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Surviving the Early Years of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

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A system that increasingly stigmatized its recipients only became more stigmatizing with the enactment in 1996 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) program. This program has been so successful in deterring cash-needy people from applying for assistance that the decline in participation from the start of the program continues—even in times of economic downturn. The study reported here follows 150 impoverished families during the first three years of PRWORA, when the economy was booming. The data were derived from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project of 1996-2001. Through this secondary analysis a construct was developed that measured the men's identity as fathers. In keeping with PRWORA's use of the labor market as the source for economic well-being, the research studied the relationship between the construct for the fathers' identity and the fathers' long-term employment, and found the construct to positively affect the fathers' employment.

Key words: Poverty, welfare policy, parenting, Early Head Start, stigma, families, strength perspective

In the liberal 1960s Wilensky and Lebeaux (1965) distinguished between residual and institutional social welfare, and added that the country was heading in the institutional direction. An institutional system, in which public welfare is considered a normal first line source of assistance, is consistent with reducing the stigma of being dependent on social services. This is particularly important for those who are financially needy, since poverty in this country, like dependency, is itself a source of stigma (Goffman, 1963; Merton, 1967).

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Starting in only a decade, however, a shift to the ideological right gradually turned the welfare state in the residual direction, in which public assistance is not the first line of assistance for those who are financially needy. Individuals were expected to turn first to the labor market and to family instead of to government. On issues of relieving poverty, moreover, this country's values historically have favored hard work over dependence, even when help is provided by one's family. Consistent with such trends and values, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), replacing Jobs Opportunity and Basic Skills, made the source of cash welfare for all needy able-bodied men and women the labor market, and turned what was an entitlement program into a block grant (Caputo, 1996). Cash grants for families under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are limited to a lifetime of five years, and restrictions are placed on participation in occupational training and education programs in favor of work programs and services that help people secure immediate jobs (Administration for Children & Families, 2006; Schiller, 2008). The guiding principle of the new program, "work first," is that work in any job, even the lowest-paying job, is the most effective route to economic self-sufficiency and personal well-being. Moreover, any able-bodied individual is assumed to be capable of obtaining work if he or she only tries, regardless of the economy, and whether the individual has prior work experience, skills, education, and/or English-speaking ability.

Looking back from the beginning of PRWORA we see an early trend of increased employment, particularly among the women who had a history of poverty and receipt of public assistance (DeParle, 2004). This increased employment is consistent with the economic boom of the mid- to late 1990s and was supported by the "make-work-pay" provisions of PRWORA, which included monies for child care (Parrott & Sherman, 2006). At the same time, PRWORA includes provisions which focus on the men's role as economic providers and responsible fathers. For example, the child support program, which addresses biological fathers living apart from mother and child, was strengthened. Most commentators cite the success of this program for promoting family responsibility (Roberts &

Greenberg, 2005). Others present another side of child support enforcement in which support requirements exceed both the fathers' low-income capabilities and their knowledge about policies and procedures that can ease their economic burden (Mincy & Sorenson, 1998; Roy, 1999). In addition, Pate's (2002) findings emphasize the impoverished fathers' lament over a law that ignores the value of their in-kind support. Roy and Pate's young fathers are African American men, who have among the highest rates of unemployment of any demographic group (Holzer & Offner, 2004).

If family support programs represent particular stress and stigma for those very poor fathers who are unable to fulfill support obligations, other programs under PRWORA targeted at family responsibility likely are stigmatizing for impoverished fathers (and mothers) more generally. These programs, by virtue of their titles—building strong families and promoting healthy marriages—suggest a biased view of men and women in poverty, specifically that weak families and unhealthy marriages are responsible for the families' economic distress. But at least one study funded with a Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant suggests that poverty thwarts healthy family development more than couple relationships (Roehlkepartain, Mannes, Scales, Lewis, & Bolstrom, 2004).

Since the rise in employment from the 1990s to 2000, the declining economy starting in 2001 has seen a decrease in the employment of single mothers and an increase in child poverty (Parrott & Sherman, 2006). At the same time, local governments report a continued decline in the use of TANF and other cash welfare programs, proving the success of PRWORA in reducing the use of public assistance (DeParle, 2009).

Current Study

This study is a secondary analysis of data from the Early Head Start (EHS) Research and Evaluation Study of 1996 to 2001, the first years of PRWORA (Administration for Children and Families, 2011). The data cover a national sample of households with very young children who were found financially eligible for Early Head Start; in other words, they were below the poverty line. In focusing on the first years of the

new program, the study permits a view of poor and near-poor working families under the booming economic conditions of the mid- to late 1990s. The current study explored the factors that predict whether the fathers would be continuously employed. The hypothesis was that after controlling for certain financial, human capital, and demographic factors, the men who participated more actively as fathers were more likely to be continuously employed. The study uses continuous employment as a goal for these fathers, in keeping with today's residual social welfare approach that relies on the labor market as a front line source for economic well-being.

In preparation for testing this hypothesis, the author developed a social psychology construct called *procreativity* for measuring the men's involvement as fathers, and examined how the procreativity construct related to the mother's perception of the men as involved fathers. The study also explored the effect on the fathers' continuous employment of a construct known as *parenting alliance*. While other studies have explored employment and poverty in relation to demographic and human capital variables, this research is unique in its inclusion of the variables "procreativity" and "parenting alliance." A focus on these social psychology variables is based on a recognition of the importance of personal strengths enhanced by supportive relationships to compensate for the negative effects of stress and stigma experienced by the poor and marginally poor.

Social Psychology Constructs

Procreativity is a construct identified by Erik Erikson (1963), which considers the possibility that when adults successfully struggle to resolve the tension between being generative and being self-absorbed, their psychological well-being is enhanced. Generativity, the seventh of eight stages of human development in Erikson's life stage model, is represented by the acts of caring for, guiding, and being committed to people, things and ideas. Generativity, then, is not only the behaviors and attitudes of adults towards the next generation, which Erikson calls the procreative component, but also those of adults in the economic and political spheres (1963), which are relevant to the productive and creative components of generativity. Whether generativity is expressed with the

next generation (as procreativity) or in the economic or political spheres may depend on one's gender. Particularly in the early 1960s when Erikson developed his theory, women were more likely to be generative with children, and men with politics and the world of work. This study, however, focuses on procreativity in men, and posits that procreativity could play a central part in the lives of those men who are impoverished. When there are difficulties finding fulfillment in the labor market, working may lose its centrality and become the means to provide for one's family.

Procreativity as a developmental force has been supported by recent studies, but the idea of its potency being most pronounced in adulthood, and declining in importance in later stages of life, has been questioned (Kotre, 1984; McAdams, St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993). More pertinent to the aim of this study, Hawkins, in McKeering and Pakenham (2000) "emphasized the reciprocal nature of generativity, in that the presence of the child, and the nurturing and child care involved, serve as potent developmental forces for the adult, just as the presence of the adult serves to develop the child" (p. 461).

Cohen and Weissman (1984) used the term *parenting alliance* to represent the process of development between parents. Since parenting involves issues of self-esteem, the mother's and father's feelings of competence, effectiveness and well-being are highly vulnerable to positive and negative criticism. "The alliance consists of the capacity of a spouse to acknowledge, respect and value the parenting roles and tasks of the partner" (Cohen & Weissman, 1984, p. 35), and presents the opportunity for one parent to support the other and to promote his or her psychic equilibrium and development. Based on Abidin and Konold's (1999) parenting alliance scale, the definition of the construct entails a father: (a) acknowledging, respecting, and valuing the parenting roles and tasks of his partner; (b) having good communication with her; and (c) agreeing with her about how to raise the child. Until the current study, the construct had been developed and used primarily with White racial ethnic groups.

Methods

The population for this study consists of 1,500 biological fathers from across the nation, who were identified by the mother as the primary father figure of the very young child. Members of each family were interviewed three times, over three consecutive years. Interviewers included Spanish as well as English speakers. In the second-year interview, 285 fathers from these families responded to non-structured interview questions designed to capture their experiences and attitudes related to fathering. The sampling frame for the current study was created by dividing the 285 men into three racial ethnic categories, African American, Latino, and White, and randomly selecting 50 men from each category, to produce a sample size of 150.

The data for the current study included the fathers' and mothers' responses to structured questions, which were analyzed with SPSS. The non-structured data were analyzed with the software AtlasTi, and focused on the men's experiences of fatherhood and their parenting relationship with the mother. The qualitative analysis followed Neuendorf's criteria in which the coding is: (a) exhaustive, in other words having a code for each unit coded within a variable; and (b) mutually exclusive, so that there is only one appropriate code for each unit coded for the variable (2002). The researcher began her coding with pre-designated categories, based on Erikson's writings on procreativity, and created new codes as she proceeded. To help insure the reliability of interpretations of these data, the researcher compared her codes with those of additional raters who coded the same data, and clarified the coding rules when necessary.

Population and Sample

The sample for the current study is 150 men equally divided among African Americans, Latinos, and Whites. Compared to the EHS study population, the fathers in this sample are comprised of a somewhat greater share of African Americans and Latinos. The families in the sample consisted of the mother, the child applying for Early Head Start and the child's biological father, 78 percent of whom were living with mother and child.

Some families included additional children. Relative to the full EHS study group, the sample for this study had a smaller share of female-headed families, a higher poverty rate, and a slightly lower rate of food stamp use.

Each of the 150 families in the sample applied for Early Head Start, and was determined to be eligible. Eight out of ten were living below the poverty line, and each of the families was receiving Medicaid. In the study's first year, slightly more than one in five families was earning as low as one-third of the poverty level. In 2001, the amount represented by one-third of the poverty line for a family of four was \$5,883. Table 1 below shows that in the first year of the study almost three in ten families in the sample were receiving TANF or AFDC, while close to four in ten families were receiving food stamps. By the second year of the study almost two thirds of the families in the sample were still below the poverty line, although four out of five of the fathers and slightly more than one out of two of the mothers were employed.

Table 1: Demographics of Sample in Percentages

Received AFDC/TANF @ 1 yr	Received Food Stamps @ 1 yr	Household Income < Poverty @ 2 yrs	Fathers working @ 2 yrs	Mothers working @ 2 yrs
27.3%	38.7%	62.0%	81.6%	53.8%
N=128	N=150	N=124	N=147	N=130

Fathers < 12 yrs Education	Fathers Limited English	Fathers < Age 25	Fathers Reside with Mother & Child @ 2 yrs	Fathers Married to Mother @ 2 yrs
31.6%	18.4%	49.2%	78.0%	56.0%
N=133	N=138	N=138	N=150	N=150

The data do not include a variable for whether the family received the Earned Income Tax Credit in any of the study years. The low rate of TANF reciprocity relative to the poverty rate in the sample is consistent with the low rate of TANF use nationwide (DeParle, 2009).

Having less human capital, such as education, is associated with poverty (Schiller, 2008), and the table shows that almost one-third of the fathers had less than a high school education. Also, close to one in five of the fathers, all Latinos, were limited English speakers. More than 90 percent of the Latinos in this sample were Mexicans or Mexican Americans. Being a female headed household, also associated with poverty (Schiller, 2008), describes slightly more than one in five of the current study's sample.

Surviving Poverty

The men's descriptions of how they survived poverty while trying to be fathers enhances the meaning of these poverty figures. Taken from the fathers' narratives, the first examples given below show the stress of not having enough money for basic needs.

R: It's kind of tight right now. I had the electricity shut off the other day, but I am working on getting it turned back on. I called them and they said I could make arrangements to pay so much.

I: Is it surprising to find out how expensive it is to be a parent and how much work—

R: No, I kind of figured it would be expensive. What's expensive is having an apartment, just trying to keep up with the bills; that's the hard part. The way the system is set up with the state is if you actually get a job making decent money, you lose all your benefits so you can't afford stuff, so you can't afford stuff cause you actually aren't making enough money to get by. We're losing all our Food Stamps because we're getting a car that costs over \$5,000.00.

I: What gets in your way of being the kind of father you'd like to be?

R: I would say the financial burden.

I: How does that get in your way?

R: When you are thinking about your finances and bills, it kind of affects you mentally sometimes. And the things you would like to do with your son, like take him places and spend time with him, if your head ain't right, it affects you.

Sometimes a father expressed fear when talking about poverty.

R: The biggest problem right now is financial. Right now I only have one job, but a lot of times I'm working two jobs and I don't get to spend as much time here [with mother and child] as I want to. And when I'm here I'm tired, so I'm not as nice as I should be; I get grouchy and stuff. And that's not fair to the kids that I'm that way. So I just wish we had a job that made enough money, I don't have to be rich or anything, but just take the pressure off; we don't have to have the financial worries and stuff.

I: How does it make you want to do trouble?

R: It's like sometimes they need this and they need that, and like most jobs aren't paying enough or good enough. Like me, I have four kids, and it is so hard to do the things you want to do for them and the thing that keeps me from doing things is knowing that if something bad happens I won't be able to see them. I don't want to stop them from being able to see me or have me in their life.

To compensate for the stress and stigma associated with poverty, the researcher posited that the social psychology constructs of procreativity and parenting alliances would strengthen the fathers' survival skills and enable them to remain in the labor market.

Describing Fatherhood

In Erikson's life stage model, procreativity is represented by the acts of caring for, guiding, and being committed to the well-being of members of the next generation. Some fathers (90) talked about providing physical care for their child.

[My child] needs to be changed so I need to hurry.

I give her baths, I change her diapers all the time, I feed her, and I wipe her butt when she goes to the potty.

Other fathers (116) described the guidance they provided to their children.

I: ... so it sounds like what really makes you feel like you're being a good father is not so much what you do, but your examples are of how he develops, that seems to be where your focus is.

R: Yeah. Because his development at this stage in life is based upon, I believe, a whole lot on his observation of other people's interactions, and new things we introduce him to.

I: What new stuff do you introduce him to? How are you involved in introducing him?

R: Right now it's taking him places, stopping at museums and things, cruising around, gawking at dinosaurs. Last time we were there, there was a big fossilized turtle, and he goes "Turtle! Turtle!"

Many statements reflected a committed father. Here the researcher looked for evidence of sacrificing something for the sake of the child's well-being to distinguish *commitment* from other similar attributes. One hundred twenty-one (121) men made statements exemplifying this idea.

I: What can't you do now?

R: What can't I do? Shoot! I can't spend the money like I used to. Can't waste the money like I used to. Can't hang out like I used to. Can't do a lot, which is not bad that you can't. I say you can't but you just don't do it as much ... The money issue is the main can't—no wastin' it. You gotta always give them what they (kids) want even if (they're not being very good).

Additional statements reflected Erikson's theory that psychological development occurs as a result of the individual's successful resolution of conflicting issues in each stage of life (Erikson, 1963). In the adult stage the issues were self-absorption vs. generativity or in the case of this study, procreativity. Procreativity is the side of the conflict that for Erikson represents development or the *syntonic* side. The other side is *dys-tonic*. The outcome of the struggle ideally would be a creative tension between the alternatives with an emphasis on the syntonic (Bradley, 1997). For purposes of this study we see a dys-tonic resolution when the father's relationship to the child is

based on satisfying the man's needs, including the need to be needed.

R: As I build myself to be a better person at least she can be there to see how I'm growing to be a better person.

Syntonic procreativity, on the other hand, is evident in fathers who seem to love the child for him or herself and/or accept the child's separateness and individuality. Examples of syntonic procreativity were identified in the statements of 100 men.

I: If you could only teach her one thing what would it be?

R: I'd teach her to be the best person she can be. Teach her to be herself and not to be a phony for anybody (Inaudible)—just be herself. That's all she can ever learn how to be is herself and nobody else.

If the same father described his child in a way that reflected both syntonic and dystonic procreativity, the study labeled the statement balanced procreativity. This occurred for 50 men.

I: How does being an important man in (child's name) life have an impact on you?

R: It makes me feel all-important (dystonic) and that he's worth something, and that his life is important, that his parents love him, and he deserves a good mate just like his mama (syntonic).

While many fathers talked about providing physical care for the child, some fathers (29 in all) described protective care. In viewing the examples of the men's protective thoughts, it is logical to assume that they are particularly the concerns of poor people living in unsafe urban neighborhoods. One such example appears below.

There is lots of danger out there. That is what at times worries me. I start to see that my sons are getting older and I say to myself, right now, I don't have a problem; the problems will start when they are grown up.

The idea of *caring for* also is consistent with the construct *emotional care*, which psychologists are increasingly recognizing for its importance in two-person relationships, such as that between parent and child (Bell & Richard, 2000; Berscheid & Collins, 2000; Itziar, et al., 2006; Noller & Feeney, 2000; Shaver & Fraley, 2000).

I: What does being a good father mean to you?

R: Well, a lot.

I: Tell me a little more what you mean by that.

R: To love my son a lot.

I: What surprised you most about being a father?

R: I don't know ... just learning to love your kids. I didn't think I could love somebody like that.

Fifty-four (54) men made statements such as those above that were labeled "emotional care" and were distinguished from the statements of 32 fathers labeled "happiness over child."

R: Ah, all that he says when we're eating and he starts doing his ... he makes me laugh a lot. He starts being silly and to sing and he makes me laugh and of course I'm proud because he is growing and learning and talking and I feel good about him.

From Coding to Construct

All in all, the men's statements about being fathers, described above, were categorized into nine attributes. The study measured the internal consistency reliability of these attributes to determine which combination of them could represent a single construct called, in this case, procreativity. The criteria for internal consistency reliability are: (a) an alpha score of .70 or higher; and (b) a corrected item-total correlation for each individual item of .3 or higher (Field, 2005). The result of the reliability tests was an alpha of .63 for eight of the attributes, excluding dystonic procreativity. The decision was to use the eight for the construct because they reasonably adhered to the statistical criteria and were a good fit with theory.

However, the idea that describing a greater variety of procreative attributes meant that the man was a more involved

father was not supported by the mothers' statements about the fathers. Put another way, the mothers' assessment of involved fathers did not correlate with the fathers' statements about themselves. One possible reason for this discrepancy is that describing oneself as a procreative father makes the man more socially acceptable to the interviewer. African American fathers in particular were thought to be so motivated because as fathers they are the most stigmatized of the study's racial ethnic groups (Townsend, 2002). However, in comparisons between the mothers' and fathers' statements for each racial ethnic group, the only significantly positive correlation was for African Americans. The coding of men as syntonic fathers correlated with the mothers' view of them as involved fathers ($r = .35$), p (one tailed) $< .01$. In the end, the meaning of the procreative construct was understood to be primarily an internalized idea, in which the men identify as procreative fathers even if their behavior may not reflect procreativity.

In addition to procreativity, the current research also constructed a variable for "parenting alliance" using the same three attributes as in Abidin and Konold's scale (communicating, agreeing with the partner about child rearing, and recognizing the parenting of the partner). The researcher found examples of these items in the fathers' statements. Together, these examples were shown to represent a single construct; the test for internal consistency reliability yielded an alpha score of .62. A negative correlation with the mothers' reports of conflict in the family that was significant at the .01 level was understood as some support for there being a mutually recognized alliance between mother and father.

The creation of constructs from the content analyses resulted in quantifiable variables that could be analyzed together with other quantitative variables. The value of each constructed measure equaled the sum of the items for the construct that was mentioned by the father. At times, parenting alliance was used with just two values, 0 and 1, with 1 representing the presence of an alliance. The data for each measure was added to an SPSS file containing data from the structured interviews with the EHS mothers and fathers in this study in order for the relationship between the two social psychology variables and employment to be studied.

Analyzing the Constructs' Effects on Employment

As a first step, this study used cross tabulations to focus on the relationship between parenting alliance and the fathers' continuous employment over three years. In Table 3, the variable "parenting alliance" has just the values 0 and 1. The table suggests a small (but not statistically significant) advantage (5 percentage points) in employment rate for fathers in a parenting alliance. The men's continuous employment rate with a parenting alliance was 56.2 percent as compared to 51.4 percent for those without an alliance. When the analysis controls for residing with mother and child, this small advantage is no longer evident. The continuous employment rate for resident fathers is essentially the same (60 and 58 percent) regardless of whether there is a parenting alliance, while the employment rate is higher for those without a parenting alliance among the non-resident men, although the numbers here are very small.

Table 2: Percent Continuously Employed by Whether Parenting Alliance Controlling for Residential and Marital Status

Parenting Alliance	Total	Fathers Not Residing with Mother & Child	Fathers Residing With Mother & Child	Fathers Not Married to Mother	Fathers Married to Mother
Yes	56.2% (N=73)	25% (N=8)	60% (N=65)	50% (N=26)	60% (N=47)
No	51.4% (N=72)	36.4% (N=22)	58% (N=50)	50% (N=36)	52.8% (N=36)
Total	53.8% (N=145)	33% (N=30)	59% (N=115)	50% (N=62)	57% (N=83)

When marriage is the controlling variable, parenting alliance makes no difference for non-married fathers, but shows its biggest advantage for married fathers (60% vs. 52.8%), although the effect is not significant. The one variable in Table 2 showing a statistically significant effect ($p < .01$) on the fathers' continuous employment is their residential status, where the difference is 59 percent for fathers in residence as compared to 33 percent for the others.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Models for Continuous Employment, Models 1, 2, 3 (N=111)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B/ (SE)	Odds ratio	B/ (SE)	Odds ratio	B/ (SE)	Odds ratio
Constant	.30 (.34)		.23 (.47)		.58 (.64)	
Above poverty @ 2 years	1.13* (.46)	3.09	1.12* (.46)	3.06	1.03* (.48)	2.80
Food Stamps @ 1 year	-.84* (-.43)	.43	-.84 (.43)	.43	-.92* (.47)	.40
Participation in EHS			-.37 (.42)	.69	-.36 (.42)	.70
Completed high school			.36 (.44)	1.44	.21 (.48)	1.23
African American					-.12 (.53)	.88
Latino					-.49 (.58)	.61
Living w/Mother & Child						
Parenting Alliance						
Procreativity Construct						
	R ² =.17, p=.001		R ² =.18, p>.05		R ² =.19, p>.05	

Note: R² is Nagelkurke R².

*Significant at $\leq .05$, based on the Wald Statistics

In findings from a logistic regression (Table 4), neither the variables "father residing with mother" nor "father being in a parenting alliance" were statistically significant predictors of their continuous employment. Residing with mother lost its significance with the addition of controlling variables. What the regression findings do demonstrate is that after controlling for economic, human capital, and demographic variables as well as the mens' residence and alliance with mother, the fathers' procreativity was significantly and positively related to whether they were continuously employed (odds ratio = 1.21, $p = .04$). The hypothesis regarding procreativity is supported.

The odds ratio of 1.21 for the fathers' procreativity means that these men are 20 percent more likely to be continuously employed than men who do not describe themselves as procreative. Besides the fathers' procreativity, the only statistically significant predictors were the two economic variables,

households being above the poverty line at two years (odds ratio = 2.88, $p = .01$) and receiving food stamps at one year (odds ratio = .32, $p = .01$). Earning more was associated with increased employment, while receiving food stamps was associated with less employment. Although living with mother and child and parenting alliance did not have a statistically significant effect on the fathers' continuous employment, being in a parenting alliance significantly promoted the fathers' procreativity. This suggests a chain of effects in which parenting alliance furthers the fathers' procreativity, which in turn furthers the probability they will be continuously employed.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Models for Continuous Employment, Models 4, 5, 6 (N=111)

	Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	B/ (SE)	Odds ratio	B/ (SE)	Odds ratio	B/ (SE)	Odds ratio
Constant	.04 (.76)		.05 (.76)		-.82 (.89)	
Above poverty @ 2 years	.91 (.48)	2.5	.99* (.50)	2.70	1.06* (.51)	2.88
Food Stamps @ 1 year	-.97 (.47)	.38	-.96* (.48)	.38	-1.15* (.49)	.32
Participation in EHS	-.37 (.43)	.69	-.36 (.43)	.70	-.24 (.44)	.78
Completed high school	1.17 (.48)	1.19	.24 (.50)	1.28	.11 (.51)	1.12
African American	.05 (.55)	1.05	.06 (.55)	1.06	.05 (.56)	1.05
Latino	.60 (.59)	.55	-.66 (.59)	.52	-.48 (.60)	.62
Living w/Mother & Child	.74 (.57)	2.1	.83 (.59)	2.29	.82 (.60)	2.27
Parenting Alliance			.17 (.23)	.84	-.23 (.24)	.79
Procreativity Construct					.19* (.09)	1.21
	R ² =.21, P<.01		R ² =.22, p>.05		R ² =.26, p<.05	

Note: R² is Nagelkurke R².

*Significant at $\leq .05$, based on the Wald Statistics

Discussion

Based on Early Head Start data collected from poor mothers and fathers during the first years of PRWORA, the research

for the current secondary analysis focused on a sample of 150 fathers and their families. Demographically the families displayed characteristics associated with poverty, including lack of academic credentials, limited English, and unemployment. At the same time, the extent to which they turned to public assistance for economic support was insufficient to compensate for the poverty, a finding consistent with national studies on this issue (DeParle, 2009; Parrot & Sherman, 2006). The residual philosophy that guided TANF requires that families look to the labor market for their economic well-being. This study, that focuses on impoverished families, many of which include adults who are employed, shows that the outcome is economic survival more than well-being. The men who were interviewed talked to us about the challenges of dealing with fatherhood and poverty, including the temptations of utilizing illegal means of support.

This study turned to Erik Erikson's concept of procreativity and Cohen and Weissman's (1984) concept of parenting alliance to explore possible social psychological explanations for the families' survival. The study found that the men's procreativity increased the likelihood that they would be continuously employed; being in a parenting alliance did not. On the other hand, a parenting alliance had an indirect influence on the fathers' working status in that men who described a parenting alliance were more likely to describe themselves as procreative. Besides the fathers' procreativity, the only other variables tested that were significantly related to the fathers' longer-term employment were the economic factors, being above poverty in the second year and the family receiving food stamps, the latter being negatively related to continuous employment.

Limitations and Implications of Findings

The small sample size and lack of certain data elements affected the scope of the analysis and the significance of the findings. Some of the relationships tested might have shown significance if the sample size were larger. In addition, the percent of variance in continuous employment that the models predicted could have been higher if the data were collected during low as well as high periods of demand for low-skilled

labor. Obviously, demand for labor is an important consideration in the length of time one is employed.

Perhaps the most important limitation of the current study is that the sample does not represent the universe of very poor fathers and their families in the United States. Rather, the biological fathers in the study are men sufficiently involved with their families to be identified by the mothers as the children's primary father figure. In addition, the men and women represent parents who are knowledgeable and concerned enough about their children's well-being to apply for Early Head Start.

At the same time, the limitations of the study with respect to the nature of the sample point to certain policy and programmatic measures for enhancing the well-being of impoverished families. Specifically, we see evidence of the beneficial effect of one's attachments to family members in the context of a program for children and families, namely Early Head Start. Can we consider this study to be preliminary evidence for supporting the expansion of Early Head Start and parents programs? Should we ensure that such programs include services for parents that are designed to further the development of parenting alliances, fathers' identification as proactive, and their presence in the lives of their children? We return to the fact that the study was conducted in the context of Early Head Start and children. Are programs that focus on families effective when offered through PRWORA? This is now possible under the marriage and family promotion components of PRWORA. The author of this article posits that child and family programs under PRWORA would be less effective than those under Head Start, given the stigma associated with the current welfare program, and the fact that its objective is deterrence more than service.

One other consideration in this study is the imperfect nature of the outcome that the study measured, namely the fathers' continuous employment, and the fact that just being employed does not represent economic well-being. Although the EHS data did not include the families' total income, it did provide an item constructed to show how their income level measured against the poverty line. Not surprisingly, the study found a positive relationship between longer-term employment and the families' being above the poverty line; however,

this poverty measure is based on outdated assumptions. The result is that the income that defines the poverty line falls considerably short of family need (Boushey et al. in Pimpare, 2009).

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