permissive/indulgent homes (high in responsiveness, but low in demandingness) are more likely to be involved in problem behavior and perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

African American Parenting Styles

Findings from empirical research analyzing whether Baumrind's (1971, 1978, 1991) and Maccoby and Martin's (1983) parenting styles have the same outcomes on children of different cultural and racial groups are mixed (Mandara, 2006; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). For example, authoritative parenting has not been consistently linked to the academic success of African American students (Gonzalez, Greenwood, & WenHsu, 2001; Mandara, 2006; Park & Bauer, 2002). Moreover, researchers have found that African American and Hispanic parents are slightly less likely than European American and Asian American parents to be authoritative and slightly more likely than European American and Asian American parents to be authoritarian (Baumrind, 1978, 1991; Mandara, 2006). With a large African American sample, Mandara and Murray (2002) conducted a cluster analysis on family environment variables and discovered three types of parenting that resembled Baumrind's authoritarian, authoritative, and neglectful parenting styles. They concluded that the emergent African American parenting styles were similar, yet still different, from European American parenting styles in many ways. For instance, they found that African American authoritative parents tended to be more demanding and less submissive to children's demands than European American authoritative parents.

Over 20 years ago, Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh (1987) found that there was no relationship between parenting style and African American high school students' grade point average (GPA). However, in 1994, Steinberg et al. found that African American children living in authoritative homes did much better on all well-being variables except for academic achievement. Similarly, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, and Henry (2000) found that African American parents who used an authoritative style had boys who were involved with more prosocial activities at school and higher educational aspirations across five waves of assessments. Also, Taylor, Hinton, and Wilson (1995) found that children from homes with authoritative parents had higher grades than those whose parents used an authoritarian or permissive parenting style. These findings make it clear that the relationship between parenting styles and the academic achievement of African American children, particularly African American boys, is complex and warrants further research.

Ecological Factors and African American Students

The extent to which ecological factors influence the academic success of African American students has a long history in educational research (Horton, 2004; Reynolds, 1989; Wooley

& Grogan-Kaylor, 2006). Research has generally addressed two ecological dimensions: school environment (e.g., teacher expectations) and the social environment (e.g., family, neighborhood). For example, Stewart (2007) examined student predictors of academic achievement using regression-based techniques. He found that, among 10th grade African American students, individual-level predictors such as student effort, parent–child discussion, and associations with positive peers play a substantial role in increasing students' achievement. Further, the results also suggested that environmental factors such as school climate—in particular, the sense of school cohesion felt by students, teachers, and administrators—are important to successful student outcomes.

An important discussion that has emerged from the African American literature is the extent to which church attendance, as a social environment variable, can be viewed as a predictor of academic achievement. The literature has suggested that church attendance in the African American community is positively correlated with increased academic achievement (Adksion-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Jeynes, 2002; Sanders, 1998). Historically, the church has been viewed as a place where African Americans sought solace and as a platform for social justice (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005). Jeynes (2002) conducted a meta-analysis on African American and Hispanic students and found that religiosity and religious school attendance had a positive effect on their academic achievement. Likewise, Jeynes's research indicated that religious commitment (i.e., a personal relationship or dedication to church or worship services) of African American and Hispanic students had a positive effect on their academic achievement. T. R. Williams, Davis, Saunders, and Williams (2002) also found that African American students who had family members or peers who attended church were more likely to graduate from high school than peers who had family who did not attend church.

Family structure is another ecological factor that may play a significant role in the development of African American males. Boyce-Rodgers and Rose (2001) conducted a study, including a diverse sample of 2,153 students, which examined the effects of personal and family structural factors (one-parent vs. two-parent households) and school factors on the academic achievement of the students. They found that parental monitoring and parental support were higher for intact families (e.g., married parents) than for step families or single–divorced families. Additionally, Boyce-Rodgers and Rose (2001) concluded that parental monitoring and support were predictive of academic success in single, step, and intact families and especially in single-parent family structures.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Given that the research (e.g., Mandara, 2006) related to the influence of parenting and parental factors on African American student behavior and development is mixed and contradictory, the notion of a positive association between Baumrind's (1971) and Maccoby and Martin's (1983) parenting typology and other ecological factors, such as church attendance, family structure, and parental communication, with African American males' achievement is uncertain. Nevertheless, understanding the influence of parenting and parental factors on African American male achievement would potentially indicate the buffering and empowering role that parenting may play in the lives of African American males. As such, we designed this study to explore the possible relationships between Baumrind's and Maccoby and Martin's parenting styles and African American males' academic achievement, as evidenced by self-report GPAs and enrollment in advanced placement courses. Based on the mixed findings in our review of the literature, we decided that making predictions about the relationship between parenting styles of African American parents and academic achievement was not appropriate at this point.

Despite the current investigation's major focus on the relationship between parenting style and academic achievement of African American males, we also wanted to better understand which combination of ecological factors, such as family structure, church attendance, and parent monitoring, best predicts African American male high school achievement. These research questions are important because the results can potentially assist counselors in developing more effective helping strategies for African American male students and their parents. The research questions for this study were as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between the perceived African American parenting style and the academic achievement of African American males?

Reserach Question 2: Which combination of factors (e.g., family structure, church attendance, parental communication, parent monitoring) best predicts African American male high school achievement?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 153 African American 11th and 12th grade males at two schools in a large school district outside of a major city in the northeastern region of the United States. The majority of the participants were either 17 years old (38%, $n = 58$) or 18 years or older (48%, $n = 74$). Moreover, both schools were similar in student demographics (e.g., high African American and Hispanic populations). A priori power analysis was conducted, and it determined that 128 participants were needed to detect a medium-sized effect (.15) when conducting the analyses at the .05 criterion of statistical significance. The majority of participants were 12th graders (77%, $n = 109$). The mean self-reported GPA of

participants was 2.62 (*SD* = .62). Forty-three percent (*n* = 63) of the participants reported taking no honors courses (e.g., international baccalaureate, advanced placement courses), and some reported taking one or two honors courses (34%, *n* = 50). The majority of participants reported not participating in any college preparatory programs (64%, *n* = 92), and some attended high schools affiliated with College Summit (25%, *n* = 35), Gear Up (1%, *n* = 2), Talent Search (6%, *n* = 9), and Upward Bound (4%, *n* = 5). Additionally, 54% of the participants (*n* = 82) reported that they lived in a suburban community setting, whereas the rest of the participants reported that they lived in an urban (40%, *n* = 61) or rural (5%, *n* = 8) setting. Table 1 displays all of the descriptive information for the participants.

Measures

The Parenting Style Index (2nd rev.; Steinberg et al., 1994) and the Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire were used in this study. The Parenting Style Index was created to measure Baumrind's (1971) and Maccoby and Martin's (1983) typology of parenting. The Parenting Style Index is composed of two subscales using a 4-point Likert scale (4 = *strongly agree*, 3 = *agree somewhat*, 2 = *disagree somewhat*, and 1 = *strongly disagree*). The subscales are My Parents and My Free Time.

The My Parents subscale is composed of 18 items that assess the extent to which adolescents perceive their parents as loving, responsive, and involved. Sample items include "my parents say you should not argue with adults" and "my parents keep pushing me to think independently." The internal consistency reliability alpha for the scale was .72.

The My Free Time subscale measures the supervision/restrictiveness characteristics and includes four items, with questions such as "in a typical week, what is the latest you can stay out on school nights (Monday–Thursday)?" and "in a typical weekend, what is the latest you can stay out on Friday or Saturday night?" The response options include "I am not allowed out . . ." "before 8:00 a.m.," "8:00 to 8:59 a.m.," "9:00 to 9:59 a.m.," "10 to 10:59 a.m.," "11 a.m. or later," or "as late as I want." Also, two categories of items, "How much do your parents try to know?" and "How much do your parents really know?," are included on this scale. Response items include "don't know," "try a little," and "try a lot" for the first category and "don't know," "know a little," and "know a lot" for the second category. The internal consistency reliability alpha for this scale was .76. After an exhaustive search of the literature, we contacted the authors of the instrument and were told that the parenting style index has face validity, which is clearly a limitation of this study.

The Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire was developed by the first author to gather supplemental information regarding African American males' community, family, and educational background. It is composed of three sections: school information, school and community information, and family information. School information includes items about the participants' age, grade level, parents' highest education

TABLE 1

Descriptives of Participants and Variables in the Study

Descriptive	*n*	%
Age (in years)		
Under 15	3	2.0
15	9	5.9
16	9	5.9
17	58	37.9
18 or older	74	48.0
Grade		
11	33	23.2
12	109	77.0
Number of AP, Honors, IB courses taken		
None	63	43.0
1–2 courses	50	34.0
3–4 courses	14	9.5
5–6 courses	14	9.5
7 or more courses	7	4.7
College preparation program affiliation		
Upward Bound	5	4.0
Talent Search	9	6.0
Gear Up	2	1.0
College Summit	35	25.0
None	92	64.0
School club/organization involvement		
Student government		
Yes	21	13.7
No	132	86.3
ROTC		
Yes	21	13.7
No	132	86.3
African American clubs or organizations		
Yes	20	13.1
No	133	86.9
Marching band		
Yes	17	11.1
No	136	88.9
Other school clubs or organizations 1[a]		
Yes	52	34.0
No	101	66.0
Other school clubs or organizations 2[b]		
Yes	24	15.7
No	129	84.3
Attendance at place of worship		
Does not attend	27	18.0
Attends yearly	12	8.0
Attends monthly	28	18.7
Attends weekly	74	49.3
Attends daily	9	6.0
Community setting		
Urban	61	40.0
Suburban	82	54.0
Rural	8	5.0
Parenting styles		
Authoritarian	18	11.8
Authoritative	46	30.1
Indulgent/permissive	44	28.8
Neglectful/uninvolved	36	29.4
Father's communication		
Sometimes communicates about school	25	16.7
Frequently communicates about school	51	34.0
Do not communicates about school	42	28.0
Mother's communication		
Rarely communicates about school	9	6.0
Sometimes communicates about school	3	2.0
Frequently communicates about school	50	33.1
Does not communicate about school	89	58.9

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)

Descriptives of Participants and Variables in the Study

Descriptive	*n*	%
Father's education		
Don't know	26	17.1
Less than high school	17	11.2
High school graduate or GED	39	25.7
Education after high school other than 2- or 4-year college	14	9.2
Some college (community college/junior or 4-year college)	13	8.6
College graduate (bachelor's degree)	22	14.5
More study after bachelor's degree	5	3.3
Graduate/professional degree	16	10.5
Mother's education		
Don't know	7	4.6
Less than high school	12	7.9
High school graduate or GED	51	33.6
Education after high school other than 2- or 4-year college	20	13.2
Some college (community college/junior or 4-year college)	22	14.5
College graduate (bachelor's degree)	20	13.2
More study after bachelor's degree	5	3.3
Graduate/professional degree	15	9.9
Description of parents' current relationship		
Married	77	51.0
Divorced	18	11.9
Never married	37	24.5
Dating	8	5.3
Don't know	11	7.3
Live with mother		
No	21	13.7
Yes	132	86.3
Live with father		
No	72	47.1
Yes	81	52.9
Live with guardian		
No	138	90.2
Yes	15	9.8

Note. AP = advanced placement; IB = international baccalaureate; ROTC = Reserve Officers' Training Corps; GED = graduate equivalency diploma.
[a]Academic or social clubs. [b]Athletic clubs.

level, advanced placement courses, and involvement in school activities. Examples of items in this section include "what is your overall grade point average (GPA)?" and "what is the highest level of education obtained by your mother?" Community and school involvement asks African American males about the type of community they live in (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), place and frequency of worship, the level of their parents' involvement in school activities, parents' marital status, and parents' monitoring their academic and social activities. Examples of items in this section include "I attend a place of worship (e.g., church, synagogue, or temple) at this rate" and "how would you describe the community that you live in?" Family Information includes items about the relationship between the students and their parents. Examples of items include "How would you describe your communication style with your father?" and "How would you describe your communication style with your mother?"

A series of steps were taken to ensure the validity of The Academic and Family Supplemental Questionnaire. For feedback, the questionnaire was sent to six experts in counselor education who have written and researched the academic and social development of African American males. Additionally, the questionnaire was sent to a doctoral candidate in counselor education and two African American male upperclassmen at the University of Maryland, College Park, for feedback regarding item clarity and purpose. Based on feedback from the experts, several revisions were made to the questionnaire for clarity.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board and the school district research review board, a packet including a cover letter, student and parent consent forms, and the instruments was compiled. The first author visited all senior and junior English classrooms of the participating high schools to solicit participants for the study. Two hundred instrument packets were distributed to African American male students in English homerooms at both schools. As an incentive for participation, two Ipod shuffles were raffled. Participants were given numbered tickets that were attached to the questionnaire.

Recoding, completed by the authors, was required on both the Parenting Style Index and the Academic and Family Questionnaire for data analysis. Parenting style groups were created by using Pittman and Chase-Lansdale's (2001) method of assigning subjects to one of four parenting style groups through the use of median cutoff scores. Pittman and Chase-Lansdale's method was used because it retained the majority of the sample ($n = 121$), and it also emphasized the differences between the groups of parents, as opposed to the tertile split method used by Steinberg and colleagues (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994), which yielded a smaller sample ($n = 77$), because any parent receiving scores in the middle third on either parenting style category would be dropped from the analyses. The Parenting Style Index was coded on two dimensions, acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision, to assign participants to a parenting style category (i.e., authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, indulgent). Participants who scored above the median on both acceptance/involvement and supervision/strictness were assigned the authoritative parenting style, whereas subjects below the median on acceptance/involvement and above on supervision/strictness were assigned the authoritarian parenting style. The indulgent parenting style category was assigned to subjects who scored above the median on acceptance/involvement and below the median on strictness/supervision. Participants who scored below the median on both acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision were assigned the neglectful parenting style. See Table 2 for the participants' reported parenting style frequencies and percentages.

Several questions on the measures were coded for data analysis. For example, "I attend a place of worship at this rate"

TABLE 2

Hierarchal Regression Analysis of Factors That Predict Grade Point Average of African American Males

Step and Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Neglectful	–.17	.15	–.12
Indulgent	–.14	.14	–.10
Authoritarian	–.25	.19	.13
Step 2			
Neglectful	–.04	.15	–.03
Indulgent	–.13	.14	–.09
Authoritarian	–.15	.19	–.07
Mother's education	.02	.04	.07
Father's education	.10	.03	.34*
Mother's monitoring	.01	.01	.11
Father's monitoring	.00	.01	–.00
Father's communication	.11	.07	.19
Mother's communication	–.05	.09	–.06
Mother's expectation	.01	.02	.03
Father's expectation	–.04	.01	–.42**
Two-parent homes	.27	.13	.22*
Step 3			
Neglectful	–.01	.15	–.01
Indulgent	–.12	.15	–.08
Authoritarian	–.07	.20	–.04
Mother's education	.02	.04	.07
Father's education	.10	.04	.33*
Mother's monitoring	.02	.01	.12
Father's monitoring	–.00	.01	–.02
Father's communication	.11	.07	.19
Mother's communication	–.05	.09	–.06
Mother's expectation	.01	.02	.03
Father's expectation	–.04	.01	–.42*
Two-parent homes	.27	.13	.21**
Suburban	.10	.13	.08
Rural	.29	.27	.10
Attend place of worship	.01	.05	.02

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

(Question 4) was reverse coded (4 = daily, 3 = weekly, 2 = monthly, 1 = yearly, and 0 = I don't attend a place of worship); parents' educational level (Questions 4 and 5) was recoded (7 = less than high school, 6 = high school graduate, 5 = education after high school other than 2- or 4-year college, 4 = some college, 3 = college graduate, 2 = more study after college bachelor's degree, 1 = graduate/professional degree, and 0 = don't know) and parents' communication style (Questions 3 and 4 in Section 3) was recoded (3 = frequently, 2 = sometimes, 1 = rarely, and 0 = do not) to perform cross tabulations and chi-square data analysis. Also, for the same purpose listed previously, parent expectations were interpreted as father and mother expectations (Questions 8a, 8b, and 8c and 9a, 9b, and 9c in Section 2) in a Likert-scale format summed from 3 to 21. To note, we consulted with a statistician to ensure reliability in coding and recoding of both instruments.

Results

Frequencies for all of the items and variables in this study are presented in Table 1. The highest percentage of the participants (30%) identified their parents as having an authoritative style of parenting, whereas the lowest percentage (11%) reported their parents as having an authoritarian style of parenting. To examine whether parenting style was significantly related to the academic achievement of African American male students, a one-way analysis of variance between each parenting style and the participants' enrollment in honors courses (e.g., advanced placement, honors, or international baccalaureate) was performed. Results indicated no significant relationship between the four parenting styles and the participants' enrollment in honors courses, $F(3, 144) = .66$, $p = .58$.

To examine which combination of factors best predict African American male achievement (i.e., GPA), a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. The rationale for factors entered was derived from Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) ecological theory. The microsystem variables were entered at the first and second steps. These factors were considered to be of the microsystem level because they are characteristics that have a direct influence on the child. The first block of variables, Model 1, included parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, neglectful, indulgent). The other microsystem variables (e.g., mother's education, father's education, mother's monitoring, father's monitoring, two-parent home) were entered into Model 2 of the regression. The remaining mesosystem variables or variables with an indirect influence on the child (e.g., community type, attend a place of worship) were added at Model 3 of the regression.

Step 1 found no variables to be predictive of GPA. For Step 2, results indicated that father's education was a positive predictor of GPA, $t(123) = 2.88$, $p = .01$; father's expectation was a negative predictor of GPA, $t(123) = –3.04$, $p = .003$; and two-parent household was a positive predictor of GPA, $t(123) = 2.10$, $p = .04$. Again, in Step 3, the results indicated that father's education was a positive predictor of GPA, $t(123) = 2.74$, $p = .01$; father's expectation was a negative predictor of GPA, $t(123) = –2.98$, $p = .004$; and having a two-parent household was a positive predictor of GPA, $t(123) = 2.00$, $p = .05$. The *F*-change for Model 3 is .49. The factors referenced or used as comparison categories were authoritative parenting style, urban community style, and one-parent household. Moreover, correlations among father's education and GPA were significant, $r(124) = .00$, $p < .01$. Also, mother's education and GPA were positively correlated, $r(124)$, $p < .002$, $p < .01$. Correlations between father's expectation and GPA were not significant, $r(124)$, $p < .49$, $p < .05$, and correlations between mother's expectation and GPA also were not significant, $r(124)$, $p < .09$. Table 2 shows the three steps of the hierarchical regression and the combination of factors that are significant predictors of GPA.

Discussion

In light of the increasing calls for more effective strategies to assist African American males in today's schools, this study

used Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) ecological framework to examine the influence of parenting characteristics (e.g., parenting style) and ecological factors (e.g., family structure) on African American male academic achievement. Overall, the results indicate that microsystem variables (e.g., father's education, family structure) seem to have an influence on the academic achievement of the participants, whereas parenting style (as described by Baumrind's [1971, 1978, 1991] typology) had no significant relationship with academic achievement (i.e., enrollment in honors, advanced placement courses). This finding suggests that African American parenting needs to be further investigated, beyond Baumrind's typology, to determine the complexities and possible parenting style differences when raising African American males.

Another finding that deserves attention relates to the influence of father's educational level, two-parent homes, and father's expectations on African American male achievement. These significant predictors seem to reflect the influence of father presence on the development of young African American males. Research on parent–child relationships has typically focused on the role of the mother, and less attention has been focused on the role of the father and the influence of his parental style, attitudes, and behavior. Of the research (e.g., Veneziano, 2003) that has been conducted on father involvement, continued paternal involvement can be a powerful predictor of positive outcomes, such as achievement in reading, success in adolescence, and healthy future relationships. For instance, Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998) interviewed fathers of successful African American males and identified common characteristics that framed their involvement. Among those identified characteristics were: (a) emphasis on discipline, religion, and education; (b) monitoring the use of television, video games, and media; (c) careful attention paid to son's friends and peers; (d) an emphasis on academic grades and talent development; (e) strict disciplinary measures for breaking family rules, but without physical punishment; and (f) open discussion on topics such as sex and drugs.

Two-parent homes were found to be a positive predictor of GPA for African American male students. Hrabowski et al. (1998) found that boys with fathers in the home performed well academically and socially in school. However, many of the boys in their study without fathers in the home had found male role models in relatives, teachers, friends, or fathers living outside of the home. Those boys with strong male mentors also did well. Therefore, the authors suggested that,although the presence of two parents in the home, especially when they are working together as a team, can be very beneficial to a young African American male both academically and emotionally, a two-parent family is not a necessary condition for success. In another study, Boyce-Rodgers and Rose (2001) also noted that two-parent homes were one of the family factors that contributed to the academic achievement of young males.

Finally, the results found that father's expectation is a negative predictor of GPA for African American males. Although we are perplexed by this result, we believe that it may further confirm the importance of boys' relationships with their fathers. Although this result is in contradiction to what previous research has indicated about high parental expectations having a positive effect on academic success, high parental expectation may not be defined or manifested in the same way in the African American father–son relationship. Perhaps the boys' perceived negative perceptions of their fathers' expectations reflects another aspect of their father–son relationship. Clearly, this finding should be further explored in future research.

Implications for Counselor Practice

Our results strongly suggest that African American fathers' educational backgrounds and expectations and the family structure of African American homes play a more significant role in the academic development of African American males than parenting style and other parental and ecological factors. As such, one could interpret these results as meaning that counselors have very little influence on the achievement of African American males, because these variables (e.g., fathers, families) cannot be controlled by counselors. Before drawing this conclusion, we believe one major issue needs to be considered. A father's educational background is linked to social capital (e.g., Coleman, 1988), which denotes the amount of knowledge that he has about the schooling process, his relationship with others who can share pertinent and important information, and/or his capability to assist his son with academic work. As the literature has stated repeatedly, school counselors can serve as an important source of social capital for many students and parents, particularly low-income students and parents, students and parents of color, and prospective first-generation college students and parents (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; McDonough, 2005; Perna et al., 2008). Social capital in the school setting can mean one's access to information and support that is needed to be successful. Put more simply, highly educated parents tend to have more social capital because they have access to more resources, social networks, and information that can be used to assist their children in obtaining academic success (Lin, 2001). Perhaps educated fathers in this study were the "brokers of social capital" and were able to assist their sons more than fathers who had less education. As such, counselors in schools and communities are in a pivotal position to help parents gain more social capital by sharing information about opportunities, academic resources, and community resources that may prove to be beneficial to their students. To decrease the educational gap among African American males and their peers, counselors may need to serve more as brokers of social capital when working with African American parents, particularly parents of African American males.

The results of this study also indirectly suggest that counselors should emphasize the involvement of African American fathers in the schooling and counseling process. Creating father–son events and/or events that are inclusive of African American fathers would provide opportunities for African American fathers and sons to interact while obtaining information about resources, networks, and norms of schools and other community institutions (e.g., community-based mental health agencies). For African American males whose fathers may not be active in their lives, counselors should develop partnerships with local community groups and organizations that can provide mentors for young African American boys. Given the research that indicates a strong relationship between father–son relationships and academic success, counselors should not only acknowledge that African American father involvement is critical but also advocate for more father input in school-based decisions, male mentoring programs, and increased numbers of African American males among school-based educators and counselors.

Although this study's results are helpful in understanding the relationships between selected parental characteristics, ecological factors, and African American male achievement, the study did not include other possible parental and ecological factors that may be influencing African American male achievement. For instance, other parental characteristics (e.g., racial identity development of parents, parent involvement), school-based factors (e.g., school climate) and community-based factors (e.g., concentration of poverty in community) were not included in this study. More extensive research is greatly needed to explore the influence of these contextual factors or a combination of these factors on African American male achievement.

Studies that explore the parenting practices of successful, high-achieving African American males are also warranted. Longitudinal studies that follow the growth and development of African American males and their families would add to the existing research and literature. In addition to longitudinal studies, there is a critical need for more studies that use African American communities as central participants. Participatory action research, for example, is implemented by local communities and is designed to address specific issues identified by the community members so that the results can be directly applied to the problems at hand (Santelli, Singer, DiVenere, Ginsberg, & Powers, 1998). The questions "How does one best parent African American males?" and "What are the best methods for helping African American males in schools?" may be best answered by African American students, parents, and community stakeholders. More rigorous studies that implement diverse research methods (e.g., mixed methods, clinical trials to evaluate programming for African American males) are needed so that educators and counselors can better understand the variables that best predict African American male success.

While this study has taken a step forward in exploring the relation between parenting styles, ecological factors, and the academic achievement of African American males, it is limited by its descriptive design; thus, causality cannot be inferred from these findings. In addition to its design limitations, the study was limited by its small sample size and narrow geographical representation of the participants. The two participating schools are located in the Northeast region of the United States, and the results may not be representative of African American male students across the United States. Also, a larger, more robust, and geographically diverse sample would have increased the generalizability of the results. In fact, large-scale longitudinal studies of African American males in multiple contexts (e.g., schools, playgrounds, juvenile detention centers) would further our understanding by exploring how age and contexts, such as school quality, community norms, and peer association, moderate the relationships between parenting styles and academic achievement. Finally, the instrument used in this study (i.e., the parenting style index) lacked validity information beyond face validity. Although the instrument has been frequently used in past comparative research studies, its lack of reported validity is a limitation.

Conclusion

By examining the relationships among parental characteristics, ecological factors, and the academic achievement of African American males, this study extends the existing literature on African American male achievement. Although family structure, father's educational level, and father's expectation were the best predictors of African American male achievement in this study, there are other combinations of school, family, and academic factors (e.g., prior academic achievement, teacher expectations) that might also predict the academic achievement of African American males. We believe these other combinations of factors should be further explored with an exploration of counseling strategies that enhance the academic development of African American males. Overall, this study further emphasizes how family and parents matter in the quest to determine predictors of increased African American male achievement.

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