Father involvement has become a very important area to investigate within the realm of parent-child attachment, especially since the 1990s when interest in the topic became very popular. According to Lerman (1993) and Perlman and Buckner (1996), a very large number of fathers in low-income families who were not initially very involved and were then categorized as highly involved, became involved between them or over time. However, it has been shown in more recent studies that fathers who were involved during pregnancy and present at the time of their child’s birth were less likely to become absent from their child’s life over time (Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, & Lamb, 2009). In addition, it has been supported that fathers who may not be involved prenatally or immediately after birth, but are at some point within the first year of the child’s life, are more likely to have long-term involvement. In essence, early involvement is a facilitator for long-term involvement, but does not necessarily determine it (Barry et al., 2011). It has also been shown that mother-child interaction is significantly associated with, not only the quantity, but also the quality of father-child interaction (Holmes & Huaton, 2010). From this, it can be hypothesized that fathers who are perceived by mothers to be more involved with their children at a young age can have better relationship outcomes with their young children.

Research Aim
The present study examines how various forms of father involvement correlate with mothers’ affect and behaviors displayed in play interactions with their children, an important aspect of mother-child relationship quality. It was hypothesized that the more involved a father is (based on a number of indicators), the more often mothers would display more positive and less negative behaviors toward the child.

METHODS

Participants
120 women followed from pregnancy through the first five years of their infants’ life
• Mothers’ age range: 18-42, M = 26 years
• 47% African-American, 36% Caucasian, 13% Biracial, 4% Other
• 56% single/severed married, 28% married, 4% divorced, 4% separated
• 20% had a high school diploma or less, 44% some college, 36% college degree
• Median monthly household income = $1500
• 73% receive services from WIC, and 76% have public health insurance

Procedures
Three thousand positive of flyers in pregnancy agencies and area community organizations, pregnant women were recruited. These women were interviewed during the last trimester of pregnancy (T1), 3 months after pregnancy (T2), when the baby turned 1 year (T3), and when the baby turned 2 years (T4). Retention rate: T1 (120), T2 (119), T3 (115), T4 (99). Data from the third and fourth waves were used in the present study.

Measures
To encourage mothers’ perceptions of their relationships with the target children’s fathers, as well as father involvement, the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment-Infant/Toddler Edition (HOME; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984), Marital Relationship Scale (MRS; Brooker & Kelley, 1979) and a Demographics Questionnaire were used. Items that were measured touched on areas of father involvement. These areas were accessibility, engagement, and emotional support.

Mothers’ overall parenting was assessed through coded observations of maternal behaviors from 12 minute video-taped play interactions between the mother and child at age 2 (T4). Maternal behavioral and affective codes were developed by Gallagher and Huth-Bock (2010) based on other published coding systems. All maternal codes were rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 being low and 5 being high on each scale, which were then combined into Positive and Negative parenting composite.

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION
Father Involvement and Accessibility across Age 1 and 2 and Maternal Parenting at Age 2

Table 1. Father Involvement at Age 1 and 2 and Maternal Parenting Behaviors at Age 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father Involvement at Age 1 and 2</th>
<th>Positive Maternal Parenting at Age 2</th>
<th>Negative Maternal Parenting at Age 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.204**</td>
<td>0.059**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Correlations between Father Involvement and Accessibility across Age 1 and 2 and Maternal Parenting at Age 2

- Father involvement and accessibility correlated with maternal parenting: *p < .05.
- Both positive and negative aspects of parenting behavior and affect were significantly related to father accessibility and engagement in expected directions. As shown in Table 1, various aspects of father involvement were significantly associated with more positive and less negative parenting across nearly all factor variables. Overall, mothers who reported the child’s father as involved displayed more positive parenting and (to a lesser degree) less negative parenting compared to mothers who reported the father as uninvolved.

DISCUSSION

These results reveal that different aspects of father involvement are significantly related to positive and negative maternal parenting behaviors. This indicates that certain areas of father involvement tested (accessibility and engagement) are very important factors in predicting mothers’ positive and negative parenting. Interestingly, associations between father involvement and parenting differed based on method of measurement (researcher impressions/observations vs. mother self-report). Specifically, the Demographics Questionnaire took a more structured approach whereas father involvement was based on the mother’s own perception. The HOME, however, was given in a semi-structured interview format. This highlights the need for multi-method designs.

Perceived emotional support was not associated with observed parenting quality. This may have been because the measure used for support may have been tapping the degree the mother felt emotionally close to her partner generally, rather than the degree she felt supported emotionally as a parent.

Limitations of this study include questions being picked from questionnaires that did not have the explicit purpose of measuring father involvement. These limitations have been noted in past research, as well as about the ways that were socially acceptable instead of being based on what was most accurate for their situations. One may also speculate that fewer significant differences for negative parenting dimensions may be due to other aspects of the mothers that were unmeasured, such as the father being involved or not (as such as rates of depression, intimate partner violence, or socioeconomic status). Overall, future studies must make an effort to focus on the role of fathers to better understand their impact on family-functioning.

The researchers would like to thank the families for participating in our study and allowing us to follow them over time during this important period of development. We also thank the many research assistants who helped collect and code the data. Funding for this study came from the American Psychiatric Association, the International Psychiatric Association, Psi Chi, and Eastern Michigan University.

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