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Family structure and children's academic achievement : the role of income and parental control

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FAMILY STRUCTURE AND CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:
THE ROLE OF INCOME AND PARENTAL CONTROL

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Jean M. Hoth
University of Northern Iowa
May 2000

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the relationship between family structure and children's academic achievement, and to assess the roles of income and parental control in this relationship. The present study involves secondary analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) is a national random sample survey conducted in two waves that covers a wide variety of issues on American family life. This study examines data gathered from the second wave of this data set. The total sample for the present research is 1056. The hypotheses guiding this study are derived from two theoretical perspectives which are based on the belief that children in intact, two-parent families exhibit higher levels of well-being than do children in single-parent families.

First, economic-deprivation theory states that it is not family structure, per se, that has an effect on a child's well-being; rather, it is the lack of resources that often accompanies single-parent status (McLanahan, 1985).

Second, father-absence theory suggests that income is not the key factor, but that the lack of motivation, supervision, attention, and role modeling that often occur

in one-parent families are to blame for the lower well-being of children in single-parent families compared to those in intact, two-parent families (Amato & Keith, 1991).

The objective of the present study was to compare these theories using a group which has been left out of prior analyses—the father-only family. The anticipated relationships between family structure and income were not found. However, results did indicate that parental control had significant effects on children's academic achievement, regardless of family type. These findings have implications both for future research and for child custody arrangements.

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This Study by: Jean Marie Hoth

Entitled: Family Structure and Children's Academic
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Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
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DEDICATION

This tnesis is dedicated to my family without whom
completion of this project would not have been possible.

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Many thanks to my thesis committee: to Kristin Mack for her patience, guidance, and support—you truly made the “process” both a learning and an enjoyable one; to Mike Leiber for his vast expertise and unceasing willingness to help; and to Jerry Stockdale for being so generous with his time and knowledge and for his interest in my research endeavor.

My love and appreciation go to my family. I thank Mom and Jeanette for their hard work; it did not go unnoticed. Thanks especially to Ben, Alyssa, and Brandon for all your patience, support, and love.

Finally, to all mothers and fathers out there—in having the power to shape our children, we have the power to shape our world. May we all rise to the task.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The structure of the American family has changed a great deal in recent years (Glick, 1990). The two primary reasons for this are increasing marital disruption and nonmarital fertility (Dawson, 1991; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). In fact, of all the children born to married couples, roughly 45% are likely to experience their parents' divorce prior to turning age 18, and nearly one-third of infants today are born to unmarried mothers (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). The economic repercussions of these trends are staggering; the average loss in income of a mother and child who were living in a nonpoor family prior to the marital separation is 50% (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). This is in stark contrast to the 130% of predivorce income men have in the same year after divorce (Hetherington, Law, & O'Connor, 1993).

The educational effects are also striking. Children living with single mothers are more likely to repeat a grade in school and/or be expelled than their intact-family counterparts (Dawson, 1991). Despite the changes in the family, it remains a widely held belief that parents', children's, and society's best interests are served when

children are raised in a home in which both parents are present (Glick, 1990). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) suggest that this is so because when two adults in a home have a biological connection to the child, they will be more likely to sacrifice for that child, and will be less likely to abuse that child.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that this has sparked numerous studies on the effects a one-parent family has on children (Dawson, 1991; Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, & Mcloughlin, 1983; McLanahan, 1985; Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, & Ginsburg, 1986; Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994). Many previous studies have found that children in single-parent families have lower levels of well-being than those in intact families (Dawson, 1991; McLanahan, 1985; Thomson et al., 1994). Well-being has been defined in previous research as physical and emotional health, high academic performance, low susceptibility to antisocial peer pressure, and few behavioral problems (Dawson, 1991; Steinberg, 1987).

Few studies, however, have examined these relationships explicitly within a theoretical framework (Bernard & Nesbitt, 1981; Kulka & Weingarten, 1979). Of those that have, two theories have been put forth. First,

economic-deprivation theory states that it is not family structure, per se, that has an effect on a child's well-being; rather, it is the lack of resources that often accompanies single-parent status (McLanahan, 1985). Second, father-absence theory suggests that income is not the key factor, but that the lack of motivation, supervision, attention, and role modeling that often occur in one-parent families are to blame for the lower well-being of children in single-parent families compared to those in intact, two-parent families (Amato & Keith, 1991). Since most single-parent families are mother-headed (Amato & Keith, 1991), and since divorce often means lessened quantity and lowered quality of father-child relationships (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), father-absence, not income, is believed to be the primary cause of children's lowered well-being.

Of the studies that have addressed these theories, none have adequately tested the father-absence hypothesis and how it relates to children's well-being. Many studies have assumed that single-parent family status meant father absence (McCord, McCord, & Thurber, 1962; Shinn, 1978). Up until this time few studies have included father-headed single-parent families in their analyses, primarily because of the low frequency of this family type. However, with a

growing number of single fathers, which is a trend that is projected to continue (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996), it would be useful to conduct research that includes this alternative family structure. Such analysis might provide support for, or may refute the father-absence theory. If support is found for the hypothesis suggested by father-absence theory, namely, that children in mother-only families are more likely to fare worse than children in father-only families, a re-examination of current family law and custody arrangements may be necessitated. Perhaps the traditional awarding of custody to the mother in divorce cases would be questioned. Up until now, custody has most often been awarded to the mother unless it could be proven that she was unfit. However, findings which indicate that father-only families are best for children's well-being might call this practice into question.

Evidence in support of the economic-deprivation theory would also likely prompt a reevaluation of child support guidelines. In short, this study could bring to bear several policy implications.

The present study seeks to fill in this gap in the research, and involves secondary analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households

(Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) is a national sample survey conducted in two waves that covers a wide variety of issues on American family life. This study examines data gathered from the second wave of this data set. It will be used to illustrate the relationship between family structure and the academic achievement of children.

It is important to understand the factors that influence academic achievement for two primary reasons. First, it is important because of the outcomes academic achievement predicts. High school and possibly college graduation have a significant effect on long-term financial security (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Therefore, a greater understanding of the factors that help children succeed in school will help parents and the rest of society assure their children's economic security.

Second, and relatedly, low academic achievement currently restricts career opportunities more than it has in the past (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). McLanahan and Sandefur argue, "(Y)oung people with inadequate education are worse off today than they were twenty years ago" (p. 20). In the past, a young person could obtain a stable, well-paying manufacturing job without a high school diploma

(McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Currently, these jobs are disappearing. Therefore, academic achievement is more important today than ever before.

In regard to the present study, the primary hypothesis is that children from single-parent families will exhibit lower levels of academic achievement than children from intact, two-parent families. This relationship has been shown in prior research (Dawson, 1991; McLanahan, 1985; Thomson et al., 1994). However, few researchers have included the father-only family in their studies.

Furthermore, the father-absence theory posits that fathers raise their children's academic achievement through role-modeling, discipline, and supervision (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington, Camara, & Featherman, 1983). Thus, it is hypothesized that among those children from single-parent families, those living with their father will perform better in school than those who are living with their mother.

In this study, two primary theoretical explanations flowing from prior research on this topic of inquiry will be presented. They are economic-deprivation theory and father-absence theory. A review of the literature will

follow, and its implications for the present study will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY

Though several studies concur that children of single-parent families are generally worse off than their intact family counterparts (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Thomson et al., 1994), few are in complete agreement on the theoretical explanations behind this phenomenon. The two most commonly cited theories in previous research are the economic-deprivation hypothesis and the father-absence hypothesis (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; McLanahan, 1985; Smith, 1990).

As the names of the theories might imply, the economic-deprivation theory suggests that a lack of economic resources commonly found among single-parent families is the primary explanation for different levels of well-being of children across different family structures.

Father-absence theory, on the other hand, suggests that aside from economic resources, a father brings something else to a child's life that may affect his or her well-being. Perhaps he brings about more parental control, more supervision, or better role-modeling (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Regardless of what that "something" is, according to father-absence theory, it

stands above and beyond economic resources as a determinant of a child's well-being.

Economic-Deprivation Theory

The economic-deprivation theory states that poverty, rather than family structure, explains the poor academic achievement of children in single-parent families (McLanahan, 1985). According to this theory, it is not living in a single-parent family per se, but the almost certain loss of resources that results from father-absence that leads to lower academic performance and self-concept. McLanahan (1985) cites the fact that single-parent families comprise almost one-half of all families below the poverty line, and since income has been shown to be linked to educational attainment (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan, 1985), this theory should be taken very seriously.

Economic-deprivation theory suggests that children in father-only families should fare better than children in mother-only families because men generally have higher incomes than women (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). It is argued that fewer economic resources means decreased access to such things as private lessons, educational toys and books, and computers that often increase a child's educational attainment (Amato & Keith, 1991). In addition,

Amato and Keith (1991) point out that single-parent families are more likely to live in neighborhoods which do not adequately finance their schools.

Additional arguments in support of this theory are numerous. First, because single-mothers are often employed outside of the home, supervision in the home is lacking. This, in turn, results in poor cognitive performance and behavioral problems in school (Shinn, 1978; Thomson et al., 1994). McLanahan (1985) points out that this is often referred to as the "mother-absence" hypothesis (p. 878).

Second, this theory states that since economic resources are lacking, children may find it necessary to quit school in order to work full time or take care of younger siblings (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan, 1985). Thus, their academic careers are either delayed or terminated prematurely (McLanahan, 1985).

According to Weiss (1979), these changes in children's roles and responsibilities result in earlier maturity. The children he interviewed, however, saw this maturation as both good and bad. It was a positive experience in that the demands on them for autonomy led to growth. On the other hand, the increase in responsibility resulted in a loss of security. The children became involved in the parents'

worries. In having to "grow up a little bit faster," the time and energy spent on schoolwork may be compromised (p. 98).

Third, McLanahan (1985) cites another argument lending credence to the economic-deprivation theory that blames the welfare system for lower academic achievement. According to this argument, the dependency and stigma which go along with welfare often make it more difficult for a student to do well in school (McLanahan, 1985). Blechman (1982) found that teachers' expectations may bias their subjective assessments of students' academic performance, and that teachers seem to judge students on the basis of their observations of the student's family. Therefore, teachers may be biased in favor of students from two-parent families.

It is important to note that the economic-deprivation theory considers economic status as an endogenous variable rather than a background influence (McLanahan, 1985). In other words, in all of these arguments current income is thought to have an independent effect on a child's academic achievement, aside from any antecedent economic factors (McLanahan, 1985).

Father-Absence Theory

The other most frequently-cited theoretical explanation focuses on family structure, and is known as the father-absence hypothesis (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; McLanahan, 1985). Termed "father-absence" because of the preponderance of female-headed single-parent families, this perspective derives from psychoanalytic theories that highlight the importance of the father as a male role model in the child's behavior and sex role development (Hetherington et al., 1983.)

The father-absence hypothesis also arises out of socialization theory which regards the male role model as crucial to a child's cognitive and emotional development (McLanahan, 1985). Shinn (1978) found that children's interaction with their parents nurtures cognitive growth and that a lessening of parent-child interaction resulting from family disruption hampers it. Moreover, Guidubaldi and colleagues (1983) found that a good relationship between the child and the noncustodial parent was associated with better academic and social adjustment. Thus, these studies found father absence to be a valid explanation for the lower performance of children from single-parent families.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) describe the importance of the parents as role models:

In primary socialization there is no *problem* of identification. There is no choice of significant others....Since the child has no choice in the selection of his significant others his identification with them is quasi-automatic. For the same reason, his internalization of their particular reality is quasi-inevitable. The child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world.... (p. 134)

In this process of socialization, the child internalizes the roles and attitudes of the parent(s) along with the norms and values of society, and they become a part of himself (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It is evident, then, that the father, like the mother, is crucial to the child's development.

It is important to note that being a noncustodial parent does not necessarily mean they are "absent" from their child(ren)'s lives. However, research has shown that most noncustodial fathers substantially decrease their involvement in parenting their children (Furstenberg et al., 1987; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). According to Seltzer (1991), almost 30% of the children studied had no contact with their non-custodial fathers in the previous year. Fathers often have

difficulty maintaining the closeness with their children when they are no longer involved in their day-to-day care and in decision-making regarding their children (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Some argue that the pain of being separated from their children is what prompts fathers to limit their contact; by not seeing their children, some fathers are less often reminded of their "lost" children (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978).

In terms of the father-absence hypothesis, the focus can be on the presence of the mother or absence of the father. For example, daughters who live with single mothers are more likely to become single mothers themselves because they have learned that women are capable of running a family alone, and that this is an acceptable family form (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988; Spruijt, 1995).

For studies that stress the absence of the father, this theory posits that his continued absence lowers motivation for achievement (McLanahan, 1985). Furthermore, some believe that fathers may offer unique contributions to their children's development and to healthy family life (Hetherington et al., 1983). Some of a father's roles are in support of the roles of the mother; he supports her with

income, help in housework and child care, and appreciation of her motherly role (Hetherington et al., 1983).

Some more direct ways in which fathers influence their children's outcomes is through discipline and role modeling (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983). It has been found that in divorced and intact families, children are more obedient to fathers than to mothers (Hetherington et al., 1978). Father-absence, then, reduces parental authority and social control, and may lead to the inadequate learning of social skills, especially for boys (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan, 1985; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). For instance, children in one-parent families are more likely to succumb to peer pressure than children in intact families (Steinberg, 1987). Thus, children in mother-only families are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems at school and be less yielding to social control.

Another argument in support of the father-absence hypothesis contends that in an intact family, one parent who is competent and caring can mediate between the child and the other parent who may be cold, harsh, or emotionally unstable (Hetherington et al., 1978). If the mother is unstable and has custody of the child, and if the father is

no longer present to be that buffer, the result may be more direct harm to the child (Hetherington et al., 1978).

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) and Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) have linked the economic-deprivation and father-absence hypotheses in their argument that income loss is not only due to the fact that it is more expensive to have two households than one, but also because fathers tend to feel less financially obligated to their children over time. Because of their absence, the fathers are no longer involved in the day-to-day care of the child; therefore, they become less willing to share their incomes with them (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Seltzer (1991) found that more than 50% of noncustodial fathers had not paid any child support in the previous year.

Not only are non-custodial fathers more reluctant to give of themselves financially, they are also hesitant to give of themselves personally and emotionally (Hetherington et al., 1993). Braver and O'Connell (1998) termed this phenomenon the "parentally disenfranchised dad" (p. 156).

They write:

(The fathers) felt as if the child was in no real sense theirs anymore. The child, in effect, belonged now to someone else, someone who, not uncommonly, despised and disparaged them.... No longer did they have the right to share in the joys and struggles of

child rearing.... Overwhelmingly, it was these disempowered, embittered, despairing fathers who were the ones who discontinued contact with and support of their children. (p. 158)

In this situation, avoiding the pain through non-contact is easier than continuing a complicated and difficult relationship.

Summary

Economic-deprivation theory suggests that the lower levels of academic achievement among children in single-parent families is due to the lack of economic resources they often experience (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Lower income usually means decreased access to private lessons, educational toys and books, and computers (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Father-absence theory suggests that it is not income that accounts for the differences in achievement, but that fathers have an important role in the lives of their children. According to this theory, fathers bring with them an ability to motivate, discipline, and control their children (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988).

Based on the two different views presented by these theories, the present study examines the link between family structure and children's academic achievement.

Accordingly, this study investigates why family structure and academic achievement may be related by examining the role of income and parental control in children's academic achievement.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, studies of the effects of living in a single-parent family will be examined. The focus will be on research that utilized the economic-deprivation and father-absence theories as explanatory frameworks.

Although many studies have examined the effects living in a single-parent family has on children, only a handful have addressed the academic achievement of these children (Dawson, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; Milne et al., 1986; Smith, 1990; Thomson et al., 1994). Moreover, the outcomes examined in these studies have been widely varied, investigating everything from delinquency to sexual behavior to long-term effects on well-being manifested in adulthood (Amato & Keith, 1991; Keith & Finlay, 1988; McCord et al., 1962; Smith, 1990). Though the focus of the present study is on the academic achievement of children from single-parent families, these other topics of investigation are important because they often affect, either directly or indirectly, the academic performance of children (Amato & Keith, 1991; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

McLanahan (1985) points out that the literature on family structure and academic performance is driven by two perspectives: research on adult well-being and attainment and studies of achievement in children and adolescents. The former will be discussed first, since the outcomes of academic achievement are as important to discuss as are the factors that help or hinder a child's academic achievement.

Adult Well-Being and Attainment

Research on adult well-being and attainment has examined the long-term effects of being raised in a single-parent family. Spruijt (1995) used data from a national panel study conducted in the Netherlands that tracked the developments in the life course of young people during the 1990s. The study revealed that children from single-parent families are the first to leave home, in comparison to children from stepfamilies, instable intact families, and stable intact families. They are also the youngest to move in together with a partner. These same children scored lowest on measures of well-being, indicators of which were physical health, psychological health, and suicidal thoughts. Children from stable intact families scored highest. Since being preoccupied with physical or psychological illness takes time and energy away from

academic endeavors, all of these can have impacts on the academic performance of children. Though Spruijt (1995) points out that no one single theoretical explanation is adequate, he does state that the economic-deprivation and father-absence theories are two of the most supported explanations.

McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) examined the long-term effects of single-parent families and found that women who spent part of their youth in single-parent families are more likely to marry and bear children early, to give birth before marriage, and to experience separation and divorce themselves. Of specific concern to the present study is the likelihood of marrying and having children early, which is certainly a factor in one's educational attainment (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). For example, using data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth in which interviews of 7,969 respondents were conducted, McLanahan and Bumpass (1988) found support for the socialization theory which contends that parental role-modeling and supervision are crucial to the formation of children's life chances and expectations.

Keith and Finlay (1988) used data from the National Opinion Research Corporation's General Social Surveys to

examine the educational attainment of children from single-parent families, stepfamilies, and intact families. They hypothesized, using economic-deprivation theory, that children from mother-only families would encounter more financial barriers to educational attainment than would children from intact families, with children from stepfamilies falling somewhere in between. They found that for white respondents, parental divorce is associated with lower educational attainment and earlier age at marriage for both males and females. These findings were in support of their hypothesis.

Amato and Keith (1991) carried on the examination of divorce effects by conducting a meta-analysis of studies dealing with the effects of parental divorce on adult well-being. The purpose of their study was to uncover the impact of parental divorce on a number of variables, including educational attainment, across all existing research. Their analysis included 37 studies involving over 81,000 individuals, only a few of which were specifically related to academic achievement. They found that divorce and single-parenthood have significant negative effects on the well-being of the child in adulthood, but that these effects vary by gender and race. Specifically, they found

that the educational attainment of females was more likely to be negatively influenced by parental divorce than that of males. They also found that the educational attainment of whites was more significantly affected by parental divorce than the educational attainment of blacks.

In summary, prior research has found that the experience of divorce in childhood can have significant ramifications on adults' well-being. Some of these outcomes are decreased educational attainment, early marriage and childbearing, and poorer psychological health.

Achievement of Children and Adolescents

Previous research has also focused on the more short-term impacts of divorce, such as the increased likelihood of children from broken homes to engage in delinquent behavior or to succumb to anti-social peer pressure (McCord et al., 1962; Steinberg, 1987). Both of these behaviors can have a negative impact on children's academic performance. It is important to note, however, that some research does not confirm the broken home/delinquency link (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

In the 1962 study by McCord and colleagues, 255 boys aged 10 to 15 were observed along with their families at home over a period of five years. The focus of the study

was on the effects of paternal absence for these boys; thus, they were testing the father-absence theory. The findings discredited this theory because gang delinquency was shown to be unrelated to father absence. They concluded that the relationship between criminality and father absence resulted from characteristics of broken homes such as general instability, rather than from father absence itself. However, in failing to control for socioeconomic status, and by drawing a sample from a lower-class, deprived environment, the findings are difficult to generalize to other populations.

Consistent with McCord and colleagues' (1962) focus on deviance, Steinberg (1987) set out to investigate the hypothesis that children from homes with both biological parents have lower rates of delinquency than do children from broken homes. His reasoning behind this is that children from single-parent families are more susceptible to peer pressure. If young people are more likely to engage in deviant behavior, logic dictates that they are also more likely to do poorly in school. A questionnaire was administered to adolescents, with special attention paid to measures of family decision making and susceptibility to peer pressure.

As Steinberg predicted, children from intact homes were less susceptible to peer pressure than were children from broken homes. This finding that family structure has effects on a child's well-being supports both the economic-deprivation and father-absence explanations guiding the present study.

Furstenberg and colleagues (1987) addressed the father-absence theory in a more direct manner using data from the National Survey of Children, a nationally-representative panel study of American children. They set out to assess various measures of children's well-being including delinquency, problem behavior, and academic difficulty. The data collected in 1981 consisted of interviews of 227 children aged 11-16 who had experienced their parents' divorce, lived with their mother, and whose fathers were still living.

Their study examined whether noncustodial father participation in a child's life improves the child's well-being. In light of the current belief in the importance of a father's participation, they were surprised to find that paternal participation was of little consequence. Only in terms of problem behavior did paternal participation show any effect. In other words, the greater the father's

participation, the less problem behavior exhibited by the child. Furstenberg et al. (1987) acknowledge, however, that the low level of father involvement in the sample resulted in not enough cases in the high-participation category to achieve statistically significant findings. There simply were not enough fathers who were highly involved in their children's lives to produce meaningful results.

While a wide array of well-being indicators have been examined, several researchers have narrowed their focus of study to the cognitive development and academic achievement of children from one-parent homes (Hetherington et al., 1983; Shinn, 1978). Shinn (1978) and Hetherington et al. (1983) found that children from two-parent families have higher measured mental aptitude, academic achievement, and school grades than children from single-parent homes. Shinn's (1978) study supported her hypothesis that children's interaction with their parents nurtures cognitive growth and that a lessening of parent-child interaction hampers it. Thus, she found father absence to be a valid explanation for the lower performance of children from single-parent families.

In what is perhaps the largest study of academic achievement differences between children from intact two-

parent families and single-parent families, Milne et al. (1986) presented dramatic findings. The study, which used two nationally representative data sets of students from two age groups, showed that both black and white elementary school students from one-parent families had lower reading and mathematics scores than their two-parent family counterparts. In addition, they found that the results were in the same direction for high school students, but were statistically significant for white students' mathematics scores only. Milne et al. (1986) explained this difference by the diminished impact of divorce over time. Since divorce has become more common in the last 30 to 40 years, the effects of divorce on children may be less than they once were (Amato & Keith, 1991). However, when controls for socioeconomic differences between the families were included, the gap in the scores was significantly reduced. Since socioeconomic status was found to explain much of the relationship between family structure and academic achievement, the economic-deprivation hypothesis seems particularly plausible.

Dawson (1991) expanded upon this notion in her study of data from a nationally representative sample of 17,110 children age 18 and younger. The data were collected as

part of the National Health Interview Survey, a continuing study of American households. She found that children living with single-mothers were more likely to have repeated a grade in school, been expelled, and have a higher incidence of behavioral problems than children from biologically intact families or even those in stepfamilies. She concluded that the problems associated with divorce and remarriage tend to wane over time, whereas the problems facing children of single-mothers due to task overload are more constant. All parents are confronted by an enormous amount of tasks, but the difference lies in the fact that remarried parents have their spouse's help and support in completing these tasks, while single mothers do not. This, too, is consistent with the economic-deprivation hypothesis since single-mothers are more likely to have to work outside of the home than married mothers, thereby causing children to take on a number of household tasks.

The results of McLanahan's 1985 study were similar to Dawson's findings. Using longitudinal data taken from the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics, McLanahan demonstrated that children from mother-headed families are more likely to drop out of high school, to be unemployed, and to live in poverty in adulthood than those from intact

families. Furthermore, the data showed that these problems would be ameliorated if the incomes of single-parent families were increased which would allow these children to complete high school. This lends further support for the economic-deprivation hypothesis.

Smith (1990) expanded the previous studies' investigations of academic achievement to include the effects of parental separation on academic self-concept. The data for this study were obtained in 1986 and included 1,682 students in seventh and ninth grades in 14 public schools in the racially- and economically-mixed Columbia, South Carolina area. After controlling for variables such as race, parental occupation, and parental education, Smith (1990) found that the time of separation before the divorce was a key factor in determining how affected a child would be.

The results from Smith's 1990 study showed that the academic self-concepts of adolescents in mother-only families are lower if the father left after the child began third grade. However, in mother-only families where the father left earlier, there are fewer differences between these children and those from two-parent homes. Smith (1990) concluded that the negative effects on children's

well-being are caused by marital conflict prior to separation or from the stress caused by the separation, not from the separation per se.

The interrelated nature of the hypotheses seems clear: the economic-deprivation hypothesis suggests that without a father in the household, the necessity that mothers work outside the home often means less supervision (McLanahan, 1985). Correspondingly, the father-absence hypothesis states that this lack of supervision reduces parental authority and control. Despite this theoretical relationship, little research has been conducted to integrate the two explanations (Thomson et al., 1994). Thomson and colleagues (1994) sought to bridge this gap by posing the following research questions:

(1) To what extent do economic resources account for differences between family types in children's well-being; (2) to what extent do parental behaviors account for such differences; and (3) what is the relationship between economic resources and parental behaviors, i.e., are differences in parenting due to differences in family economic circumstances, and do they mediate adverse effects of economic strain?
(p. 222)

Using data obtained from 13,017 randomly selected respondents from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households, Thomson and colleagues found that economic strain of single-mother families is responsible for much of

the detrimental academic effects on children. They also found that parental behaviors, such as parental support and control, did not mediate income effects. Thus, the study gives support to the economic-deprivation hypothesis.

However, one interesting finding from their study is that there is no significant difference in the academic achievement between mother-stepfather families and original two-parent families. In addition, children in both fare better academically than children in mother-only families (Thomson et al., 1994). Regardless of whether the male role model is the original father or the stepfather, the presence of a father-figure seems to be the important factor. This lends tacit support to both the father-absence and economic-deprivation hypotheses.

In contrast to the numerous quantitative studies on children from single-parent families, few qualitative studies have been conducted and even fewer have employed a longitudinal design. One study that was both qualitative and longitudinal is Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1989) study of 60 divorced families. The purpose of the research was to examine the long-term divorce process and the perceptions and experiences of divorced families. Both

parents and children were interviewed, but the main focus was on the children.

This panel study, begun in 1971, involved interviewing each family member within 6 weeks after the parents' physical separation. The respondents were then re-interviewed at 18 months, 5 years, and 10 years. At the time of publication, the researchers were in the process of conducting the 15-year assessments.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found that the gender of the child and his or her age at the time of parental divorce strongly influences the child's immediate reaction as well as how he/she adjusts over the subsequent decade. Specifically, the younger the child at the time of the divorce, the better-adjusted he or she eventually became. In terms of gender, males were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems in the short term. However, in their 10- and 15-year follow-ups, they found that females exhibited a "sleeper effect." This refers to how females seem to cope better with their parents' divorce in the short term, but the trauma they endured during the divorce emerges later in life in the form of preoccupation with betrayal in their own relationships.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1989) findings painted a bleak picture of the life-chances for children of divorce. They concluded that the psychological condition of children was dependent upon the quality of life in the family after the divorce. In other words, if at least one of the parents was able to rise above the divorce and continue parenting effectively, then the children had a better chance to succeed. However, if the parents (especially the custodial parent) became mired in the emotional baggage of the divorce, then the children's chances were poor at best.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1989) findings did not go unquestioned. Due to its small, unrepresentative sample, generalizations cannot be made. Furthermore, their lack of a control group raised questions regarding what actually caused the children's problems. Critics ask if the dysfunctions shown were caused by divorce, or if they were typical problems of the average teenager. Without the intact family as a comparison group, this is difficult to determine.

Summary

A consistent theme in the previous literature is largely in agreement with the notion that living in a single-parent family is not the ideal circumstance in which

to raise a child. A number of background variables were shown to be important. Variables previously discussed include the child's age, sex, and race, parental educational attainment, and socioeconomic status (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; Milne et al., 1986; Shinn, 1978; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Moreover, prior studies have advanced two primary theories about why children are adversely affected by living in a single-parent family.

Economic-deprivation theory states that it is the lack of financial resources that cause difficulties for the single-parent family. Poor mothers often live in poor neighborhoods, which means that their children will go to poor schools. These schools often have funding deficiencies that preclude the purchase of effective, but expensive learning aids such as computers.

The father-absence hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that families with no father present suffer from a lack of parental authority and role-modeling which, in turn, lowers a child's motivation for achievement and increases his or her chances of exhibiting behavioral problems, especially at school. The present study operates

within the framework of these two theories to test which is more plausible.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT RESEARCH

A study of the effects family structure has on children's academic achievement is important for two primary reasons. First, the father-absence hypothesis has been widely discussed in the prior literature (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; McLanahan, 1985; Smith, 1990;). However, few of these studies have included father-only families in the comparison of how family structure influences children's outcomes (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; McLanahan, 1985; Smith, 1990). The explanation for this omission has often been that since few fathers are awarded custody in divorce cases, the small number of that type of family form has precluded conducting statistical analyses (Smith, 1990).

This explanation notwithstanding, the findings of these studies can only provide tacit support for the father-absence hypothesis. It is difficult to assess whether the effects on children are due to the lack of a father-figure or to living with one parent instead of two (McLanahan, 1985). For these reasons, the father-absence hypothesis has rarely been measured empirically (McLanahan, 1985).

Thus, two basic questions arise from previous research:

1. Is it the loss of the father's income that causes the detrimental effects on children's academic achievement?

2. Is there something unique about having a father in the home in terms of discipline and role-modeling that influences a child's academic achievement?

For example, father-absence almost necessarily means a lower family income. Therefore, is it the absence of the father, or the loss of his income that is of primary importance? Without the father-only group for comparison, it is difficult to know which answer is more accurate.

The NSFH sample is so expansive that the family type not extensively examined thus far--father-only families--will be large enough to facilitate statistical analysis. The best way to verify the father-absence hypothesis is by including father-headed single-parent families so that direct comparisons may be made. The present study seeks build on this area previously neglected by research.

The second indication of the study's significance is that it intends to clarify the relationship between family structure and children's academic achievement. It is hypothesized that single-parent family status has

detrimental effects on children's academic achievement. Previous research has failed to conclusively explain why the detrimental effects on children's academic achievement occur. For this reason, the present study will utilize data which addresses the question posed by the economic-deprivation and father-absence theories; is it a lack of economic resources or the absence of parental authority that effects lower academic achievement?

If it can be shown that increasing a family's socioeconomic status can ameliorate these effects, this study will have important policy implications in terms of child support laws. In addition, if it is shown that children in father-only families fare better than children in mother-only families, this study may prompt a re-examination of current family law, custody arrangements, and visitation requirements.

If parental control is found to have significant effects, parents might find greater understanding in how to help their children succeed academically. This might encourage parents to learn more effective control techniques.

Hypotheses

The present research examines not only whether, but also how family structure affects children's academic achievement. Two theories are guiding this investigation. The father-absence theory predicts that children in single-parent families, most often headed by women, are inadequately socialized and/or disciplined; thus, they are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems at school and be less yielding to social control. The economic-deprivation theory is an extension of this since it operates under the assumption that father-absence often leads to a loss of financial resources. This theory states that it is not living in a single-parent family per se, but the almost certain loss of resources that results from father-absence that leads to lower academic performance.

It is expected that the data will show that growing up in a single-parent family has significant effects on the academic achievement of children. Specifically, the main hypothesis guiding the present study is:

- H₁: Children in intact families are more likely to do better academically than children in one-parent families.

Furthermore, it is hypothesized that:

- H₂: Children from father-headed single-parent families are more likely to do better academically than do children from mother-only families.
- H₃: Intact families will be more likely to have higher incomes than single-parent families.
- H₄: Father-only families will be more likely to have higher incomes than mother-only families.
- H₅: Intact families will be more likely to exhibit higher levels of parental control than single-parent families.
- H₆: Father-only families will be more likely to exhibit higher levels of parental control than mother-only families.

The focus of this study is to investigate whether data collected from a nationally representative sample of Americans lend initial support to these hypotheses. The next step in the analysis is to discover whether these relationships hold when controlling for a number of demographic and theoretical variables that have been shown in prior research to be related to the academic achievement of children. The following sections explain how this study attempts to test these six hypotheses.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present study utilizes data from the NSFH, which was funded by a grant (HD21009) from the Center for Population Research of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The survey was designed and carried out at the Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the direction of Larry Bumpass and James Sweet. The field work was done by the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988).

This is an explanatory study using secondary analysis to determine whether, and why, children from single-parent families fare worse academically than children from intact families. Although it limits a researcher to the original measures in the survey, secondary analysis will be used for a number of reasons. First, secondary research is faster and less expensive than doing original surveys, and one may benefit greatly from the work of highly-regarded professionals (Babbie, 1995). Second, the data is often obtained from a random national sample of 2,000 or more respondents. Therefore, its representativeness allows for

generalizations to be made from a sample to the larger population (Babbie, 1995).

Another benefit to using this data set is that survey research is usually strong on reliability because of its use of standardized questions (Babbie, 1995). The efforts made by the survey designers to construct a reliable instrument benefit future researchers who wish to work with the data.

Sample

The NSFH, conducted in 1987-88, is a national probability sample survey that encompasses a wide variety of issues in American family life (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). It involved interviews with 13,017 respondents, including a main cross-section sample of 9,643 persons who represent the non-institutional United States population age 19 and older. In addition, the survey involved an oversample of minorities and single-parent households, stepfamilies, recently married couples, and cohabiting couples. In each household, a randomly selected adult was interviewed, and a shorter, self-administered questionnaire was administered to the spouse or cohabiting partner of the primary respondent. Interviews lasted about 100 minutes on the average, but interview length varied with the complexity of

the respondent's family history. The following topics were covered: detailed household composition, family background, adult family transitions, couple interactions, parent-child interactions, education and work, economic and psychological well-being, and family attitudes (Sweet et al., 1988).

In 1992, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development began support for a 5-year follow-up of the original 13,017 NSFH respondents and key members of their households. The follow-up expanded researchers' ability to examine the individual implications of family events and facilitated research on the causes and consequences of changes in family structure. The second wave also included a short telephone interview with "focal children" who were aged 10-17. Topics addressed in these interviews included quality of the parent-child relationship, average grades, parental supervision, and peer relationships (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996). Although longitudinal analysis using the two waves would be informative, the present study used the Wave 2 data collected in 1992-1994. Wave 2 data were chosen for two primary reasons. First, the focus of the present study is on the effects of family structure on children's academic

achievement. Therefore, reports from the children themselves are important to ascertain these effects. This would not be possible using Wave 1 data, since the focal child was not interviewed in the first wave.

Second, the influence of divorce and single parenthood may depend in part on how prevalent these family structures are (Dawson, 1991). In other words, as divorce and single parenthood become more common and accepted, their effects may be diminished. Therefore, the most recent data are best for finding the contemporary effects of family structure (Dawson, 1991).

In the first wave of the NSFH, respondents who had any children under the age of 18 living in their household were asked a series of questions about one of these children--the focal child. This same focal child was the child that was interviewed by telephone in Wave 2. A total of 1,415 children were interviewed, but the sample for the present study was limited to families in which the focal child was between age 9 and 18. Also excluded from the present analysis were custodial mothers who had been divorced and then remarried. Custodial fathers who had been divorced more than twice were excluded as well. The objective of this is to avoid the possible confounding effects of

experiencing multiple family disruptions. The total sample size for the present research is 1056.

Variables

Variables were chosen on the basis of theory and prior research. Some variables were taken from the focal child interview; others were taken from the parent interview. These files were merged to facilitate analysis.

The main independent variable, family structure, is comprised of three categories: intact families, mother-only families, and father-only families. Intact families are those in which both biological parents of the focal child have been continuously married. The mother-only families are those families in which the focal child resides with the mother, who is single. Father-only families are those in which the focal child's father has primary custody. In this father-only group, remarried fathers were included for two reasons. First, despite the fact that single-father families seem to be more common now than in the past, this family structure is far from widespread (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). Thus, fathers who have custody of their children and who are remarried were included in order to increase the sample size to facilitate analysis. Since research on the father-only family is in its beginning

stages, any investigation into its effects is an improvement on what is currently available. Second, research has shown that children living in stepfamilies are at equal risk for truancy and school discipline problems as are their peers living in single-parent families (Steinberg, 1987). Thus, it is conceivable to conclude that the presence of a stepmother in the home might not be very effective in terms of parental control. The benefits of including cases in which the father is remarried outweigh any possible confounding effects.

For purposes of analysis, dummy variables of family structure were constructed. The mother-only variable compares mother-only families (coded as one) to intact families (coded as zero). The father-only variable compares father-only families (coded as one) to intact families (coded as zero). The single-parent family variable compares father-only families (coded as one) to mother-only families (coded as zero).

The importance of economic well-being to academic achievement has been demonstrated by prior research (McLanahan, 1985; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). In this study, the information regarding income was obtained from the primary respondent--the single parent or randomly

selected female or male parent in married families (Thomson et al., 1994). However, to deal with discrepant income reports of husbands and wives, income "best measures" were produced by systematically applying a series of "decision rules." For example, if the respondent gave an interval measure of income, and the spouse gave a dollar value, the spouse's dollar value report was chosen. It was from this "best measures" file that the income data were taken. To adjust for the skewed income variable, the natural logarithm of household income was used.

The father-absence hypothesis states that without a father in the household, the necessity that mothers work outside the home often means less supervision of children (McLanahan, 1985). The study measured parental control using items asked of the focal child with a scale comprised of the following: "How much (do/does) (he/she/they) know about who you spend time with away from home?"; "How much (do/does) (he/she/they) know about what you do with your free time?" Responses ranged from nothing at all (1) to everything (5). These items factored together, with factor loadings of .68 and .73, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .60.

Similarly to Thomson et al. (1994) parent's level of education is measured in years completed as reported by the primary respondent (high school graduates=12, college graduates = 16, etc.). A number of other background variables are included. Since family structure has been shown to have differential effects on the academic lives of young children and older children, males and females, and whites and nonwhites, age of the focal child, gender, and race are included in the analysis and are treated as control variables (Amato & Keith, 1991; Rosen & Aneshensel, 1978; Smith, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Age and gender information was taken from the focal child, but no item regarding race was asked of the children. Therefore, race of the parent was used as a proxy measure of the race of the child. Although this is a weak measure of the child's race, it is one consequence of doing secondary data analysis; future researchers are limited to data obtained from the original instrument (Babbie, 1995).

The dependent variable used in the analysis is academic achievement. Academic achievement is measured by two separate items. First, achievement is indicated by the focal child's self-reported grade average. Second, whether or not the focal child reported that he or she had skipped

school in the past year was included as a second measure of achievement.

Analysis Procedures

The analyses in the present study examined the relationships among family structure and academic achievement, and how income and parental control might be involved in those relationships. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a descriptive analysis of all variables in the study was conducted. Means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores are provided in Table 1. Bivariate analysis was facilitated by conducting zero-order correlations, in which the strength and direction of preliminary associations among two variables could be seen (Tables 2, 3, 4).

Since the present research includes several variables which have been shown to influence academic achievement, multivariate analysis was essential. As the first step in the regression analysis, academic achievement was regressed on the independent variables using Ordinary Least Squares Regression (OLS; Table 5). Each dummy variable was included in a separate run to mirror the comparisons of the correlations. The dichotomous measure of skipping school was then analyzed using logistic regression (Table 6).

Finally, analyses of interaction effects of parental control, income, and family structure on academic achievement were conducted to assess whether these variables have combined effects in addition to individual effects.

Unlike the bivariate analyses, which assess preliminary associations without controlling for the other variables, the regression techniques employed in the present research help to determine whether these associations will hold when the other variables are controlled in the analyses. Regression also allows one to make predictions on the basis of the strength of the associations.

Descriptive Statistics

As indicated in Table 1, of the 1056 cases in the sample, 665 are intact families (63%), 313 are mother-only families (30%), and 78 are father-only families (7%). Using the natural logarithm, the mean income (\ln) is 9.89, with a range from -4.6 to 12.95. On a scale of 2 to 10, the mean score for parental control is 7.56.

The mean level of parental education is 12.2 years. Seventy-three percent of the children are Caucasian, while 27% are minority. The collapsing of all minority groups

Table 1

Distributions of Variables (N = 1056)

Variables		N	%	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range
<u>Independent</u>						
Mother-only ^a	0=Intact	665	68.0			
	1=Mother	313	32.0			
Father-only ^a	0=Intact	665	89.5			
	1=Father	78	10.5			
Single-parent ^a	0=Mother	313	80.1			
	1=Father	78	19.9			
Income (ln) ^b				9.89	2.22	Low=-4.61; High=12.95
Parental Control				7.56	1.74	Low=2; High=10
<u>Controls</u>						
Parental Education				12.2	3.08	Low=0; High=20
Parental Race	Other	281	26.6			
	White	775	73.4			
Child's Gender	Male	529	50.1			
	Female	527	49.9			
Child's Age				13.9	2.15	Low=9; High=18
<u>Dependent</u>						
Academic achievement						
Grades				5.94	1.57	Low=1; High=8
Skip	No	856	81.1			
	Yes	200	18.9			

Note. a. Dummy variable.

b. Natural logarithm of household income.

into one category, though not usually recommended, was done to simplify analysis and also because race is not an issue of primary importance to this study. In terms of gender, the sample consists of 50% male and 50% female focal children. The mean age of the sample is 14 years. Appendix A details the means for income, parental control, grades, and skipping school across family types.

Zero-Order Correlations

Based on theory and prior research, the main hypothesis of the present study posits that family structure influences a child's academic achievement. Specifically, it is hypothesized that children from single-parent families will be more likely to exhibit lower levels of academic achievement than will their intact-family counterparts. In order to examine this hypothesis, five secondary hypotheses have been created. Zero-order correlations are used to assess the bivariate relationships among the variables. Correlation analysis also helps to determine the validity of the secondary hypotheses.

According to theory and prior research, it is believed that children from father-only families will likely have fewer problems in academics than will children of mother-only families. Furthermore, income and parental control are

expected to be significantly related to both family structure and academic achievement, with mother-only families having the lowest levels of both. Six zero-order correlations matrices were run—three including one dummy variable comparison each (Tables 2, 3, 4), and three selecting out by family type (Appendices B, C, D).

Bivariate analysis via zero-order correlations of each dummy variable indicates that family structure influences academic achievement (H_1), in terms of grades and skipping school. Results from the comparison of mother-only and intact families (Table 2) indicate that children in intact families are more likely to have higher grades than children in mother-only families ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$). The comparison of father-only families to intact families shows similar results (Table 3). Children from intact families are more likely to have higher grades than children from father-only families ($r = -.08$, $p < .05$). Children from mother-only families as shown in Table 2 ($r = .11$, $p < .01$) and father-only families as shown in Table 3 ($r = .07$, $p < .05$) are more likely to skip school than children in intact families.

H: Children in father-only families are more likely to do better academically than children in mother-only families.

Table 2

Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables Comparing Mother-Only Families and Intact Families (N = 978)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Mother-Only	1.00				
(2) Income	-.05	1.00			
(3) Parental Control	-.03	-.05	1.00		
(4) Parent's Education	-.03	.18**	-.06	1.00	
(5) Parent's Race	.05	-.02	-.06	.00	1.00
(6) Child's Gender	.02	.03	.12**	.03	-.04
(7) Child's Age	.00	.00	-.00	.00	.01
(8) Grades	-.14**	-.01	.21**	-.03	.01
(9) Skip	.11**	-.01	-.22**	-.03	.03

(table continues)

Variable	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Mother-Only				
(2) Income				
(3) Parental Control				
(4) Parent's Education				
(5) Parent's Race				
(6) Child's Gender	1.00			
(7) Child's Age	-.00	1.00		
(8) Grades	.18**	-.04	1.00	
(9) Skip	-.03	.03	-.26**	1.00

Note. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Inconsistent with theory and expectations, Table 4 shows no statistically significant differences between mother- and father-only families. Thus, evidence suggests that children in father-only families are neither more nor less likely to do better in school compared to mother-only families.

Table 3

Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables Between Father-Only Families and Intact Families (N = 743)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Father-Only	1.00				
(2) Income	.02	1.00			
(3) Parental Control	-.09*	-.09*	1.00		
(4) Parent's Education	.05	.19**	-.04	1.00	
(5) Parent's Race	-.00	-.03	-.06	-.01	1.00
(6) Child's Gender	-.06	.02	.12**	.03	-.07
(7) Child's Age	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01
(8) Grades	-.08*	.01	.22**	.04	.01
(9) Skip	.07*	.02	-.24**	.01	.02

(table continues)

Variable	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Father-Only				
(2) Income				
(3) Parental Control				
(4) Parent's Education				
(5) Parent's Race				
(6) Child's Gender	1.00			
(7) Child's Age	-.03	1.00		
(8) Grades	.17**	-.01	1.00	
(9) Skip	-.09*	-.00	-.26**	1.00

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

H₃: Intact families are more likely to have higher incomes than single-parent families.

H₄: Father-only families are more likely to have higher incomes than mother-only families.

Inconsistent with theory, prior research, and expectations, results fail to indicate a statistically significant relationship between family structure and income. No family type was shown to be more or less likely

than the others to have higher incomes. However, one must be alert to the fact that the income variable is skewed and, therefore, claims to its validity must be made cautiously.

Table 4

Zero-Order Correlation Among Variables Between Father-Only Families and Mother-Only Families (N = 391)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Single-Parent	1.00				
(2) Income	.06	1.00			
(3) Parental Control	-.07	.01	1.00		
(4) Parent's Education	.09	.23**	-.02	1.00	
(5) Parent's Race	-.05	-.01	-.04	.04	1.00
(6) Child's Gender	-.10*	.04	.15**	.01	-.01
(7) Child's Age	-.00	.00	.02	.06	.01
(8) Grades	.03	-.05	.22**	-.07	.10*
(9) Skip	-.00	.03	-.16**	.04	-.05

(table continues)

Variable	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Single-Parent				
(2) Income				
(3) Parental Control				
(4) Parent's Education				
(5) Parent's Race				
(6) Child's Gender	1.00			
(7) Child's Age	-.02	1.00		
(8) Grades	.18**	-.05	1.00	
(9) Skip	.03	.10	-.25**	1.00

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

H₃: Intact families are more likely to exhibit higher levels of parental control than single-parent families.

In terms of the father-absence theory, in which parental control seems to be a significant factor, only in the comparison of intact families with father-only families (Table 3) is there a significant relationship with parental control ($r = -.09$, $p < .05$). Thus, parents in intact

families are more likely to exert higher levels of parental control than are single-fathers.

H₆: Father-only families will be more likely to exhibit higher levels of parental control than mother-only families.

No initial support for the father-absence theory was provided in regard to single-parent families. The comparison of the single-parent families (Table 4) shows that father-only families (some of which included step-mothers) were neither more nor less likely than mother-only families to exhibit parental control.

However, even though there appears to be no statistically significant difference between intact and mother-only families, or between mother- and father-only families, parental control is associated with grades in each of the three correlation runs selecting out by family type (Appendices B, C, D): intact ($r = .21, p < .01$), mother-only ($r = .21, p < .01$), and father-only ($r = .27, p < .05$). Parental control is also significantly associated with skipping school among intact families ($r = -.25, p < .01$) and mother-only families ($r = -.16, p < .01$). Thus, although it appears that children from intact families experience more parental control, this control is

associated with academic achievement across family structures.

Controls

Of the control variables in the model, gender was the only one that was consistently and significantly related to parental control and grades. Results of the family type selective correlations support the findings of prior research that gender is associated with parental control and supervision. Girls are more likely to experience higher levels of parental control in intact families ($r = .11$, $p < .01$), and in mother-only families ($r = .14$, $p < .05$).

In addition, in all but the father-only correlation, it was shown that females are more likely to get higher grades than males. Females from intact families ($r = .17$, $p < .01$) and mother-only families ($r = .20$, $p < .01$) are likely to get higher grades than their male counterparts. In terms of gender and the likelihood of skipping school, females in intact families are significantly less likely to skip school than males ($r = -.08$, $p < .05$).

Summary

Overall, the results from the zero-order correlations indicate that family structure is significantly associated with academic achievement both in terms of grades and

skipping school. Therefore, on the basis of the bivariate comparisons, the main hypothesis (H_1) seems to have initial support. However, significant differences in achievement between family types are only found when comparing intact with single-parent families. No such differences are found when comparing mother-only families to father-only families. Thus, the correlations provide little support for the hypothesis that children from father-only families do better academically than children in mother-only families (H_2).

In examining the main theories guiding this study—economic-deprivation and father-absence—the lack of many significant relationships between academic achievement and income seems to provide very little support for the economic-deprivation theory (H_3 , H_4). Parental control, on the other hand, is consistently and significantly associated with academic achievement. The more parental control exerted by the parents, the higher the child's grades, and the less likely the child is to skip school. However, levels of parental control are significantly different only between intact and father-only families. Thus, partial support is given to H_5 , but the lack of

differences between mother- and father-only families indicates a lack of support for H_6 .

Regression Results

Ordinary Least Squares Regression was used to determine whether the initial associations would hold when controlling for the effects of multiple variables at one time. The results are discussed in the next section.

Ordinary Least Squares Regression—Additive Models

The results of the Ordinary Least Squares regression for academic achievement in terms of grades are presented in Table 5. As indicated in the first column, the model in which intact and mother-only families are compared accounts for 9% ($p < .01$) of the explained variance in grades. Column 2 shows that the model including intact and father-only families accounts for 7% ($p < .01$) of the variance in grades, and the model Column 3 which includes results among single-parent families accounts for 8% ($p < .01$) of the dependent variable.

H1: Children in intact families are more likely to do better academically than children in one-parent families.

Consistent with theory and prior research, family structure in the case of mother-only families has a significant negative effect on grades. Children in

Table 5

Grades Regressed on Independent Variables^a

Variables	Intact vs. Mother-Only (1)	Intact vs. Father-Only (2)	Mother-Only vs. Father-Only (3)
Mother-Only ^b	-.48*** (.10)		
	-.14		
Father-Only ^b		-.25 (.18)	
		-.05	
Single-Parent ^b			.30 (.20)
			.07
Income	.00 (.02)	.02 (.03)	-.03 (.03)
	-.00	.02	-.04
Parental Control	.17** (.03)	.19** (.03)	.18** (.04)
	.19	.21	.21
CONTROLS			
Parent's Education	-.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.02)
	-.03	.04	-.12
Parent's Race	.11 (.11)	.11 (.12)	.44** (.19)
	.03	.03	.12
Child's Sex	.51** (.10)	.43** (.11)	.52** (.16)
	.16	.14	.16
Child's Age	-.02 (.02)	-.00 (.03)	-.04 (.04)
	-.04	-.01	-.05
$R^2 =$.09**	.07**	.08**
$N =$	978	743	391

Note. a. Tests failed to produce statistically significant interactions between family type and independent variables.

b. Dummy variable.

c. Unstandardized Beta, Standard Error (), Standardized Beta.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

mother-only families are more likely to get significantly lower grades than children in intact families (Beta = $-.14$, $p < .01$). Column 2 shows that there is no corresponding statistically significant effect of growing up in a father-only family on grades. The results indicate that children in father-only families do not have significantly different levels of achievement in terms of grades than children in intact families. Thus, partial support is given to H_1 .

H_2 : Children from father-headed single-parent families are more likely to do better academically than do children from mother-only families.

Column 3 shows that inconsistent with theory and expectations, no statistically significant difference is found between the grades of children in mother-only families and those in father-only families. Thus, evidence is lacking to support the idea that children from father-only families are academically advantaged over children from mother-only families.

H_3 : Intact families will be more likely to have higher incomes than single-parent families.

H_4 : Father-only families will be more likely to have higher incomes than mother-only families.

Inconsistent with theory and prior research, and as was indicated in the zero-order correlation, income is not

shown to have a significant effect on children's grades, regardless of family structure. Consequently, evidence is lacking to support H_3 and H_4 .

H_5 : Intact families will be more likely to exhibit higher levels of parental control than single-parent families.

H_6 : Father only families will be more likely to exhibit higher levels of parental control than mother-only families.

As was indicated in the zero-order correlations (Tables 2, 3, 4), no significant relationships are shown between parental control and family structure. The results indicate that none of the family types have statistically significant effects on parental control. Thus, H_5 and H_6 are not supported.

Controls. The relationship between sex and grades found in the zero-order correlation holds when controlling for other factors. Each of the models indicates that sex is predictive of grades; girls are more likely to get higher grades than boys. Since the unstandardized beta allows for comparison across models, the coefficient of .52 ($p < .01$) in Column 3 shows that the child's sex has the strongest effect on grades of children from single-parent families. Also, a comparison of Column 1 with Column 2 (in which the number of intact families is held constant) indicates that

child's sex has a greater effect on grades in mother-only families (Unstandardized beta = .51, $p < .01$) compared to father-only families (Unstandardized beta = .43, $p < .01$).

Summary. The results of the OLS regression provides support for one of the present study's six hypotheses. Partial support is provided for the notion that children who grow up in intact families are more likely to get higher grades than children in single-parent families (H_1). Support is only partial because this is shown only in reference to mother-only families; grades of children in father-only families were not significantly lower than the grades of children in intact families.

The remaining hypotheses are not supported in the OLS regression. No significant difference is found between the grades of children in mother-only families and those in father-only families (H_2). Income is not shown to be significantly related to family structure (H_3, H_4). The lack of findings in regard to income does not provide support for the economic-deprivation theory. However, the skewness of the present study's measure of income limits how much can be said in regard to economic-deprivation theory.

Logistic Regression

In an effort to determine whether the use of a dichotomized variable symbolic of academic achievement has an effect on the findings, logistic regression was employed involving the variable of whether the focal child had skipped school in the last year. The results of the logistic regression can be found in Table 6. Whether the focal child had skipped school in the last year is measured with the responses of "yes" (coded as one) or "no" (coded as zero).

Relationships similar to those in the OLS regression are found. Support or partial support is given to the notion that children in intact families are more likely to do found better academically than children in one-parent families (H_1).

The comparisons made in Table 6 indicate that children in intact families experience more parental control and are, therefore, less likely to skip school than children in mother-only families (Beta = .53, $p < .01$). This gives partial support for H_1 and the father-absence theory.

As shown in columns 1, 2, and 3, the results also indicate that living with parents who exert more parental control decreases the likelihood of skipping school.

Table 6

Logistic Regression Results for Academic Achievement (Skip)*

Variables	Mother-Only vs. Intact (1)	Father-Only vs. Intact (2)	Father-Only vs. Mother-Only (3)
Mother-Only ^a	.53^{c**} (.17)		
Father-Only ^a		.42 (.43)	
Single-Parent ^a			-.09 (.30)
Income	-.00 (.04)	-.01 (.06)	.03 (.05)
Parental Control	-.31^{**} (.05)	-.35^{**} (.06)	-.21^{**} (.06)
CONTROLS			
Parent's Race	.08 (.20)	.04 (.23)	-.32 (.27)
Parent's Education	-.03 (.03)	.00 (.04)	.02 (.04)
Child's Gender	-.04 (.17)	-.34 (.21)	.23 (.24)
Child's Age	.04 (.04)	.05 (.05)	.11* (.05)
-2 log likelihood	881.19	921.90	419.38
N	978	743	391

Note. a. Tests failed to produce statistically significant interactions between family type and each independent variable.

b. Dummy variable. Reference category is father-only families.

c. Regression coefficients, standard error ().

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Thus, parents who make it a point to know how and with whom their children spend their free time, have a direct effect on, and increase the likelihood of their children having higher levels of academic achievement, in this case in terms of attending school regularly.

Interaction Effects

Because of possible interaction effects of parental control, income, and family structure on academic achievement, separate regressions were run to investigate these relationships. For example, since the effects of parental control on grades are slightly greater for single-parent families than for intact, and the effects are slightly greater for mother-only families than father-only families, there may be an interaction between parental control and family structure. Furthermore, it is possible that a variable may not have an effect by itself, but rather it may interact with another variable to produce a combined effect. Testing for interactions examines these possibilities.

In order to examine possible interaction effects, interaction terms were included in the analysis. These terms included the following: mother-only X income, father-only X income, single-parent X income, mother-only X

parental control, father-only X parental control, and single-parent X parental control.

OLS Regression. No interaction effects were found between family structure and income. In addition, since the regression coefficients for the interactions between family structure and parental control are not statistically significant, it suggests that the combination of these sets of variables is not predictive of grades. Because the estimated interaction terms failed to improve upon the explanatory ability of the individual additive models or yield statistically significant effects, the results are not provided in Table 5.

Logistic Regression. When using skipping school as the dependent variable in the logistic regression, an interaction effect between single-parent families and income was found. The positive coefficient indicates that children in father-only families with higher incomes were more likely to skip school than those in father-only families with lower incomes. It also indicates that they are more likely to skip school than children in mother-only families with either high or low incomes.

Since this interaction was significant only at the .05 level, further testing was conducted to see if the

interaction was a valid interaction. Using the mean and the standard deviation, income was broken down into 3 groups: high, middle, and low. Selecting out by income level, three logistic regression analyses were then done using skipping school as the dependent variable and the dummy variable for single-parent families as the only independent variable. Again, this was done to assess whether income and family structure interact to have effects on a child's likelihood of skipping school.

Upon this further testing, however, the interaction failed to hold. Consequently, this indicates that the interaction found in the logistic regression for single-parent families is likely an artifact of the data and not a genuine interaction effect.

Summary

Overall, the results of the analyses provide limited support for the hypothesis that children who grow up in a single-parent family exhibit lower levels of academic achievement than children in intact families. For instance, family structure (in the cases of intact and mother-only families) is correlated with both measures of academic achievement: positively among intact families, negatively among mother-only families (Table 2).

The analyses yielded mixed results regarding the hypotheses derived from the economic-deprivation and father-absence theories. As measured by the present study, income was shown to be an insignificant factor in children's academic achievement, regardless of family structure. The finding that parental control is a significant factor in academic achievement among intact, mother-only, and father-only families lends partial support to the father-absence hypothesis.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Summary

The results of the analyses lend weak support for the primary thesis of the present research, which posits that children from single-parent families have lower levels of academic achievement than do children from intact families. The OLS and logistic regressions indicated that this is true with regard to mother-only families, but that children in intact families do not do better academically than children in father-only families. Beyond this initial hypothesis, the purpose was to compare the plausibility of the two major theories guiding the study. First, the economic-deprivation hypothesis states that poverty, not merely family structure, is responsible for the lower achievement of children from single-parent families (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan, 1985). Second, the father-absence hypothesis posits that with the father out of the home, motivation for achievement, parental control, obedience, and supervision may be lacking (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1978; McLanahan, 1985).

Inconsistent with theory and expectations, children from father-only families did not do significantly better

academically than children in mother-only families. Thus, H_2 is not supported. In addition, this finding casts some doubt on the father-absence theory.

The relationships which were consistently supported in this study were that both parental control and child's gender (as a control variable) were predictors of academic achievement. Of primary concern is the finding that regardless of family structure, parental control has significant effects on a child's academic achievement. The greater the parental control, the higher the child's grades are likely to be and the lower his or her likelihood of skipping school.

Interpretation of Results

The economic-deprivation hypothesis (H_3 , H_4) indicated in this study by income, is not supported by the results of the zero-order correlations, or when other variables are controlled for in the regression analyses. This is inconsistent with theory and prior research. Studies have found that family income has been consistently linked with children's academic achievement (Dawson, 1991; McLanahan, 1985; Milne et al., 1986). According to McLanahan (1985), children in single-mother families have more academic problems than children in intact families because a low

family income means than the child may have to quit high school to help support the family.

The findings of the present study are not consistent with these earlier findings in regard to economic-deprivation. One explanation for this might be that the effects of divorce as a type of family disruption diminish over time as this is increasingly becoming an acceptable family form (Milne et al., 1986). Many of the studies done in the late 1980s and early 1990s may indicate greater effects of divorce than might actually exist now.

The evidence from this study relating to the father-absence explanation for lower academic achievement, primarily to its focus on lack of parental control, is supported in the correlations for all three family structures. When controlling for other variables in the regression analyses, this relationship held in each model.

Bear in mind that the correlations indicated that children from mother-only families exhibited significantly lower levels of achievement than children from intact families (H_1). This is consistent with Dawson's (1991) study in which she concluded that the economic hardships faced by mother-only households result in task overload which, in

turn, reduces the supervision necessary to keep a child on the right track, academically speaking.

The comparison of the parental control of mother-only families to father-only families failed to show any significant differences in children's academic achievement. Furthermore, the lack of significant findings in regard to income suggests that the economic hardships reported in Dawson's (1991) study are not necessarily the basis of the differences in achievement. Thus, these findings seem to support the father-absence theory.

Recall that in the correlations, mother-only families did not have significantly lower levels of parental control than intact families, whereas father-only families did (H_5 , H_6). This seems to be inconsistent with theory and expectations. If father-absence means less time for supervision and control on the part of the parent, then father-presence should mean that more control can be exerted (Thomson et al., 1994). One might expect that if fathers bring with them the unique ability to exert control over their children, then mother-only families would be expected to show the least degree of parental control. However, when fathers are in the home, perhaps overt control as indicated in this study by parents knowing how

and with whom children spend their free time, may not be necessary. It can be theorized that the type of control that fathers exert may be more implicit than that. Perhaps merely the child's awareness that the father is around is enough to ensure proper behavior.

Furthermore, the regressions that were run using parental control as the dependent variable indicated that family structure was not a predictor of parental control. In other words, no single family type was any more or less likely to have a higher level of parental control. Thus, the findings seem to provide limited support for father-absence as an explanation of children's academic achievement.

Previous research has shown that boys who experience divorce and, consequently, live in single-parent households often fare worse in the short-term than do girls (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The father-absence hypothesis would explain this by pointing out that if no father is in the home, children (especially sons) would be inadequately socialized (McLanahan, 1985; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The present research found initial support for this in the zero-order correlation which showed that girls are more likely to have higher academic

achievement. This relationship remained significant in the OLS regression in which the other variables were controlled. However, this relationship was not indicated in the zero-order correlations of father-only families. It appears that among father-headed single-parent families, sex of the child is not a significant predictor of academic achievement. This too, seems to lend some support to the father-absence hypothesis since children living with single fathers are neither more nor less likely to achieve academic success, regardless of sex.

The fact that a few of the initial associations in the zero-order correlation failed to hold after regression analysis was conducted suggests that studies which do not use control variables tend to overestimate the effects of family structure on children's well-being in general (Amato and Keith, 1991), and specifically on academic achievement.

Implications For Future Research

Although limited support was given for the hypotheses, the present study was significant because it included a group previously neglected in research, the father-only family. Furthermore, the study facilitates comparison between the economic-deprivation and father-absence theories to explain why children in different family

structures exhibit different levels of academic achievement. The finding that children in intact families do better academically than children in mother-only families, but not better than children in father-only families suggests that perhaps it is father-presence that influences achievement. Future research that examines children's well-being in father-only families would be informative.

In addition, the lack of findings relative to income seems to cast doubt on the economic-deprivation hypothesis. Since these findings are contrary to prior research, future studies that examine further the connections between family structure, income, and academic achievement may help to clarify these relationships.

The results of this analysis, though limited, should be viewed with some degree of caution because of some limitations. Since prior research (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan, 1985; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988; Milne et al., 1986; Thomson et al., 1994) has shown income to be a significant factor in the differential achievement of children across family types, the lack of findings consistent to this in the present study seems suspect. Future research might attempt to deal with the highly

skewed income variable of the present study to more accurately assess the effects of income (or lack thereof) on academic achievement.

In addition, grade average as a measure of academic achievement may be inadequate. Despite the fact that it seems straightforward, grades can be affected by a number of things other than what was included in the analyses, extended absence due to illness or difficulties with a particular teacher being two examples (Blechman, 1982). Blechman (1982) found that teachers' expectations may bias their subjective assessments of students' academic performance, and that teachers sometimes judge students on the basis of their observations of the student's family. Therefore, teachers may be biased in favor of students from intact families (Blechman, 1982). Future research might examine more facets of academic achievement, including not only grades, but also participation in academic activities or clubs and standardized test scores.

Although the present study examines a group previously neglected in research--father-only families--no significant differences emerged between this group and the mother-only group. No hypothesized differences in income or parental control were found. On the basis of theory and past

research, it was hypothesized that father-only families would exert more parental control than would mother-only families, because father-absence has been found to reduce parental authority and social control (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). Especially in the case of divorced families, research has shown that most noncustodial fathers substantially decrease their involvement in parenting their children (Furstenberg et al., 1987; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

But what about parental control in father-only families? Why were the hypothesized relationships not supported? Why did father-only families not exhibit significantly higher levels of parental control than mother-only families? Perhaps with a sample size of only 78 father-only families, the sample may be too small or homogeneous to demonstrate these specific differences. If future research were to use a larger, more diverse sample of father-only families, the hypothesized differences may emerge.

In addition, the hypothesized differences may not have been brought out because of the measure of parental control. Keep in mind that the measure of parental control

was comprised of very overt types of supervision, that is, parents who knew how and with whom their children spent their free time. According to father-absence theory, perhaps in father-only families there exists beyond this measure a different and unique type of parental control. McLanahan (1985) points out that the male role model is crucial to a child's cognitive and emotional development. Future research might expand upon the present study's measure of parental control to include other possible types, such as role modeling (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1983; McLanahan, 1985).

Future research might also examine two other factors previously shown to influence the academic achievement of children: age at time of family disruption, and reason for family disruption (Smith, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found that a child's age at family disruption influences his or her capacity to cope with the disruption; the younger the child was at the time of family disruption, the better-adjusted he or she eventually became.

In addition, the present study made no distinctions between reason for family disruption; single-parent families caused by death were grouped together with those

caused by divorce. According to the economic-deprivation theory, parents who invested in life insurance and secured the finances of their survivors would give their children an academic advantage over children of divorce. For example, prior research has found that the average loss in income of a mother and child who were living in a nonpoor family prior to a divorce is 50% (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). This is in contrast to the 130% of predivorce income men have in the same year after divorce (Hetherington et al., 1993). Studies that investigate any corresponding changes in income among widowed families might further examine the economic-deprivation theory.

On the other hand, according to father-absence theory, reason for family disruption should not matter. Thomson and colleagues (1994) found that children in mother-stepfather families and original two-parent families fare better academically than children in mother-only families. Regardless of whether the male role model is the original father or the stepfather, the presence of a father-figure seems to be the important factor (Thomson et al., 1994). Therefore, whether the absence of the father is due to death or divorce, according to father-absence theory, children in either situation would fare comparably in

academics. Research that examines this link would be informative.

A common thread in a few of these limitations is that the present study is limited by the use of secondary data. Though this is the most cost-effective and convenient mode of conducting research, it does not allow subsequent researchers to delve any deeper or more directly into the variables of interest, if more in-depth or direct responses are required. One cannot go back to the respondents and ask them to expound upon, or clarify their responses. Further research that included more accurate and valid measures of the variables of interest is necessary to assess any relationship between family structure and academic achievement. For example, the income variable was skewed enough that it raised questions as to its accuracy. A more precise measure of income may cause some of the hypothesized relationships to emerge.

Another example would include the race variable included in the analysis. As large and as detailed as the NSFH is, nowhere did it ask for the focal child's race. The present study had to rely on the proxy measure of parent's race to infer race of the child. Again, secondary data

analysis does not allow a researcher to go back and ask exactly what is of interest.

A final weakness of the present study arises out of its cross-sectional nature. Divorce and its effects on children are phenomena best studied over time (Dawson, 1991; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Not only does divorce occur more often now than in the past, divorce has also become more socially acceptable over the last 30 years, or so (Amato & Keith, 1991). As a result, effects of living in a single-parent family might not be as great as in the past; the impacts of divorce on children have diminished over time (Amato & Keith, 1991).

However, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found, after interviewing a panel of 60 divorced families over a period of 10 years, that boys exhibited more behavioral problems than girls in the short-term. This finding is supported by the present study. However, in their 10- and 15-year follow-up interviews, girls exhibited what Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989) termed a "sleeper effect." They found that even though girls seemed to cope better with divorce than boys in the short-term, the trauma they endured during the divorce emerges later in life in the form of preoccupation with betrayal in their own relationships. Therefore, future

research conducting analyses comparing the two waves of the NSFH would facilitate investigations into the long-term effects of divorce.

Implications for Policy

Despite the need for further research, the present study has added to our knowledge of what affects children's academic achievement. It has built on an area largely neglected by prior research, namely, the effects of father-only families. It can be concluded that children in mother-only families have different experiences than children in father-only families, and that this difference must be addressed for children to have an equal chance for success.

Children in mother-only families were found to be significantly more likely to do poorly in school than children in intact families. Although no significant differences in academic achievement were found between children in mother-only families and those in father-only families, this seems to question the belief that children are best raised in a mother-only home as compared to a father-only home. It has been the practice for courts to award custody to the mother unless the father can prove that the mother is unfit in some way (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). In spite of the increase in joint custody and father

custody, the traditional practice continues today (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). However, no longer can fathers be ignored in child custody decisions. Since the number of father-only families is likely to rise in the future, especially since the automatic awarding of custody to the mother is beginning to come under fire, any additional understanding of the father-only family structure will be beneficial.

Furthermore, the finding that children in intact families perform better academically than children in single-parent families suggests that our country needs to enact policies that will make it easier for families to survive. The phrase "family values" is spoken so often that we no longer know exactly to what it is referring. The family values of a half-century ago are obsolete; times have changed. In today's economy, both parents often have to work, which means that affordable child care becomes an issue. Thus, the so-called "family-friendly" workplace policies need to be expanded. Flex-time, family leave, and on-site childcare are ways of smoothing the road for both intact and single-parent families.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to keep a family intact amidst the changes and challenges that the

traditional family is facing. For example, married couples filing jointly are taxed at higher rates than unmarried couples or spouses who file separately. As a country that continuously lauds "family values," the time has come to fully support initiatives and programs that will make it easier for a family to stay together.

Conclusions

The present study offers some important contributions to the body of research on the effects of family structure on academic achievement, particularly in that when comparing the two theories, father-absence seems to have more explanatory power than does economic-deprivation. Despite the lack of empirical support for each of the hypotheses, this study does offer a number of directions for future research.

Despite its weaknesses, this study advances the current literature in ways mentioned before. It adds to prior literature by empirically testing the father-absence theory, rather than simply inferring father-absence effects without using the father-only group as a comparison.

This study also examined precisely how parental structure affects academic achievement in terms of two theoretical explanations. In understanding that fathers

play a unique and important role in the lives of their children, above and beyond their financial contributions, this study provides valuable insight into what child advocates, family court judges, and parents themselves can do to aid in the achievement and overall well-being of children.

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Appendix A

Income, Parental Control, and Academic Achievement by Family Type

Variable	Intact	Mother-Only	Father-Only
<i>Income (ln)</i>			
Mean	9.95	9.71	10.11
Std. Dev.	2.05	2.69	1.25
Median	10.39	10.31	10.42
<i>Parental Control^a</i>			
Mean	7.63	7.51	7.17
Std. Dev.	1.63	1.87	1.86
Median	8.00	8.00	8.00
<i>Academic Achievement</i>			
<i>Grades</i>			
Mean	6.11	5.63	5.74
Std. Dev.	1.49	1.67	1.59
Median	6.00	6.00	6.00
<i>Skipping School</i>			
Mean	.16	.25	.24
Std. Dev.	.36	.43	.43
Median	.00	.00	.00
N =	665	313	78

Note. a. Scale ranges from 2 to 10.

APPENDIX B

Zero-Order Correlation Between Variables Among Intact Families (n = 665)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Income	1.00							
(2) Parental Control	-.10	1.00						
(3) Parent's Education	.17**	-.06	1.00					
(4) Parent's Race	-.03	-.06	-.01	1.00				
(5) Child's Gender	-.02	.11**	.04	-.06	1.00			
(6) Child's Age	-.00	-.01	-.01	.01	-.01	1.00		
(7) Grades	.01	.21**	.02	-.02	.17**	-.02	1.00	
(8) Skip	-.01	-.25**	-.03	.05	-.08*	-.02	-.25**	1.00

Note. *p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01.

APPENDIX C

Zero-Order Correlation Between Variables Among Mother-Only Families (n = 520)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Income	1.00							
(2) Parental Control	.01	1.00						
(3) Parent's Education	.20**	-.05	1.00					
(4) Parent's Race	-.00	-.04	.04	1.00				
(5) Child's Gender	.05	.14*	.03	.02	1.00			
(6) Child's Age	.00	.01	.04	.01	.02	1.00		
(7) Grades	-.06	.21**	-.14*	.07	.20**	-.07	1.00	
(8) Skip	.01	-.16**	-.02	-.02	.06	.10	-.24**	1.00

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.

APPENDIX D

Zero-Order Correlation Between Variables Among Father-Only Families (n = 78)

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Income	1.00							
(2) Parental Control	.00	1.00						
(3) Parent's Education	.44**	.11	1.00					
(4) Parent's Race	-.04	-.02	.04	1.00				
(5) Child's Gender	.02	.17	.00	-.13	1.00			
(6) Child's Age	.02	.09	.15	-.01	-.15	1.00		
(7) Grades	.00	.27*	.18	.21	.10	.03	1.00	
(8) Skip	.28*	-.15	.24*	-.18	-.10	.07	-.31**	1.00

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