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African American Adolescent Girls in Impoverished Communities:

Quality of Parenting and Adolescent Outcomes

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Abstract

The relationship between parenting style and adolescent functioning was examined in a sample of 302 African American adolescent girls and their mothers who live in impoverished neighborhoods. Although previous research has found that authoritative parenting, as compared to authoritarian, permissive, and disengaged parenting, is associated with positive adolescent outcomes in both White, middle-class and large multi-ethnic school-based samples, these parenting categories have not been fully explored within African American families living at or near the poverty line. Data were collected using in-home interviews and self-administered questionnaires of adolescent girls and their self-identified mothers or mother-figures. Parenting style was found to be significantly related to adolescent outcomes in multiple domains including externalizing and internalizing behaviors, academic achievement, work orientation, sexual experience and pregnancy history. Specifically, teens whose mothers were disengaged (low on both Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring) were found to have the most negative outcomes. Furthermore, a significant difference was not found between authoritative and authoritarian parenting.

African American Adolescent Girls in Impoverished Communities: Quality of Parenting and Adolescent Outcomes

African American adolescents living in inner-city, high-poverty neighborhoods in the United States are at risk for developmental difficulties including behavior problems, depression, early sexual activity, and poor school performance (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber, 1997; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Maynard, 1997). Of particular interest, considering recent policy debates, is the greater likelihood of teenage pregnancy, single parenthood, and dependence on government aid that urban African American adolescent girls face as they move into adulthood. African American adolescent girls growing up in impoverished communities must overcome multiple obstacles placed in the path of success: pervasive, intense, and chronic poverty at the neighborhood and family level; crime and violence; inadequate schooling; few recreational, cultural or growth-enhancing community institutions; and peers who are young mothers or are in gangs (National Research Council, 1993; Wilson, 1987). Yet, there is great heterogeneity and variability in developmental outcomes in high risk environments, and many young people manage to do well (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Sameroff, 1999; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, and Borquez, 1994; Taylor, 1997). Specifically, they manage to stay in school, graduate, and avoid life-compromising experiences such as early child-bearing and involvement with the law (Smith, Lizotte, Thornberry and Krohn, 1995; Williams and Kornblum, 1985, 1994). An important intervening or protective factor in the lives of African American or economically disadvantaged adolescent girls is the quality of their primary caregivers=parenting (see, e.g. Conger, Conger, Edler, Lorenz, Simons, and Whitbeck, 1993; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, and Hiraga, 1994; McLoyd et al., 1994).

Strong evidence has already accrued in the literature, indicating that parental warmth and acceptance, inductive discipline, nonpunitive disciplinary practices, and consistency in childrearing are related to positive developmental outcomes in White, middle-class children. These practices have come to be known as "authoritative" parenting, one of several prototypic parenting styles first suggested in Baumrind's seminal work (1967, 1971). Children raised in authoritative homes, as compared to those reared in permissive or authoritarian homes, demonstrate higher levels of competence, achievement, social development, self-esteem, and mental health (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). In the last decade, parenting typologies have also been linked to variations in white, middle-class adolescent outcomes including academic achievement, psychological symptoms, behavioral problems, and psychosocial development (Baumrind, 1991; Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, and Mueller, 1988; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh, 1987; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch, 1994; Weiss and Schwarz, 1996). However, few studies have examined the impact of parenting, using either dimensional measures of parenting or parenting typologies, in ethnically diverse adolescent populations.

Recent work exploring the influence of parenting on African American and economically disadvantaged adolescents has produced mixed results. As in European-American families, parental warmth and acceptance have been found to be associated with better academic achievement, higher levels of reported self-reliance, and fewer problem behaviors in African American families in both high-

and low-risk communities (Gonzales, Cauce, Friedman, and Mason, 1996; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, and Dornbusch, 1991; Taylor and Roberts, 1995). However, findings regarding parental control are not so consistent. Parental firm control has been found to be related to lower levels of problem behaviors in working-class and disadvantaged African American teens (Steinberg, et al., 1991; Taylor and Roberts, 1995), while restrictive control, which may limit adolescents' age-appropriate autonomy, has been found to be related to higher levels of problem behaviors (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, Hiraga, and Grove, 1994). Furthermore, the effects of parental supervision and control have been found to differ by families' economic status, where greater supervision and control were associated with increased well-being in children from poor households, but decreased well-being in non-poor households (Hanson, McLanahan, and Thomson, 1997). Similarly, Gonzales and colleagues (1996) found that maternal restrictive control was positively related to African American adolescents' grades in high-risk neighborhoods, but in low-risk neighborhoods the direction of the effect was reversed.

Several contextual factors may influence the relationship between parenting and adolescent outcomes. First, parents may attempt to judge the necessary level of control based on their particular child, their specific neighborhood, and their child's selected set of peers. Given that neighborhoods in which disadvantaged teenagers live are dangerous and stressful, with many adolescents involved in gang activity and other delinquent behavior, parents may modify their parenting to be more controlling with their adolescents than they would be in safer settings (Furstenberg et al., 1999). Second, the acceptance and perception of parental firmness and control may differ among ethnic groups (Deater-Deckard and Dodge, 1997). Variations in the meaning of discipline have been shown in cross-cultural studies of parenting behaviors in Asian subgroups where some groups regard authoritarian discipline as parental rejection, while other groups perceive it as parental involvement (Lau, Lew, Hau, Cheung, and Berndt, 1990; Rohner and Pettengill, 1985). Empirically there is some support for these cultural differences in reference to African American families. First, more African American parents are authoritarian, while fewer are permissive, in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Shumow, Vandell, and Posner, 1998). In addition, a stricter parenting style is viewed by many African Americans (across social class lines) as necessary to aid the development of effective coping abilities in the face of the harsh realities of racism and discrimination (Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey, 1994). But, despite the increased emphasis on strict parenting, such discipline has had healthier impacts when offered within the context of high levels of warmth, support, and open communication with younger African American children (Bartz and Levine, 1978; Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

The present study was designed to explore the associations between multiple adolescent outcomes and parenting, using the fourfold parenting typologies (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and disengaged) suggested by Maccoby and Martin (1983), in a sample of African American girls from high-poverty neighborhoods in the inner city. We include a number of advances over previous investigations of parenting and the development of African American adolescent girls. First, we take an individual differences approach to examining the role of parenting within this population and do not make comparisons to other races and ethnicities. Second, a randomized sampling technique was used for selecting target households with adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 18 in three specific communities with a high concentration of poverty. Use of this sampling technique allows generalization of findings to other similar inner-city communities. In addition, rather than relying exclusively on

information from adolescents as in previous school-based studies, the adolescents' mothers or mother figures also were interviewed. Thus, information on important family background variables including household income, family structure, and mothers' psychological functioning (often not measured in school-based studies of parenting) were obtained in considerable detail from mothers. In addition, both mothers and daughters were asked about their perceptions of the mother-daughter relationship. Therefore, measures from different reporters could be used in analyses in order to avoid inflated associations caused by shared error variance.

Finally, through in-depth interviews and questionnaires, information on outcomes in multiple domains, rather than one specific domain, was gathered, which will provide a fuller exploration of how parenting style is associated with adolescent development in this population. These outcomes include domains often explored in the literature on middle-class and school-based samples (e.g., delinquent behaviors, psychological functioning, academic achievement) as well as domains that are particularly relevant to these inner-city African American adolescent girls (work orientation, sexual experience, and pregnancy history; Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1998), considering recent policy debates over welfare reform and teenage pregnancy. The study examines all of these outcomes in order to provide a more thorough understanding of how parenting style operates for girls in disadvantaged, African American families.

Method

Sample

As part of the Families in Communities study, 302 adolescent girls and their female caregivers from three impoverished neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago were individually interviewed. Given the greater fluidity of kin networks in African American families where individuals often rely on "fictive" kin (Burton and Stack, 1993), whomever the adolescent identified as the person who is most like a mother to you was interviewed as the mother.¹ A randomized block quota technique was used for selecting target households. The three neighborhoods comprised 41 census blocks; 18 of these blocks were randomly selected for the study, with probability proportional to the size of the African American female population age 15-18 (according to 1990 U.S. Census figures). Although it was initially planned to use a block quota technique using 1990 Census figures as a guide in order to ensure a geographic dispersion of sample cases within the study area, it soon became apparent that the 1990 Census data were not reliable for some study areas and that the population had changed significantly as evidenced by vacant lots, boarded up buildings and other signs of out-migration (see e.g., Wilson, 1987). Therefore, a door-to-door enumeration of households and qualified respondents in the randomly chosen 18 census blocks was completed. Of the 7,064 dwelling units identified in this study area, 5,869 (83.1%) were successfully screened; 37 (0.5%) households refused the screener, and 1,158 (16.4%) households were unavailable after 4 attempts to screen. It is believed that the majority of screenings we were unable to perform was due to dwelling unit vacancy. There was a significant correlation between Census rates of unoccupied dwelling units and proportion of households unable to be screened. Of the screened households, 491 (8.4%) contained qualified respondents.

Of the 491 qualified teenagers, interviews were completed with 302 teen/mother combinations. All of the households were approached at least once, with the following outcomes: in 61.5% (302) of the

households interviews were completed with both teen and mother; in 3.5% (17) of the households, either the teen or the mother refused to participate; and in 35% (172) of the households, interviews were not conducted prior to completion of data collection because of either teen or mother unavailability (these included cases in which no one was at home; the teen or mother were not at home or not available; or an appointment was made but then broken and not rescheduled prior to completion of the fielding). In sum, the direct refusal rate was 4% and interviews were completed with 62% of identified qualified respondents prior to completion of data collection. In addition, of the 302 teenagers who completed the interviews, 286 (94.7%) completed a self-administered questionnaire.

Procedure

Data were collected by trained, primarily African American women in the homes of each participant. A family was only included in the study if both the teenager and her caregiver agreed to be interviewed. The 75 minute individual interviews with the adolescent and mother included questions about residence, perceptions of the neighborhood, social support and role models, knowledge and opinions of the welfare system, sexual and relationship histories, household composition, family and peer relations, educational and employment history, and family financial difficulties. In most cases (83%) the adolescent and her mother were interviewed on the same day, while 94% of the interviews were completed within a week of each other. After the teenager's interview, a self-administered questionnaire including measures of psychological and behavioral functioning, perceptions of their own parents=parenting, knowledge and use of community services, and their own parenting stress (if they were mothers themselves) was left to be completed and mailed back to the researchers with an included stamped return envelope. The adolescents=mothers were paid \$20 for a completed interview and teenagers were paid \$20 for the interview and \$10 for the questionnaire.

Measures

Background variables— During the interview teenagers and mothers were asked about their birth dates, educational attainment, employment and welfare history, dating and marital history, and fertility history (teenagers only). Detailed information regarding who lived in their households, in addition to the multiple sources of household income, were gathered. As a measure of household economic status, an income-to-needs ratio was created by dividing the total yearly household income (not including food stamps or other in-kind benefits) by the poverty threshold for the number of members in the household.² By definition, an income-to-needs ratio of 1.0 indicates that a family income is equal to the poverty threshold (see e.g., \$15,600 for a family of four, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996a).

Mothers' current emotional functioning— Mothers=depression and financial strain were used as controls in this study since previous research has shown a link between parental emotional functioning and their children's well-being and mothers in poverty are at high risk for depression and financial strain (see e.g., Beardslee, Bemporad, Keller, and Klerman, 1983; Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, and Simons, 1994; Downey and Coyne, 1990; McLoyd, et al., 1994). The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) was used to assess mothers' depressive symptomatology.

The CES-D has 20 items which ask about several different components of depressive symptomatology including depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, psychomotor retardation, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbance. Respondents are asked how often they have felt this way during the past week using a four-point Likert scale response format for each item. The CES-D has strong psychometric properties ($\alpha = .87$ for this sample).

A measure of perceived financial strain was created by standardizing and combining items from the Making Ends Meet scale (Conger et al., 1994) and the Financial Strain Scale (McLoyd et al., 1994) as well as two additional items about having enough money for essentials and things for fun. Our six item Financial Strain scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$).

Mothers' parenting— Twelve of the original 25 items from the revised version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden and Greenberg, 1989) were used to measure adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their mothers or mother figures. In addition to the adolescents' perceptions of the relationship, all items were reworded and asked from the mothers' perspective. Factor analyses were conducted separately for teenagers' and mothers' reports of the relationship. In each factor analysis, a similar Parental Warmth factor was derived, both having strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$ for adolescents girls and $.82$ for mothers). Mothers' and daughters' perceptions of Parental Warmth were significantly correlated ($r = .26, p < .001$).

In addition, as part of the self-administered questionnaire, adolescents were asked six of nine items from the Parental Strictness/Supervision scale which assesses parental monitoring and supervision of the adolescent (Lamborn et al., 1991). Items include questions about the adolescents' curfew and how much parents know about the adolescents' friends and free time. An additional item was added asking how much parents know about how the teenager spends her money. The internal consistency of our Supervision/Monitoring measure is adequate ($\alpha = .73$). In examining the question "Who acts as a parent to you?" which is asked directly before the Supervision/Monitoring measure, 10 teenagers did not identify the person interviewed as someone who "parents" them. Thus, a dummy variable was created to indicate when this discrepancy occurred. The correlations between Supervision/Monitoring and Parental Warmth were significant ($r = .29$ for mothers' report of warmth and $r = .35$ for teenagers' report of warmth, $p < .001$ for both).

Mothers were coded as having one of four parenting styles using the Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring measures described above. Mothers scoring above the median³ on both Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring were coded as Authoritative. Mothers scoring below the median on Parental Warmth and above the median on Supervision/Monitoring were coded as Authoritarian. Mothers scoring above the median on Parental Warmth and below the median on Supervision/Monitoring were coded as Permissive. Mothers scoring below the median on both Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring were coded as Disengaged.⁴ To avoid shared error variance between adolescents' report of Parental Warmth and the outcome measures (all adolescent report), mothers' report of Parental Warmth was used in the following analyses.⁵ Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the individual parenting measures for each of the four Parenting Style groups. The distribution of mothers with the four parenting styles in this population is similar to that reported in other studies using an ethnically diverse population (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994).

Adolescent Delinquency— Adolescents' delinquent behavior was measured using the 20 items from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY; Borus et al., 1982) and seven non-overlapping items from the Youth Deviance Scale (Gold, 1970 and used by Steinberg et al., 1991). In addition to the items from the Youth Deviance scale and the NLSY, the item "gotten drunk" was added. The combined Delinquency Scale asked respondents how frequently they had engaged in a wide range of activities in the previous 12 months using the following response choices: never, once or twice, several times, or often. Two subscales derived from this measure were used in the following analyses: Minor and Major Delinquency. Minor Delinquency included items reflecting more typical teenager misconduct (e.g., "Cheated on a class test", "Gotten drunk", "Taken something from a store without paying for it"; alpha = .80). Items on the Major Delinquency scale were of a more serious nature (e.g., "Got in trouble with the police" "Carried a weapon", "Other than from a store, taken something not belonging to you worth under \$50", and "Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing them"; alpha = .80). Since the endorsement rate was low on most items, as would be expected among females, the natural log of the average of the standardized items was used for each measure.

Adolescent Psychological Functioning— Adolescents' psychological functioning was measured by two scales. First, as with the mothers, the CES-D assessed teenagers' level of depressive symptomatology (alpha = .80 for this sample). In addition, adolescents' anxiety and difficulty in concentrating was measured by the four-item Cognitive Distress Scale (McLoyd et al., 1994). Items on this scale included "How often do you find it hard to keep your mind on your schoolwork?" and "How often do you have trouble making up your mind?" The internal consistency of this measure was found to be adequate (alpha = .66).

Adolescent Academic Success/Work Orientation— Each teenager was asked "During your most recent full semester or grading period in school, what grades did you receive on your report card?" The teenager responded using nine choices ranging from "Mostly A's" or "Mostly A's and B's" to "Mostly D's and F's", or "Mostly F's". These responses were coded so that a higher score indicated better grades. Adolescent reports of grades have been found to correlate highly with official school reports (Gonzales et al., 1996). In addition, the Work Orientation scale from the Psychosocial Maturity Index (Greenberger, 1984) assessed the adolescents' functioning in work and school environments as well as work performed in day-to-day living. Work Orientation, as conceptualized by Greenberger, is a composite trait consisting of general task or work skills, aspirations for competent work performance, and the capacity to experience pleasure in work. The Work Orientation subscale (from Form D, Grade 11) is a ten-item questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale response format. Items include: "When work turns out to be much harder than I was told it would be, I don't feel I have to do it perfectly," "I don't often get behind in my work," and "It's more important for a job to pay well than for a job to be very interesting." The internal consistency of this measure is adequate (alpha = .73).

Adolescent Sexual Experience— The adolescent girls were asked about their sexual experience as well as their fertility history. These questions included how old they were the first time they had sexual

intercourse, if they had ever been pregnant, and the result of each pregnancy. From this information three outcome variables were created and used in the following analyses: whether the girl had ever had sexual intercourse, age at first intercourse, and whether the girl had ever been pregnant.

Results

Characteristics of sample

Table 2 provides background information about these adolescent girls, their identified mothers, and their households. Due to missing data, primarily as a result of teenagers who did not complete the self-administered questionnaire, the final sample included 281 subjects. Subjects that were dropped were similar in many respects to the subjects remaining in the sample (e.g., teens= age, mothers= marital status, mothers= educational level). However, mothers who were dropped from analysis were older (43.0 years versus 40.8 years), less likely to be on welfare (42% versus 51%), and less likely to be the girls' biological mother (52% versus 86%). In addition, the household's income-to-needs ratio was significantly lower in those households that were dropped from analysis (0.90 versus 1.03), and the adolescent girls were more likely to be mothers themselves (48% versus 17%). Thus, the families dropped from these analyses appear to have more disadvantages than the sample as a whole.

The sample used in these analyses is characterized by high levels of poverty. Sixty percent of the households were at or below the poverty line (\$15,600 per year for a family of 4) and 91% were at or below two times the poverty threshold (\$31,200 per year for a family of 4, U.S. Health and Human Services, 1996a). The households' median yearly income was \$16,386 (SD = \$13,453). Adolescents had a mean age of 16.24 (SD = 1.11) ranging from 14 to 19. The mean educational level of the teenager was the completion of 10th grade. Ninety percent of the girls were still enrolled in high school while 4% had already graduated. Seventeen percent of the girls had at least one child, with an additional 5% currently pregnant.

The mothers interviewed were primarily the biological mothers of the adolescent girls (86%). The remaining mothers were maternal or paternal grandmothers (7%), aunts (5%), older sisters (1%), and unrelated female adults (1%). Because of the different relations of the mothers interviewed, the age range was quite large (20 - 79 years old) with the median age being 39 ($M = 40.81$, $SD = 8.83$). Only 66% of the mothers had received either a high school diploma or a GED. Twenty-four percent of the mothers had received some higher education with 6% earning a Bachelor's degree. Mothers tended not to be in romantic relationships; 16% reported being currently married, 18% reported currently living with a partner, 27% reported being separated or divorced, and 7% reported being widowed. As might be expected in a population of women living in more dangerous and stressful environments, many of the mothers reported experiencing symptoms of depression. Approximately 36% of these mothers were above the suggested cutoff of 16 for significant depressive symptomatology, compared to 17% in the general population (Radloff, 1977). Although mothers' depression was not significantly correlated with either the households' yearly income or income-to-needs ratio, depression was associated with their own perceived financial strain ($r = .18$, $p < .01$). Financial strain was only moderately correlated with household income and income-to-needs ratio ($r = -.27$ and $r = -.23$, respectively, $p < .001$).

All but five girls (98%) currently lived with their identified mother, and considerable variation was found in general for household composition. The most common living situation was with a single mother

(48% of households). Approximately 31% of the girls lived with a biological mother and her male partner (either biological father, stepfather, or cohabiting boyfriend). The remaining girls lived with their mother and other adult relatives (7%), with their grandmother and other relatives (6%), with an aunt and other relatives (5%), or in other unique living situations such as with a foster family or a boyfriend's family (3%).

Adolescent outcomes

The means and standard deviations of the adolescent outcome measures are presented in Table 3. Overall, the girls in this sample are similar to same-aged girls in both nationally representative samples and samples of African American adolescent girls. We could not compare our total scores for Minor and Major Delinquency to other samples because we used subsets of items; however, we could compare specific items. The proportion of girls who have engaged in specific activities is similar to the proportion reported in a nationally representative sample of adolescent girls (Borus et al., 1982). For example, in the previous 12 months 38% of this sample had skipped school compared to 44% in the national sample, 23% had shoplifted compared to 24% in the national sample, and 8% had sold marijuana compared to 7% in a national sample. However, many more girls reported never using alcohol or marijuana in this sample (64% and 74%, respectively) as compared to the national sample (37% and 54%, respectively).

At first glance, the high level of depressive symptoms found in this sample is surprising, with the mean score being just below 16, the suggested cutoff score for significant depressive symptomatology. However, Radloff (1991) also found that adolescents reported more symptoms of depression than the general population ($M = 16.60$ for junior high school students and $M = 17.88$ for high school students). Thus, our sample has slightly lower levels of depression than might be expected in an adolescent population. Similarly, the mean level of Cognitive Distress in this sample was slightly lower than that reported for a population of African American seventh and eighth graders ($M = 2.80$, McLoyd et al, 1994).

Academically, these adolescent girls received B's and C's during their most recent semester, which is slightly lower than reported in the nationally representative sample from the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet and Bumpass, 1996). However, compared to an African American sample of 11th graders, these adolescent girls have a higher Work Orientation (mean score for other sample 2.66 as compared to 2.91 for our sample), which places this sample at the 69th percentile on Work Orientation (Greenberger, 1984).

It should also be noted that just over half of this sample was sexually active (54%) with 26% having been pregnant at some point. These are in line with the rates reported for African American girls nationally (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996b)

As can be seen in Table 4, there are moderate intercorrelations among all outcome measures. Minor and Major Delinquency were strongly correlated ($r = .56$), but tap different aspects of deviance. Although girls who participated in more major delinquent acts were also more likely to participate in minor ones, the reverse was not necessarily the case. Across all outcomes, depression seems to be particularly salient, and is significantly correlated with all of the other outcomes measured.

Analysis of covariance

In order to see how Parenting Style relates to teen outcomes, an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for each of the nine outcome variables with Parenting Style (4 categories) as the main effect. In all ANCOVAs, the following background variables were used as covariates: teenagers' age, mothers' age, mothers' level of education, household income-to-needs ratio, mothers' welfare receiving status, mothers' living and marital situation (two dummy variables, with mother married as referent group), and whether the teenager is a parent or is currently pregnant (two dummy variables). In addition, mothers' financial strain and mothers' depression were entered as covariates in all ANCOVAs since they have been shown to be significant predictors of adolescent functioning (Conger et al., 1994; McLoyd et al., 1994; Downey and Coyne, 1990). Furthermore, the dummy variable indicating if there was a discrepancy in who parents the teenager in the Supervision/Monitoring measure was used as a covariate in all analysis. For the sexual outcome variables, the teenagers' age at menarche and teenagers' reported grades were added as covariates since they have previously been identified as important predictors of adolescent sexual experience (Brooks-Gunn, 1988; Upchurch and McCarthy, 1990; Zabin, Smith, Hirsch, and Hardy, 1986).

Externalizing problem behaviors— A significant effect of Parenting Style was found for both Minor and Major Delinquency ($F(3, 261) = 11.04, p < .001$ for Minor Delinquency and $F(3, 261) = 4.90, p < .01$ for Major Delinquency). As shown in Table 5, adolescents with Disengaged mothers exhibited more minor delinquent behaviors than teenagers with Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive mothers, and more major delinquent behaviors than teenagers with Authoritative or Permissive mothers.⁶ Also, adolescent girls with Permissive mothers exhibited more minor delinquent behaviors than those with Authoritative mothers. In addition, if the teenager did not identify the mother interviewed as someone who "parents" her, she was more likely to report more minor and major delinquent behaviors (Beta = .17 and Beta = .12, respectively, $p < .05$). When mothers reported more depressive symptomatology, their daughters reported both more minor and major delinquent behaviors (Beta = .12 and Beta = .13, respectively, $p < .05$). Teenagers reported significantly more minor delinquent behaviors, but not major delinquent behaviors, when their mothers reported greater financial strain (Beta = .14, $p < .05$) or when their mothers were younger (Beta = -.13, $p < .05$).

Internalizing problem behaviors— Parenting Style was found to have a significant main effect on adolescents' levels of depression ($F(3, 261) = 4.61, p < .01$) and cognitive distress ($F(3, 261) = 2.94, p < .05$). As shown in Table 5, teenagers with Disengaged mothers were more likely to be depressed than teenagers with Authoritative or Permissive mothers. In addition, teenagers with either Authoritarian or Disengaged mothers reported more cognitive distress than those with Permissive mothers. Once again, if the adolescent had not identified the mother interviewed as someone who "parents" her, she was more likely to be depressed (Beta = .16, $p < .01$) or cognitively distressed (Beta = .21, $p < .01$). Teenagers who already were parents had higher levels of depressive symptomatology (Beta = .14, $p < .05$), but not cognitive distress (Beta = -.01, n.s.). In addition, adolescents whose mothers reported more financial strain had higher levels of cognitive distress (Beta = .23, $p < .01$), but not depressive symptomatology (Beta = .11, n.s.).

Academic success/work orientation— Parenting style groups were significantly related to teenagers' reported grades ($F(3, 262) = 4.01, p < .01$) and Work Orientation ($F(3, 260) = 5.45, p < .01$). Adolescents with Disengaged mothers had significantly lower grades and lower Work Orientation scores than adolescents with either Authoritative or Permissive mothers (see Table 5). As seen in other models, those teenagers who did not identify the person who was interviewed as the mother as someone who *Parents@* them were doing poorly, having lower grades (Beta = $-.16, p < .01$) and lower work orientations (Beta = $-.12, p < .05$). In addition, adolescents' academic performance was better when their mother was older (Beta = $.14, p < .05$) or when their mother reported lower levels of financial strain (Beta = $-.14, p < .05$). Also, adolescents had a more mature work orientation when they were older (Beta = $.24, p < .001$) or when their mother was single, rather than married (Beta = $.21, p < .05$).

Sexual outcomes— Parenting style was significantly associated with all three adolescent sexual outcomes. Teenagers with Disengaged mothers were more likely to have had sexual intercourse than teenagers with mothers utilizing any other parenting style ($F(3, 262) = 7.78, p < .001$). Among those teenagers who had experienced sex, those with Disengaged mothers experienced sexual intercourse at a younger age than those with Authoritative mothers ($F(3, 133) = 2.789, p < .05$). In addition, the main effect of Parenting Style was significant for whether the teenager had ever been pregnant ($F(3, 262) = 3.41, p < .05$), with teenagers of Disengaged mothers having a greater likelihood of ever having been pregnant when compared to teenagers of Authoritative mothers. Across all three sexual outcomes, adolescents' age was a significant covariate, where being older was related to a greater likelihood that they had ever had intercourse (Beta = $.36, p < .001$), to an older age at first intercourse (Beta = $.35, p < .001$), and to a greater likelihood that they had ever been pregnant (Beta = $.28, p < .001$). The later menarche had begun, the older the adolescent was at time of first intercourse (Beta = $.25, p < .01$). Also, the better a teenagers' grades, the less likely they were ever to have had sexual intercourse (Beta = $-.18, p < .01$). As discussed in more detail by Moore and Chase-Lansdale (1999), the mothers' marital status was related to their daughters' sexual outcomes. Teens whose mothers were living with a partner, rather than being married, were more likely to have ever had sexual intercourse (Beta = $.14, p < .05$), while teens whose mothers were single, rather than currently married, were more likely to have ever been pregnant (Beta = $.16, p < .05$).

Discussion

This study adds to the literature examining the quality of parenting in African American families living in high-poverty communities. Using an adapted measure of warmth and responsiveness (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987), in addition to an established measure of supervision and monitoring (Lamborn et al., 1991), we were able to determine four typologies of parenting style within this sample: Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, and Disengaged. The full sample was utilized (as opposed to only the upper and lower thirds in previous research) in coding the parental typologies. One-third of our sample was Authoritative, almost one-third was Disengaged, 16% were Authoritarian, while 20% were Permissive.

Consonant with previous research, we find that parenting style appears to be an important factor in multiple domains of adolescent well-being among African American adolescent girls in high-poverty neighborhoods. In addition to areas of functioning previously examined (e.g., academic success, psychological functioning), parenting style was also related to adolescents' work orientation and sexual experience, two domains that are likely to correspond to later job success and teenage pregnancy. Although parenting style, per se, has not been explored, these findings support previous research that have found associations between sexual debut and both parent-child relationships (Inazu and Fox, 1980; Resnick et al., 1997) and supervision (Danziger, 1995; Hogan and Kitagawa, 1985). Furthermore, the associations between parenting style and adolescent outcomes were significant controlling for other important variables, many of which have not been incorporated in previous studies. A number of the covariates in the present study are particularly relevant to the challenges of parenting in the context of extreme economic hardships, especially mothers' depression and financial strain, mothers' marital status and household income, and welfare participation and teenage pregnancy. That parenting styles are linked to adolescent functioning net of other key factors attests to the importance of family process as a protective factor for these girls.

Unlike previous research, which has emphasized the positive impact of Authoritative parenting, our results suggest the very negative impact of Disengaged parenting in this population. Although adolescents with Authoritative mothers always had scores indicating the best adjustment, there often was not a significant difference between this group and either the Authoritarian or Permissive parenting groups. On the other hand, teenagers with a Disengaged mother were often functioning significantly worse than teenagers in any of the other three parenting groups. Thus, it is the absence of Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring simultaneously that seems to be most detrimental to the adolescents' well-being.

Moreover, our study does not indicate a significant difference on any outcome measures between Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting as found in white, middle-class samples. As hypothesized, Authoritarian parenting may have a different impact in the context of these teenagers' surroundings. Both cultural and environmental influences may make an Authoritarian parenting style as effective an option for mothers as an Authoritative parenting style. A high level of Supervision/Monitoring may be interpreted by the African American adolescents living in impoverished neighborhoods as caring that does not translate in the same way to Caucasian, middle-class adolescents. This null finding needs to be explored more thoroughly with a larger sample, since our small sample size may not be able to detect small, but real differences between these two groups.

In terms of findings related to covariates, the issue of the context in which these teenagers live must be considered. First, whether the teenager had identified the mother interviewed as acting as a Parent on the Supervision/Monitoring questionnaire was a significant covariate in six outcomes: minor and major delinquency, depression, cognitive distress, academic performance, and work orientation. In exploring this variable further, we found that these teenagers had usually experienced a recent and significant change in their mother figure due to either death or physical displacement. Thus, this questionnaire discrepancy may be tapping into recent loss of the primary mother figure, leading to poorer psychological functioning. In addition, the mothers' financial strain was a significant covariate in three of the outcomes (minor delinquency, cognitive distress, and GPA) where greater maternal financial

strain was associated with poorer functioning by the adolescent, a pattern also demonstrated by McLoyd and colleagues (1994) in an under-employed sample of African American families of adolescents and by Conger and colleagues (1994) in rural white samples (see also, Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Notably, neither income level nor poverty status, per se, related to adolescent well-being. Instead, mothers' perception of economic hardship, as assessed by the Financial Strain measure, was an important correlate of adolescent functioning. Like Conger and McLoyd, we believe that financial strain is an operationalization of the families' experience of low income; that is, we expect people to answer yes to questions such as "Have you had to put off buying something you need?" We also believe that the financial strain variable may be tapping some aspect of mothers' resiliency; some are more able than others to cope with and manage the small amount of income that they have.

Although our study has taken a step forward in exploring the relationship between parenting style and adolescent functioning, it is limited by its cross-sectional design, and causality cannot be inferred from these findings. Reverse causality may be an explanation. It may be that mothers with teenagers who are psychologically distressed or who act out behaviorally or sexually may not know what to do and may eventually disengage from the teenager. Alternatively, a third unmeasured factor may be influencing both the mothers' parenting and the teenagers' outcomes in a similar manner. Large-scale longitudinal studies of adolescents from multiple contexts, including impoverished communities, need to be performed in order to further explore whether mothers' parenting style directly influences adolescent outcomes. In the meantime, the results of the present investigation indicate the potentially important buffering role that parenting may play in the lives of African American adolescent girls facing economic hardships.

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Footnotes

¹The term Amothers@ refers to biological mothers as well as mother-figures. Initial analyses included a dummy variable indicating whether mothers were biological or mother-figures. Due to the nonsignificant effects of this variable, it was dropped from present analyses.

² For a more accurate estimate of household income and a more conservative estimate of family poverty, imputed income equal to the mean value was added to the household income for adults listed on the household roster with missing income values. On average, the imputed household income raised the reported yearly income estimate by \$2,000. It is this measure that is used in these analyses.

³Parenting style groups were also created by trichotomizing the sample on Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring as in previous work by Steinberg and colleagues (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). Using this method, parents scoring in the upper thirds for both Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring were classified as Authoritative. Parents scoring in the lower third on Parental Warmth, but upper third on Supervision/Monitoring were classified as Authoritarian. Parents scoring in the upper third on Parental Warmth, but the lower third on Supervision/Monitoring were classified as Permissive. Parents scoring in the lower third on both Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring were classified as Disengaged. Any parent scoring in the middle third on either Parental Warmth or Supervision/Monitoring were dropped from these analyses, which decreased the working sample size to 122. As expected, using this methodology, which emphasizes the differences between groups, the main effect of Parenting Style continued to be significant in the same eight outcomes, and the overall significance of these models often was higher (data not shown).

⁴ Those mothers who scored exactly on the median either for Parental Warmth or Supervision/Monitoring were randomly assigned as being high or low in that dimension and then included in one of the four Parenting Style groups. Including these 28 mothers (9% of total sample) did not change the pattern of results (data not shown).

⁵ To explore whether the findings were dependent on the use of mothers' reports of Parental Warmth, parenting groups were recreated using the teenagers' report of Parental Warmth as well. The main effect of Parenting Style continued to be significant in the analyses (data not shown).

⁶ Data on the full models are available from the authors.

Table 1

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Measures of Parental Warmth and Supervision/Monitoring by Parenting Style Groups

	Total	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Disengaged
Frequency	281	93	47	57	84
Percent	100	33.1	16.7	20.3	29.9
Parental Warmth					
Mean	4.01	4.55	3.56	4.49	3.34
SD	.69	.32	.45	.32	.49
Supervision/Monitoring					
Mean	.74	.85	.85	.65	.61
SD	.14	.06	.06	.08	.12

Table 2

Background Characteristics of Sample

Background Variables	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Minimum	Maximum
<u>Adolescents= Characteristics</u>				
Age	16.	1.1	14.	19.0
Education Level	24	1	00	0
Currently a parent	9.9	1.1	7.0	13.0
Currently pregnant	9	2		0
<u>Mothers= Characteristics</u>				
	.17	.37		
Age	.05	.23		
Education			20.	
Current Welfare Use	40.	8.8	00	79.0
Married	81	3	5.0	0
Cohabiting	11.	1.9	0	18.0
Depressive Symptomatology	86	5		0
Financial Strain	.51	.50		
<u>Household Characteristics</u>				
Number of Adults	.19	.39	0.0	
Number of Children	13.	9.6	0	42.0
Yearly income	91	3	-	0

Income-to-needs ratio	.05	.71	1.70	1.73
	1.7	.84	1.0	6.00
	9	1.6	0	9.00
	2.9	7	1.0	112008.00
	2	13	0	6.15
	19	453.28	27	
	407.38	.82	00.00	
	1.0		.03	
	3			

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Adolescent Outcomes

Adolescent Outcome	Mean	<u>SD</u>	Minimum	Maximum
Minor Delinquency	-	.61	-	1.3
Major Delinquency	.18	.41	1.50	2
Depression	-	8.7	-	1.6
Cognitive Distress	.10	5	.52	5
Academic Performance	15.	.74	0.0	48.
Work Orientation	92	1.6	0	00
Sexually Active	2.3	0	1.0	5.0

Age at 1 st Intercourse	9	.54	0	0
Ever Pregnant	6.1	.50	1.0	9.0
	6	1.4	0	0
	2.9	4	1.4	4.0
	1	.44	4	0
	.54			
	14.		10.	19.
	58		00	00
	.26			

Table 4

Pearson Correlations among Adolescent Outcomes

Adolescent Outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Minor Delinquency	1.00								
2. Major Delinquency	.56	1.00							
3. Depression	.21	.31	1.00						
4. Cognitive Distress	.22	.10	.44	1.00					
5. Academic Performance	-.33	-.22	-.19	-.21	1.00				
6. Work Orientation	-.28	-.23	-.32	-.36	.32	1.00			
7. Sexually Active	.33	.25	.26	.07	-.21	-.10	1.00		
8. Age at 1st Intercourse	-.14	-.12	-.12	-.02	.09	.19	. ^a	1.00	
9. Ever Pregnant	.19	.17	.21	.01	-.03	-.07	.54	-.09	1.00

Note. Correlations greater than .13 are significant, $p < .05$.

^a No correlation calculated because of colinearity between measures.

Table 5

Adjusted Means of Outcome Variables for each Parenting Style Group

DV	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Disengaged
<u>Externalizing Behaviors</u>				
Minor Delinquency	-.41 _a	-.25 _{a,b}	-.13 _b	.10 _c
Major Delinquency	-.21 _a	-.08 _{a,b}	-.11 _a	.03 _b
<u>Internalizing Behaviors</u>				
Depression	14.00 _a	16.15 _{a,b}	14.59 _a	18.60 _b
Cognitive Distress	2.32 _{a,b}	2.50 _a	2.19 _b	2.52 _a
<u>Academic Success/Work Orientation</u>				
Academic Performance	6.49 _a	6.24 _{a,b}	6.28 _a	5.66 _b
Work Orientation	3.03 _a	2.91 _{a,b}	3.01 _a	2.73 _b
<u>Sexuality</u>				
Ever Had Intercourse	.43 _a	.46 _a	.53 _a	.74 _b
Age at 1 st Intercourse	15.09 _a	14.78 _{a,b}	14.52 _{a,b}	14.30 _b
Ever Pregnant	.16 _a	.28 _{a,b}	.29 _{a,b}	.36 _b

Note. Adjusted means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ using the Least Significant Difference post-hoc test.

