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Academic Stress and Father Involvement Among University Student Fathers

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**ACADEMIC STRESS AND FATHER INVOLVEMENT AMONG
UNIVERSITY STUDENT FATHERS**

By

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B.A. Westfield State College, 1995

M.S.W. Simmons College, 1997

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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By Brian P. Masciadrelli

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Robert Milardo

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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This study investigated the relationship of school-related stress with the degree and type of involvement fathers have with their children under age 12 while enrolled as a student at the university level. Thirty-eight fathers responded to self-administered surveys measuring the degree of academic stress they experience and the frequency of involvement with their children in terms of direct interaction with child, accessibility to child, and responsibility assumed for child. The degree of psychological presence of the child to the father and marital satisfaction were also measured.

Hypothesis 1 stated that student fathers experiencing high academic stress will have low father involvement, in terms of direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility. Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Hypothesis 2 stated that daily caregiving activities will not be correlated with the degree of academic stress. Hypothesis 2 was supported. In a further investigation of fathers and their children, psychological presence of child to father was significantly and negatively correlated with academic stress. It was significantly and positively correlated with father involvement. Regression analyses found that when controlling for father's age and number of children,

academic stress was a marginally significant predictor of psychological presence. Also, a suppressor effect appeared for number of children and psychological presence when controlling for father's age and academic stress. Number of children was a marginally significant predictor of psychological presence but only when psychological presence was included in the model. Possible explanations for this finding are discussed, as are limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Involvement of fathers with their children is an area of ever-growing interest in the study of family relationships. Many variables have the potential to influence how fathers interact and are involved with their children. These include fathers' identities in the father role (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Minton & Pasley, 1996; Rane & McBride, 2000), adult developmental stressors (DeLuccie & Davis, 1991), daily hassles fathers might experience (Fagan, 2000), and work-related stress (Kinnunen, Gerris, & Vermulst, 1996; Repetti, 1992, 1994).

The literature provides support for the assumption that increased levels of father involvement can be beneficial for children. Radin (1981), in her study of preschool age children, found that an increase in father involvement is related to increases in verbal ability and verbal intelligence test scores. A high degree of father involvement is also related to having a greater number of educational materials and resources in the home. Additionally, the greater the degree of father involvement, the more time fathers put into trying to stimulate their children's cognitive development.

In his review of the literature on father involvement, Pleck (1997) also reports finding some support for beneficial consequences coming from high levels of father involvement, benefits that include increased cognitive competence, social competence, empathy, and self-esteem. An increase in internal locus of control (e.g., the belief one has control over things in his or her life) is found among the children with high levels of father involvement. Decreases in the frequency of internalizing (e.g., depression) and externalizing (e.g., disruptive behavior) symptoms were also related to high levels of

father involvement. Radin (1981) found a similar increase in internal locus of control in her preschoolers with highly involved fathers.

Given the support for father involvement in childrearing, questions remain regarding the variables that exert influence over fathers' involvement. The focus of this study is on the influence of stress on father involvement, or more specifically, the relationship between an array of school-related stressors that are experienced by fathers enrolled as students at the university level and the degree and types of involvement they have with their children.

Defining Stress

The most widely used definition of stress is from Selye (1983) that identifies stress as the body's nonspecific response to some demand placed upon it. Stress, as used for the purposes here, refers specifically to emotional arousal as a result of socioenvironmental demands that strain an individual's usual ability to manage such emotional arousal (Aneshensel, 1996). A stressor is any stress-producing factor (Selye, 1983). In the present study, stressors are demands placed on student fathers by their academic careers. As will be seen, events and experiences in areas such as work life and day-to-day environmental interactions create stress that influences the degree to which fathers become involved with their children. It is proposed that the demands of student life will create similar stress and resulting influences on the relationship between father and child.

Conceptualizing Father Involvement

The definition of father involvement offered by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) is appropriate for the purposes here. These authors provide a tripartite

description of father involvement. The first of three behavioral elements involved is the father's actual, direct interaction with his children. This is characterized as direct contact with his children through caregiving or joint activities.

Palkovitz (1997) delineates many ways this interaction might take place, including direct care activities. These activities might be feeding, bathing, dressing, and tucking a child into bed. Direct interaction can include play, such as building forts together, movie going, and playing games. Also, direct interaction can consist of teaching. Included here would be reading together, building skills such as bicycle riding or driving a car, and helping with schoolwork.

The second element in this definition of father involvement is the availability of the father to his children. Availability or accessibility may be characterized by direct contact, or simply the potential for direct contact to occur. Representative examples include chaperoning at the children's activities, attending events the children are involved in, leading group activities like scouting, and checking on a sleeping child (Palkovitz, 1997).

The third element in Lamb and his colleagues' definition of father involvement is the responsibility a father takes for his children. Separate from direct contact or being accessible to children, responsibility for the offspring involves ensuring their needs are met. Responsible fathering includes childcare, as well as providing food and shelter, arranging for health care coverage, making doctor's appointments, buying clothing, meeting educational needs, and the payment of child support if the parents are separated or divorced. Some researchers have elaborated on this further, including the father sharing in the emotional and physical care for the child beginning at the onset of

pregnancy and establishing legal paternity for his offspring (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998).

Influences of Stress on Fathering & Father Involvement

DeLuccie and Davis (1991) probe the determinants of fathering behavior from a stress perspective. Their research looked at the impact of men's perceptions of the intensity of developmental stressors on their orientations toward fathering. Orientation toward fathering refers to childrearing practices and attitudes, as well as confidence in and satisfaction with the father role. Developmental stressors, according to DeLuccie, Scheidt, and Davis (1989; DeLuccie & Davis, 1991), are events occurring in one or more of 11 different areas of life: relationship with partner, relationship with children, relationship with parents, relationship with friends, sex, health, sense of time (in terms of place in the life span), leisure time, occupational issues, death, and self-concept. Examples include concerns with health, such as "finding exercise harder than it used to be," and with occupational issues, such as "feeling stuck in my current job" (DeLuccie & Davis, 1991: p. 179).

DeLuccie and Davis (1991) measure these developmental stressors with the Male Adult Life Experiences Inventory (DeLuccie et al., 1989). Stressors are measured by having respondents indicate which areas they are currently experiencing stress in, and then indicating the intensity for each specific stressor. Ratings of the developmental stressors are then totaled to reflect their overall intensity. Fathers that report a higher intensity of stressors tend to express less confidence in the role of father. Intensity of fathers' stressors significantly predicts less involvement with their children, such as displaying little warmth or acceptance of interactions with them. Less adaptive parenting

skills, such as the use of guilt to control the children, are also apparent in fathers experiencing a greater intensity of developmental stressors.

The stressors DeLuccie and Davis (1991) look at tend to be rather global concerns in psychosocial development (e.g., health, death, self-concept). Other research has looked at more focused areas of stress, such as work experience and father-child relations. An important concept in the study of work experience and fathering, as well as family life in general, is "spillover." Spillover implies that there will be similarity between what takes place in the family environment and in the workplace, in terms of emotions (Kinnunen, Gerris, & Vermulst, 1996; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). In other words, what happens emotionally at work will seep into a family's emotional life at home. Spillover also assumes that emotions from work are additive, with greater satisfaction at work leading to greater satisfaction at home. If the spillover is negative, that is if stress from work leads to negative experiences in that setting, positive interactions in the family will be similarly upset (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990).

The family member experiencing increased stress and negative emotions, such as anger or frustration, might use withdrawal from social interaction as a way of dealing with the heightened level of stress (Repetti, 1992). Withdrawal is a means for an individual to cope with stress experienced in one setting by pulling away from further social interactions in other settings. By pulling away from interaction, the individual allows him or herself to recover, or cool off, from heightened states of emotional arousal caused by stressful experiences.

Withdrawal is significant in terms of father involvement, because when a stressed father's desired period of withdrawal is disturbed by demands from a child, the father

will probably show a low level of responsiveness (Repetti, 1992). A father having experienced a heightened degree of stress (e.g., anxiety, frustration) will not be likely to have as much energy to devote to responding to the child's needs, because much of his energy is being directed toward deescalating from his own experience of stress. It is likely that the father will pull away physically and emotionally from the child because he is already highly involved and occupied with his own internal emotional experience.

Repetti (1994) looked at the stress that fathers experienced in the workplace and its relationship to direct interaction with their children. The fathers studied were all air traffic controllers, who in some ways are not dissimilar to students in the intensity and periodicity that characterizes their experiences of stress. There are known factors that lead to increased stress among air traffic controllers, such as weather conditions with poor visibility (Repetti, 1994). University students also face known conditions that result in experiences of increased stress, such as studying for examinations or waiting for their return, uncomfortable classroom temperatures, and a deadline-driven schedule.

One facet of the workplace that was measured by Repetti (1994) with regard to air traffic controllers' stress was the perceived workload for the day. Outcomes were measured in terms of withdrawal from parent-child interactions following the fathers' day at work. For three consecutive days each father responded to a survey at night. His perceptions of the day's workload and the interactions with his children following the workday were recorded.

Findings indicate that when fathers perceived their workload as more demanding, they tended to withdraw from interactions with their children. This withdrawal occurred in terms of behaviors, such as less play and laughing together, as well as in emotional

interactions. Fathers perceiving greater stress on a particular day indicated expressing less affection and warmth toward their children, as well as expressing less negative affect, such as anger, likely because of their withdrawal from interaction with the child in general.

Following up on these findings, a replication was attempted using working mothers (Repetti & Wood, 1997). Increases in perceived workload and distressing interactions with coworkers were hypothesized to lead to an increase in withdrawal from parent-child interactions following the workday. For five consecutive days, the mothers responded to scales measuring their perception of the intensity of the day's workload, and the quality of interactions with coworkers. Quality of interactions refers to the perception of being appreciated or respected by coworkers. Involvement with children was measured in terms of withdrawal from interactions with their children after work.

The mothers were found to report greater withdrawal from interactions with their children when they felt the day's workload had been high. This withdrawal occurred both behaviorally and emotionally. The former is described as direct interactions in play and talking, while the latter is considered the expression of affect, such as praise and affection. Also, increased distress in social interactions with coworkers was found to be significantly associated with mothers' reports of increased withdrawal from these interactions with their children.

Fagan (2000) investigated the relationship of daily hassles, or day-to-day stressors (e.g., conflicts with neighbors or employers, dealing with heavy traffic leading to delays getting to important appointments or to and from work) with some of the father involvement dimensions defined by Lamb and colleagues (1985). He looked at fathers

with young children involved in a Head Start program and how daily hassles interacted with levels of involvement with their children.

Father involvement in this case is specifically defined as direct interaction and accessibility. Direct interaction is measured by play involvement and caregiving, as well as reading with the child, talking during meals, and going on outings to playgrounds or movies. Accessibility is operationalized as being near enough to the child for direct interaction to occur, whether or not direct interaction actually takes place. Thus, it is not mutually exclusive from the direct interaction dimension. For example, going to a playground might include both direct interactions at some times and simply “being there” at others.

Hassles are any potential stressors in areas such as work, health, and family life that occur during the course of a day. Specific areas used were: health of a family member, personal substance use, personal health, lack of sleep, problems with partner, job stressors (dissatisfaction and hassles from boss), lack of time for family, transportation problems, discrimination from others, and trouble with neighbors. These were measured as the number occurring per day.

Significant, negative relationships were found between the fathers’ number of daily hassles and (a) play involvement, and (b) accessibility. One explanation for the decrease in play involvement is that such interaction with the child might require positive affect that the stressed father is not able or not willing to give (Fagan, 2000). With respect to the absence of a significant relationship between hassles and fathers’ caregiving, this kind of interaction might be done out of necessity regardless of any stressors experienced.

In sum, the findings from studies investigating the relationships between various stressors and father involvement with their children, particularly those looking at emotional spillover from work and daily hassles, tend to indicate a negative relationship between stress and father involvement. In other words, as the experience of stress increases for a father, particularly in settings outside of the family environment, the degree of involvement he has with his children, in general, appears to decrease. The apparent exception to this involves daily caregiving interactions, which do not appear to decrease as stress increases. This might be due to their relatively involuntary nature as required activities of daily living.

Student Fathers, Stress, & Father Involvement

The data on global developmental stressors, employment-related stressors, and daily hassles suggests a strong influence on the relations between father and child. Placing a particular emphasis on stressors similar to work-related and day-to-day stressors could be telling for the involvement of university student fathers with their children. Since academic demands are certainly stressful, requiring much of the students' time and attention, the following research question is generated: Does the intensity of stressors that a student father experiences influence the level of involvement he has with his children?

The literature indicates that parents, particularly fathers in this case, who experience greater stress in their lives are less likely to be involved with their children. For the purposes here, involvement will be operationalized as the perceptions of direct interaction of the father with the child, his accessibility to the child, and the responsibility he assumes for the child, as outlined by Lamb and colleagues (1985). This includes time

spent together in forms of one-on-one activity (e.g., play, helping with homework), times the father is readily available for the child if he is needed (e.g., attending a little league game), assuming responsibility for the child (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences), and any other activity that is relatively voluntary on the father's part. Thus, hypothesis 1 states that for student fathers, experiencing high stress in their academic life will be paired with low father involvement in terms of direct interaction, accessibility and responsibility.

The findings of Fagan (2000) indicate that direct physical caregiving on the part of fathers might be a different kind of interaction than is play or help with homework. Whereas play or help with homework are interactions a father can choose to engage or not engage in, the fathers in his study indicated that, for them, direct daily caregiving to the child is a necessity. Feeding and bathing a child are required activities, regardless of any stress that is being experienced. Therefore, hypothesis 2 states that school-related stress experienced by student fathers will not be correlated with the degree of direct, daily caregiving performed by the father.

Chapter 2

METHODS

Participants

The participants were fathers attending a rural state university in the northeastern United States. To qualify for participation, the fathers needed to (a) be enrolled in classes at the university, (b) have at least one child under 12 years of age, and (c) reside with that child. A nonprobability convenience sample was used, as the target population was difficult to identify and this method allowed the greatest number of qualifying fathers to respond. The final sample includes 38 fathers, ranging in age from 20 to 49 years old ($M=34$ and $SD=7.33$). The majority (66%) were undergraduates, 29% graduate students, and 6% were not seeking a degree. The majority (81%) were studying full-time. Married students were the majority as well (89%), with 8% cohabitating, and 3% divorced. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Procedure

The data were collected by means of an anonymous self-report questionnaire, returned by mail in an envelope provided by the researcher. Participants were recruited through announcements of the study in classes, student support offices, advertisement postings on campus, electronic bulletin board postings on the campus intranet system, and a mailing to the university's family housing facility. An introductory letter attached to the survey explained the procedure, outlined informed consent, and informed participants that completion of the survey instrument indicated their consent for participation (see Appendix A). Data collection took place during the first half of the spring 2001 semester. The survey instrument included four scales. For the two scales

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 38)

<i>Characteristic</i>	
Age	
Range	20-49
Mean	34
Standard Deviation	7.33
Ethnicity	
White	81%
Asian	8%
Native American	5%
Black	3%
Hispanic	3%
Student Status	
Undergraduate Student	66%
Graduate Student	29%
Non-Degree Student	6%
Full Time Student	
Full Time Student	81%
Part Time Student	19%
International Student	
International Student	11%
Employment Status	
Full Time	30%
Part Time	35%
Unemployed	27%
Full Time Homemaker	8%
Marital Status	
Married	89%
Cohabiting	8%
Divorced	3%
Total Household Income	
Less than \$10,000/year	8%
\$10,000 to \$19,999/year	30%
\$20,000 to \$29,999/year	30%
\$30,000 to \$39,999/year	22%
\$40,000 to \$49,999/year	3%
\$50,000 or more/year	8%
Number in Household	
Range	3-5
Mean	4
Standard Deviation	0.73
Number of Children	
Range	1-3
Mean	2.0
Standard Deviation	0.68
Age of Referent Child	
Range	1-11
Mean	5
Standard Deviation	3.11
Gender of Referent Child	
Male	65%
Female	35%

measured paternal activities (i.e., the Father Involvement Scale and the Psychological Presence of Child to Father Scale). Fathers were instructed to respond in reference to only one of their children under age 12, if in fact they had multiple children. Because the ways fathers are involved with their children change over the developmental progression from childhood into adolescence, fathers were instructed to focus on one referent child under age 12.

Measures

School-related stressors were measured using the Academic Stress Scale (Kohn & Frazer, 1986). The scale consists of 35 items describing stressful experiences, events, and demands that a university student might experience during the semester. For example, environmental stressors such as cold classrooms and poor lighting, as well as psychological stressors such as waiting for graded exams and speaking in class are included. Respondents indicated how stressful each stressor is for them on a ten-point scale, ranging from not at all stressful (0) to extremely stressful (9) (See Appendix B for complete instrument). Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .89, close to the original authors' report of an alpha of .92 for the full scale. For this scale, and each of the additional measures, total scores were computed by summing responses and dividing by the number of valid responses (i.e., mean scores across items).

A scale to measure father involvement in the three domains described by Lamb and colleagues (1985), consisting of 21 items, was developed from several existing instruments (Ahrons, 1983; Barnett & Baruch, 1988; Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Minton & Pasley, 1996). The frequency of father involvement was rated on a six-point scale ranging from never (0) to always (5). Examples of items included are attending a parent-

teacher conference for the child, disciplining the child, and attending the child's games or sports. Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .87 for the full scale. This is the same as that found by Ahrons (1983) for the 10 items from her scale original scale, and is close to the alpha of .90 reported from the Minton and Pasley (1996) adaptation. There were no alpha reliabilities reported in the original Baruch and Barnett (1981) or Barnett and Baruch (1988) instruments.

The father involvement instrument was then broken down into three subscales that reflect the three key dimensions of fathering (Lamb et al., 1985). These three subscales measure the frequency of direct interaction with the child, accessibility of the father to the child, and responsibility taken by the father for the child. The Cronbach's alphas for each subscale are .69, .73, and .79 respectively. One further subscale was assembled for purposes of hypothesis testing. It includes items related to direct caregiving activities that are requirements for daily living. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated at .79. (See Appendix B for complete instrument and subscales.)

It is important to note that the direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility subscales are mutually exclusive. Each father involvement item appears in only one subscale. The additional subscale, measuring direct caregiving activities, is comprised of items previously included in the three primary subscales. This reassignment is potentially useful because it permits us to examine father involvement in terms of activities of daily living that are necessary for the child's day to day well-being. Intercorrelations for the three primary father involvement subscales were computed to determine the amount of variance they share with one another. The subscales are moderately to highly correlated with one another, with Pearson r coefficients ranging

from .57 to .78 ($p < .001$, one-tailed). This results in the amounts of shared variance ranging from 33% to 61%. The intercorrelations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Intercorrelations of the Father Involvement Scale and its Primary Subscales

	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Accessibility</u>	<u>Direct Interaction</u>
Full Scale	.89*	.91*	.85*
Responsibility	--	.70*	.57*
Accessibility	--	--	.78*

* $p < .001$ (1-tailed).

Psychological presence of the child to the father was measured with the eight-item Psychological Presence Scale (Erera, Minton, Pasley, & Mandel, 1999). Psychological presence is characterized by the degree to which the father thinks about, or keeps in mind his child during the course of each day. Psychological presence might be construed as a form of mental involvement with a child on the father's part. Measuring this will allow possible relationships between it and the perceptions of fathers' behavioral involvement to be explored. For example, this scale asked fathers if they found themselves thinking about the child and what he or she is doing, and if they talk about the child to other people. Responses were made on a five-point scale ranging from never (0) to always (4). A Cronbach's alpha of .68 was calculated, much lower than the .91 originally reported by Erera and colleagues (1999). (See Appendix B for complete instrument.)

For fathers who were currently married, marital satisfaction was measured with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens & Bugaighis, 1986). Marital satisfaction is characterized by how favorable the

father feels his marriage and relationship to his wife is. The scale consists of three items, such as "how satisfied are you with your wife as a spouse?" Each item is rated on a seven-point scale ranging from extremely dissatisfied (0) to extremely satisfied (6). A Cronbach's alpha of .92 was calculated, nearly the same as the original authors' .93. (See Appendix B for complete instrument.)

Mean scores and standard deviations for each measure are reported in Table 3. In general, most of the variability on the Father Involvement Scale and its subscales falls within one standard deviation of the mean, as does the variability for the Psychological Presence Scale. On the other hand, the Academic Stress Scale and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale each have variability that falls just outside one standard deviation of their respective means.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Measures

	M	SD
Academic Stress Scale	3.91	1.20
Father Involvement Scale	3.19	0.85
<i>full scale</i>		
<i>direct interaction</i>	3.61	0.82
<i>subscale</i>		
<i>accessibility</i>	2.99	1.16
<i>subscale</i>		
<i>responsibility</i>	2.96	0.96
<i>subscale</i>		
<i>daily caretaking</i>	3.41	0.96
<i>subscale</i>		
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale	4.85	1.08
Psychological Presence Scale	3.52	0.35

Data Analysis

The first round of data analyses consists of bivariate analyses using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients to determine if an association exists between the stress variable and the father involvement variables. Also, this round of analyses includes determining if correlations exist between (a) the psychological presence and marital satisfaction measures, and (b) the stress and father involvement measures. In conducting these analyses, composite scores on the academic stress and father involvement measures were based on total scores averaged across valid responses.

Composites omitting cases with extremely low response rates were computed for academic stress and father involvement. A composite including only those cases responding to at least 32 of the 35 items on the academic stress scale was computed and used on a preliminary trial of hypothesis testing, along with a composite including all cases on the same scale regardless of response rate. This produced no difference in the significance of the analyses, and resulted in a negligible difference of 1% in the explained variance. Similarly, a composite was formed by totaling all the father involvement items, but including only those cases responding to 15 or more of the 21 items. Again, this composite, as well as one with all cases included, was used for a preliminary trial of hypothesis testing. Again, no difference in the significance of the analyses occurred, and a negligible difference of 2% in the explained variance resulted. As a consequence, the composites consisting of all cases regardless of response rates were chosen for use in the final analyses, and these composite scores on the academic stress and father involvement measures were based on total scores averaged across valid responses.

The second round of analyses consists of multiple regression analyses with academic stress, using father involvement and psychological presence as dependent variables, while controlling for number of children and age of father. These two controls were selected, as they are factors known to influence father involvement (Erera et al., 1999), although they were relatively uncorrelated with each other ($r = .01$, ns) in the present data.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

Bivariate Analyses

Bivariate analyses were conducted for hypothesis testing using Pearson Product-Moment Correlations. Table 4 summarizes the correlational findings between all measures. Hypothesis 1 states that high school-related stress will be paired with low father involvement, in the three domains of father involvement as defined by Lamb and colleagues (1985). This hypothesis was not supported (see first row, first column, Table 4). There were no significant correlations between stress and total father involvement. Nor were there any significant correlations between stress and any of the three primary subscales (i.e., direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility). Examination of scatterplots depicting these bivariate analyses showed no indication of any relationship.

The stress variable significantly and negatively correlated with psychological presence of the child to the father ($r = -.27, p < .05$, one-tailed). In other words, high school-related stress is associated with low psychological presence. In fact, the psychological presence variable was significantly and positively correlated with all of the father involvement measures.

Hypothesis 2 states that there will be no correlation between the degree of stress experienced in school and the fathers' involvement in caregiving activities that are required for a child's needs in daily living. This hypothesis was supported (see first row, fifth column, Table 4). School-related stress was unrelated to the daily caregiving variable in father involvement ($r = -.01, ns$).

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations Between Measures

	Father Involvement Scale <i>full scale</i>	<i>direct</i> <i>interaction</i> <i>subscale</i>	<i>accessibility</i> <i>subscale</i>	<i>responsibility</i> <i>subscale</i>	<i>daily</i> <i>caregiving</i> <i>subscale</i>	Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale	Psychological Presence Scale
Academic Stress Scale	.01	-.18	-.01	.16	-.01	.00	-.27*
Father Involvement Scale <i>full scale</i>		.85***	.91***	.89***	.78***	.24	.46**
<i>direct</i> <i>interaction</i> <i>subscale</i>			.78***	.57***	.51***	.13	.40**
<i>accessibility</i> <i>subscale</i>				.70***	.61***	.40†	.29*
<i>responsibility</i> <i>subscale</i>					.87***	.15	.48***
<i>daily</i> <i>caregiving</i> <i>subscale</i>						.14	.50***
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale							.08

* $p < .05$ (1-tailed)** $p < .01$ (1-tailed)*** $p < .001$ (1-tailed)† $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Marital satisfaction was significantly correlated with only the accessibility variable in father involvement ($r = .40$, $p = .03$, two-tailed). Marital satisfaction did not even approach significance when correlated with any of the other variables, and interestingly showed absolutely no correlation whatsoever with school-related stress.

Regression Analyses

The first regression models were calculated using age of father and number of children as controls, and father involvement as the dependent variable (see Table 5). These analyses proceeded in two stages. In the first model both controls are introduced as predictors; in the second model stress is entered. Because the primary subscales are so strongly correlated with the full-scale measure of father involvement (see Table 2) only the full scale was used for purposes of regression. In both models 1 and 2 for father involvement, no significant findings emerged.

Table 5. Regression Analyses with Father Involvement

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE
Father's Age	.20	.02	.20	.02
Number of Children	.07	.22	.07	.23
Academic Stress			.00	.13
R ²	.05		.05	
F	0.82, ns		0.53, ns	
N=38				

The second set of regression models repeated the stages of the first set, while using psychological presence of child to father as the dependent variable (see Table 6). In Model 2, two marginally significant findings emerged. When both father's age and number of children are controlled for, academic stress is a marginally significant predictor of psychological presence ($\beta = -.32$, $p = .06$).

Table 6. Regression Analyses with Psychological Presence

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE
Father's Age	.15	.01	.15	.01
Number of Children	-.25	.09	-.33*	.09
Academic Stress			-.32*	.05
R ²	.08		.18	
F	1.50		2.36†	

N = 38

* $p = .06$ (one-tailed)

† $p = .09$

The other marginally significant finding that emerges is between number of children and psychological presence. In model 1, where father's age is controlled and before academic stress is added to the equation, number of children is not significantly related to psychological presence. The number of children a father has becomes marginally significant ($\beta = -.33$, $p = .06$) as a predictor of psychological presence in model 2, when both academic stress and father's age are entered as controls in the

regression equation. Academic stress leads to a suppressor effect, where the number of children does not reach marginal significance as a predictor of psychological presence until the stress is controlled for.

A potential explanation for this suppressor effect is that there is a difference between fathers with one child and those with multiple children in terms of psychological presence. Fathers with a single child have but one child to keep psychologically present. In other words, the full potential psychological presence of child to father is devoted to that one offspring. When the father has multiple children, his potential psychological presence might become distributed across his children.

In the bivariate analysis, psychological presence was negatively correlated to academic stress. This decrease will be greater for fathers with multiple children in this study because they were instructed to respond with reference to only one of their children under age 12. The father having multiple children is assumed to report a much smaller amount of psychological presence to the referent child if he or she has siblings sharing or competing for the father's full potential psychological presence, than the father with only one child (to use as a referent child) to whom he devotes his full potential psychological presence. This would particularly be the case with high levels of stress. Therefore, adding stress to the regression equation is enough to make the number of children show marginal significance as a predictor of psychological presence.

This reasoning suggests that fathers with multiple children will have lower psychological presence of child to father than those with only a single child, because the referent child for a multiple child father will be receiving less psychological presence than that of an only child father. A one-tailed t-test for independent samples supports this

hypothesis ($t = 1.86$, $p = .04$, one-tailed). Controlling for stress appears to allow the difference in psychological presence between fathers with an only child and those with multiple children to become visible.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effects of academic stress on university student fathers' involvement with their children. The first hypothesis states that higher stress related to school will be paired with low father involvement, as defined by Lamb and colleagues (1985). This hypothesis was not supported when tested using bivariate correlations. Further analysis using regression did not turn up any support. It appears, at least with the present data, that academic stress is not associated with father involvement among university student fathers.

The second hypothesis states that there will be no correlation between academic stress and the fathers' participation in daily caregiving activities with their children. This hypothesis was supported. The correlation between these two variables was almost nonexistent. Such a finding is consistent with those of Fagan (2000), where a similar lack of association was found. One possible reason for this finding comes from the nature of daily caregiving activities. If a father partakes in these tasks, he is engaging in a relatively involuntary part of childrearing. Daily caregiving, as measured here, includes tasks such as the planning and preparation of meals, and bathing the child. Such tasks are required activities for daily living regardless of the stress being experienced by the father.

This interpretation must be made with extreme caution. There is no data collected from the mothers, therefore we do not know if the mother is participating in the direct, daily caregiving work. Another possible interpretation of this finding is that the academic stress for fathers is uncorrelated with daily caregiving because the fathers simply do not participate in these tasks. If there is a division of labor in the family by

gender, and primarily the mother carries out childrearing tasks, including the involuntary requirements for daily caregiving, those behaviors would not occur on the part of the father. In this case, no relationship could exist between academic stress and daily caregiving for fathers.

A significant finding in the bivariate analyses appears when correlating academic stress with psychological presence of the child to the father. These two variables have a significant negative association. In other words, as academic stress increases, psychological presence decreases. If a more broad definition of father involvement were used, one that included a father's thinking about his child regardless of the child's physical proximity, academic stress would have the effect of lowering father involvement. Such a finding might make sense intuitively when thinking about the experience of heightened stress. A common experience with stress, manifested as anxiety or worry, is a preoccupation by thoughts concerning the event eliciting the stress. This would be like the forgetfulness people experience under stress because they "have other things on their minds."

Regression analyses performed on psychological presence with academic stress, controlling for age of father and the father's number of children, produced marginally significant results. When father's age and number of children are used as controls, academic stress predicts a negative relationship with psychological presence. In other words, a higher level of academic stress predicts a lower level of psychological presence of child to father.

An interesting and unexpected finding that emerged during the above regression analysis involved number of children for a father, and the psychological presence

variable. When controlling for academic stress and age of father, a marginally significant negative relationship appears between number of children and the psychological presence of child to father. Larger numbers of children predict, at least to some extent, a lower degree of psychological presence on the father's part toward the child singled out as the referent one. There may be a number of plausible hypotheses to explain this finding, which is typically referred to as a suppressor effect. One possibility is that the addition of academic stress as a control factor is enough of a change between model 1 (no stress variable) and model 2 (stress added with father's age for controls) to bring the relationship between number of children and psychological presence to a marginal level of significance, although the beta value does not significantly increase from model 1 to model 2 ($\beta = -.25$, model 1 vs. $\beta = -.33$, model 2, $z = .25$, ns).

Another possible explanation comes from the nature of the data collection. If a father has multiple children under age 12, he was asked to respond to the father involvement and psychological presence scales by selecting one of these children as a referent child. The potential amount of psychological presence that the father with an only child has to devote to that child may be greater than that which the father of multiple children has to devote to the referent child. This is due to the fathers' potential psychological presence being distributed across the multiple children.

This explanation posits that fathers with one child and fathers with multiple children have a different amount of potential psychological presence to devote to their referent child to begin with. With the negative correlation between academic stress and psychological presence, it is likely that when experiencing high academic stress the father with multiple children has even less psychological presence to devote to his referent child

than the father of an only child experiencing high academic stress. The explanation that the two groups of fathers differed in the amount of psychological presence reported toward the referent child was tested by subjecting the fathers' number of children and the psychological presence variable to a one-tailed t-test for independent samples. This explanation found significant statistical support.

All measures of father involvement were significantly and positively correlated with psychological presence. Overall, these findings are intuitively expected. A higher degree of psychological presence of child to father would be expected as a father becomes more involved with his child.

Marital satisfaction was significantly correlated only with the accessibility subscale of father involvement. A significant positive association appeared between the two. One possible explanation for this finding might revolve around the father's availability to the mother. Marital satisfaction was measured only for fathers that reported being currently married. This might indicate that the father who is satisfied with his marriage is more present and available for his wife. This could in turn translate into greater availability to the child. When a father is present for his spouse, it is likely that this will also include being present for the child at the same time, whether or not this includes being directly interactive with the child.

The findings of this study face limitations on several accounts. The results and conclusions are based on a nonprobability sample. The findings cannot be reliably generalized beyond the sample drawn here. A wide variety of biases might be unknowingly at work. The small sample size obtained for this study has certainly further limited the findings. It has limited the statistical power of the results obtained. These

results are not as reliable as those from a sample of 100 or more fathers. The small sample size here allows for a much larger degree of error in measurement to exert an influence on the results.

Implications for future research abound, regardless of the sample size used in the present study. The number of significant correlations between psychological presence of child to father, particularly those found during regression analyses point out the need for further investigation in this area. Although there were no significant findings between the stress measure and measures of perceived father involvement, as used here to measure fathering activity, the mental involvement the fathers have, in terms of their thinking about the child, does stand out. Since father involvement is measured by self-reporting a general frequency, many factors could be affecting responses. Actual behavior and the perceptions of that behavior might be inconsistent with one another, while mental activities might be perceived and reported more accurately. Thus, the mental activity measured as psychological presence might be an interesting and fruitful path to follow in further attempts to understand the relationship of stress to fathers' behavior.

Incorporating a wider range of stressors is another path that can be taken. This could be particularly relevant to student fathers like those studied here, as they occupy multiple roles much of the time. Some are breadwinners as well as students, while others might be single parents, too. In such cases, academic stress might only be a minor factor on top of other several other types of stress. It is possible that school is the least stressful part of some student fathers' lives. Without measuring a wider range of stressors, such issues may well remain unknown.

An interesting route future research might take would be to follow student fathers day by day for a week's time or more. Stress could be measured at various points during the day, possibly signaled by a beeper set off at random times by the investigator. Psychological presence could be measured at the same time. Total number and type of father involvement activities could be recorded at the end of each day. This would allow the course of stress and its relation to psychological presence of child to father and the daily amount of father involvement in child rearing to be charted day by day over an extended and specific period of time. It may be possible to identify particular stressors as significantly influencing father involvement on both a mental and behavioral level.

Although this study did not produce statistically significant results for all hypotheses, it did demonstrate that daily caregiving behaviors student fathers perform for their children likely operate beyond the direct influence of academic stress. It also points out interesting relationships between academic stress and the psychological presence of child to father, as well as between marital satisfaction and the student father's availability to his children. The unexpected relationship between number of children and the psychological presence of child to father that emerged, provides more fodder for study. The results here certainly point us in directions that hold the potential for interesting and important findings in the future.

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Appendix A

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS INCLUDING INFORMED CONSENT CAMPUS DISTRIBUTION FORM

Student Fathers Survey

My name is Brian Masciadrelli, and I am currently a graduate student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies here at the University of Maine. I am interested in father-child relationships, and my thesis research is investigating the relationship between school-related experiences and student fathers' involvement with their children. I have a survey that explores school-related stress, father involvement, and asks some brief questions about marital relations (for married respondents).

The survey is 6 pages in length and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. All respondents and surveys will remain anonymous. You may choose not to answer any question and you are free to discontinue participation at any time. All surveys may be returned via campus mail in the envelope provided or directly to myself, in 217 Shibles Hall.

You qualify for participation if (a) you are a father living with your child or children, (b) the child or any one of the children are under 12 years old, and (c) you are currently enrolled as a full time, part time or nondegree student. Completing the survey serves to acknowledge your consent to participate in this study. The benefits of participation include providing new knowledge and understanding in this under-researched area of family functioning. The findings may help develop new strategies to support parents who are attending institutions of higher learning. There are no known or foreseeable risks to participation. However, sometimes answering questions about your personal life may raise concerns at a personal level for you, or might be upsetting to think about. Please be aware that this campus offers supportive services at the University Counseling Center (581-1392) should any issues emerge for you after completing this survey.

This is a budding area of research with exciting possibilities. I hope you will take a few moments to fill out and return this survey. Your participation is most appreciated. Thank you for taking the time to consider this survey. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me. Phone and email information is provided below. If you would like to receive a brief, nontechnical summary of my results, simply notify me at the address below. These results will be ready in May of this year.

Sincerely,

Brian Masciadrelli
5766 Shibles Hall, Room 217
University of Maine
Orono, ME 04469-5766
(207) 581-2497 brian.masciadrelli@umit.maine.edu

**LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS INCLUDING INFORMED CONSENT
POSTAL DISTRIBUTION FORM FOR FAMILY HOUSING**

Student Father Survey

My name is Brian Masciadrelli, and I am currently a graduate student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies here at the University of Maine. I am interested in father-child relationships, and my thesis research is investigating the relationship between school-related experiences and student fathers' involvement with their children. I have a survey that explores school-related stress, father involvement, and asks some brief questions about marital relations (for married respondents).

The survey is 6 pages in length and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. All respondents and surveys will remain anonymous. You may choose not to answer any question and you are free to discontinue participation at any time. Surveys may be returned via U.S. Mail in the envelope provided. If you choose to participate, please return the survey no later than Wednesday, March 28th. If you have already participated, do not complete this survey and thank you for your participation!

You qualify for participation if (a) you are a father living with your child or children, (b) the child or any one of the children are under 12 years old, and (c) you are currently enrolled as a full time, part time or nondegree student. Completing the survey serves to acknowledge your consent to participate in this study. The benefits of participation include providing new knowledge and understanding in this under-researched area of family functioning. The findings may help develop new strategies to support parents who are attending institutions of higher learning. There are no known or foreseeable risks to participation. However, sometimes answering questions about your personal life may raise concerns at a personal level for you, or might be upsetting to think about. Please be aware that this campus offers supportive services at the University Counseling Center (581-1392) should any issues emerge for you after completing this survey.

This is a budding area of research with exciting possibilities. I hope you will take a few moments to fill out and return this survey. Your participation is most appreciated. Thank you for taking the time to consider this survey. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me. Phone and email information is provided below. If you would like to receive a brief, nontechnical summary of my results, simply notify me at the address below. These results will be ready in May of this year.

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Appendix B

INSTRUMENTATION

Academic Stress Scale

Instructions: The next statements refer to stress-causing issues and events that occur for students during the course of a semester. Mark the number that best describes how stressful each stressor is for you at the present.

Stressor	not stressful ↓	hardly stressful ↓	moderately stressful ↓						extremely stressful ↓	
Final Grades	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Excessive Homework	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Term Papers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Examinations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Studying for Examinations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Class speaking	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Waiting for graded tests	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Fast-paced lectures	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Pop quizzes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Forgotten assignments	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Incomplete assignments	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Unclear assignments	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Unprepared to respond to questions in class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Announced quizzes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Academic Stress Scale (Continued)

Stressor	not stressful ↓	hardly stressful ↓				moderately stressful ↓				extremely stressful ↓
Studied wrong material	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Incorrect answers in class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Missing class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Buying text books	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Learning new skills	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Unclear course objectives	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Hot classrooms	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Lectures not in your native language	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Boring classes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Attending wrong class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Late dismissals of class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Cold classrooms	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Arriving late for class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Forgetting pencil/pen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Note-taking in class	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Noisy classroom	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Irrelevant classes toward major	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Academic Stress Scale (Continued)

Stressor	not stressful	hardly stressful			moderately stressful			extremely stressful		
	↓	↓			↓			↓		
Crowded classes	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Classes without open discussion	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Evaluating classmates' work	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Poor classroom lighting	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

Father Involvement Scale

Instructions: The next statements ask about your involvement with your child. If you have more than one child under 12 years of age, please think of one of these children. You will be responding to all of the following statements in terms of this one child.

Is this a son ____ or a daughter ____? What is the child's age in years ____?

Please mark the response that best describes your degree of involvement with this child.

Activity	never ↓	seldom ↓	some- times ↓	always ↓		
Take to a birthday party.**	0	1	2	3	4	5
Take to a pediatrician/doctor/dentist appointment.***	0	1	2	3	4	5
Go to teacher/school conference.***	0	1	2	3	4	5
Supervise morning routine.** #	0	1	2	3	4	5
Pick up/clean child's room.***	0	1	2	3	4	5
Spend time at bedtime.*	0	1	2	3	4	5
Take to or from school.*** #	0	1	2	3	4	5
Buy child clothes.***	0	1	2	3	4	5
Take to museum, park, etc.*	0	1	2	3	4	5
Give bath.*** #	0	1	2	3	4	5
Stay home when child is sick.**	0	1	2	3	4	5
Make arrangements for care when child is sick.***	0	1	2	3	4	5
Discipline/set limits.* #	0	1	2	3	4	5

Father Involvement Scale (Continued)

Activity	never 0	seldom 1	some- times 2	3	4	always 5
Help with schoolwork.*	0	1	2	3	4	5
Discuss problems/concerns with child.*	0	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrate special events with child.*	0	1	2	3	4	5
Play with child.*	0	1	2	3	4	5
Attend child's games/sports.**	0	1	2	3	4	5
Attend school or church related activities with child.**	0	1	2	3	4	5
Dress or groom child.*** #	0	1	2	3	4	5
Plan or prepare meals for child.*** #	0	1	2	3	4	5

Primary Subscales

* Direct Interaction Subscale

** Accessibility Subscale

*** Responsibility Subscale

Composite Subscale

Daily Caregiving Subscale

Psychological Presence Scale

Instructions: The next questions ask about your relationship to your child. When responding to these questions please answer in terms of the same one child you used for the previous scale. Mark the number that best describes how frequently the statement is true for you at the present.

How Frequently...	Never ↓		Sometimes ↓		Always ↓
Is it important to you to be included in special events involving the child (i.e. graduation, awards, performances)?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Do you think about what is best for the child?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Do you think about the child?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Do you find yourself thinking about where the child is and what he/she is doing?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Do you look forward to seeing the child?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Do you talk about the child to other people?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Is it important to you to be included in decisions involving the child?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Do you look forward to hearing from the child?	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Instructions: The next questions ask about your current marital satisfaction. If you are currently married, please mark the number that best describes how satisfied you feel at the present.

Questions	Extremely Dissatisfied 0	Very Dissatisfied 1	Somewhat Dissatisfied 2	Mixed 3	Somewhat Satisfied 4	Very Satisfied 5	Extremely Satisfied 6
How satisfied are you with your marriage?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How satisfied are you with your wife as a spouse?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
How satisfied are you with your relationship with your wife?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Demographic Information

Instructions: The following questions ask for specific information about you. Please respond as completely as possible. For multiple-choice items, circle the letter indicating your choice of response.

- 1.) Please list all the people living in your household. Include their relationship to you and their age (beginning with you). For example, if your son is living with you, you'd write "son" and, to the right, his age.

Relationship (son, daughter, wife...)

Age

Yourself

- 2.) Now list any child or children not living with you.

Relationship (son, daughter...)

Age

- 3.) Are you a(n):

- a. Undergraduate Student
- b. Graduate Student
- c. Non-Degree Student

- 4.) Are you a:

- a. Full Time Student
- b. Part Time Student

- 5.) Are you an International Student?

- a. Yes
- b. No

- 6.) Are you employed:

- a. Full Time (35 hours a week or more)
- b. Part Time
- c. Unemployed
- d. Full Time Homemaker
- e. Retired
- f. Other (Specify) _____

Demographic Information (Continued)

7.) Which of the following best describes you?

- a. White
- b. Black
- c. Hispanic
- d. Asian
- e. Native American
- f. Other (Specify) _____

8.) Which of the following categories best describes your total family income in 1999 (before taxes)?

- a. Less than \$10,000
- b. \$10,000 to \$19,999
- c. \$20,000 to \$29,999
- d. \$30,000 to \$39,999
- e. \$40,000 to \$49,999
- f. \$50,000 or more

9.) Are you currently:

- a. Single
- b. Married
- c. Cohabiting
- d. Separated
- e. Divorced
- f. Widowed

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Brian Masciadrelli was born in Westfield, Massachusetts on September 13, 1971. He was raised there and graduated from Westfield High School in 1990. He attended Westfield State College and graduated magna cum laude in 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. He then attended the Graduate School of Social Work at Simmons College and graduated in 1997 with a Master of Social Work. During his time there he was able to receive his advanced field training in child and adolescent mental health as a primary clinician on the Richmond Inpatient Psychiatry Service at The Children's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. From 1997 to 1999, he was an outpatient psychotherapist with Community Services Institute of Springfield, Massachusetts. He returned to school in the fall of 1999 and entered the Human Development graduate program at The University of Maine.

After receiving his degree, Brian will be continuing on to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Development and Family Studies at The University of Illinois. Brian is a candidate for the Master of Science degree in Human Development from The University of Maine in August, 2001.